GOD AS THE OTHER WITHIN: SIMONE WEIL ON GOD, THE SELF AND LOVE

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Bu belge, Yükseköğretim Kurulu tarafından 19.01.2021 tarihli *"Lisansüstü Tezlerin Elektronik Ortamda Toplanması, Düzenlenmesi ve Erişime Açılmasına İlişkin Yönerge"* ile bildirilen 6689 Sayılı Kişisel Verilerin Korunması Kanunu kapsamında gizlenmiştir.

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ÖZET

İÇERİDEKİ ÖTEKİ OLARAK TANRI: SIMONE WEIL'DE TANRI, BENLİK VE SEVGİ

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Simone Weil (1909-1943), aynı zamanda Hristiyan mistisizm geleneğinin önde gelen isimlerinden biri olan Fransız bir filozoftur. Erken dönem felsefi yazılarında ve derslerinde felsefenin amacını "İyiyi Aramak" olarak tanımlar. Platon, Descartes ve Kant'tan çok etkilenen Weil, mutlak İyi olarak Tanrı'nın bilinen gerçeklerin ötesinde olduğunu ve ona ancak Sevgi yoluyla ulaşılabileceğini belirtir. Sevginin, Tanrı'ya yaklaşmak için Benliğin kendini yok ettiği yıkıcı bir güç olarak ele alınmasının, mistik bir izleği yansıttığı söylenebilir. Weil'e göre, böyle bir bilgiye ve dolayısıyla Tanrı'ya ulaşmak, yaşamın tek amacı olan olmanın yanı sıra felsefenin de amacı olması gereken şeydir. Bu tez, bir taraftan Weil'i bu sonuçlara götüren etkilere odaklanmayı, diğer taraftan da felsefedeki metafizik ve etik sorunlara bir alternatif olarak, Weil'in felsefi yönteminin, kendi başına sağlam durup duramayacağının bir çözümlemesini sunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Simone Weil, benlik, Tanrı, sevgi, etik, metafizik, öteki

ABSTRACT

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Simone Weil (1909-1943) is a French philosopher who is also a prominent figure in the tradition of Christian mysticism. In her early philosophical writings and lectures, she describes her understanding of the aim of philosophy as "the Search for the Good". Very much influenced by Plato, Descartes and Kant, Weil states that God as the absolute Good is beyond known truths and can only be reached through Love. This treatment of love as a destructive power whereby the Self effaces itself in order to get closer to God, echoes a somewhat mystical scheme. Weil believes that the only way to reach such knowledge and therefore God, which in her view is the sole purpose of life and should also be the purpose of philosophy. This dissertation focuses on the grounds that bring her to such conclusions as well as providing an analysis of whether Weil's philosophical approach as an alternative to metaphysical and ethical problems in philosophy is able to stand firm on its own.

Keywords: Simone Weil, the self, God, love, ethics, metaphysics, the other

GENİŞLETİLMİŞ TÜRKÇE ÖZET

İÇERİDEKİ ÖTEKİ OLARAK TANRI: SIMONE WEIL'DE TANRI, BENLİK VE SEVGİ

Doğaüstü ya da Tanrı ile ilgili konuların felsefi konular arasına dahil edilip edilemeyeceği ve ne ölçüde dahil edilebileceği sorusunun özü, bilgi ve inanç arasındaki ayrımla ilgili görünmektedir. Birçok filozof, özellikle de Aydınlanma'dan sonra, felsefi sorularla uğraşırken dine ya da inanca doğrudan atıfta bulunulmasını eleştirmiştir. Bununla birlikte, Simone Weil gibi metafizik sorgulamalarında dini paradigmalara atıfta bulunan, mistik öğretilerden ilham alan ve düşüncelerini açıklığa kavuşturmak için kilit fikirleri ödünç alan filozoflar da vardır. Ancak bu durum felsefelerini zenginleştirirken, özellikle dini ya da mistik öncüller eleştirel düşüncenin önüne geçtiğinde bazı sorunlar da ortaya çıkarabilmektedir. Weil her ne kadar Tanrı'yı Öteki olarak tasvir etmese de Tanrı'nın mistik ilişkisinde Tanrı hem uzak ve tarifsiz hem de insanla "bir" olan çok tuhaf bir "Öteki" olarak temsil edilir. Bu birlik ilahi aşk aracılığıyla gerçekleştiğinden, aslında hiçbir zaman tam ve kusursuz bir "birlik" değildir, çünkü mükemmel olan Tanrı ile kusurlu insan arasında her zaman aşılamaz bir mesafe vardır. Tanrı ve insanın ilahi aşkta birleşmesi meselesi, ilginç olduğu kadar, bu birleşmedeki tarafların statüsü, Tanrı'nın insaniliği ve insanın tanrısallığı meselesi, Tanrı'nın mükemmelliği ve insanın kusurluluğu gibi felsefi problemleri de beraberinde getirmektedir. Ancak tezin asıl meselesi, Tanrı ve insan ilişkisinde Ötekilik sorununu tartışmak ve felsefi sınırlarına zorlandığında Weil'in düşüncesinin sorunlarla karşılaştığını ve bunları aşmanın tek yolunun mistik teolojiden kopmak ve onun Sevginin gücü kavramsallaştırmasının sonuçları üzerine düşünmek olduğunu savunmaktır.

Simone Weil (1909-1943), aynı zamanda Hristiyan mistisizm geleneğinin önde gelen isimlerinden biri olan Fransız bir filozoftur. Erken dönem felsefi yazılarında ve derslerinde, felsefenin amacına ilişkin anlayışını "İyiyi Aramak" olarak tanımlar. Platon, Descartes, Spinoza ve Kant'tan çok etkilenen Weil, mutlak İyi olarak Tanrı'nın bilinen gerçeklerin ötesinde olduğunu ve ona ancak Sevgi yoluyla ulaşılabileceğini belirtir. Benliğin Tanrı'ya yaklaşmak için kendini yok ettiği yıkıcı bir güç olarak "sevgi"nin bu

şekilde ele alınması, biraz mistik bir şemayı yansıtmaktadır. Kişi, iyi ve güzel olan her şeyin kaynağı olan Yaratıcı ile Tanrı'nın lütfu sayesinde birleşir. Seküler bir Yahudi burjuva ailesinde doğan Weil, daha sonra Yeni Ahit'e ve özellikle de İsa Mesih'in eylemlerine ve sözlerine giderek artan bir ilgi duyar. Bu ilgi, çocukluğunda ve gençliğinde kafasını meşgul eden acı ya da ıstırap sorununa kadar uzanır. Oldukça kısa süren yaşamı boyunca dünyada ve Avrupa'da olup bitenler göz önüne alındığında bu oldukça anlaşılabilir bir durumdur. Istırabın hesabını sormak için siyasi hareketlere katılır, bir fabrikada çalışır, İspanya Savaşı'nda savaşır ama tüm bu deneyimler hayal kırıklıklarıyla sonuçlanır. Acı çekmenin insana özgü bir şey olmasına rağmen, ille de kendini tanımaya yol açmadığını fark eder. Tam tersine Weil, bir şeyle aktif olarak ilgilenirken ya da acı çekerken "kişinin kendisi hakkında düşünemeyeceği" sonucuna varır. Dolayısıyla, kişinin kendi zihin durumlarını (l'âme) incelemesi ancak geriye dönük olarak mümkündür ve o da öyle yapmaya çalışmıştır. Bununla birlikte etik anlayışını Sevgi ile insanın Tanrı'ya ulaşması üzerine temellendirir.

İÇİNDEKİLER

1. INTRODUCTION

With that in mind, the first chapter of this dissertation is on the nature of the self or what we refer to as the 'I' which is a good starting point because anything that an individual contemplates begins with either an explicit or an implicit 'I' which is inevitable by any being that would be classified as human. This is perhaps, in a way, our curse as Weil later notes, because we are able to contemplate our very own being as well as the only beings who are also aware of the implications of affliction that we face in our lives. This is not true for other beings, either animals who feel pain but do not contemplate the metaphysics of pain, or God and other supernatural beings who are said to not feel pain. As this is a dissertation of philosophy, it is vital that I must try to keep an open mind regarding definitions and beliefs of supernatural entities insofar as Weil engages with the concepts as such, however it is also important that I try and present an analysis of the way they are defined. This is the reason why the first two chapters include all the major religious and philosophical influences that Weil shares with us in her work. In this way, we will be able to not only revisit and examine but also compare those thoughts and ideas fresh in our minds. It is perhaps one of the most important aspects of a philosophical investigation that we must try and capture the essence of a problem before embarking on a journey where that problem presents other problems with it in its natural habitat.

The nature of self is, thus, first examined in the light of Plato's works and how Plato presents a concept of the 'I' or rather what he understands from this concept. Plato's understanding of the self is characterized in three parts, the *λογιστικόν*, the *θυμοειδές* and the *ἐπιθυμητικόν*, or the parts related to reason, to spirit and to desire, which make up the tripartite soul. The tripartite soul is the foundation for further investigation regarding the self and consciousness. Through examination of these ideas within Plato's relevant body of work, a deeper understanding of Weil's influence of Plato's concept of the self will be reached. The aim is to look at primary sources but then compare these ideas with Weil's interpretation of them in her esoteric view.

Following Plato, Descartes's understanding of the 'I' is summarized and viewed in the light of Simone Weil's own doctoral dissertation in which she explores how a true

Cartesian might overcome the inconsistencies that are criticized within Descartes' works. In this way, Weil discovers that though a person might see Descartes' claims as controversial, once a person regards themselves as a Cartesian themselves, they eventually realize that the once controversial claims are only natural to the human mind. Descartes' *cogito* is one of the most essential in the history of philosophy in the path to the emphasis of the primacy of consciousness and investigation upon the understanding of the self. Descartes' arguments regarding the existence and the nature of the self, analysis of his concept of the mind-body distinction with regards to the grounding of the concept of a creator God are scrutinized in this section.

This leads us to Kant's understanding of the self which is developed on top of Plato's depiction of the human soul and Descartes' *cogito* in which he presents a transcendental and an empirical self to distinguish between the mind and the physical world or the difference of noumena and phenomena which helped spark a new discussion regarding the nature of the self from an epistemological stance which, though seen as someone in the metaphysical tradition, Weil valued greatly. Weil believed that Kant's epistemological and ethical groundings of the self were quite relevant to the divine pursuit of knowledge that humanity must take on as a primary task.

Finally, Simone Weil's understanding of the 'I' and the Self is explored in her works beginning with her lectures and concluding with her notebooks through which we may see the development of her ideas based on Plato, Descartes and Kant but also her mystical understanding of the Gospels. This investigation leads one to forming better connections between her predecessors as well as her own works however irrelevant they may seem at first glance. Through this, it is quite apparent that Weil held a firm core ideal of the self in the path to knowledge inspired by the Delphic maxim and opens a clearer way regarding her more cryptic notes.

Having established Simone Weil's thoughts and concepts within the scope of her understanding of the self, the second part of the dissertation is focused on God through various religious and philosophical traditions that have inspired Weil. The second chapter begins with the concept of God in Classical Theism as discussed in contemporary as well as classical philosophy. Then we take a somewhat chronological route in religious

traditions of the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, the Ancient Greek beliefs, and Plato's understanding of God, finally the God of the Old and the New Testaments finishing with Weil's own understanding. I say *somewhat* chronological because the Old Testament does not quite fit the order, we may instead consider this route more logical since the ideas that are presented in the former are required in the latter. I have chosen to include the God of the Gnostics only after Weil's understanding of God in order to better compare it with that of the classical Christian beliefs. This way, we can get a clearer view of why Simone Weil criticizes the history of the Church and compares their ways to the fascist ideals of the Roman Empire which once persecuted the.

The final chapter of the dissertation is titled Love and it is the final chapter because the concept itself is the link between the self and God, without which, according to Weil, it would not be possible for the two entities to communicate. Love is the binding energy in the universe and it is where all the previously discussed concepts and beliefs come together as one because love is both the initiator, the mediator and the finality of all there is to know of life for Weil. This is because Love is both a god as Greeks once described and the God according to the Platonist and Christian view, in the eyes of Simone Weil. Through this understanding she grounds her ideas concerning ethics, politics, aesthetics, metaphysics and even mathematics. Love is also the reason why God is both absent in this world and within us as the ultimate and divine Other.

The inquiry towards the distinction between knowledge and belief is always a given if and when the supernatural or God is within the course of any philosophical pursuit. When it comes down to the gap that could be filled with God or the question of God that follows certain philosophical methods, there are at least three camps that we could think of: the philosophers of the post-Enlightenment, those who utilize analytical methods—who are either skeptical of religious beliefs and God or who disregard the question entirely in the scope of philosophy—and those who try to strongly implement God and religious beliefs into philosophy as well as advocating against the possibility of a philosophy without such a method. The last camp is certainly where Weil belongs to as she claims that the only way to reach any sort of philosophical knowledge is through such a path. Here, it is feasible to ascertain that with such methods, while their philosophy is surely richer and wider, certain limitations come with it, when, for example, religious beliefs get in the way

of critical thinking. Though Weil's case, in particular, does not have God as the Other (in the strictest meaning of the word) in relation to the human being, there is certainly an implicit and peculiar "Other" who is also "one with" the human while being both distant and ineffable. Considering the tacit and impervious distance between God as the perfect and the human as the imperfect, one is never *one* in the sense that we would understand, unless the union is defined, by Weil, as to be bound by divine love. The captivating question of the unification of God and the human leads to philosophical problems such as the human-likeness of God and the godlikeness of the human that are infinitely puzzling at first glance. Having said that, the main issue that will be explored in this dissertation is the discussion of the question of Otherness in the relationship between God and the human. The aim is to argue that when pushed to its philosophical limits, Weil's thought gives birth to problems that can only be overcome by breaking free from mystical theology. Hence, I will try to contemplate the implications of her conceptualization of the power of Love in terms of philosophy.

The crux of the question of whether and to what extent issues concerning the supernatural or God can be included amongst philosophical subjects appears to be related to the distinction of knowledge and belief. Many philosophers, especially after the Enlightenment, were critical of any direct reference to religion or belief when dealing with philosophical questions. That said, there are also philosophers like Simone Weil who, in their metaphysical inquires, allude to religious paradigms, take inspiration from mystical teachings and borrow key ideas to make their points clear. However, while this surely enriches their philosophy, some problems present themselves, especially when the religious or mystical premises get in the way of critical thinking. While Weil does not portray God as the Other per se, in the mystic relationship of God, God is represented as a very peculiar "*Other*" who is both distant and ineffable as well as "*one*" with the human. As this union is effectuated through divine love, it is never actually a complete and impeccable "*oneness*" since there is always an unbridgeable distance between God as the perfect one and the imperfect human even if the distance can be communicated through a metaphysical bridge that is *metaxu*. This question of God and the human uniting in divine Love, interesting as it is, presents philosophical problems such as the status of the parties in this union, the question of the human likeness of God and the godlikeness of the human, the perfection of God and imperfection of the human. However, the main

issue of the dissertation is to discuss the question of Otherness in the relationship of God and the human and argue that when pushed to its philosophical limits, Weil's thought runs into problems and the only way to overcome these is to break free from mystical theology and contemplate the implications of her conceptualization of the power of Love.

Though it may be seen as irrelevant in some academic circles, the life of such an eccentric philosopher as Simone Weil needs mentioning before diving deep into her essays, notes, and core ideas. For this, I shall provide a chronology from Robert Coles book on Simone Weil subtitled "*a modern pilgrimage*."

Simone Adolphine Weil was born February 3, 1909, in Paris to Dr. Bernard and Selma Weil (Simone Weil: A Modern Pilgrimage, 2001). Her father joined the French war effort in 1914 and as a result the family had to move with each transfer. Weil attended the Lycée Montaigne in Paris for three months in 1916 and because of her father's transfer continued her education in the girls' lycée in Laval in 1917. The family returned to Paris after the end of the first World War in 1919 and in September, Simone entered the Lycée Fénelon. She got admitted to the baccalauréat and entered Lycée Duruy in 1924 and passed her philosophy exams in 1925. From 1925 to 1928 she attended Lycée Henri IV where she met and studied with philosopher Alain (Emile-August Chartier). In 1928 she passed the entrance exam for the École Normale Supérieure in first place (as the rumor goes de Beauvoir came in second) and entered at the end of the year. In 1931, she received her agrégation diploma and took her first teaching post at the girls' lycée in Le Puy. In 1932 she engaged in demonstration for unemployed workers and got transferred to the girls' lycée in Auxerre by the school authorities. In 1933, she got appointed to the girls' lycée in Roanne, where all of her lecture notes were preserved by a student of hers, a large portion of which is discussed throughout the dissertation. The very same year, she participated in a march of miners organized by the Confederated Miners' Union in December 3 and met Trotsky in December 31. In 1934 she took a leave from teaching to work as a power press operator at Alsthom Electrical Works in Paris in 1934. In 1935, she took a job at the J. J. Carnaud et Forges de Basse Indre factory where she worked at a stamping press. In the June of the same year, she worked on a milling machine at the Renault factory at Boulogne-Billancourt and got appointed to teach philosophy at the girls' lycée in Bourges. In August of 1936, she left to join the republican front in the

Spanish civil war and joined an international group allied with an anarchist trade union in Aragon. She got injured a few weeks later after stepping into a cooking pot of boiling oil and left the front to be treated in Sitgès. While on sick leave from the school in 1937, she visited Italy in the spring and felt compelled to kneel and pray in Assisi, in a chapel frequented by Saint Francis. The very same year she taught the fall term at a girls' lycée in Saint-Quentin which is a working-class town near Paris. She took another sick leave in January of 1938 and attended services at the Benedictine abbey of Solesmes at Easter where she said: "*the Passion of Christ entered my being once and for all*." In 1939, the war was declared in September while she was on holiday with her family and had to return to Paris where she read the Bhagavad-Gita for the first time. In 1940, after the Armistice she moved to Vichy with her family and then to Marseille in October where she got involved with the literary magazine Cahiers du Sud and the group associated with it. She requested a new teaching post but there was no reply from the ministry most probably because of the Vichy anti-Jewish laws. In 1941 she began to study Sanskrit and met the Dominican priest Father J.-M. Perrin who helped her find work at a farm with Gustave Thibon who was a Catholic writer in the Ardèche. In 1942 she left her notebooks with Thibon and set sail to New York with her parents on May 17 after spending two weeks at a refugee camp in Casablanca. She was eager to join the Resistance in London and wrote to several officials there. She sailed to Liverpool in November and got held in a detention camp. Weil obtained work as a writer with the Free French organization in London in 1943. Her reports included *The Need for Roots*. In April, she got admitted to the hospital where the diagnosis was tuberculosis. She refused to eat and died on August 24 and got buried in Ashford, Kent.

2. I AND THE SELF

The very first concept we must uncover is the study of self and what Simone Weil means by 'I'. This ambition goes back to the age of the Ancient Greeks since all Plato talks about is the pursuit of self-knowledge as it is inscribed in the temple of Apollo at Delphi: "*ΓΝΩΘΙ ΣΑΥΤΟΝ*"[1] (Plato, 1903, Protagoras 343B). For Simone Weil, the self is above all the most important of all concepts that one should study, taking over the mission from Plato. While in her lectures she states that there is nothing purely internal or external in relation to oneself, the only thing that we can study is everything else in relation to ourselves. In addition to this seemingly paradoxical remark, we also possess *nothing but* the power to say 'I'[2]. In order to track Weil's thought process, we may begin with her lectures where clearer definitions are given, and continue with her lecture notes, her doctoral dissertation, and her mystical notes that she kept to herself in her lifetime and try to unravel her esoteric sentences. However, it is important to note that since all of Weil's notes were published posthumously it is difficult to sequentially follow her arguments as they are scattered and later put together under titles that were added by the editors (2003, p. xl). There are some untouched notebooks, but on either occasion, we would have to look at the sentences or the complete paragraphs on their own without presuming an argument that follows throughout. All the notes certainly refer to a larger conceptualization, however, if we go in that route, we are forced to use induction as an imperfect philosophical tool. For us to avoid this, we must always keep in mind that a single sentence or a complete paragraph is on its own logical and they are almost always based on her background in philosophy as what she understood from Plato, Descartes, and Kant as well as her critiques on materialists/empiricists, Spinoza, and psychoanalysis. However, later, as we dig deeper, we will find out that this way of studying Simone Weil is not a crutch but perhaps exactly what she would have wanted anyone to follow as she embraced logical contradictions in the field of metaphysics as liberating rather than

[1] "Know thyself", *Philebus*, 48c.
[2] (2003, p. 26)

limiting our pursuit of knowledge which is also the reason that pushed her into considering Plato and Descartes as much as she did.

We never see an explicit definition of the concept of the self in Plato or many of the other philosophers that must be mentioned in order to study Simone Weil's thoughts more in-depth. I will try to explore aspects of the self or concepts that are related to the self/individual or a part of the self/individual. This is because *the self*, *ego*, or the *I* are concepts that are quite difficult to define, and more often than not it is thought of as a given in philosophical works. It is the *I* of the author that writes a philosophical work, it is the *self* that something other than the *I* refers to when they refer to this *self* that writes these words. The grammatical person that is signified by the first personal pronoun is present but hidden in sentences that are even without the *I*, it is always the *I* that makes a value judgment, for example, i.e. '*this work of art is beautiful*'. When we word out personal value judgments, in common everyday speech, and say that something is beautiful or ugly, good or bad, we are almost always referring to some kind of opinion that we have come to the conclusion of within ourselves or perhaps in relation to a feeling or thought about something else, it is the *I* that makes such a comparison and it does not stem from knowledge in the sense of *episteme* [ἐπιστήμη]. Nonetheless, the self that is referred to in common speech or in philosophical works has different criteria to be the self, because philosophers often define what it is to be a human being or an individual in different ways or they may not even consider the self to be something *real* at all, i.e. Buddhism and Hinduism. In Simone Weil's case, even though we cannot find a definition of what *the self* is we may come to an understanding of the way she views the self through Plato, Descartes, and Kant if we are to follow her references in her works, notes, and lectures.

2.1 The Self in Plato

As mentioned before, in accordance with the Delphic Maxim "*ΓΝΩΘΙ ΣΑΥΤΟΝ*", Plato does not necessarily define the self but sets out the importance of the pursuit of self-knowledge as the most important goal that a human being can possibly have. With this in mind, is it possible for us to extract some sort of definition of the self from Plato? In Plato's works we see that there is an overarching theory of ideas or forms [εἶδος] and in

line with this theory a soul divided in three (Barney, Brennan, & Brittain, 2012), though this way of simplifying Plato's theory of the soul has also been criticized (Moline, 1978), thus we must be careful not to push too far away from what is contained within the text, with the exception of Weil's own interpretation.

In one of the groundbreaking dialogues of Plato the *Meno* he presents the concept of the self being other than what one might think of when thinking of an individual in their current state. In the dialogue, Socrates uses a slave boy to demonstrate that knowledge of *ideas* is not taught but already present within one's soul or mind waiting to be unearthed into consciousness. Socrates describes this experience as recollection or [ἀνάμνησις] where if one follows the proper steps into acquiring knowledge one may be able to remember what the soul has forgotten in its previous lifetimes:

> These opinions have now just been stirred up like a dream, but if he were repeatedly asked these same questions in various ways, do you know that in the end his knowledge about these things would be as accurate as anyone's(…) And he will know it without having been taught but only questioned, and find the knowledge within himself(…) And is not finding knowledge within oneself recollection?(...) Must he not either have at some time acquired the knowledge he now possesses, or else have always possessed it?(...) If he has not acquired them in his present life, is it not clear that he had them and had learned them at some other time? (*Meno*, 85c-e)

From here Socrates suggests that the only way a slave boy could have known geometry without being taught is for the soul to be immortal and distinct from the body upon death which separates and goes through a process which he handles in other dialogues, as we will see, in the end finding itself in a new body in the world, hiding away all the knowledge within it waiting for them to be brought to the conscious state by the individual. But this makes it quite puzzling for one to define the true nature of the individual, if it is the soul itself, the body or both. This will be further inquired as we continue with the Republic where instead of virtue, justice is focused on, but the true investigation is again directed toward the concept of the self.

A general conclusion is made in the *Republic* concerning the concept of justice, and it is reiterated throughout that it is *the* goal of the whole dialogue. This a very difficult task to understand beginning from particulars, which is why Socrates suggests that they begin with what a city may need as whatever a city may need is quite similar to what an individual needs in order to be virtuous[3] because as it is said in the fourth book, a human being is quite similar to a city in terms of the manner of their formal structure through the *eidos*[4] of justice:

> We thought that, if we first tried to observe justice in some larger thing that possessed it, this would make it easier to observe in a single individual. We agreed that this larger thing is a city, and so we established the best city we could, knowing well that justice would be in a one that was good. So, let's apply what has come to light in the city to an individual, and if it is accepted there, all will be well. But if something different is found in the individual, then we must go back and test that on the city. (Plato, Complete Works, 1997, p. 1066)

We may say that a city is "*completely good*" if "*it is wise, courageous, moderate, and just*"[5]. Therefore, if one were to find any of the four cardinal values in a *good* city all that would be left will make up the rest of the values[6]. From here, if we consider what is said about the likeness of a human being and the city is true then these four values must also be found in the person that is *good*. However, the definition of the purpose of a person in the city, that fundamentally make up the city itself, is divided into at least three as well: the ruler, the soldier, and the commoner or the artisan that provides for the essential needs of all citizens[7] though this division is important for the discussion of what makes a person *good* and how each class should be educated because the four values that are found in the city are a combination of different classes showcasing different states of their soul, i.e. the soldier is courageous the most as it adds to the courage of the city. We must, first, focus on what brings all people together in terms of the way they *are*, in other words, we must look for that which is common in all of them in Plato's works in the manner of Plato

[3] *Republic* 368e.
[4] In order to bypass the form vs. idea debate as well as all other related discussions that are not in the scope of this dissertation.
[5] *Republic* 427e.
[6] *Ibid*.
[7] *Republic Book II*.

himself so that we may also find out what makes them different insofar as they are individuals. The use of the word *individual* here is denotative because we cannot speak of *the self* or the one who says *I* yet before determining what makes each being that is human, human, and what sets human beings apart. While Socrates is wise in giving the example of an ideal city here in order to find the virtue of justice in it as a whole in order to move onto that which makes a human being just or in accordance with the virtue of justice, it may not help much in terms of how that particular human being is an individual and not a couple or a few, because it is easy to distinguish different cities in terms of its location, it becomes more difficult when Plato introduces the soul with its own parts.

A citizen has a clear purpose in the city, with how they should be educated, how they should live their daily lives, and more importantly how they should serve the city. Surely, the soldier is there in the city to protect other citizens from external threats, the artisan or the common citizen is there to provide for the fundamental needs of other citizens, and finally, the ruler is there in the city because without them the citizens would not be able to organize themselves and know what to do when to do them and in which particular ways. Hence, the descriptions of the city are quite similar to how a human body works in the *Republic*, or vice versa, and not just the presence of justice in the individual as well as the city. Just as the city has its citizens that have the purpose of doing something in the city *for* the city, the human being has parts that constitute different virtues either.

In the *Republic*, all human beings are said to have a body and a soul each made up of distinct parts with these parts making a whole in unity. The reason Plato describes different parts of the soul is given by Socrates as the individual being able to do different things for different reasons that may sometimes contradict each other in terms of the understanding of *virtue*, that is present in all of his works, because an individual learns, gets angry, seek carnal pleasures, or make decisions that do not seem to be done with the same *mindset* so to speak:

> Then a just man won't differ at all from a just city in respect to the form of justice; rather he'll be like the city(…) But a city was thought to be just when each of the three natural classes within it did its own work, and it was thought to be moderate, courageous, and wise because of certain other conditions and states

> of theirs… Then, if an individual has these same three parts in his soul, we will expect him to be correctly called by the same names as the city if he has the same conditions in them. (*Republic*, 435b-435c)

Certainly, the reason cannot be the culprit at times when an individual acts in a way that is not in line with the idea of the *good* or seeks pleasures to the point of self-harm. Just as the city needs three classes to do what they are meant to do in a city for that city to be *just*, the soul needs those three parts in order to be *virtuous* and *good*, though not all individuals are able to live a completely *virtuous* life. After all, in order for someone to be virtuous they need to have *knowledge*[8], to gain knowledge they need to be a philosopher[9], and not every individual is able to be a philosopher[10] because philosophy is rare (Plato and the Divided Self, 2012, p. 53):

> After that, we must look in turn at the natures of the souls that imitate the philosophic nature and establish themselves in its pursuits, so as to see what the people are like who thereby arrive at pursuits they are unworthy of and that is beyond them and who, because they often strike false notes, bring upon philosophy the reputation that you said it has with everyone everywhere(…) I suppose that everyone would agree that only a few natures possess all the qualities that we just now said were essential to becoming a complete philosopher and that seldom occur naturally among human beings. (*Republic*, 491a-491b)

It is because not every individual, nor a city for that matter, can possess a balanced soul because the only perfectly *just* individual and the perfectly *just* city would be *ideal*. These three parts that the city and the soul have in common are described with their respective virtues as moderation, courage, and wisdom[11]. The division of the soul into three cannot be classified as individuals in a city but more should be regarded as being different *aspects* of the soul that is a unity, however as mentioned before not every individual has a *virtuous* "*earned*" unity as opposed to those individuals that are less virtuous having an

[8] *Republic,* 442c.
[9] *Ibid.* 474b-480a.
[10] *Ibid*. 491a-b.
[11] *Ibid.* 435b.

"*unearned*" unity of the soul (2012, p. 53). So, reason, spirit, and appetite are all part of the soul, but it is important to keep in mind that individuals may choose either knowingly or unknowingly to feed different parts in different portions that lead to the division between the more and the less virtuous individual because all that an individual does in this life as an *embodied soul* is transferred to the next[12]. In the Myth of Er, we see the soul as carrying everything about the individual into the next, however in *Phaedo*, for example, Plato's view shifts towards an *embodied self* and a *disembodied soul* that is not necessarily what we may call the self in this world because only the *embodied self* desires and wills if there is no *willing* then there is no *I*, so the soul after physical death is no longer the one that wants or wills but the one that merely *knows*[13]. which means that the soul itself may not be regarded as the whole of an individual.

In the *Timaeus*, Plato describes a somewhat similar account of the divided soul that is in the *Phaedrus* and the *Republic* with the restatement of the purpose of the individual to live a good life. *Timaeus* also mentions "*the sovereign part of the soul*" which is the "*guiding spirit*" that is a gift from God that "raises us up away from the earth and toward what is akin to us in heaven" which is very similar to Weil's concepts of *gravity* and *grace* that we will come back to. If the individual, through this "*guiding spirit*", devotes themselves to the "*love of learning*" and "*true wisdom*", they may live on as immortal souls in the afterlife:

> And as regards the most lordly kind of our soul, we must conceive of it in this wise: we declare that God has given to each of us, as his daemon, that kind of soul which is housed in the top of our body and which raises us – seeing that we are not an earthly but a heavenly plant up from earth towards our kindred in the heaven. And herein we speak most truly; for it is by suspending our head and root from that region whence the substance of our soul first came that the Divine Power keeps upright our whole body. Whoso, then, indulges in lusts or in contentions and devotes himself overmuch thereto must of necessity be filled with opinions that are wholly mortal, and altogether, so far as it is possible to

[12] *Republic,* 614b-616b.
[13] *Phaedo,* 66a-b-c, 78b-84b. "Now one part of ourselves is the body, another part is the soul?" (79b) (Plato, Complete Works, 1997, p. 69)

> become mortal, fall not short of this in even a small degree, inasmuch as he has made great his mortal part. But he who has seriously devoted himself to learning and to true thoughts, and has exercised these qualities above all his others, must necessarily and inevitably think thoughts that are immortal and divine, if so be that he lays hold on truth, and in so far as it is possible for human nature to partake of immortality, he must fall short thereof in no degree; and inasmuch as he is for ever tending his divine part and duly magnifying that daemon who dwells along with him, he must be supremely blessed. (Plato, Timaeus, 1925, 90a-b)

On the other hand, a few shockingly sexist remarks follow that, if the individual lives a life full of "*cowardice or injustice*" then they are condemned to be reborn as "*women*", birds came to be because of "*simpleminded men*" who believed that "*visual observation*" was enough proof for astronomy, "*land animals in the wild*" come from those who have had no interest in philosophy[14]. If we are to leave the obvious sexism of Ancient Philosophy that is also present in Plato for later, it is clear that *immortality* and the loss of the "*disdainful*[15]" body are possible through the study of philosophy and knowledge, even if Timaeus believed that only men were capable of such a thing. The *Timaeus* dialogue adds to the issue that the body and the physical world prevent the philosopher from reaching knowledge and so the philosopher must aim to leave the world through philosophy and virtue.

From Plato's understanding of the individual, then, we can say that the individual is made of a body and a soul with each having different parts that make up a whole for each but only when the soul is *embodied* can we speak of *the self* or the one that says *I*, and can say that once the body dies and the soul is able to move onto the *world intellect* that is discussed in the whole of *Timaeus* the individual is a *self* no longer, nor is the individual *divisible* from the divine anymore[16]. Plato's understanding of the soul is important to

[14] *Ibid,* 90e-91e.
[15] *Phaedo*, 65d.
[16] Of course, I must also note in the Myth of Er we see someone seemingly dying and making a conscious decision in the afterlife and telling about it in this one when he "comes back". Even though this seems like it is contradicting with what is said in the *Timaeus*, Socrates in the *Republic* clearly mentions the body of Er being *fresh* compared to the others who died (Republic, 614b-616b.), which means that Er is not *actually dead* but *seems* to be dead through the power of gods.

explore because Simone Weil also talks about the *destruction of the self* in order to receive God's grace which will be discussed later.

2.2 The Self in Descartes

As we move closer to Weil's understanding of the self, we may now explore how Descartes described the self in relation to Plato. Descartes gives an account of the self or the individual in the *Meditations*, quite similar to that of Plato's, in ways, but follows a different method to do so. One of the most important things is the fact that he speaks by *I* which makes it clearer to see what he understands from the self or the individual, he begins by saying that he himself is an individual that says *I*. Descartes and Plato share a common that is to pursue knowledge insofar as to know the self and to know God, though Descartes also questions his manner of inquiry through methodical skepticism that Plato does not employ. Though, even this method of Descartes is a demonstration of his views on the self and the peculiarity of the *self* questioning its own existence as well as the world around it. Though in Plato we see Socrates searching for the answer to what justice is and through this question the state of the soul and how we may come to a realization of such a description, in Descartes we see the inquiry of the things we *can* know and things we *cannot* know, in addition *how* we may know the things we *can* know.

What do we know according to Descartes, then, and how can we know this as the questioning self? Before exploring an answer to this question, we must go back to the beginning of Descartes' *Meditations* (Meditations on First Philosophy, 2008) and try to follow in his steps so that we may establish another core philosophical understanding that Simone Weil revered as much as she did[17]. The reason why we must go through this is because all of the *Meditations* establish and support Descartes' understanding of the self simply because *Meditations* is the self in its purest form asking the infamously fundamental question of existence.

[17] Weil even suggested that Plato's God and Descartes' God are one and the same and that both Plato and Descartes were mystics who were "two incarnations of the very same being" (1978, p. 219).

The *Meditations* begin with Descartes coming to a realization that how much of the things he held to be true up until that time have been false and that there must be a way, he can determine which of his beliefs are true:

> It is some years now since I realized how many false opinions I had accepted as true from childhood onwards, and that, whatever I had since built on such shaky foundations, could only be highly doubtful. Hence, I saw that at some stage in my life the whole structure would have to be utterly demolished, and that I should have to begin again from the bottom up if I wished to construct something lasting and unshakeable in the sciences. (2008, p. 13)

This is not an easy task, obviously, there are several ways that he considers to be paths that lead to nowhere like trying to go at his beliefs one by one in order to prove or disprove them. He comes to the conclusion that, in order to do this, he must set out to challenge the foundation that his opinions stand on which will in turn destroy all the false opinions he has had before[18]. This journey begins with the doubting of the senses since all that is known to be true is either learned "*from or by means of the senses*"[19]. The senses are the connection we have to the outside world as much as our body is situated in the outside world, this use of the *outside* is already presupposing that the mind, or rather the thoughts at this point, is hierarchically prior to the body in terms of what Descartes considers as *the self*, the statements and the questions concerning the world that the individual is through the mind that asks the questions and makes the statements. The senses at the waking moment seem to be sure enough and pass the tests that the mind tries to put up, however, this is not the case when the body is dreaming in sleep. In our dreams, we are often tricked by what we *believe* that we see and feel that at the moment nothing that we sense is doubted, and if we doubt the dream, we either wake up or continue having a *lucid dream*[20] in which we are *seemingly* able to bend the laws of nature that rule the physical world. This means that we may not always be sure of what the senses show us and are very likely to be misguided by them and surely cannot reach the absolute through the senses. Descartes, then, lists things that are doubtful by their dependence on the senses

[18] *Meditations*., 18-19 (2008, 9. 13-4)
[19] *Ibid.*
[20] A dream where the dreamer is aware of the dream and is able to control the way the dream leads on (Eeden, 1913).

by their *composite* nature as opposed to *simple* things. Composite things that are doubtful are listed as "*physics, astronomy, medicine*" and all other disciplines that may be studied through composite things or both thoughts and senses in order to reach conclusions (2008, p. 15). Studies that involve simple things like anything that relates to pure mathematics, on the other hand, are given as examples of things that cannot be doubted since it is of no importance whether they exist in nature or not because the conclusions are come to by means of the mind (2008, p. 15). While astronomy and physics need observations in nature in order to be studied, the study of numbers needs nothing but numbers, which themselves are abstractions of the mind meaning that the conclusions do not change in any state of the individual. From here on, Descartes questions whether God may deceive our minds in the sense that we *believe* that we calculate the outcome of a mathematical operation as true or if in actuality this belief is *planted* in our minds as God's will. This idea is immediately disregarded in consideration of the definition of the *supremely good* God, a being that is *supremely good* cannot be in contradiction to its nature by being deceiving at the same time. Descartes even entertains the idea of an *evil spirit* that is powerful enough to deceive the minds of human beings, in order to make them believe that everything that is *extended* [res extensa] is an illusion, hindering the possibility of the individual's ability to reach any truth. This is where the first meditation ends and the second begins continuing with the thought that everything that we experience as *extended* may not actually exist because an *evil spirit* deceives us and that not even our bodies are real. Consequentially, if nothing in nature exists including our body then surely, *I* should not exist either. However, the very thought of the question of whether the existence of body or nature or the *self* gives rise to another conclusion, which is the infamous statement that goes: *cogito, ergo sum*:

> But there is some deceiver or other, supremely powerful and cunning, who is deliberately deceiving me all the time. — Beyond doubt then, I also exist, if he is deceiving me; and he can deceive me all he likes, but he will never bring it about that I should be nothing as long as I think I am something. So that, having weighed all these considerations sufficiently and more than sufficiently, I can finally decide that this proposition, 'I am, I exist', whenever it is uttered by me, or conceived in the mind, is necessarily true. (2008, p. 18)

At this point, while the *nature* of my existence may be doubtful, there is nothing that can make me doubt the existence itself since without that there would be no one to question existence itself. This is, perhaps, the purest form of the *I*[21]. This *I* is still not the human being that we assume in common speech because in order to give grounds to the human being, Descartes points out that we can consider the human being as a "*rational animal*" but we must first define what *rational* is and what an *animal* is that lead to questions that are even more difficult than claiming that *I exist* (2008, p. 19). Hence, we must be satisfied with the conclusion that *I* am a thing that thinks and nothing more based on what is said on the matter (2008, p. 19). Insofar as the *I* thinks then the *I* can "*will*", desire, imagine, and perceive through senses without the need for the determination of truth in those things. In other words, even if what the *I* perceives or imagines is not *real*, the *I* is still capable of the activity of imagining or perceiving. Having determined the *thinking I*, or the *cogito*, Descartes moves onto the existence of God and everything that God created which includes both the *res cogitans*, the mind, and the *res extensa*, the body. Particularly, in the sixth *Meditation*, Descartes comes to the conclusion that the mind can exist independently of the body because all that he has defined *the self* so far has been the *thinking self*, the *thinking self* is the simplest version of us in order to exist. However, according to Descartes' argumentation on the existence of God and the path of his inquiry in the *Meditations* so forth, there must also be some truth to the senses and the extensions I perceive through them since everything is God's creation and insofar as God is *supremely good* and *perfect* by definition and that I cannot possibly think of something *more* perfect than an already existing *perfect* God as having been created by the said God. Descartes, comes to this conclusion through the realization that *I*, the mind, am not merely "*a pilot*" in a ship, which is the body, because I can sense and feel "*pain, hunger, thirst*" and these feelings profoundly affect the way *I* think, and adds that if this was not the case, then *I* would not have been able to feel the injury that my body is inflicted with:

> (…)when the body is injured, I, who am nothing other than a thinking thing, would not feel pain as a result, but would perceive the injury purely intellectually, as the pilot perceives by sight any damage occurring to his ship; and when the body lacks food or drink, I would understand this explicitly, instead

[21] This form of the *I* is most likely what Simone Weil means from the "power to say *I*", which is the only thing that we possess as individuals (2002, p. 26).

> of having confused feelings of hunger and thirst. For certainly, these feelings of thirst, hunger, pain, and so forth are nothing other than certain confused modes of thinking, arising from the union and, so to speak, fusion of the mind with the body. (2008, p. 57)

This realization leads to another that *I* learn from nature is the thought that there are other *I's* that exist. This idea of Descartes is also important in Weil's understanding of the implicit other which will be explored in depth in later chapters. However, the more important thing here that Descartes presents us is the conundrum that he comes to as opposed to claiming that the mind is the simplest form of *the self* and that the body is not necessary to the existence of *the self* as it exists independently of *res extensa*. Now we have a definition of a human being or an individual that is *composed* of a body and a mind (Chamberlain, 2020, p. 6). Therefore, *I* am not in a way two-fold or made up of two parts that we can call the mind and the body but a *composition* that is not "separate but… separable" (Simmons, 2017). This conclusion of *the self* is all but based on God and as mentioned before, it is what this particular nature that belongs to the individual that shows the mind *how* to conceive of oneself as a human being or an individual because *the self* as created by God is not only the *thinking self* but the *thinking self* with an *extended self:*

> Now there is nothing I am more emphatically taught by this nature of mine than that I have a body, with which there is something wrong when I feel pain, which needs food or drink, when I experience hunger or thirst, and so on and so forth. Hence, I cannot doubt that there is some truth in all this. Nature likewise teaches me, through these very feelings of pain, hunger, thirst, and so forth, that I am not present in my body only as a pilot is present in a ship, but that I am very closely conjoined to it and, so to speak, fused with it, so as to form a single entity with it. (Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy, 2008, p. 57)

2.3 The Self in Kant

Immanuel Kant had a view of the self that is founded, though heavily criticizing them, on the concepts of Plato and Descartes, and his conception of the mind is quite more detailed than the antecedents, which is why it will be a difficult task to summarize without omitting a large part of his texts, especially considering that almost all of his works have

some way or another to do with various aspects of the self; and the terminology Kant uses, though similar in terms of names, is different and more complex in comparison. Similar to Descartes, Kant begins with the possibility and the manner of acquiring knowledge within the mind in response to Hume's hard empiricism, first the possibility of *synthetic a posteriori*[22] knowledge and then the possibility of *synthetic a priori* knowledge that is not based on an immediate *a posteriori* knowledge. Kant exclusively responds to Hume in this matter while of course branching out on terminologies of the past as well as creating new ones in order to prove that the mind is able to *know* without the necessity of immediate experience by the senses. Kant believes that he must do this in order to *save* philosophy after Hume's "*attack*" on it (Kant, Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics, 2004, p. 7). Within Kant's pursuit of the possibility of *synthetic a priori* knowledge, he also gives an outlook on the mind and its thoughts, the body and its senses, and the self.

In the very beginning of the section titled *The Transcendental Aesthetic* in his highly influential work *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant summarizes the way cognition works in relation to objects and names each element of the act of cognizing. It is Kant's understanding that the way our cognition relates to objects *immediately* is called *intuition*:

> In whatever way and through whatever means a cognition may relate to objects, that through which it relates immediately to them, and at which all thought as a means is directed as an end, is intuition. This, however, takes place only insofar as the object is given to us; but this in turn, is possible only if it affects the mind in a certain way. (Kant, The Critique of Pure Reason, 1998, p. 155)

He begins with this statement because intuition is the result of the only way we interact with the objects outside of our cognition: our means of sensibility (1998, p. 155). However, the explanation of how this must be grounded is clearer in the *Doctrine of Elements* where he says that since the transcendental condition is the ground for every

[22] A judgment that is not based on immediate empirical data but on something that the mind itself can reach through the concepts of space and time and the *categories* of the mind which the *a priori* refers to. The *synthetic* refers to the fact that the judgment combines two notions into a new kind of knowledge that was not known before, and a good example to this is pure mathematics: 2+4=6. If the judgment is *analytic* instead of *synthetic*, in that there is no new knowledge gained from the judgment itself: "All squares have four sides."

necessity, there must also be a transcendental ground for "*the unity of the consciousness in the synthesis of the manifold of all our intuitions*" (Kant, 1998, p. 232). According to Kant, there are "*two modes of the existence of the self*" and these two modes are the *transcendental* and the *empirical self* (Azeri, 2010, p. 271). The reason for this is simply because rationalists like Descartes claim that the *I* is able to reach knowledge only through the use of the mind and empiricists like Hume claim that the only way to reach knowledge is through the use of the body or bodily experiences. Kant's, goal, is, so far, to show that the self is made up of the mind and the body and that the *self* can only know insofar as it exists with a mind and a body as a whole: *"Now no cognitions can occur in us, no connection and unity among them, without that unity of consciousness that precedes all data of the intuitions, and in relation to which all representations of objects is alone possible"*. (1998, p. 232)

The *transcendental self* is conscious of the *empirical self* (Azeri, 2010, p. 271) and the *empirical self* is a necessity for the *transcendental self* to perceive because intuition is only possible when there is an *empirical self* and if the *empirical self* does not exist nor does intuition, therefore, nothing the *transcendental self* is able to *perceive*.

Furthermore, Kant claims that "*I think must be able to accompany all my representations*" and this *I think* precedes sensibility and is therefore called "an act of spontaneity" in the sense that it is before *empirical apperception* and aptly named the *pure apperception* or *the original apperception* since the *I think* that is prior to sensibility is what we understand from *self-consciousness* (1998, p. 246). Thus, we may say that, according to Kant, *the self* is not *made up* of two parts but has two *modes* that we may identify with the Cartesian mind and body, however, unlike it, Kant's *I* exists as mind+body in *unity* instead of mind>body in *hierarchical combination* though able to affect one another. The Cartesian mind is able to exist without the body as an *I* but it possesses a body given by God, while the Kantian mind is not able to exist as an *I* without the body, and even if it does exist it would be beyond the limits of a human being as shown in his *antinomies*[23]. Moreover, Kant does not prove or disprove the existence of the self in the sense that Descartes believes he has, for, knowledge is possible only if there is *a priori* knowledge, thus the

[23] See the section titled "*The antinomy of pure reason*" (1998, p. 459).

knowledge of the empirical self is, as said before, a variable that is only possible in that time when the transcendental self is actively conscious of the empirical self and the empirical knowledge of the empirical self is only possible if and only if the transcendental subject exists (Azeri, 2010, p. 274). While *cogito* allows for the proof of the existence of the transcendental self, it does not necessarily mean the same thing for the existence of the empirical self since empirical knowledge is not beyond doubt (Azeri, 2010, p. 274). On this matter, Kant says that while existence is a given, the *I* is not able to posit itself as "*belonging to it*" and the *I* cannot determine the existence of itself as "*a self-active being*" but only as "sensibly determinable, i.e., determinable as the existence of an appearance" (1998, p. 260). The *self* only *appears* to oneself as exiting and not as a true cognition of the self as "*I am*[24]."

2.4 The Self in Simone Weil

Having followed in the footsteps of Weil in regard to her major influences which we might very well need to come back to later on again when discussing her understanding of God and the Other, we may now do the same through her own texts. I will try to search for all that Simone Weil possibly understands from *the self* and what she means when she says, "*the power to say I*". The timeline of Simone Weil's bibliography is quite interesting considering that she had almost never published her notes on her mystical understanding of religion, God, or the self. These works were all published posthumously as either untouched or edited notebooks. This led to some people claiming that there are two Simone Weil's and the difficulty of following how her ideas chronologically. Therefore, it seems reasonable to begin with her lectures that present a summary of how she taught.

2.4.1 Weil's lectures on philosophy

2.4.1.1 The Materialist point of view

At the beginning of her lectures, which are made up of notes from Simone Weil's teaching of "the materialist point of view," the study of oneself [soi-même] is discussed within the frame of psychology. The study of oneself or the study of what the self is in the sense of

[24] Kant's claim that the self cannot be known is also referred to by Simone Weil in her lectures (Weil, Lectures on philosophy, 1978, p. 191).

I myself is the ultimate goal of any individual[25] and more important than any pursuit as it all comes down to that puzzling question of the self. It is because only through *the self* we can do anything including the act of questioning the self that does anything at all as well as everything that we think about is within us and even the idea of others or nature and God first appears, again, within us, it is also where the only illusion of control may be actualized to a degree, at first glance. However, the self is also puzzling because the self questions the self through the self which leads Weil to conclude that "*one cannot think about oneself*" when actively involved with something or in suffering (1978, p. 28). Because while the embodied self is in the act of doing something because the mental capacity for true introspection is limited at that moment. We cannot possibly closely analyze *while* doing the thing we wish to analyze because the analysis can only come afterward. How can we preemptively engage in introspection when the action itself is not done? On the other hand, introspection is not always about a certain action that belongs to oneself, it can also be merely the questioning of the self for the existence of the self. However, introspection is a psychological state that can only exist when no other psychological state is present within oneself such as: "*thinking about the world (astronomy, physics), theoretical speculation (mathematical reasoning)*", "*voluntary action*" like sports, art, or work, "*a very strong emotion*" (1978, p. 27). What is left, with the exception of violent emotions, is the introspection of the states of mind [l'âme[26]]. However introspection is also not a way to reach knowledge about oneself because of the reason that time flows and the self changes with it and that the act of introspection in the present is bound to become an act of itself, meaning that if I think about myself at the moment that I am in it is very likely that I will only find myself thinking about myself and nothing further. This is why it seems that introspection is only possible retrospectively, however, Weil quickly points out that this can also result in an error as I can never know the exact state of my mind in the past. Hence, the psychological method of introspection fails because it results in nothing that is of use to oneself. Weil moves onto the question of whether philosophy has the answer to such a conundrum of self-inquiry and lists John B. Watson and Henri Bergson and categorizes each as "*the*

[25] Simone Weil repeats this throughout the *Lectures* and her notebooks.
[26] Although the English translation says 'mind', Simone Weil often uses the word *l'âme* which means 'the soul', a worthy difference in her later works.

psychology of behavior" or "*behaviorism*" and "*the psychology of intuition*" respectively (1978, p. 29). In the first example, Watson claims that one cannot give proof of the soul, therefore the soul does not exist and in the second Bergson claims that intelligence is not enough for questioning the states of our mind through thoughts, to which Weil responds as the first giving no place to the soul and the second giving no place to the intelligence. The examples that Weil gives are similar to the conundrum that Descartes and Kant fell into having had different solutions for them. Weil is clearly not satisfied with either of the answers that Watson or Bergson gives since the first one is not psychological and the second one is not scientific. However, it is also not possible to give a truly scientific answer to the question of introspection because science is done through thoughts, and once the self is taken to be the subject of science the self is already lost. In her concluding remarks of the section, Weil seems to hold a Kantian stance regarding the mind and the body as everything the mind has the possibility of doing is dependent on the body and everything the body has the possibility of doing is dependent on the mind which means that nothing is purely internal or purely external (1978, p. 30). From this outcome, Simone Weil sets a goal for the lectures which will be to question whether we need to follow the "*means of the body*", the "*means of the mind*", or both in order to explain everything regarding action, feeling and thought and this goal is important because it directly relates to morality and the determination of conscious human behavior which will, in the end, lead to not only understand the source of our feelings but also what we *can* know and what we *should* do, the latter of which is "*what governs and directs our life*" and there are three ways to view this problem because the materialist, the idealist, and the dualist will answer quite differently: "*For materialists, morality is only a matter of policy. For idealists, morality is a matter of principles; as a result it becomes something that has no value. For dualists, morality consists in putting matter under control of mind*" (1978, p. 33).

In this regard, as the first step in the study of the three differing views of materialists, idealists, and dualists, Weil moves on to study how the body affects the soul in terms of reflexes, instincts, actions, feelings, thoughts, sense, and sensations. Reflexes can be divided into two: congenital reflexes, which are shared by every human being, and

acquired or conditioned reflexes[27]. Reflexes that are common to all people are those that we are born with and those that we do not have any control over, and these types of reflexes affect the body before any thought:

> It is in this way that the body classifies things in the world before there is any thought. (Example: the chick leaving the egg distinguishes between what is to be pecked and what not.)
>
> So, from the very fact that we have a body, the world is ordered for it; it is arranged in order in relation to the body's reactions. (1978, p. 31)

The second type of reflexes is *learned* through experience like those that were demonstrated by Pavlov on dogs[28]. Our body associates various reactions based on previous experiences that become habits that we do naturally without any preceding thought:

> It is, then, the things as a whole that have an affect on our bodies, and not their particular aspects. (The stairs can be made of wood or stone, covered with carpet or not, etc., they call up before anything else the idea of stairs.) What we are saying now has to do with something very important – the theory of forms (Gestalt theory). German psychologists have made interesting experiments on this matter, which lead us to the conclusion that the body grasps relationships, and not the particular things. (1978, p. 32)

Instinct, on the other hand, are more complicated compared to reflexes because it is harder to define what it is and how they are different from reflexes. Weil turns to the theory of evolution in order to explain instincts and explores Lamarck and Darwin. In summary, instincts are explained as being related to structure and the structure is influenced by the environment in the way of "*spontaneous variations*" (1978, p. 36). Instincts when observed from the outside resemble knowledge because somehow an animal is able to act in a way that serves their well-being, however, when observed closely an instinct is "*reflex action*:"

[27] (Weil, Lectures on philosophy, 1978, pp. 30-1)
[28] (Weil, Lectures on philosophy, 1978, p. 31)

> Instinct gives the appearance of being knowledge that is limited to one single thing (the nerve centre in the case of the sphex, the hexagonal property in the case of bees). So, instinct cannot be knowledge, since knowledge is by its very nature something general. (1978, p. 36)

Congenital and conditioned reflexes as well as instincts are able to influence "*customs, family, traditions"* meaning that there are indeed things that are outside of the control of the mind and those things influence the life of a human being and so *the self*. The same is the case for feelings, insofar as they influence *the self* and are outside of the mind's control.

Weil compares some feelings that are related to production and reproduction to a type of instinct as well. Maternal and sexual instincts give rise to pleasurable states of the mind like joy, happiness, and love which means that these types of feelings are, in a way, reflexes to particular instincts. While instinct as reflex action is one way feelings arise there are also examples where conditioned reflexes are able to result in various feelings, for example, if we are scared of a place and are conditioned to be scared whenever we pass by feelings of sadness also follow. Weil concludes that the material theory regarding emotions is quite consistent and feelings that come from the movement of the body are either "*instincts, natural reflexes or conditioned reflexes, or a combination of all these*" (Descartes, Spinoza, Freud)[29]. Further, in the next step of the inquiry into the effect of the body on the mind in terms of the materialist point of view, Weil begins to talk about thought. Even though everything that the body experiences in a way influences thoughts retrospectively, Weil here tries to determine the materialist thought on the way thoughts are influenced by the body directly and not as an aftermath. Senses and sensations such as sight and touch are examples of the body *immediately* influencing thought insofar as whatever we *perceive* of the world is through senses and sensations and in turn make up our thoughts regarding the outside world[30]. However, the close analysis of senses shows us that they do not tell us anything about how they are related to other senses or how they are different compared to other sensations, the hearing itself does not give us any

[29] (Weil, Lectures on philosophy, 1978, p. 39)
[30] *Ibid.,* (1978, p. 40)

information on our ears nor does sight give anything to think about regarding our eyes because "*senses work in a passive way*"[31] the same can be said of the sensation of movement[32]. Even though sensations themselves do not present us with information the way sensations are *perceived*, on the other hand, does. This means that we do not only have the ability of sensations on their own but we also associate those sensations with things from the outside world that we sense and this is where *perception* comes into play. It is not possible to *perceive* without both the body and the mind, because without the mind the sensations have nothing to give and without the sensations, the mind can see nothing:

> Conclusion about the senses: none of the senses tells us that there are other senses. None of the senses tells us how the sensations it gives are related to those that are given by the other senses. Sight tells us nothing about the eyes, nor hearing about the ear, etc., since the senses work in a passive way.
>
> What we can about the operation of the senses apart from movement is that we have an infinite variety of sensations and that they teach us nothing at all. (1978, p. 43)

The next question that comes is that of perception. In this section, Weil inquires whether imagination has any effect on sensation, in other words, can perception be led by the imagination of the mind reaching something that is not truly there. Since perception begins with sensations it is also acceptable that the mind can *misinterpret* sensations and create a completely false outcome. However, the materialist point of view, that Weil is studying, rejects *illusions* as *normal perception*, therefore perception cannot be misled by illusions because there is "*a difference of degree or one of kind*" that the resemblance of knowledge that an illusion provides compared to what normal sensation is capable of. The point that is made here is that sensation is not the culprit here but "*the imagination added to sensations*" is what an illusion is compared to hallucinations that are "*unreal sensations*" (1978, p. 48). The dream state also provides us with illusions and not hallucinations because in a dream we may interpret the sounds that come from the outside

[31] *Ibid.,* (1978, p. 43)
[32] *Ibid.,* (1978, p. 45)

as something else, the example Weil gives here is confusing the alarm clock beside the bed for "*a ghost dragging its chains*" (1978, p. 48). Consequently, Weil moves on to the question of whether imagination or the sensation that is dominant in our consciousness and quickly points out that we are not conscious of the thing that we sense but the thing that we *believe* that we sense, meaning that imagination is more important in what we cognize in our consciousness firstly[33]. Examples of things that we are conscious of through imagination are space, relief[34], shape, sensations that are not felt[35], illusions arising from movement[36], the identity of objects[37], and the distinction between the essential and accidental properties of an object[38] (1978, pp. 49-53).

There is also the role of *memory* in perception which is an extension of the role of imagination. Memory affects the *way* we perceive things or the *way* we "*react*" to things. Weil gives a few examples from various writers but the one she takes from Proust is quite satisfactory and it summarizes the entire point of the role of memory in perception: "*Proust's analysis: he returns from a walk, he is very tired; his tiredness disappears once he sees his house*" (1978, p. 54). Here, Proust is not simply imagining that he is no longer tired but recognizes his house and remembers how his house gives him comfort in turn imagining that sense of comfort and the fact that he is now home to relax after a tiresome walk that makes him forget about the physical tiredness, or rather he can no longer truly *perceive* the tiredness his body is signaling to. Bergson gives an explanation of how the past affects us, and in which ways it cannot, in two ways: recollection and memory. While recollection is simply the act of remembering or calling some precise object from the past and bringing it back to the present consciousness, memory is "*traces of the past*" (1978, p. 54) and it has no particular object; something that is more indefinite or broad. Bergson defines memory as having "*all the characteristics of a habit*" which means that it is something that can be repeated like "*a lesson learnt off by heart*", while recollection is a

[33] (1978, p. 49)
[34] Or *embossment*.
[35] For example, seeing something from a distance and determining that what we see is such and such a thing, a book that we see and say that it is made of paper, or feel the corner of a table and say that it has a triangle shape, we see something that looks like water and feel our thirst (1978, p. 52).
[36] "cinema, waves of the sea, rivers, the moon at the horizon" (1978, p. 52)
[37] Because we can separate an object from the rest, or a particular individual from other human beings in comparison with ourselves.
[38] "Example: a book is yellow; a shadow is cast on it: one sees something grey, but that seems accidental to us, it seems to us that there is, underneath, a layer of yellow." (1978, p. 53)

definite time in the past residing in the unconscious, that has nothing to do with habit (1978, p. 55). Simone Weil is appreciative but critical of this explanation of recollection because she does not find it to be scientific, and claims that the unconscious is not clearly defined and asks whether it is possible to recollect something that does not exist because there certainly are feelings unaccounted for that we cannot explain with what Bergson is suggesting (1978, p. 55). An example of this is Proust's recollection in his book *Remembrance of Things Past*, where a stream of feelings encapsulates him once he dips a *madeleine* into his tea. The feelings of what he experiences at that moment have no specific object that is recalled from the past but are quite indeterminate, though there are certainly things in the past that relate to those feelings which he likes to remember but cannot. This kind of feeling is not only a fictional account that Proust has made up but surely something that any individual has the possibility of experiencing which brings us to a point where Bergson's theory falls short since the feelings that were *recalled* preceded the objects of recollection (1978, p. 56).

After the analysis and definitions of reflexes, instincts, actions, feelings, thoughts, sense, and sensations, Weil begins analyzing the concept of reasoning, scientific method, logic, and language which show that a human being has two natures: active and passive. A human being is able to passively receive reflexes, instincts, actions that are based on outer stimuli, feelings that are based on sensations, thoughts that are based on empirical data, and sensations that result in perceptions all of which relate to how the body affects the mind which may be categorized into the nature of a human being that is passive. The active part is certainly the one that reasons, questions, does research, employs logic, and utilizes language in order to both express and form thoughts that can be based on both the body and the mind[39]. The active state of a human being can conceive of thoughts that are based on imagination and thoughts that are based on understanding which is shown by Descartes in his *Second Meditation* (1978, p. 87). One can imagine the infinite but cannot *perceive* the infinite, this distinction is important to make in order to find which thoughts are based on imagination and which thoughts are based on understanding. Weil distinguishes between contingent thoughts, which are the things that Hume says we cannot be sure of like the rising of the sun and the boiling point of water that are only true

[39] (1978, p. 87)

as long as they are in certain conditions and are not true all the time, and thoughts that arise from necessity which are based on *synthetic a priori* judgments that have their source in space and time only as Kant defended (1978, p. 88). According to Weil, materialism loses when it comes to necessity because necessity arises from the confrontation of the world and the mind (1978, p. 88). A human being is only able to truly understand and work with that which is in the mind that is based on the necessity that comes from *a priori* judgments that are *synthetic* because nature is outside of the capability of our minds. Weil quotes Kant[40] and Bacon[41] in light of this discovery, of the mind, concluding that only actions and thoughts that are based on necessity truly belong to human beings:

> It is only those actions and thoughts which have a necessity about them that are truly human. Whenever one does not have to act, one must avoid those actions and thoughts which have no necessity about them. A thought without necessity is a prejudice. (1978, p. 89)

With this conclusion Weil begins the section titled "*After the discovery of mind*" where she talks about Plato, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant and summarizes their ideas on the characteristics of the mind, knowledge (*a priori* and *a posteriori*) and reasoning. These sections are, as expected, highly historical and based on summaries of different theories and their refutations however it is important to note that as already introduced and explained before, Weil emphasizes these philosophers in her later works.

2.4.1.2 After the discovery of the mind

After proclaiming the impossibility of the study of mind directly because of its negative characteristics. The first of the three important remarks that she makes is that since duality does not exist on two separate terms we can never distinguish between our thoughts and our judgments of our thoughts (1978, p. 90). This means that we can never truly know if what we have in our minds is the thought itself or the judgment of that thought, even when we are thinking about our minds we are also thinking about the judgment of the

[40] "The dove, when in its free flight it strikes the air and feels resistance, might well believe that it would fly better in a void.' (The dove – that is thought; air – that is the world.)" (1978, p. 89)
[41] 'Homo naturae non nisi parendo imperat.' (Man has command over nature only by obeying it.) (1978, p. 89)

thought of thinking about our minds (1978, p. 90). This is a peculiar paradox that seems to lead nowhere; however, it is something that one should acknowledge in order to find a way to study the mind *somehow* if not directly. Secondly, Weil points out that the very first thing we realize about ourselves when we try to examine how our mind works is that we are finite and imperfect. This is also the reason why Descartes says that he knows God before he knows himself (1978, p. 90). Once we realize that we are imperfect and finite and cannot even *perceive* what perfection and infinity are but that we can think of them is when we come to the idea of God because "*we feel that we are not God*" (1978, p. 90). Thirdly, while necessity is a way to conceive of the mind it is not sufficient because necessity only exists because the mind is able to "bring it to the surface" which is why whenever we think that we understand the mind or try to study the mind itself we are seeing nothing but an illusion (1978, p. 90). According to Simone Weil, the study of the mind cannot be done through the thoughts of the mind themselves but by studying what there is beyond those thoughts, in other words in order to understand the mind one must engage in metaphysics (1978, pp. 90-1).

Before continuing we must elaborate further on this notion. In the traditional sense, since the Ancient Greeks, and with Descartes' ultimate judgment, a human being is divided into two: the mind or the soul, the incorporeal self, and the body, the physical self. We must sidestep using the *self* or the *I* in this context because of the very reason Simone Weil avoids uttering them interchangeably. The distinction between the *I* and the *self* goes back to the traditional view of the division of a being into the mind/soul[42] and the body, while the body is bound to the Earth, the mind/soul is always bound to the divine or the heavenly. In this sense, the body dies, and the mind/soul remains either moving on to another 'realm' in some beliefs or coming back to a physical form in other beliefs. However, the word *self* [soi-même] does not seem to have the same distinction of mind-body as opposed to the concept of the *I*. The *self* might also come to mean the sum of mind-body where the *I* is the mind/soul only. At first, it seems that they refer to the same thing, however, if that is so how can one investigate the other? Either it is an illusion that one can actually investigate the other, or they are distinct, after all. There is something

[42] The reason why we must be careful to use mind/soul instead of only mind or soul at this point is because we have not made the distinction yet and Ancient Greeks and Descartes seem to have different understandings of what they mean by these words.

that is for certain, primarily which is that the *self* and the *I* belong to in the human being. Are they, then the whole or a part of a human being? Are they completely distinct, one belonging to the other, or do they coexist? If the *I* comes to mean the mind/soul without the physical being, or in other words, if the *I* is the one who makes decisions for both the mind/soul and the body then it means that it is the *I* that *thinks*; the mind/soul investigates its *shell*. If it is the *I* that thinks then it must also be the *I* that thinks about the *I*-itself. This is the point where everything either comes to a halt, is ambiguous, or perhaps mysterious[43]. However, the claim that the mind/soul is capable of questioning and investigating the self/mind/soul is in need of further inquiry. When the *I* is in the act of *thinking*, is it possible that in this act of thinking the *I* is able to think about the *thinking I* or is it only an illusory thought of thinking about the *thinking I*? According to Simone Weil in her *Lectures*, it is not possible for this *I* to be actually thinking about itself and coming to any knowledge about the *I*-itself, hence the reason why in her notes, especially *Gravity and Grace*, we see that the path to the knowledge of the self is not through thinking. The self that we believe that we know to be ourselves is nothing but an illusion and the moment we realize this we experience a kind of death (Pirruccello, 1995, p. 61), this is also why the only thing we could ever possess is not even the *I*-itself or *the self* but the power to say *I*. So then must first establish the meaning of the *self* in relation to the *I* as well as the power to say *I*.

Simone Weil as a conclusion to the mind's characteristics points out that until Leibniz no one was able to raise a question of the degree of consciousness and the unconsciousness itself. After Leibniz's introduction of the notion of "*conscious perception*" being "*made up of a number unconscious perceptions*" the approach to the study of the mind changed (1978, p. 91). After Leibniz, philosophers now doubted whether individuals were in complete control of their minds compared to uncontrollable nature. According to Weil, classical philosophy until that point mostly accepted that while there were some things that the mind cannot control but, in our minds, we were the "*masters*" (1978, p. 91). Now we have an unconscious mind that we do not have control over to worry about. However, while someone like Freud thought that the unconscious is where all our worst nature is, not every philosopher thought that this was something worrisome like Bergson. Freud

[43] We will come back to why such contradictions might have different meanings for Simone Weil in the following chapters.

thought that the repressed thoughts in our unconscious were all thoughts that should not ever come out, while Bergson thought the opposite and said that it is not the unconscious mind but the "*demands of practical life*" that contain the part of human beings that is "*bad*" (1978, p. 91). Weil points out that both of these ideas suggest that the unconscious is something outside of "*ourselves*" (1978, p. 91). What Simone Weil is underlining here is the difference between being *attentive* and being "*on the verge of consciousness*" (1978, p. 92). She wants to explore the nature of the unconscious, and find an answer to the following questions: in what ways is it part of the subconscious and how is it different than the state of being conscious or phenomena that fall under consciousness? These questions are important enough to study because Weil believes that geniuses also have a genius unconscious (1978, p. 92).

2.4.1.3 Freud's Unconscious

Simone Weil proceeds with Sigmund Freud's understanding of the subconscious, though it is better to stick with the word *unconscious* from now on[44]. Simply put, Freud divides the *psyche* or the *soul* in the sense of the *mind* into three parts: the id, the ego, and the superego. While the id [das Es, or the *It*] is related to the *unconscious*, the ego [das Ich, or the *I*] is related to the *conscious* mind. Of course, this is a complete oversimplification of Freud's understanding of the parts of the mind. If we were to elaborate a bit more, the combination of *id, ego, and superego* are not so *severely* distinct from each other but somewhat intertwined. In his work titled *Das Ich und das Es* (1927), Freud gives more detail on how he conceptualizes the mind through the conscious [*bewusst*] and the unconscious [*unbewusst*] in terms of the *id* and the *ego*. According to Freud the division of the conscious and the unconscious is essential for psychoanalysis in order to determine "*pathological mental processes*" because one cannot accept that the conscious is all there is and hope to shed light on abnormalities of the mind (1927, p. 9). Even at the time of Freud's text, there were still scholars educated in philosophy who refused any unconscious mental activity and because of this Freud's response is that they must not

[44] Though he later stopped using *subconscious* and used the word *unconscious* instead because he thought that when the former is used it is not clear if it refers to those things that are completely out of the reach of the conscious mind (Freud, The Question of Lay Analysis: Conversations with an Impartial Person, 1989). In these lecture notes of Weil's high-school philosophy class both terms are seemingly used interchangeably but since these are notes of a student it is better to focus on distinctive remarks and the way Simone Weil progressed in class.

have studied "*hypnosis and dreams*" because in these states the conscious mind is nowhere to be found and if one tried and study these states only through the understanding of a conscious mind they would not be able to solve the problems that these states bring into the discussion (1927, p. 10). Freud describes the difference in simple terms with the example of a conscious idea in a way that the state is a fleeting one. We are only conscious of one particular idea at a moment in time, before and after the state of being conscious of that idea we say that the idea was not in the forefront of our minds or "*latent*", which is exactly what Freud means by the *unconscious* (1927, pp. 10-1). An *unconscious* idea is an idea that can be called forth into consciousness at any given time for a variety of reasons[45] but Freud mentions that "*philosophers*" object to this definition of the *unconscious* because if the idea is "*in a state of latency*" we cannot possibly say that this is "*a mental element at all*", in other words, those who object Freud's understanding of the *unconscious* claim that the idea that is not in focus does not *affect* the mind (1927, p. 11). Freud bases his understanding of the *unconscious* on the *theory of repression* that he claims is practically shown in psychoanalysis where some ideas are *repressed* into the unconscious as if something holds them back, only to be unearthed by techniques of psychoanalysis. This means that the unconscious can be divided into two: the latent but repressed unconscious not capable of becoming conscious [N.B. on their own without the means of psychoanalysis] and the latent unconscious that is capable of becoming conscious (1927, p. 12). This calls for having to call each by a different name which brings Freud into calling the former *the unconscious* and the latter *the preconscious*. The *preconscious* is latent and easily called into the conscious state while the *repressed unconscious* cannot come into consciousness naturally, without psychoanalysis, or perhaps cannot ever come into consciousness (New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, 1976, p. 103).

The states of the mind and degrees of consciousness that we have examined through Freud's words are, again in his words, "insufficient" in practice, henceforth he gives the definition of the *ego*[46]: "*a coherent organization of mental processes*" (1927, p. 15). This definition means that the *ego* more or less coincides with the mental state of being

[45] Weil, in her *Lectures*, has given in-depth analyses of each of the cases where an idea comes to the mind that we have mentioned before.
[46] *Das Ich* in the original German, the Latin is commonly used in all languages.

conscious, however, Freud quickly points out that, based on his practical experience, the ego is also capable of having *repressed* mental processes and these are only brought out with psychoanalysis which means that there is something that is unconscious that belongs to the ego or the ego bleeds into (1927, pp. 15-7). There are also latent mental processes that the ego is able to bring into consciousness because this is a necessity for there to be any conscious thought. When we *sense* something but do not know what we sense about the sensation is latent in the preconscious waiting to be made aware of by the ego so that it gets lifted into the conscious mind at the moment of realization of the thing that we *sense* in whichever way. This means that the ego that we mostly associate with *being* conscious also possesses repressed and preconscious objects which means that there may be a way to come up with a new term for the unconscious that relates to the ego and the unconscious that is far from the reach of the ego. However, Freud suggests that the use of the concept of the unconscious in such a way would make all the other meanings obsolete and a better way of viewing all of this would be that ego is *mostly* conscious that also has the ability to hold *most* of the preconscious as well as the capability of *some* of the unconscious (1927, p. 18). The unconscious and the preconscious are distinct from one another also in a way that the preconscious works with "*verbal images*", which Freud refers to as "*memory-residues*[47]" (1927, p. 21). Something becomes preconscious when they connect with their corresponding verbal images which were, themselves, perceptions and with the triggering of the memory they become conscious once more (1927, p. 21). What Freud is describing here is what Weil talked about how the body affects the mind in terms of sensations, the sense data that we come into contact with are perceived and made "*sense*" of in the mind in the form of mental processes. There is a time, which Kant also describes as mentioned before, between coming into contact with an object and realizing the object as something determinate that we know of before, and even if we do not know we start questioning the nature of the said object. The time in between sensation and that sensation becoming perception is what Freud refers to as the preconscious in this case. The "*system*" that makes up the sense-perception which follows the path of preconscious towards the conscious is the *ego*, and the "*uncontrollable forces*" or urges that are shared among different individuals' minds but behaving "*as though it were unconscious*" is the *Id* (Es) (1927, pp. 27-8). The repressed mental processes that are

[47] They can connect with all senses (1927, p. 23).

shared with the *ego* are also connected to the *Id*, in fact, the *Id* is completely immersed in the unconscious which is why Freud relates the force that governs the *Id* to that of the instinct while the *ego* is mostly led by perception (1927, p. 30). With this, Freud has filled perhaps half of the emptiness that he left when describing that the ego is somewhat that of the preconscious, unconscious but mostly the conscious state of the mind, and now the *Id* makes up for much of the unconscious there is still something left to fill the rest. Freud, introduces the term "*super-ego* [*Über-Ich*]", which is actually a part of the ego that needs to be viewed separately, and defines it as having domination over the ego "*in the form of conscience or perhaps of an unconscious sense of guilt*" (1927, p. 45). Thus, the super-ego is, very much like the ego, present in all states of the mind especially as somewhat opposite to the *Id* since the *Id* takes its power from instinct that can be associated with the more primitive side of our nature while the super-ego could both demand and criticize certain acts and decisions of the ego in ways that may also be led by ethical or unethical thinking, though the super-ego is associated with conscience it may not also be a conscience that is based on ethical values – the super-ego in a child is formed not by the ego of the parents but by the super-ego of the parents (1927, pp. 40-46). With all of this, Freud sees the individual as being made up of the *Id*, the *ego*, and the *super-ego* and that they correspond to three mental states of the conscious, the unconscious, and the preconscious that combines the mind and the body into one rejecting the traditional understanding of the body and soul that makes up an individual being as *the self*.

Weil criticizes Freud's understanding of the unconscious regarding the fact that the repressed mental processes are outside the control of oneself and that no one is responsible for their repressed thoughts or feelings. Weil believes that everyone should have a responsibility to control their repressed unconscious it should even be a "*duty*" to both control oneself and "*reproach someone*" for their repressed thoughts (1978, p. 97). Weil even goes as far as claiming that Freud's theory of the unconscious is "*dangerous*" and that it reduces us in the words of Plato into "*wooden horses*" that are guided by "*warriors* (thoughts)" (1978, p. 97). Weil criticizes Freud because his theories claim that a person can be both good and bad at the same time and that the bad is deep within us somewhere either waiting to come out or guiding our actions without us being able to realize which she completely rejects and suggests that just as Socrates taught through Plato, one must always be able to recognize the bad and try to deal with it instead of

repressing the unconscious further than it already is (1978, pp. 97-8). One can only realize the bad within them if one actively looks for it and try to get rid of the *I* because we are always able to act morally even if it seems impossible and our instincts seem more powerful than us. Freud claims that psychoanalysis is based on science or his own practical experience, while Weil advocates that it is above all a question of morality instead of science (1978, p. 98). The self is not divided into the psychological and the moral, but they are both the same whatever affects the psychological self is in turn able to affect the moral self (1978, p. 98).

2.4.1.4 The Present and the Future *I*

When we talk about the self in our daily lives it always seems to be clear exactly what we are referring to, it is always some individual that has a name. For example, if we say that "*Simone is teaching a class in philosophy*" we immediately assume that the *entity* named Simone is an individual human being who would refer to her*self* the same way we do. The self is not always the *I* but may also be an object of a statement as well as a question. It is quite clear until now that towards an inquiry of the *I* or the *self* it seems as if we will not be able to go further than that which we understand from common language because of the fact that Weil pointed out at the beginning of the lecture on the mind: one cannot truly think of oneself or in other words, we cannot seem to be able to question our minds using our minds except perhaps the question itself. Continuing with this dilemma, Weil searches for the self in terms of personality, in the next section of the lecture, and tries to answer through two concepts: "*the self as existing in the present, the self as existing in time*" (1978, p. 99). This is simply because when we refer to a self in the present that is now, we are referring to a self that is only existent in the now and never a minute before or after. However, there is also a sense of a complete self when we say *you* or *her* or *I* in more of a general manner. This second manner is what Weil refers to as *the self as existing in time* because the self, according to her citing Kant and Descartes, cannot be divided into more than one, there is only one soul that we can refer to and that soul is the object of the *I* (1978, p. 99). The *I*, we refer to exists throughout time, and no matter what shape our body goes through the *I* refers to the same entity, however, it is arguable whether the same entity is the *same* in terms of both the matter of the body and the mind, however, note that Weil uses *soul* here instead of the mind. Our body is in a state of constant change:

the cells die, and new ones get born; we get new experiences and change our outlook on different things; we learn new things and apply them differently throughout our lives; we are young, mature and old and in every state of life we have a different *sense* of self in our mind even if the *self* that we refer to in terms of language stays the same. Weil, being a Platonist, considers that while the body may change and exists in time in different shapes and forms, the soul stays the same because the soul is part of the divine and is immortal, therefore cannot change. Descartes claims the same thing and describes two *parts* of the soul, though not in the sense that there are two different souls but one soul that has different *areas*: the lower part that is "*sensitive*" or the part where natural appetites reside, and the higher part which is "*rational*" where the will is (The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, 1985, pp. 345-6).

In whichever way we see the soul, whether, from a Cartesian point of view, having a rational and instinctive part, or in three parts like the tripartite soul of Plato, there is always an unchanging notion that is the *self* which Weil emphasizes in her lectures as well as in her other works which I will discuss later. The critical claim that Weil makes in the section titled *Identity in time* is that "*one cannot think of oneself as an object*" (1978, p. 100). Even, amnesia, as Weil points out, does not keep us from saying *I*, there is absolutely nothing that would normally make us alienate from the *I*. This is quite important because Weil later tries to determine a way to give this *self* away in order to be able to get closer to the divine, because as long as we have that *I* that *wills* we will always have a sense of urgency regarding *ourselves*, the only way that we will be able to purify ourselves from the dangers of ambition is to give away our self in the sense of the *I*. Because, the *self* that never changes is neither merely the soul nor the body nor both but it is literally the individual[48] that is the last particle that cannot be divided regarding the human species, similar to the word *atom* [ἄτομος][49], which comes from Greek, meaning "*indivisible*" mainly used in chemistry and physics to mean the smallest particle of a chemical element (McSween Jr & Huss, 2022), once thought to be something indivisible until the discoveries of Rutherford (Rutherford, 1911). The individual is the same, even if it is *thought* to be divided into a body and a soul, the individual is still the *self* as a whole and cannot *actually* be divided, *yet*. Furthermore, a distinction between the self in

[48] The word *individual* comes from Latin *individuum* meaning "the indivisible thing".
[49] (Liddell et al., 1889)

time and the self in the present prompts Weil to distinguish between three kinds of consciousness: consciousness of oneself as a subject, consciousness of oneself as an object, and consciousness of oneself which is a combination of the two previous kinds (1978, p. 100). In the first kind of consciousness the individual is saying *I* and is the subject at the moment, in a recount, in a certain situation where the individual "*fills the world*", the second kind of consciousness is where the individual knows who they are in terms of objective information such as a name, where they live, what they do, the third kind of consciousness is "*the normal state*" of the individual where both previous kinds of consciousnesses are combined into the day to day *self* (1978, p. 100). The first and second kinds of consciousnesses are where the individual is in an "*abnormal state*" because we never view ourselves only subjectively or objectively in any normal daily situation (1978, p. 100). Excluding these abnormal states where we only feel that we are either only as a subject or only as an object, the unity of ourselves is never broken as an individual. We are always in a state where we both know who we are in terms of *information* regarding ourselves and we know who we are compared to other individuals; I am *this* individual here where I stand and feel that I exist in my mind, the one that says *I*, and not *that* individual that I refer to as she, he, it over there somewhere else other than the complete space that I am in because only one individual can occupy a physical and a mental space, which also relates to the earlier notion of not being able to think of ourselves in two different situations *at once* nor can we *feel* more than one emotion at a given time.

2.4.1.5 I and judgment

In further thinking of the self after the discovery of the mind in philosophy Simone Weil begins a section on *judgment*. Weil cites logicians as she distinguishes *concept* that is something to be used in order to "*construct judgments or arguments*[50]" (1978, p. 101). A *judgment* is a mere "*relationship between concepts*" while *reasoning* is "*a relationship between judgments*" (1978, p. 101). The question of judgments is significant for Weil because a judgment is "*an activity of the mind*" and what binds judgments "*is the 'I'*" (1978, p. 102). Judgments are a part of who we are, apart from our pure objective

[50] "In a syllogism there are three concepts. The verbs, apart from the verb 'to be', the substantives, are conmcepts (N.B. Existence is something different from ordinary concepts. Existence adds nothing to the concept of a thing.)" (1978, p. 101).

consciousness and our pure subjective consciousness all that is left is what we like and dislike, what we believe in, what we will, and what we do, all have to do with our judgments because even actions can be judgments in that there is a choice, a decision made without words (1978, pp. 101-102). According to Kant, judgments are the essential faculties of the mind and Weil adds to this by saying that "*all thought is judgment*" (1978, p. 102). Even empirical data is formed with judgment because the mind has to determine a relationship with what the senses *sense* and what the mind correlates the thing that is sensed into with the use of *categories*[51] of the mind. Weil lists and gives examples of different theories that define judgment: the associationist, the materialist, the fideist, the Cartesian, the theory of Rousseau, and finally the theory of Spinoza. The associationist theory of judgment claims that "*judgment is an association of ideas*" to which Weil responds as being absurd because a judgment can either affirm or deny (1978, p. 102). The materialist theory of judgment claims that judgment is related to our experiences and is learned through empirical data rather than through thoughts that form in the mind. The fideist theory of judgment claims that judgments are based on feelings and belief as opposed to reason and it is the feeling or belief that influences reason. Weil criticizes this theory pointing out that fideism is what in the end becomes "*spiritual tyranny*" and that the simple existence of any doubt is enough to reject such a theory for judgment, it is because fideists *believe* that belief and judgment are one and the same and according to Weil they forget the one thing that would distinguish between the two which is doubt (1978, p. 103). Descartes's theory of judgment makes a distinction between understanding and judgment (1978, p. 103). Understanding has degrees that suggest a limitation, while judgment is absolute and limitless because according to Descartes through *doubt* one, or the mind, can understand something without judgment (1978, p. 103). Descartes's methodical doubt and how it leads to an understanding before judgment has been discussed earlier in this chapter, so it is needless to reiterate. However, Weil notes that Descartes's view of what judgment is and how it works within mental processes is shared by Rousseau and Kant as well (1978, p. 103). Rousseau's theory of judgment is an active power that compares objects of sensations, and this leads to understanding. I perceive an object by sight and compare what I see, therefore I make a judgment, that suggests that judgment comes afterward, because sensation only shows objects in nature

[51] (Kant, The Critique of Pure Reason, 1998, p. 212 A80/B106)

separately from each other, and as they are, with my judgment I am able to understand the objects both as themselves and among each other which leads to my understanding of the objects in nature as they are among other objects (1978, p. 104). For Rousseau, the cause that determines the will is also that which determines the judgment, in this sense judgment must be an activity of the mind, or in other words, I must actively be involved in my judgments, they do not just form on their own. Hence, according to Rousseau, if I realize that I am actively making judgments and that my understanding is based on this, I will also realize that my freedom is also an extension of my faculties of judgment and understanding, which means that once I judge something as true then I can also actively choose the good. On the other hand, every bad choice is based on false judgments that I have made, in this sense, judgment determines the will and intelligence determines judgment (1978, p. 104). The last theory of judgment belongs to Spinoza, and his theory is based on his criticism of Descartes. According to Spinoza, the activity of judgment exists within ideas or rather ideas signify certain judgments or affirmations as opposed to the mind (1978, p. 104). This means that every idea that forms in our minds is at first judged true as long as there is not an idea that negates the affirmed idea, which suggests that Spinoza rejects Descartes's view of the importance or even the possibility of methodical doubt (1978, p. 104). Spinoza rejects methodical doubt because he does not believe that an individual can actively choose to judge something as false without something that prompts them to do so since the individual is not free to *choose* in the sense that Descartes claims to be so, or later Rousseau and Kant. Spinoza claims a God that is ever-present and that individuals are part of God, or rather God is the cause of everything that comes *after* God never to be separated from God, and only when the individual seeks knowledge will they find that some of the ideas that they affirmed before are false. In summary, Simone Weil sees that four theories of judgment, except Rousseau's and Descartes's, completely reject the possibility of *actual* judgment and claim that there is something that seems like judgment but it is not, or in the case of the fideist view judgment is swapped for belief, therefore she suggests to follow Descartes and Rousseau's theories (1978, p. 105).

In conclusion to the *Lectures* that relate to *the self*, we see that Simone Weil gives a historical account of what she believes is important regarding the body and the mind and above all what she understands from an individual. This endeavor comes from her

admiration for Plato, Descartes, and Kant while her criticism of philosophers that do not support her views gets clear indications within the lecture. Weil is heavily pointing towards the views in her personal notes, which were only known to a few during her life. After being able to get an overview of her syllabus in a general philosophy class, even if the notes are by a high school student, we can move on and refer back to the basics when needed in terms of her understanding based on her version of the history of philosophy. It is interesting that she begins with those who she greatly criticizes and opposes in such great detail, and only mentions her thoughts quite briefly–at least that is what have in the notes. Nevertheless, even her way of deeply studying that which she is strongly against gives will give us a better understanding of her more concise personal works, since she is never as detailed as she is in her essays and notes, as much as in her lectures, assuming that the reader would be familiar with what she was discussing during her time. Following the lectures on the materialists and the rationalists she moves on to politics, social theory, ethics, and aesthetics, however, we will have to look at her other works and try to dig more into what she understands from *the self* in order to grasp what she expects from the state, sociology, values and the importance of art in an individual's life.

2.4.2 Science and perception in Descartes

In her doctoral dissertation, titled *Science and Perception in Descartes* (1987), Simone Weil talked defended her version of the Cartesian self, the existence of God, and the importance of determining and utilizing the true nature of science as opposed to the modern understanding of it. In her dissertation, Weil tries to delve into a Cartesian *meditation* towards the faculty of understanding in terms of judgments as she taught in her lectures later on. She begins with a historical overview and moves on to her understanding of Descartes's *Meditations*. Her aim is to follow the most important question that she believed in, which is the search for knowledge as a human being, throughout history, and conclude with how Descartes handled the task and changed the course of philosophy because according to Weil, Descartes's understanding of science was in fact similar to what it is today but differing in vital aspects that needed a retelling

and a re-research. In order to study and understand Descartes completely she tries to position herself as a Cartesian[52].

In the introduction section of her dissertation, Weil briefly introduces the current state of modern science going back to the original curiosity of humanity: knowledge. At the beginning of humanity, individuals were aware of both things without further questioning: being conscious of themselves and their perception of the world (1987, p. 31). Insofar as the primitive species of humans lived in simple communities with simple daily tasks, they did not need to know more than what they inherently were *aware* of. This state of civilization was also the "*golden age*" according to Rousseau, who thought that humanity should immediately go back to those days when everyone was in "*blissful ignorance*" and did not have to worry beyond simply living because in this state the modern worries of the human being were not even imaginable[53]. As humanity began to discover that their senses were limited in terms of the things in the world they began to question, not because of ignorance but because of the error that these limitations caused (1987, p. 31). Through questioning their limitations and errors humanity found that there were individuals who possessed godlike abilities in terms of knowledge that was unreachable with the means of the senses, and as these priests and kings gained power through their knowledge without a direct object they also began to tyrannize humanity and claimed authority throughout the world in different ways (1987, pp. 31-32). This cycle started to crumble with Thales inventing and introducing geometry which showed humanity that there was another way that knowledge can be gained, without ungrounded knowledge, through the mind's faculty of reason (1987, p. 32). However, according to Weil, this created further problems, because now, apart from the kings and the priests, there was a third group that was able to claim authority over humanity: the scientists (1987, p. 32). On the other hand, this problem also opened a new way of liberation for humankind: an individual's use of their own reason in the pursuit of knowledge that is not in the authority of the rulers and scientists only. This means that any human being could utilize their own mind in order to find their own limitations as individual human

[52] Which was a special approach that was known to students in Sorbonne called "philosophie dogmatique" (1987, p. 26).
[53] Rousseau suggested that "a state of reflection is a state against nature, and that the man who meditates is a degenerate animal" (1987, p. 31).

beings and how some tyrannical rulers were in the wrong to exploit humanity. Weil points out that Greeks, especially Plato and the Platonists, viewed geometry as the only way to reach "*wisdom*", they claimed that anyone who did not possess the knowledge of geometry could not possibly possess any knowledge at all (1987, p. 33). The scientific understanding of the Greeks is now considered "*uncertain*" and perhaps unclear because they utilized "*numbers, geometrical figures, and machines*" while modern science in comparison utilizes "*pure relationships*" (1987, p. 33). Weil wants to note here that the science of today rejects anything to do with intuition which is also the only way to connect with the world as humans and tries to replace intuition with pure formal relations of numbers in the form of symbolic algebra that is based on an abstract form of reasoning (1987, pp. 33-34). This shift in science created a larger gap between the scientist and the uneducated individual because the individual lives with a common understanding of reason and intuition, which in turn transformed scientists into "*the new priests of the old theocracies*" (1987, p. 34). Weil criticizes modern science because she thinks that intuition is an integral part of the experience as a human being, in fact, it is the only way to think about the world and to have a content for a particular study in science, without the content the abstract reasonings lead to nowhere, other than being a simple language, and do not contribute to the humanities great curiosity of wisdom[54]. Weil continues the introduction into her critique of modern science and claims that inconsistencies within modern science can easily be shown and gives Poincaré's views as examples. One of the most important points that she is trying to make here is based on Poincaré's understanding of modern physics which is merely a way of utilizing mathematics as a language in order to record results of experiments: "*All laws are deduced from experiment; but to enunciate them, a special language is needed… Mathematics furnishes the physicist with the only language he can speak*"[55]. Here the physicist is turning mathematics into a tool for the physicist but the physicist is nothing more than an abstract reasoner in the modern times, according to Weil, because they have lost the true meaning and the noble goal of science which is to gain knowledge, and replaced it with "*science for its own sake*" in the words of Poincaré[56]. Weil, challenges the understanding of modern science and believes that the

[54] (1987, p. 34)
[55] *Ibid.*
[56] (1987, p. 35)

only way to clear this misunderstanding is to go back, not to Thales but, to the "*double revolution*" of Descartes when "*physics became an application of mathematics and geometry became algebra*"[57].

Weil begins the first part of her dissertation with how science substitutes the sensible world with the intelligible world as described in the very beginning of Descartes's *Meditations*, where he says that all that he knows to be true has come from his senses, which means that the senses must be ignored first, in order to understand what and how we can know or later trust our senses[58]. Weil points out that this is certainly not a mathematical but a metaphysical question, but Descartes bases all his ideas on his metaphysics[59]. The aim of Cartesian physics is to replace what we feel with what we can understand[60]. Weil shows Descates's aim by quoting his *Traité de la Lumière* where he distinguishes between what we feel, or the sense [*le sentiment*[61]], that we have towards light that forms as a result of our imagination and what we see with our eyes, and what the real nature of the light that we see is which can be the flames in the sun[62]. Descartes's *a priori* method of trying to reach an understanding of what *can* and *cannot* be known through reason alone is something that had been attempted, yet not with such a rigorous effort before[63]. In terms of his use of geometry in philosophy as a means to use reason to reach true knowledge, Descartes is a second Thales and the founder of modern science for Weil[64]. The importance of geometry according to Descartes which Weil supports is proven further in a letter he writes to Princess Elizabeth: "*The study of mathematics, chiefly exercises the imagination*" and what he writes in the *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* (Descartes, The Philosphical Writings of Descartes, 2012) subsequently follows this line of thought which claims that the imagination is the path to the idea of anything related to the body[65]. Imagination, as mentioned before when we examined the

[57] *Ibid.*
[58] (1987, p. 36)
[59] *Ibid.*
[60] *Ibid.*
[61] The English translation uses "impression".
[62] (1987, p. 36) and (Descartes, 1998)
[63] Though philosophers like Spinoza thought that even though Descartes's method was firm it was not utilized to its true limits by him (Spinoza, 2005)
[64] (1987, p. 43)
[65] (1987, p. 50)

Meditations, can be a means to something that cannot be grasped with reason alone, however imagination needs the control and the guidance of reason, and this becomes possible through geometry. Weil claims that, with further remarks by Descartes regarding the importance of perception and senses in understanding, as we look close and more and more from the outside all we find are contradictions in Descartes's method of philosophy which on the one hand claims that he is inspired by the Socratic motto of "know thyself", yet on the other hand seeks a certain understanding of "physics" that Socrates deeply criticized[66]. Considering Descartes's contradictory pursuit towards knowledge arrives at the conclusion that one can only understand Cartesian thought as a Cartesian[67]. Thus, in the second part of her dissertation, Weil gets into the role of a Cartesian and tries to imitate Descartes's *Meditations* in order to truly understand how such contradictory conclusions in his philosophy are reached or whether if there something that we, as observers, are missing[68]. Weil considers a Descartes that is stripped of all knowledge that we knew he held and leaves only two things: to be a human being and the realization that their reason is the only thing to trust[69]. Because, if Descartes were to be right then these things are all we need in order to reach true knowledge stripped of errors, or at least will have the ability to notice errors and limitations through the use of methodical doubt[70].

The second part of the dissertation begins with the Cartesian Weil speaking from first person point of view and questions what she can and cannot know and begins with a few fundamental judgments such as the fact that she is a living being who thinks with either pleasure or pain. She is situated and has a body that is in this world, and this is determined by her being a subject to nature and nature being a subject to her. Everything that she calls "objects" has the possibility of being a source for either pleasure or pain which in turn either makes her existence known to her by pleasure or her existence being limited by pain[71]. So far, Cartesian Weil has arrived to the conclusion that there is something other than herself, or external to herself, and her existence at the moment of such a feeling is dependent on the external *demonstrating* her existence to her in terms of pain and

[66] (1987, p. 54)
[67] (1987, p. 54)
[68] *Ibid.*
[69] (1987, p. 55)
[70] *Ibid.*
[71] *Ibid*.

pleasure. Everything that I feel external to me either gives me pleasure or pain and one always reminds me of the other and makes me aware of my existence here in the world at that moment. This is clear and without contradiction until the moment that I try to come up with statements that define *what* I am feeling, because at that moment I will try to say something outside of the reach of my reason[72]. On the other hand, there are things that are not dependent on the external such as mathematical statements that are based on abstract truths[73]. At this point, Cartesian Weil can think of mathematical equations in her mind without having to depend on her senses, but she cannot fathom *why* they are the way they are. This triggers the next thought which is that whatever I think about only gives me the information about myself and nothing else, and with this thought I believe that I cannot have any control over my ideas because they seem to act on their own and sometimes, I try to grasp them only for them to slip from my mind. I know only that I am conscious of the thing that I am conscious of and any further step seems impossible[74]. I can only know what a dream is because I have dreamt before, just as I know what a feeling is because I have experienced it before and it seems as though there is nothing else that I can know, there is no way that I can see further from here[75]. However, the Cartesian Weil realizes that there is something else that I can know, which is that everything that I feel is an illusion insofar as they create illusions that "*seem certain*" through my power of belief that the things I think of "*borrow*" from me[76]. It is not because the things I sense and make a thought out of are themselves illusions in the world but I make them into thoughts as such which signifies to my only power that I have over everything other than me, even if the Evil Genius tries to deceive me in whatever way it can, which is the power of knowing that *I think*[77]. I can be deceived in the things that I think of but not towards the fact that I somehow think which is something that cannot be changed as long as I exist[78]. Therefore, the power of thinking, which comes from my power of being able to doubt, leads to my knowledge of myself as existing: *Je puis, donc je suis*[79]. I have the

[72] (1987, p. 57)
[73] *Ibid.*
[74] (1987, p. 57)
[75] (1987, p. 58)
[76] *Ibid.*
[77] (1987, p. 59)
[78] *Ibid.*
[79] Translated in the English version as "I have power, therefore I am". However it can also be translated as: "I *can*, therefore I am." As opposed to Descartes's "Je pense, donc je suis" [I think, therefore I am].

power to think, or as Weil later uses it in her notes titled *Gravity and Grace* I have the power to say *I* which is enough to determine the state of my existence however it may be or whichever way it eludes me there is certainty that I exist because I can think of saying *I*. The fact that I can say *I* also comes from an earlier remark that Weil has touched on in her *Lectures*, though will certainly reiterate in her other works, is that every thought that I have is a judgment and every judgment that I make is subjective to myself, I cannot make judgments *as* others, perhaps only *based* on judgments of others. The fact that I can affirm something, anything, as something good or bad is enough to establish my existence as true, whatever that true may be or in whatever form it may take that might certainly be beyond the capabilities of my reason. With this revelation certain things are revealed such as the nature of "*doubt, thought, power, existence, and knowledge itself*"[80]. Even if I were to resist such an outcome through such reasoning, I confirm my own existence. The very moment I even consider that I do not, in fact, exist I confirm that there is an *I* that makes a judgment towards something as true or false which in turn confirms my own existence[81]. All of these things "*to exist, to think, to know*" point to "*a single reality: to be able to do something*" which is why Cartesian Weil changes Descartes's saying from *think* to *can* or *having the power of*[82]. From this point forward, we arrive at the next question that follows the proof of my existence which is "*who is this I that exists?*" Cartesian Weil claims that "*in order to know myself, I must know the extent of this power [of saying I]. The power that I possess belongs only to me and is not shared with something other than myself, and by definition power, in itself, is infinite and if I possess something that is infinite as power then I must surely be God*"[83]. However, it is quite clear that the only power I have is this freedom to be able to say I, reassuring my existence, insofar as that I have limitations towards things that escape my power as an individual being which would only mean that there must be some other being besides myself, since "*no power is limited by itself*", that could possess such a power that is beyond my limitations which signals to the existence of God by definition[84]. Cartesian Weil has arrived at a point where she knows she exists because she has the power to say I, she knows the kind of limitations she has as an

[80] (1987, p. 59)
[81] *Ibid.*
[82] *Ibid.*
[83] (1987, p. 62)
[84] *Ibid*.

individual, she knows there must be some other being besides herself because of her limitations and the fact that there are also objects beyond her, and that with these she can go further in her knowledge towards *the self* because the grounding is formed[85].

2.4.3 The Self in gravity and grace

The first sentence in the section titled *The Self* in *Gravity and Grace* is quite striking which reiterates what she had begun exploring in her dissertation and her *Lectures*: "*We possess nothing in the world – a mere chance can strip us of everything – except the power to say 'I'*" (2003, p. 26). This power to say I makes it possible for the individual to confirm their existence by the faculty of reason only. Even though both Weil and I have used *I* and *the self* in a sort of interrelated manner, we come to difficult cul-de-sacs as we go on into the more mystical works, though there are a few things that we can consider to be true such as the *self* being bound to earth and earthly desires and the *I* which may be regarded as the *self* of the soul as explored in Plato and Descartes. However, if we say that the *self* wishes then how is this wish carried? The *self* certainly says "*I wish…*" or rather the individual insofar as she regards herself as *an individual self* it is also the self that which Weil claims we must destroy in order to become closer to God and receive grace. Why and how we may come closer to God and receive grace can be understood throughout her notes, as Simone Weil, refers to Ancient Indian, Buddhist and Zen beliefs that consistently refer to the loss of the *ego* that will open up the possibility to rise up to heaven, or *Nirvana* in the case of the Buddhists to become a *Buddha*, as all humans have Buddha-nature (Williams, 2008). The *ego* in Latin, *ἐγώ* [*ego*] in Greek, the □□□□ [*ahám*] in Sanskrit and finally the I or *Je* in English and French refer all to the first person singular personal pronoun through which the *self*, expresses a desire, a statement, a judgment or a question. Simone Weil notes the following in one of her notebooks: "*Any being whose "I" (aham) is the atman (the true self/soul) is a man-God*" (1970, p. 322). Therefore, the *self* and the *I* that Simone Weil also talks about in *Gravity and Grace* is what all these beliefs also refer to and she connects the conceptualization of this certain *I* and *self* with her Christian and Platonist views that also

[85] "what I know now – that I think, that I exist, that I depend on God, that I am subject to the world (knowledge that I have had to carefully develop even though it is intuitive and one with the act of knowing) – contains everything that I have to know; I must find in it the means to satisfy myself on any subject whatever" (1987, p. 66).

stem from a Cartesian method of doubt, though she denies eclectic religions she is determined to show that Christian beliefs are not unique and the story of the beliefs has been flowing throughout history in different regions and in different languages staying constant on certain topics like the need to let go of the earthly, illusory self that we can only truly let go by giving our power to say "*I*", which is also the only true thing that we possess, to God as supplication. Though we may continue with the obvious religious basis of such an act, while her understanding of existence and what it means to be able to say *I* comes from her dissertation on Descartes, there is yet another point that Weil touches on in her Pre-War Notebooks which has to do with the relationship of human and nature that is related to a more primal relationship of human and God. Weil talks about how human beings have freed themselves from the *bondage* of nature, perhaps what Kant aspired for but in a more degenerative manner. As human beings distanced themselves directly from nature and started to satisfy their basic needs indirectly, they also distanced themselves from the satisfaction of interacting with nature. Where once humans needed to go into nature hunting and collecting in order to survive, now they go to the market, in order to go and buy basic necessities from other people who are also in a system that *produces* those necessities, which means that they (or everyone) now need to sell their time and earn currency in exchange for survival which is a completely new kind of stress that human beings were not used to in the old days that Rousseau reminisced as mentioned before. Weil sees a loss of certain satisfaction that is unique to the interaction between the human and nature that is also, in a way, divine. We are now quite distant from nature and thus liberated from the necessities of nature, but we are now bound to and enslaved by mechanics of society that appeared with such illusion of freedom. While, once people used to give supplication to the Gods with sacrifice to get their harvest in response, now "*one works at a machine and one gets back from baker's*" (1970, p. 19). Work, for Simone Weil, is a mystical action, a sort of religious ritual that is reminiscent of the way Buddhism views labor and how working could also be a kind of prayer. Work is also a way to equalize the "*surrounding forces of nature*," because nature wins over human beings when they are in *inaction* (2003, p. 178). Weil, warns against passivity of humans and believes that "everything should be done to minimize the passivity of man [*sic*] (1970, p. 16). She believes that science is the theory and art is the symbol of work; in other words, art is "*work divorced from utility*" (1970, p. 16), which means that either theory

of work, practice of work or making symbols of work is sufficient to stay active in order to keep the forces of nature at bay and in equilibrium while also, in a way, praying to God. Work [physical labor], along with science and art is a way for humans to recreate their lives, through each of them we produce. Through work we produce our "*own natural existence*"[86] because we must eat and for us to be able to eat, we must work for it, whether this be industrial work or work in nature in order to gather or hunt for resources, however it is important to note that neither must be the *end* here since "*the truth*"[87] is in the cycle. Through science we recreate "*the universe by means of symbols*"[88], which means that we search for knowledge, we try to understand the universe, and we try to reach for the idea of the Good in order to get closer to God. Finally, art lets us recreate the "*alliance*" between our body and soul[89], because with artistic work we try to express that is in our souls with the help of our bodies out into the world. Weil notes here that it is important not to take any of these three without the other two lest we render that one "*poor, empty and vain*"[90]; we must consider all of them in unity and in relation to each other because all of them are different manifestations of physical labor, or in other words different manifestations of religious worship. We can clearly see how Simone Weil's thought changed from a Cartesian epistemology into a more mystical understanding of Plato's teachings that she claims is also what influenced the Christian philosophers as well as Descartes himself. This does not mean, however, that her aim in philosophy changed, but it means that certain claims that she had made in her dissertation, lectures and other earlier essays have all become drenched with a more mysterious understanding of philosophy.

Weil criticizes modern life because we now spend all of our time wishing while we should be making the world part of our lives through *work* and *will*. Weil suggests that we must "*eliminate all wishing from human life*" and put *will* in its place, so that we may stop expecting things that we might never get from working and the things that we might receive we may now receive them as *grace*, which is the only way love can be pure[91]. Since, in our time, we have lost the close ties we once held with nature, we are no longer

[86] (Weil, Gravity and Grace, 2003, p. 178)
[87] *Ibid.* p. 180
[88] *Ibid.*
[89] *Ibid.*
[90] (2003, p. 178)
[91] (1970, p. 19)

able to know how to receive grace, and this means that we no longer know what *pure* love is. The only way we can start receiving grace is to give away our wishes and desires, ergo the power to say *I*, and replace it with a will with no specific object, which we will elaborate in the upcoming chapters; by receiving grace we may also know *pure* love. However, another problem that prevents grace is also the fact that the modern human being does not question herself. In one of her letters, Simone Weil talks about her time working among factory workers and notes that being a factory worker deprives one from anything other than *mindless* work which she opposed (Miles, 2005, p. 24). Though she ascribed much importance to the work in the sense of religious worship, she despised the work of the modern factory worker because of how difficult a life it was. The factory worker had absolutely no time to think about anything let alone thinking about the pursuit of self-knowledge, because all they did all day was mechanically working and doing menial tasks that required *muscle memory* as opposed to analytical reasoning. Thus, the factory worker was so tired most of the time that there was no time for her to go home and meditate on existence which in turn prevented the said worker from realizing that they were individuals and that they had a power to say *I* in order to affirm their existence which in turn would have made them question what they were capable of, which would lead their mental journey towards God and about the relationship of the *I*, the individual, with God, the divine. All of this, being the only freedom that we have, was denied to the factory worker, thus, the factory worker was not and still is not free according to Weil. This also meant that, sadly, there was no way for the factory to receive grace or even learn how to receive grace, making it impossible for them to actually *be* as *cogito*. This is why Weil mentions in the section *The Self* that there is another way to lose the power to say *I* which is through some great physical or mental affliction or affliction through tyranny that is outside of one's control[92].

Moreover, the *self* is of this earth, and *I* is of the body and the soul; the former is of this earth and the latter is bound to this earth by the former. The *I* is what keeps us within the confines of necessity between heaven and earth[93]. There is only one way that one may lose the power to say *I*: death. In Weil's case it is important to remember what Plato gives a description of death in *Phaedo* where Socrates talks about knowledge, the undying soul

[92] (2003, p. 26)
[93] (1970, p. 89)

and how everything we do especially philosophy is a preparation for death. According to Plato, body is the visible and represents the earthly things, while the soul is the invisible and represents the heavenly or divine things[94]. All that we know is a recollection of what our soul already knew from past lives and all that we investigate, and gain are passed on to the next body along with our souls[95]. Wisdom is the experience of the soul passing into "*the realm of what is pure, ever existing, immortal and unchanging*"[96]. This wisdom is carried by the soul when the soul leaves the body and all the earthly things with it. When the soul leaves the body, the self is destroyed along with the power to say *I*, because the soul does not need to say *I* as it already has in its grasp all the knowledge of that is pure, e.g. *eidos* of the Good in the case of Plato and *grace* in the case of Simone Weil. On the other hand, if the soul is accustomed to earthly desires and all the sins that one may expose themselves to then it is impossible for that soul to escape the body purely and by itself, even through philosophy[97]. The soul may become heavy and be drawn down to earth by the body, irrecoverably, if the one sins so gravely on this earth[98], which is exactly what Simone Weil describes in the section *Gravity and Grace* (2003), saying that there are two powers that govern the universe: gravity and grace (which is the light in the universe). Gravity is a force that pulls us towards the Earth, and it is the power that is responsible for all that belongs to earth and earthly things along with our embodied being. While grace is the power that belongs solely to God through which we are pulled up into heaven through prayer and religious worship as well as being a just, virtuous individual. The only way that we cannot possibly receive grace is if we sin so powerfully that the sins fill us with the power of gravity pulling us closer to earth. This is why just as Plato says that all sinners are bound to this earth forever haunting and wandering, Weil says that the souls that sin are so heavy that they are bound to hell as hell is beneath even the Earth itself. The only way we can avoid being heavy is learning how to receive grace and letting go of the things that make gravity have more power over us.

[94] *Phaedo* 80c-d (Plato, Complete Works, 1997, p. 70)
[95] This is mentioned in *Phaedo* as well as demonstrated in *Meno*.
[96] *Phaedo*, 79d
[97] *Ibid*., 81b
[98] *Ibid.*, 81c

According to Plato, only the souls that may "*join the company of the gods*" are those who have practiced philosophy without impure intentions, those who are lovers [or friends] of wisdom who have led virtuous lives[99]. Since the soul carries on everything that the body was exposed to in life, one must always thrive to live virtuously, and this is the basis of why pursuit of knowledge is so vital to both Plato and Simone Weil. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, in Simone Weil's philosophy the self that desires things for basic necessities is a burden and prevents the soul from receiving God's *grace*, so if the only thing we possess is the power to say *I* then that is all that we can give to God in order to be open to receiving *grace*. She believes that God only gave us being so that we should give it back to him[100]. Weil compares this situation to the ones that we read in fairy tales where characters are put to test to do the right thing and if they fail they are punished accordingly. According to Weil, the refusal of such an invaluable gift is the greatest virtue because humility is "*the queen of virtues*"[101]. The self is only a "*shadow*" that sullies the light of God on earth, and one must always aspire to end such an existence by giving it back to God, but this end should not be misunderstood as suicide. The end of the existence of the shadow that is the self must be done the way Plato describes in *Phaedo*, the body and the soul should be virtuous, and death should come without disobeying or dishonoring God's gift. This is done before death through surrendering the power to say *I* before God. When we let go of the power to say *I* not only do we act virtuously in accordance with God's light, we are also freed from the gravity of earth and we are may now become closer to God, because all earthly desires that we wish make our souls heavier and that is how the gravity of the earth pulls us down so that we may never reach God's grace in heaven, on the other hand when we possess nothing at all after giving the only thing we do possess to God we are light, as much as filled with light, and free of gravity which means we will be free of any affliction that our body may transfer into our soul. This act is similar to how Jesus Christ *emptied* himself as described in Philippians 2:7 (Westcott & Hort, 1885). The word that is used in the original Greek is ἐκένωσεν [*ekenosen*] meaning "*he emptied himself*" (New American Bible (Revised Edition), 2010). The term *kenosis* is also translated as *self-emptying* or *abasement* that originally meant to be that the Christ had a double nature that consisted of the divine, that is God, and the human,

[99] *Ibid.*, 82ab
[100] (2003, p. 38)
[101] *Ibid.*

the form he took when he descended to Earth, however in more contemporary Bible criticism *kenosis* means that the Christ truly entered "*into the human condition*" having a change in his divine nature (Brown, 2011, p. 2). The meaning of *kenosis*, in the sense of the latter, is close though, perhaps, the concept of *kenosis* in the sense of the passage taken literally is not quite what Weil, or other theologists and philosophers who were inspired by it, intended it to be. Nevertheless, the act of Jesus Christ "*taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness*" (2010, p. 2:7) and letting go of *divinity* in order to be able to receive God's exaltation is what truly invigorates them. The passage shows his followers that humility towards God and everything around them is perhaps the true purpose of human life. This is what Weil means by humbly giving back what is already given by God to God and *empty* oneself from the *self* or the *ego* or rather the power to say *I* in Weil's words. This *self-effacement* is also the only way we can reach true knowledge, according to Weil; not through an active empirical research but through a religious or metaphysical meditation of *passivity* that she calls *attention*. While *attention* is certainly one of the most important concepts of Weil, we must further investigate the relationship between human and God before understanding how *attention* plays a part in it.

2.5 Conclusion

Simone Weil's understanding of *the self* and the *I*, in the beginning is not so different than an accumulation of Plato, Descartes, Rousseau and Kant though of course she shows signs of her belief and at this point seems closer to Descartes than any other philosopher. It is clear that she actively refuses empiricism, modern science, psychoanalysis, tyrannical religious leaders and malicious kings, however despite this fact it is also clear that she has studied thoughts and beliefs that she violently opposes as much as she has studied the philosophers, she holds much dear to her own. Even when she comes to a seemingly true and logical judgment on Descartes regarding his understanding of imagination, algebra, and physics she believes that the only way to be sure is to become a true Cartesian stripping away from all prejudices. This technique, as mentioned before, apparently popular in Sorbonne, is reminiscent of Plato's search for *eidos* apart from everything else, Stoics' method of *epokhe* in order to reach knowledge of an object, and the method of phenomenology just as much as it is what Descartes's methodical doubt is all about. She is quite careful not to add anything to the thoughts and beliefs that she criticizes until

everything that could be said about them is said and established as they would be by their advocates. Weil's method of philosophical grounding suggests that, though later she turns completely to mystical metaphysics, she is deep down what we might call an epistemologist who is firstly and mostly interested in knowledge above all. Because, only through knowledge and correct way of the use of reason may we reach all that is mystical as well. Even in her doctoral dissertation, we see that before beginning the question of God, we must, as Descartes has done, first question our existence because that seems the most immediate to us at the moment that we let go of everything that we thought that were true based on our senses and natural way of understanding. Only after establishing what we can know through reason alone can we realize the relationship that we have to God and how God manifests existence to us, which is perhaps why Descartes concludes that we know God before we know ourselves (2008). Only after such firm beliefs that I have proved to be true in my mind can I begin to explore everything else that I might be able to come to know. Knowledge is also important in her political, social, and ethical understanding because without having knowledge on what the philosopher is talking about there is nothing to be said. This is why Simone Weil should be regarded as a philosopher of knowledge before anything else, since the study of knowledge and especially the knowledge of oneself moves the individual towards other problems and questions that they have which is also why this dissertation begins with the discussion of the *I* of Simone Weil. From here, we will move on to God and God's relationship with *I*, *myself*, and later on what *love* is and why it is important in Weil's understanding of God and the self. The study of knowledge itself, thus, will lead us into the study of existence which will lead to the study of ethics or how an individual should live in order to be worthy enough to receive God's gift, as God has gifted the individual before the individual was even deserving of such a gift.

Nevertheless, having discussed Weil's philosophy as it is, we may consider the fact of arguing that Simone Weil's definition of the *self* in her mystical works, as opposed to those that are based in Cartesian and Kantian epistemology, is almost on the edge of meekness in the sense that is in the New Testament towards almost a distrust of the self that is filled with resentment towards oneself or perhaps a feeling of guilt because of being given the gift of existence when clearly no one but God truly deserves such

power[102]. The sort of proposal that Weil gives for the *self* raises questions about the nature of existence as well as the nature of God in accordance with our own. One of the questions that comes to mind is how should the God of Simone Weil be understood in terms of a philosophical proposition? From a Cartesian point of view, there is indeed so much that we may come to understand regarding God as God, however there is also a historical philosophical and religious background regarding the nature and existence of God that has fed Simone Weil's philosophy as well. There is no doubt that in almost all religions there is a sense of indebtedness to the creator, whether that creator be benevolent, in the sense of the God of the New Testament, a god that is divine, or malevolent, in the sense of the *δημιουργός* [demiourgos] of the Gnostics that is inspired by Plato's *Timaeus* (Arendzen, 1913), a god that belongs to the material world also the God of the Old Testament[103]. Human beings are always in a state of gratitude towards the creator, even if that creator is someone to be feared as opposed to be loved. However, the God that is described by Simone Weil in her religiously-inclined works that take the point of view of the *self* is seemingly passive [Weil uses the word *non-activity* (*non-action*)] (2003, p. 159) and almost a God lesser than the perfect God that is described by Plato and Descartes, because of the fact that God gave a part of himself in order for humanity to exist (2003, p. 32), and this gift is given because God is pure love and creation is a result of this pure love emanating. This means that there is something that belongs to God in us, or rather we are that something that belongs to God. If we are something that belongs to God and God, out of love, gave a part of himself so that we may walk the Earth and say *I* in freedom and desire things and wish things and that we can give this *I* along with our body and soul back to God and that there are still humans that are present in this world, would that mean that God is currently not perfect? If God is not currently perfect because of the existence of human beings then does that mean God is no longer good, because the idea of perfect is good and the idea of good must be perfect? Simone Weil, while having studied contradictions that come up in Descartes's works intimately as taking over the role of

[102] We only are capable of the power to say I insofar as we exist, but even this power that we possess is surely given to us by God.

[103] This view is also present in Simone Weil's notes. She deeply criticizes aspects of the God of the Old Testament and reveres the God of the New Testament (2003, p. 159). Her views are in line with the Gnostics that were inspired by *Timaeus* and considered the God of the Old Testament, some type of malevolent, misguided artisan-God that belonged to the material world, for example Marcion of Sinope is one of those Gnostics (Barnstone & Meyer, 2003, pp. 18-9).

Descartes himself, later thinks that *contradiction* is a metaphysical necessity of truth and that without the existence of contradictions we may never know truth[104]. This type of contradiction that Weil understands is something that will be quite difficult to study because this is where Weil's *mysticism* takes form and explains things that cannot be explained by logic or reason. Weil's understanding of contradiction also aims to explain and refute the famous *problem of evil*. These are some of the questions and concepts that we must search for in the next chapter as we look further into the definition and understanding of Simone Weil's God.

[104] (Weil, Gravity and Grace, 2003, p. 98)

3. GOD

Following the investigation into the concepts of the *self* and the *I*, this chapter's particular concern will be the concept of God in general and the concept of God in Simone Weil's philosophy. Since this is quite a delicate and difficult subject matter, there must be a presupposed lineage to follow. The path that I will take will be guided by Weil's influences. This will make it easier to refer to Simone Weil's notes in regard to the passages in the works I will look at. As established so far, Simone Weil has a few religious and philosophical influences that stay constant throughout her works. Even those works of hers that are not inherently about metaphysical concepts are written in the light of her philosophy of religion. These influences can be listed as such: Jesus Christ and the fundamentals of Catholic belief, Plato and the mystical interpretation of his works, Ancient Greek culture, religion and arts, Gnosticism and the Neoplatonists, Christian Platonism, Hindu religion and culture (especially the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita that make two-thirds of the *Prasthanatrayi*), Japanese Zen Buddhism (along with other Mahayana Buddhist doctrines) and some brief remarks on ancient Mesopotamian and Nordic myths, gods and heroes. It would be appropriate to begin with the influences on Weil in relation to the definition and the belief in God in a historical fashion. She refers to these in her notes before exploring her own views. It is easy to notice that in all religions, the key questions are almost always in line with Weil's own as she lays them out in the collection of some of her notes titled *Gravity and Grace*, especially the questions of "*what is the self?*" and "*its relationship to God and the world*" (Knott, 2016, p. 27).

3.1 The Concept of God in Classical Theism

A specific and united concept of God across religions is not readily definable in any context. However, there are convergences regarding the attributes of the general idea of a supreme being in the classical theistic approaches. All theistic religions, especially the Judeo-Christian tradition, describe common characteristics of God(s), such as omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, being perfect, infinite, formless and ineffable. This is called "*classical monotheism*," and every other conception of God is left to other religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, polytheism, henotheism, pantheism, and

deism (Bayne, 2018). In the Abrahamic tradition of religions which encapsulates the idea of traditional theism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, God has three necessary attributes: "*unlimited power (omnipotence), perfect goodness, and unlimited knowledge (omniscience)*" (Rowe, 2007, p. 15). Thus, in order for a being to be regarded as supreme and worthy of worship, the being must possess all of these three attributes. However, each one of these necessary attributes is limiting when compared to the seemingly limitless concept of God expressed with words. This leads to questions of how a perfectly good being can be capable of evil. Since the meaning of omnipotence is that the being *is* capable of anything conceivable and inconceivable for other lesser beings. Here, we must maintain the idea that a being capable of something does not mean that it is necessary for that being to follow through with such a capability. This does not mean that the being who is capable of such things but refusing them on the account of being perfectly good, is *less* powerful. Such an argument brings us to the fact that God in classical theism is free of making choices as these. On the other hand, necessarily, a being would be *limited* by one of their own positive attributes. The "*Perfect Being Theology*," which finds "*its roots in St Augustine and the ancient Greek philosophical tradition*" is "*most closely associated with the medieval philosopher St Anselm*" (Bayne, 2018). This is refuted by arguments such as that of degrees of *perfectness* which is also known as the infamous Epicurean *problem of evil* that is summarized by David Hume: "*Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?*" (Hume, 2016). Classical theists have a few responses to these questions, all of which are related to defending the notion that human beings are not capable of seeing the "*greater good*" in something that seems evil to them. The greater good argument claims that the suffering in the world could be something that makes human beings stronger, but the circumstances could only be known to God. As a result, however, this answer assumes that good and evil apply to humanity as a whole and not at the level of an individual, which leads them to disregard the suffering of one person. However, yet again, to this problem the "*skeptical theist*" points to the "*cognitive limitation*" of human beings (Bayne, 2018, pp. 66-77). Of course, it is important to note that there are two problems of evil, one of which is logical and the other evidential. In the logical problem of evil, it is claimed that evil is "*inconsistent with God's existence*," and in the evidential problem of evil, "*it is the quantity and/or quality of the*

world's evil that constitutes the evidence against theism" (Conway, 1988, p. 36). The statement "*evil exists*" does not necessarily contradict God's properties and even if the statement is proven there is no logical proof of the reason why God is permitting evil and the reason must be good no matter what, therefore logical problem of evil is averted (Conway, 1988, p. 37). The evidential problem of evil is refuted by saying that there is no possible grounded proof that would evidentially show that the existence of evil voids the existence of God in any way (Conway, 1988, p. 37). Without a doubt, such arguments are at the end dependent on the knowledge of God and God's nature in totality, which is at the same time an impossibility or, rather, an extreme improbability.

Moreover, while the nature of God and God's properties are quite arguable, the act of creation is just as controversial and elusive; we must also take a look at the concept of creation before continuing with Simone Weil's Christian and non-Christian religious influence of her conception of God. Creation, of course, at least for Judeo-Christian beliefs, is the very beginning of both the Jewish and the Christian bibles with Genesis:

> [1] In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth— [2] and the earth was without form or shape, with darkness over the abyss and a mighty wind sweeping over the waters— [3] Then God said: Let there be light, and there was light. [4] God saw that the light was good. God then separated the light from the darkness. [5] God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." Evening came, and morning followed—the first day (New American Bible (Revised Edition), 2010, Genesis 1:1-5).

It is clear from the beginning that the Old Testament describes *what* God *created* in order, and not *why* God created or *how*. What God has created has also been argued in that there are things that can be considered to be contingent and others necessary such as "*existent abstract objects, objects so firmly rooted in reality that they could not possibly have failed to exist*" (Morris & Menzel, 1986, p. 353). The classical theist belief, which is supported by Déscartes, is: "*All things which need not have existed but do exist are totally dependent for their existence on the creative activity of God*" (Morris & Menzel, 1986, p. 353). This belief is that God is the source of all things including the creation itself, meaning that before creation there was nothing but God. However, some theists believe that certain things are by definition impossible to exist anyhow. For example, can God "*create two*

mountains that touch at their bases and, nevertheless, surround no valley?" (Inwagen, 2009, p. 3). It is vital in philosophy that one must challenge the definition of highly cyclopedic concepts or at least strive to designate some sort of viable and understandable limitation of what that concept truly wields even if such an attempt has the appearance of being futile. Peter van Inwagen gives a clear account of the concept of "*everything*" in the statement "*the creator of everything*" by comparing the two views. On the one hand, Déscartes was thought to have argued that anything and everything is possible with God[105] as Jesus says in Matthew 19:26 (2009, p. 3). On the other hand, Aquinas[106] refused and instead believed that "*suffering, sin, and death*" are not things that God would be in power to do since they are not "*intrinsically good*" (2009, p. 3) this would render God impotent which would go against the idea of a perfectly good God however this would not mean that God is *not* omnipotent (2009, p. 4). This matter was also referred to by Augustine of Hippo and is explained by van Inwagen:

> St Augustine solved the problem raised by such nouns by saying that their referents are not real things, not substances, but mere defects in substances. To bring about a defect in a substance is not, properly speaking, to create, and the 'existence' of defects may therefore be ascribed to the acts of creatures (2009, p. 4)

This approach goes back to Plato in the sixth book of the *Republic* where the idea of the *good* is explained as that which allows us to understand every other idea in relation to it, just like the sun allows us to see but not the sight itself *per se* (Plato, Complete Works, 1997, pp. 1128-9). The approach is seen also in the works of the Neoplatonists, of course, especially Plotinus in the *Enneads* where he talks of evil as a lack of goodness and not an idea in and of itself: "*The good is that on which all else depends, towards which all Existences aspire as to their source and their need, while Itself is without need, sufficient to Itself, aspiring to no other, the measure and Term of all(...)*" (Plotinus, 1988).

However, though a defect of something may be taken as the presence of *evil* or things that are simply not *perfectly good*, there remains the question of how it is possible for God to

[105] Though there are views on this argument that Descartes might *not* have exactly meant the statement to be so rigid in terms of human understanding (van Inwagen, 2006, p. 157).
[106] In the first part of his work *Summa Theologica*.

create something defective if God is *perfectly good*, omniscient, and omnipotent. The "*paradox of the stone*" is a good example demonstrating such an argument which proposes the idea that if an omnipotent being *x* can create a stone that the being itself cannot lift: "*Either x can create a stone that x cannot lift*" which would mean that *x* is not omnipotent "*or x cannot create a stone that x cannot lift*" which would also mean that *x* is not omnipotent (Pojman & Rea, 2008, p. 264). How then would one say that an omnipotent being such as God could exist? As mentioned earlier, some philosophers like George Mavrodes argue "*that since God is essentially omnipotent, the act of creating a stone heavier than he can lift is a logical impossibility*" because the idea of omnipotence would only cover logically possible things (2008, p. 265). The fact that an omnipotent God's incapability of doing a logically impossible thing would not imply impotence (2008, p. 265). Even though the tradition of classical theism accepts God as a simple being with attributes such as omniscience, omnipotence, and being perfectly good, the concepts themselves are not taken at face value and they must coincide with necessity and logical possibility.

3.2 God in the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita

Let us begin then with the concept of God or Gods of the Hindu religion–especially the scriptures of *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Upanishads*, dated between 500 and 100 B.C. (Shideler, 1960), that are so often quoted and referred to by Weil – claimed to be one of the oldest that Simone Weil refers to, other than the ancient Mesopotamian beliefs.

3.2.1 God and searching for the self in the Upanishads

Before getting into the Bhagavad Gita, one must be familiar with the fundamentals of Hindu thought which are laid out in the Upanishads. The Upanishads (Easwaran, 2007) have two important concepts that relate to the previous chapter concerning the understanding of the Self in Weil's works, which are: *Atman* and *Brahman*. *Atman* is translated as *self* and is the "*innermost essence*," while *Brahman* [ब्रह्मन्] is, related to the Creator God *Brahma*[107] (Gonda, The Hindu Trinity, 1968), translated as "*to be or make firm, strong, solid; expand, promote*" (Gonda, 1962), though it also said that the word

[107] The creator God *Brahma* is part of the Hindu *Trimūrti* [or trinity] along with *Vishnu* the preserver and *Shiva* the absorber [destroyer] (Gonda, The Hindu Trinity, 1968).

Brahman is quite indescribable and depicted as "*ineffable silence*" (Chaudhuri, 1954), and is "*the innermost essence and support of the universe*" (King, 1995, p. 64). According to Adi Shankara, the *Upanishads* are wholly concerned with the description of "*the true nature of the Atman*" (Shankara, 1905, p. 1) and the Atman or *The Self* is depicted as the *Lord* which is one and everything is *from* the *Lord*:

> The Lord is enshrined in the hearts of all. / The Lord is the supreme reality. / Rejoice in him through renunciation. / Covet nothing. / All belongs to the Lord. / Thus working may you live a hundred years. / Thus alone will you work in real freedom. / Those who deny the Self are born again / Blind to the Self, enveloped in darkness, / Utterly devoid of love for the Lord. (2007, p. 57)

There are two scholastic interpretations of the Hindu scripture, and thus two ways to interpret the *Upanishads*: Advaita Vedanta and Dvaita Vedanta. Vedanta means "*end of the Veda*" and is made up of "*the teachings of the Upanishads, the Brahma-sutras, and the Bhagavadgita*" (Deutsch, 1969, p. 3). The Advaita Vedanta tradition, being the most widely accepted, practices *non-dualism* which means that the Lord, the Reality, the Truth, and the Self are all interpreted as *one*, thus not separable from all the depictions of God in different forms, they are all united under one Supreme Being. The term *non-dualism* is used instead of *monism*:

> (…)to distinguish it from any position that views reality as a single order of *objective* being. Advaita Vedanta is concerned to show the ultimate non-reality of all distinctions – that Reality is not constituted by parts, that in essence, it is not-different from the Self. The unity or 'oneness' that Advaita upholds […] does not require variety or multiplicity, as is the case with most monistic views, in order to be affirmed. (Deutsch, 1969, p. 3)

While the Dvaita Vedanta tradition believes God to be different than the beings of the world along with their attributes in relation to each other (Rao, 1942). Hence, the Dvaita Vedanta interpretation of the *Isha Upanishad* would be that the Lord is not the Self but *other* than the Self. For the sake of brevity, I will not compare each phrase in the Upanishads but try and convey the conception of God in terms of the Brahman and the Atman.

The Self in the Upanishads is a governing ethical way of living that is both calming and unreachable at the same time which also works as a grand explanation of everything around the individual as a self-questioning being:

> Those who see all creatures in themselves / And themselves in all creatures know no fear. / Those who see all creatures in themselves / And themselves in all creatures know no grief. / How can the multiplicity of life / Delude the one who sees its unity? / The Self is everywhere. Bright is the Self, / Indivisible, untouched by sin, wise, / Immanent and transcendent. He is / Who holds the cosmos together. (Easwaran, The Upanishads, 2007, p. 58)

These passages encourage the individual to see themselves in every being and every being in themselves. This leads to an all-encompassing thought towards life that seems to provide a grounding for the necessity of ethics. However, the problem behind the question which leads to the self is that the concept of Brahma. This concept is only able to satisfy one aspect of the search of the Upanishads, which is the "*eternal principle behind the changing flux of things and events*" (Mathur, 1972, p. 391). The concept of Brahma is sufficient for the explanation of the supreme reality of all things, however, there is still something that cannot be explained which is "*certainty and freedom from all doubt*", and, according to Mathur, the *Upanishads* are able to fill that void of doubt with the very thing that cannot be doubted: the self (Mathur, 1972, pp. 391-2). Unlike Hume, Ryle, and Wittgenstein who claimed that the self was something that could not be grasped as a *self*, the *Upanishads* lay out a concept of *the self* as connected with reality:

> (…) the self, as thinking subject, could not be its own object in one and the same act of thinking. This is not only a psychological but a logical impossibility. An act of thinking as an existential occurrence is concerned with an object other than itself(…) And thus the Upanishads came out with what is regarded as the most famous statement *Tat Tvam Asi* (That Thou Art) declaring the identity of Brahma (the creative and unifying principle of the universe) with the Atman (the deepest self) conceived as the unchanging subject to which the whole temporal order is an object(…) Brahma was not an 'external hypothetical principle. It was our

> innermost self – the eternal 'I' which is the same behind the multiplicity of phenomenal egos. (Mathur, 1972, p. 392)

Thus, while the Upanishads give a depiction of the Self, they are also describing God, or Brahman, because knowing the Self is knowing God and there is nothing further to know:

> He, who knows God, becomes free from all bonds; his sorrows disappear, together with birth and death; he, who (only) adores him, becomes on the third stage after death, divine, the absolute with all his wishes fulfilled. He knows that (triad) resting eternally in the Atman; then nothing higher remains to be known; the objects of enjoyment, the enjoyer and the impeller (who impels these both) / All this threefold is collectively called the Brahman. (Deussen, 2004, pp. 307-8)

The ultimate truth in this world is the Brahman: "*God is both the wholly other, transcendent and utterly beyond the world and [hu]man*" (Radhakrishnan, 1968, p. 77). Truth is *satya* in Sanskrit (The Upanishads, 2007, p. 179) and is used in conjunction with *dharma*[108], which may be understood primarily as "*law*" but also "*virtue*" and "*ethical merit*" (Horsch & Whitaker, 2004, p. 437). The truth is that the Brahman can only be known through the knowledge of the Atman. The Atman can be described as the transcendental self while the "*empirical*" or individual selves are Jivas (Mathur, 1972, p. 395), which is why one should not confuse the knowledge of the self as including the physical characteristics of the body. This line of thought, in the end, leads to another problem of duality which Advaita Vedanta rejects that forces one to make a distinction between the importance of the transcendental self and the nonexistence of the physical self without the transcendental self, or that the physical self is nothing but *Maya*. The word *maya* is, like many Sanskrit concepts, quite difficult to translate into one word in English, however, the two primary meanings are "*power*" or "*a mysterious power of the will*," and "*deception*" (Shastri, 1911, p. 10). However, *maya* in the sense of deception or power does not mean that the world we perceive is deceptive, it means that the world

[108] "Truly the law is the truth; that is why it is said of one who speaks the truth that he speaks in accordance with the law, and of one who speaks in accordance with the law that he speaks the truth" (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 1.4.14).

we see only *seems* as such, though the reality is quite different than our perception which is *Brahman*:

> (…)the world is a manifestation of the one divine, and is created. This creation, however, is a "game" (lila) of the gods. The world does not seem to be what it is. Although it is ultimately one with brahman, it seems to be separate from it. If the divine is pure bliss, the world is that least of all. The world originated from a magical act, as it were; it is maya. The term *maya* has been translated as "illusion," but then it does not concern normal illusion. Here "illusion" does not mean that the world is not real and simply a figment of the human imagination. "Maya" means that the world is not as it seems; the world that one experiences is misleading as far as its true nature is concerned. At bottom, everything is one; but it appears in an actual multiplicity that is all too real. By distinguishing between real and apparent reality, one is able to distinguish between good and evil. (Vroom, 1996, p. 57)

With the conception of *maya* one is able to redirect oneself from the inevitable contradictions of oneness, nondualism, and dualism or the God and the Self or the Truth and the Self or the Brahman and the Atman. There are two aspects, but they are not to be understood as two separate *things*, this is at least how it is in the orthodox Advaita Vedanta teaching. This means that the supreme reality or the supreme God is not a being that *acts* or *wills* but is a manifestation of all that there is which seems to be the same thing as the transcendental self that one has within, beyond the physical perception of all reality and all the other aspects of God are split into god*s* that represent different aspects of reality which is why Brahma is the supreme God as well as *a god* along with the other aspects of this supreme reality[109].

> The face of the truth is hidden by your orb / Of gold, O sun. May you remove your orb / So that I, who adore the true, may see / The glory of truth. O nourishing sun, / Solitary traveler, controller, / Source of life for all creatures, spread your

[109] God may also be seen as: Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Shiva the destroyer. This conception is the "Trimurti" and described by Shankara as: "The one God has different names, forms, activities, attributes and powers owing to differences of function" (Shankara, on *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 3, 9, 9, as cited in Gonda, The Hindu Trinity, 1968)

> light / And subdue your dazzling splendor / So that I may see your blessed Self. / Even that very Self am I! (Easwaran, The Upanishads, 2007, p. 59)

However, this truth of the Self as God is not revealed by intellectual study through scripture or contemplation but through meditation and a realization that arises without any physical or mental attempt to reach it. This is described by the God of Death Yama in Katha Upanishad:

> The Self cannot be known through study / Of the scriptures, nor through the intellect, / Nor through hearing discourses about it. / The Self can be attained only by those / Whom the Self chooses. Verily unto them / Does the Self reveal himself. (Easwaran, The Upanishads, 2007, p. 79)

3.2.2 God in the Bhagavad Gita

Bhagavad Gita is part of the epic of *Mahabarata* and it depicts the story of Arjuna and Krishna (Davis, 2014). The Bhagavad Gita is about Prince Arjuna who grows weary of the upcoming war within his extended family between two families, Pandavas and Kauravas, of two brothers who claim the throne for the kingdom. Arjuna, a prince of the Pandavas, questions the nature of the war and whether he should fight at all killing his cousins who are not only warriors but also fathers, brothers, grandfathers, and friends to many. Upon his doubt, his charioteer, Krishna who is an incarnation of God in disguise, comforts him with a speech on the nature of God, virtue, ethics and the spirit (Easwaran, The Bhagavad Gita, 2007, p. 13). However, according to the mystic tradition of Hinduism, the *Gita* is considered just another *Upanishad* as being distinguished from the rest of the epic of *Mahabarata* because of the nature of its form, the fact that Arjuna is not just fighting a worldly fight but a spiritual one, Arjuna is not to defeat his kin but to defeat his *lower self* and in that vein, Krishna can be seen as the teacher and Arjuna as the student (Easwaran, The Bhagavad Gita, 2007, p. 75). In the traditional view, though the *Gita* is not as holy as the *Upanishads* it still contains the essence of the latter in a different context.

Krishna, with long and detailed speeches in response to Arjuna, explains the nature of all beings along with the ultimate one, the divine Self: the Atman within everyone and Brahman which is the ultimate reality that encompasses every living and non-living thing. Krishna tries to explain to Arjuna that he must fight a spiritual fight against evil in order to be free from the birth-death cycle, *Samsara* [अवतार] , and how to attain such a goal and what exactly that would mean. Toward the end of the *Gita*, Krishna reveals himself as a manifestation or *avatar*[110] of the ultimate reality, *the God*, which convinces Arjuna, who already considered Krishna a dear friend, to follow his teachings and advice furthermore.

One of the first important teachings that Krishna reveals to Arjuna is the importance of desireless work. This idea is also present in Simone Weil's *Gravity and Grace* where the vitality of work as work alone is emphasized as being a form of prayer. Krishna talks about a similar concept:

> You have the right to work, but never to the fruit of work. You should never engage in action for the sake of reward, nor should you long for inaction. Perform work in this world, Arjuna, as a man established within himself – without selfish attachments, and alike in success and defeat. For yoga is perfect evenness of mind. (The Bhagavad Gita, 2:47-48)

However, work should never be motivated "*by desire for the fruits of action*" since this only leads to suffering (2:49). The wise person must let go of such attachments to ends and be satisfied with means, in order "*overcome the confusion of duality*" (2:51) so that one may be able to control their reactions to things which leads to escape from suffering: "*They are forever free who renounce all selfish desires and break away from the ego-cage of "I," "me," and "mine" to be united with the Lord. This is the supreme state. Attain to this, and pass from death to immortality*" (2:71-72). The concept of immortality that is mentioned here is demonstrated further in the following chapters but the main idea

[110] "The word *avatar* [अवतार] in Sanskrit signifies descent, especially of gods to earth. The Bhagavad Gita does not employ the term *avatar* to indicate incarnation of Vishnu in Krishna… However, the *avatar* of Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita designates the participation of God in the world of human beings to bring righteousness (*dharma*) and salvation." In other words Vishnu's self does not change but is born again in a body as Krishna (Easwaran, 2007).

is already outlined in *Katha Upanishad*, that every living thing has two options after death which are determined in life: live a life embodied again, or break free from the embodiment and be one with the ultimate reality in what may be loosely described as *heaven* in Christian terms, and whichever one will receive after death is determined by *karma* [action[111]]. Hence, Krishna replies to Arjuna's question about being taught that knowledge is greater than action by himself, at the beginning of the third chapter, which is aptly titled *Karma Yoga* in the original Sanskrit (The Bhagavad Gita, 2007), with the following:

> [3] At the beginning of time I declared two paths for the pure heart: *jnana yoga*, the contemplative path of spiritual wisdom, and *karma yoga*, the active path of selfless service. [4] One who shirks action does not attain freedom; no one can gain perfection by abstaining from work. [5] Indeed, there is no one who rests for even an instant; all creatures are driven to action by their own nature. [6] Those who abstain from action while allowing the mind to dwell on sensual pleasure cannot be called sincere spiritual aspirants. [7] But they excel who control their senses through the mind, using them for selfless service (The Bhagavad Gita, 3:3-7).

Though knowledge may be more important than action, action determines what the individual is capable of in this world so that they may be worthy to leave the embodied world into the higher plane of existence where one is part of the pure self:

> [42] The senses are higher than the body, the mind higher than the senses; above the mind is the intellect, and above the intellect is the Atman. [43] Thus, knowing that which is supreme, let the Atman rule the ego. Use your mighty arms to slay the fierce enemy that is selfish desire. (3:42-43)

One must, then, control their ego with their higher self so that one may be victorious against the evils of the physical world that keep the self from emancipation. This dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna reveals how the divine self is a part of us in the physical

[111] (Macdonell, 2004)

world, in a sense the whole of the *Gita* is Arjuna's revelation of God and how one is *connected* to God in various degrees of awareness.

In the eleventh chapter, the *Gita* finally reveals the scope of the concept of God in the Hindu tradition when Arjuna asks Krishna who he is. This chapter goes beyond the explanation of God as the ultimate reality and provides details both visual and verbal for Arjuna to experience. This experience is compared to what Patanjali, a sage that lived in 200-400 who developed a study and practice of *yoga* (Bryant, 2015), calls *samādhi*[112] which is "*the final stage in meditation, in which the mind is completely concentrated and a superconscious mode of knowing comes into play*" (The Bhagavad Gita, 2007, p. 191). In the stage that is called the *samādhi*, one finally becomes completely aware of the world beyond physical existence, which is only possible with "*intense discipline*" and through vigorous study and "*through orientation toward the ideal of pure awareness, one can achieve integration [samādhi]*" (Hartranft, 2003, II.45). This power is given to Arjuna by Krishna because he deems him worthy of such a divine vision:

> [5] Behold, Arjuna, a million divine forms, with an infinite variety of color and shape. [6] Behold the gods of the natural world, and many more wonders never revealed before. [7] Behold the entire cosmos turning within my body, and the other things you desire to see. [8] But these things cannot be seen with your physical eyes; therefore I give you spiritual vision to perceive my majestic power. (11:5-8)

The experience of this spiritual vision is described as: "*If a thousand suns were to rise in the heavens at the same time, the blaze of their light would resemble the splendor of that supreme spirit*" (11:12) by the narrator of the *Gita*. This chapter in the *Gita* reveals the nature of the Hindu conception of God in detailed imagery where everything that Arjuna knows of or might know of is connected with the supreme deity and finally, he realizes that everything not only goes *to* but also comes *from* God as if everyone and everything is God alone in different places at different times conceived by humans almost as if acting

[112] "Once the body is gone, and these latent impressions are dissolved in nature, they are inclined to be reborn. For all others, faith, energy, mindfulness, integration [*samādhi*], and wisdom form the path to realization" I.19-20 (Hartranft, 2003).

out parts for a play, played simultaneously throughout time itself[113]. Krishna further explains the nature of his being, or in this case of *the only being*:

> [32] I am time, the destroyer of all; I have come to consume the world. Even without your participation, all the warriors gathered here will die. [33] Therefore arise, Arjuna; conquer your enemies and enjoy the glory of sovereignty. I have already slain all these warriors; you will only be my instrument. (11:32-33)

Being that God is everything and everyone and has been so *always*, God is also *time* itself. *Time* only exists as an idea in the supreme mind. The evil that Arjuna must defeat has already been defeated by God himself because time is not linear in the understanding of the *Gita* and the *Upanishads*. Time is cyclical in the sense that beings live and die and are reborn but it can also be conceived as a seed that grows into a plant and dies but leaves remnants of itself in the soil that is transferred to the next seed which restarts the whole cycle. This is why Krishna speaks as if everything has already happened, is happening and will happen at once, "*beginninglessly*" [*anadi*] (Coward, 1999).

Finally, God is also depicted as the "*supreme Self*" that which is reflected on and by everyone, and only those who are worthy may remember that they are God:

> [15] Entering into every heart, I give the power to remember and understand; it is I again who take that power away. All the scriptures lead to me; I am their author and their wisdom. [16] In this world there are two orders of being: the perishable, separate creature and the changeless spirit. [17] But beyond these there is another, the supreme Self, the eternal Lord, who enters into the entire cosmos and supports it from within. [18] I am that supreme Self, praised by the scriptures as beyond the changing and the changeless. [19] Those who see in me

[113] This simple allegory of the Hindu God is often given as example by Alan Watts: "… no Hindu can realize that he is God in disguise without seeing at the same time that this is true of everyone and everything else. In the Vedanta philosophy, nothing exists except God. There *seem* to be other things than God, but only because he is dreaming them up and making them his disguises to play hide-and-seek with himself. The universe of seemingly separate things is therefore real only for a while, not eternally real, for it comes and goes as the Self hides and seeks itself. But Vedanta is much more than the idea or the belief that this is so. It is centrally and above all the *experience*, the immediate knowledge of its being so, and for this reason such a complete subversion of our ordinary way of seeing things" (Watts, 2011).

that supreme Self see truly. They have found the source of all wisdom, Arjuna, and they worship me with all their heart. (15:15-19)

In this section we are given two notions of being that are encapsulated by the one truth of the "*supreme Self*," therefore the fact that we as embodied human beings understand life and death in a dualistic nature is only a perception given to us by God and this perception may be overcome by remembering the true nature of Self that is also from God.

3.3 Buddhism

It is from Weil's notes that she wrote while in New York that we know Japanese Zen Buddhism piqued her interest. She specifically notes down a few books that include "*Essays in Zen Buddhism*," "*An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*," "*Japanese Buddhism*," "*Lankavatara sutra,*" and following them a few pages later with this quotation: *"It is Buddha who makes flowers grow from the branches of trees, to make men look upward. It is he who makes the moon sink below the waves, so that the afflicted may know that God comes down"*. (Weil, First and Last Notebooks, 1970, pp. 181-2)[114]

It is, thence, reasonable to follow the Hindu thought that inspired her understanding of mysticism[115], particularly with Zen thought of God and spirituality rather than other schools and interpretations of Buddhist thought and religion. Of course, before embarking on a journey to search for a concept of God[116] in Zen, I must first lay out the basis of the teachings in comparison to Hinduism, as they sometimes overlap, and other times completely disagree with each other.

As mentioned before, Buddhism has its roots in Hinduism and India, particularly in The Buddha himself, also known as Shakyamuni Buddha in the Mahayana tradition (Buswell & Lopez, 2014). The historical Buddha is still somewhat controversial in that there are

[114] In French it reads: "C'est Buddha qui fait sortir les fleurs aux branches des arbres pour amener les hommes à regarder en haut. C'est par lui que la lune se noie dans les vagues, afin que les malheureux sachent que Dieu descend" (Weil, La connaissance surnaturelle, 1950).
[115] "…a mystic can be defined as a person who has been favored by an immediate, and to him, real experience of the divine or who at least strives to attain such experience. As the mystical experience is in essence very personal, the union with God cannot easily be defined in simple and straight forward terms" (Güney, 1996).
[116] Or a concept that might come close to God, because a supreme creator being is non-existent in Zen and Buddhism in general (Suzuki, 1991).

no undisputed facts about him or his life, only that he lived and taught at some point around the sixth and fifth centuries (Drewes, 2017). Fortunately, my focus here shall remain on Buddha's teachings that form the traditional Buddhist religion.

Thus, to begin with, within the framework of this chapter: according to Buddha, there are no supreme beings that have the role of the creator in the universe, and so, there was nothing that was *created*. Not only those beings that one might call Gods or *devas* are limited in their power and understanding, but, however powerful they may be compared to human beings, they are still trapped within the cycle of birth and rebirth, or *samsara* (Harvey, Buddhism and Monotheism, 2019, p. 1). The prime objective of the teachings, rituals, and beliefs in Buddhism is toward ending everything and anything that causes suffering; suffering causes a being to live again through rebirth.

The only way out of this cycle of birth and rebirth that is full of nothing but suffering is to accept the "*Four Noble Truths*" which are: the noble truth of suffering [dukkha] which exists within us both physically and mentally that surrounds, the noble truth of the origin of suffering [samudaya (Keown, 2013, p. 53)] which is the cause of suffering from "*craving, desire, and attachment,*" the noble truth of the cessation of suffering and the origin of suffering [nirodha (2013, p. 56)] which shows that there is a way to end said suffering, the noble truth of the path that leads to the cessation of suffering and the origin of suffering [magga (2013, p. 58)] (Tsering, 2005, pp. 8-9). The last of these noble truths is also known as the "*Noble Eightfold Path,*" or the "*middle way*", which consists of "*Morality, Meditation and Wisdom*" that leads to the "*cessation of suffering*" (Keown, 2013, p. 59). These truths are the "*blueprint for the entire body of the Buddha's thought and practice*" and serve as a basis for the "*path to enlightenment*" (Tsering, 2005, p. 9). All of the noble truths and the eightfold path are part of the thought and practice of an individual that aims to reach enlightenment as a whole simultaneously and should not be seen as progressive, meaning that one does not pass through each and leave them behind on their journey (Keown, 2013, p. 59).

The main goal of Buddhism rests on understanding that suffering is the cause of reincarnation, and that overcoming suffering is the way to reach enlightenment. If an individual is able to come to the complete realization that one can overcome suffering by

letting go of earthly sins and desires to become a "*good person*" in the eyes of the Buddha then that individual will be able to break free of the chains that imprison both humans and devas alike. This realization is the realization of the "*nature of reality*" which is also referred to as *Dharma* [or Dhamma in the Pali language], a term that is shared in Hinduism, albeit in a different manner (Harvey, Buddhism and Monotheism, 2019, p. 2).

Dharma is the "*uncreated order of the universe and human society, sustained by the gods and by rightly performed ritual and embodied in specific duties (dharmas) assigned to each social class*", or simple "*how things are (law of physics) and how things should be (a legal law)*" (Harvey, Buddhism and Monotheism, 2019, p. 2). The Hindu belief of *dharma* is rejected by the Buddha, but the name *dharma* refers to "the nature of reality" that one must understand in order to reach "*liberation*" (Harvey, Buddhism and Monotheism, 2019, p. 2). The Hindu belief of *dharma* and Vedic teachings were defended by followers and priests of Brahmanism during Buddha's lifetime however there were also teachers and wandering ascetics, much like early Greek philosophers, who defended different interpretations of these teachings or simply rejected the whole canon of the Vedas (Harvey, Buddhism and Monotheism, 2019, p. 3). As time went on, Brahmanism evolved into what we would understand from Hinduism today, some of them still believing in Brahman, Shiva, and/or Vishnu, also seen as the incarnated being Rama, Krishna, and even the Buddha and apart from Hindus there also emerged different schools of asceticism, Jainism, and of course Buddhism (Harvey, Buddhism and Monotheism, 2019, p. 3). All these different religious understandings and/or teachings influenced each other and borrowed or responded from and to each other's scriptures, and of course, there are many sects and traditions of Buddhism, but the major three in chronological order of appearance in history are the Theravada [the teaching of the Elders], the Mahayana [Great Vehicle], and the Vajrayana [Vehicle of the Thunderbolt] schools (Harvey, An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices, 2013, p. 3). All of these schools of thought also have regional differences, distinct interpretations according to their teachers, and may have different ways of reaching the same goal: liberation from the vicious cycle of birth and rebirth filled with suffering. Since it is not in the scope of this dissertation to have a complete history and comparison of different types of Buddhism, following the summarized introduction of the general thought of the core of the religious teachings in Buddhism, I shall continue with the school of thought that

influenced Simone Weil the most, which is D. T. Suzuki's, who was a scholar, an academic, and not a monk, rather controversial interpretation of Zen that was popularized in the West (Sharf, 1993). Suzuki's Zen is controversial because of its variation from the traditional expression of the teachings of Zen Buddhism and his way of writing has been compared to "*German Romantic idealism, English romanticism, and American transcendentalism*" (McMahan, 2008, p. 105). Let us first summarize the history and ideas of traditional Zen Buddhism that traveled from India to China with Bodhidharma (Dumoulin, Zen Buddhism: India and China, 2005, p. 85) and from China to Japan with Dosho (Dumoulin, Zen Buddhism: Japan, 2005, p. 5).

3.3.1 Traditional Zen Buddhism

Zen Buddhism is rooted in the Mahayana tradition of Buddhism in China (Dumoulin, Zen Buddhism: India and China, 2005, p. 27), also known as *chan* [禪] which itself comes from the Sanskrit word *dhyana* [ध्यान] meaning "meditation" that is based on specific wordless teachings of the first Buddha, or Sakyamuni, that involved deep meditation in search of enlightenment.

The legend of the arrival of Zen to the East is related to the legend of the arrival of Bodhidharma into China with his teachings of sitting meditation (Dumoulin, Zen Buddhism: India and China, 2005, p. 85). The legend of Bodhidharma goes like this:

> Bodhidharma is said to have come from a Brahman family in southern India and may even have been of royal blood. After a long and difficult journey he reached South China. In an encounter with Emperor Wu (502-550), the founder of the Liang dynasty, he pointed to the futility of building Buddhist temples and reciting sutras. Then he crossed the broad Yangtze River on a reed and for nine years remained seated in meditation before the wall of a monastery until his legs withered away. He bequeathed the seal of the mind – that is, the Zen patriarchate – to his disciple Huik'o. The chronicles report further that his doctrine of a new way to enlightenment aroused harsh opposition. Six times he is said to have miraculously foiled the attempts of his enemies to poison him, and three times to have refused an invitation by the emperor Hsiao-ming to visit the court of the northern kingdom. A later account tells of an official named Sun Yün, who,

> returning to China from abroad, met Bodhidharma in Central Asia on the very day of Bodhidharma's death. In his hand the patriarch held one of his sandals; the other was found when they opened his grave. Other traditions speak of the patriarch's return to India or of his crossing over to Japan (Dumoulin, Zen Buddhism: India and China, 2005, p. 86).

This legend, however controversial it may be in its historicity, is very influential in all the schools of Zen emphasizing the importance of endurance and diligence in order to reach enlightenment on one's own. Thus, Zen distinguishes itself with students observing and doing as their masters *do*, on their own, instead of memorizing, reciting sutras and being tested on their knowledge of the dogmas. Zen practice that is attributed to Bodhidharma is, made up of a few sutras, the emphasis of wall-gazing meditation (2005, p. 93), and koans that are aimed to make the student contemplate the simple nature of things which is *nothingness* and reach enlightenment through this contemplation (2005, p. 91). Yet, there is one sutra that the Bodhidharma insisted on reading to understand what he tried to accomplish and that is the Lankavatara Sutra which is passed on from disciple-to-disciple following Bodhidharma's lineage:

> The deepest truth lies in the principle of identity. It is due to one's ignorance that the mani-jewel is taken for a piece of brick, but lo! When one is suddenly awakened to self-enlightenment it is realized that one is in possession of the real jewel. The ignorant and the enlightened are of one essence, they are not really to be separated. We should know that all things are such as they are. When we know that between this body and the one Buddha there is nothing to separate one from the other, what is the use of seeking after nirvana [as something external to ourselves]? (2005, p. 96)

The teachings of the Lankavatara Sutra, along with Bodhidharma's lineage, was passed on from Hui-ko, the student of Bodhidharma, to Hui-man. Hui-man was Dosho's master. Dosho brought what he learned and practiced in China to Japan, and lived in the Gango-ji monastery in Nara, the first "*Zen meditation hall in Japan*" (Dumoulin, Zen Buddhism: Japan, 2005, p. 5). This lineage forms the fundamental teachings of the Japanese Zen School of Buddhism.

3.3.2 The Lankavatara Sutra

This sutra is the heart of Zen that was taught by Bodhidharma that reached from India to China and finally to Japan. It is in the form of a dialogue between the Buddha and Mahamati, a bodhisattva[117]. This conversation touches on ideas about the nature of consciousness, the mind, reality, Buddha-nature[118], and most importantly "*on the egolessness of all things*" (Suzuki D. T., The Lankavatara Sutra: A Mahayana Text, 1978, p. 3).

The Lankavatara Sutra is a representation of the skepticism towards words and dogmas as Bodhidharma taught:

> Further, Mahamati said: Blessed One, is it not because of the reality of words that all things are? If not for words, Blessed One, there would be no rising of things. Hence, Blessed One, the existence of all things is by reason of the reality of words. Said the Blessed One: Even when there are no [corresponding] objects there are words, Mahamati; for instance, the hare's horns, the tortoise's hair, a barren woman's child, etc. – they are not at all visible in the world but the words are; Mahamati, they are neither entities nor nonentities but expressed in words. If, Mahamati, you say that because of the reality of words the objects are, this talk lacks in sense. Words are not known in all the Buddha-lands; words, Mahamati, are an artificial creation. In some Buddha-lands ideas are indicated by looking steadily, in others by gestures, in still others by a frown, by the movement of the eyes, by laughing, by yawning, or by the clearing of the throat, or by recollection, or by trembling (1978, pp. 91-2).

Throughout the sutra, Mahamati asks the Buddha one hundred and eight questions regarding, though an incomplete list: liberation, intellection, causation, form, action, behavior, body, existence, the difference between the teachings of the Buddha "*from the*

[117] A bodhisattva is one who is on the path to becoming a Buddha and someone who helps those who are still struggling in the world before reaching Nirvana themselves (Krishan, 1984).

[118] "There is something in all beings which is true, real, eternal, self-governing, and forever unchanging—this is called Ego, though quite different from what is generally known as such by the philosophers. This Ego is the Tathāgata-garbha, Buddha-nature, which exists in every one of us, and is characterised with such virtues as permanency, bliss, freedom, and purity" (Suzuki D. T., The Lankavatara Sutra: A Mahayana Text, 1978, p. xxxviii)

philosophers" regarding appearances, emptiness, the world as a vision and a dream, elements of enlightenment, birth and death, knowledge (jnana), speech, food and drink, kinds of Buddhahood, poetry, science, art, rulers, astronomy, freedom, rationalism, idealism, wisdom, geography, meteorology, vegetarianism, desire, meaning, truth, philosophical views, morality, the realization of imagelessness, egolessness, the doctrine of Mind-only as truth (1978, pp. 23-8). Upon hearing these questions, the Buddha congratulates Mahamati and states that he will answer his questions in the order he asked them and begins by reiterating them with one word for each and then negates each of the questions and follow-up reiterations with "*a statement concerning birth is no statement concerning birth*" until the Buddha finishes with all one hundred and eight statements of Mahamati (1978, p. 32). In the following lines, Mahamati asks the Buddha about different types of consciousness/mind or Vijnana in Sanskrit, or Vinnana in Pali[119]. The Buddha says that there are eight Vijnanas however "*two functions generally are distinguishable" which are "the perceiving and the object-discriminating*" and between these two "*there is no difference; they are mutually conditioning*" (1978, pp. 33-4). This may come to mean as the mind perceives and with perception it discerns between different objects that it perceives. In other words, the mind has to perceive *something* in order to be considered perceiving, therefore there is always an object being discerned in perception and there is no perception without an object. However, the Buddha adds:

> (…)when both that which supports [the Vijnanas] and that which is comprehended [by the Vijnanas] cease to function. By that which supports [the Vijnanas] is meant the habit-energy [or memory] which has been accumulated by erroneous reasoning since beginningless time; and by that which is comprehended [by the Vijnanas] is meant the objective world perceived and discriminated by the Vijnanas, which is, however, no more than Mind itself. (1978, p. 34)

This is also called "*the doctrine of 'Mind-only'*" and it is one of the main ideas of the Lankavatara Sutra which may be seen as "*a pure idealism*" (Suzuki D. T., Studies in the

[119] Vijnana in Sanskrit is translated as "discernment, knowledge, skill, proficiency, art, profane knowledge, organ of knowledge" (Macdonell, 2004) and Vinnana in Pali is translated as "a mental quality as a constituent of individuality, the bearer of (individual) life, life-force, principle of conscious life, general consciousness" (Rhys Davids & Stede, 1921-1925, p. 619)

Lankavatara Sutra, 1998, p. 241). Suzuki gives a few *gathas* [a verse, stanza, line of poetry (Rhys Davids & Stede, 1921-1925, p. 248)] and a couple of them summarize the main idea of what is meant by the concept: "*The worldly way of thinking (prajnaptisatyata) views [the Mind] as the individual self (atman), but there is no such substantial reality. So with the substance (skandhata) of the Skandhas, the worldly way of thinking views it as real; in reality it has no existence*" and "*It is not an existence, nor is it a non-existence; it is indeed beyond both existence and non-existence; it is Suchness, it is even released from mind: I say, there is nothing but Mind*" (1998, p. 242). This thought is akin to what George Berkeley, Kant and the German idealists argued, though in varying forms and interpretations which is why Suzuki calls it "*pure idealism*" (1998, p. 244). This "*pure idealism*" or "*Mind-only*" helps the individual in the path to "*the ultimate truth*" because the language or "*words themselves are not the truth. It is the self-realization inwardly experienced by the wise through their supreme wisdom, and does not belong to the domain of words, discrimination, or intelligence; and, therefore, discrimination does not reveal the ultimate truth itself*" (1998, pp. 244-5). The Bodhisattvas are able to enter into Nirvana because "*they know that the visible world is nothing but the manifestation of Mind itself; they are free from such ideas as mind (citta), will (manas), consciousness (manovijnana), external world, self-substance, and distinguishing marks*" (1998, p. 246).

3.3.3 Suzuki's ıntroduction to Zen Buddhism

D.T. Suzuki argues, that, though Zen has its origins in Indian Buddhism, the Far-Eastern, especially Japanese understanding, and teaching of Zen is not the same as the Indian understanding of *dhyana* nor traditional Buddhism in general (Suzuki D. T., 1964). What Suzuki means here is that the teaching has evolved so much that the ideas present in Zen are now engulfed with other East Asian teachings and philosophies such as those found in Confucianism, Manichaeism, and Shinto. However, all religions, religious philosophies and beliefs are influenced by surrounding cultures that those religions reach throughout time. On the other hand, Suzuki warns the reader that though "*Zen claims to be Buddhism*" (Suzuki D. T., 1964, p. 38) it considers the teachings that are found in written "*sutras and sastras*" as "*waste of paper*" because they are not the most profound

way of reaching the goal of the said teachings, however, this should not be understood as nihilism, nor should Zen be considered a religion:

> (…)in the sense that the term is popularly understood; for Zen has no God to worship, no ceremonial rites to observe, no future abode to which the dead are destined, and, last of all, Zen has no soul whose welfare is to be looked after by somebody else and whose immortality is a matter of intense concern with some people. Zen is free from all these dogmatic and 'religious encumbrances (Suzuki D. T., 1964, p. 39).

While the core of Buddhism is liberation in the sense of enlightenment or *nirvana*, the *way* to reach *nirvana* is different in many schools and traditions. The essence of Japanese Zen has no specific or *required* scriptures, mantras, or written guidelines[120] that are considered holy nor is there an affirmation or rejection of any supreme being. Suzuki defends his argument that Zen is not a religion, and not a philosophy because it wants to rise above dogmas and logical calculations so that there is not even an understanding of contradiction or fallacies because there are no spoken words in the practice of *silent meditation*. In Zen, not only is there no God in the traditional Western sense of the word, but there is also no heaven or hell: "*It [Zen] boldly declares that 'the immaculate Yogins do not enter Nirvana and the precept-violating monks do not go to hell*'" (Suzuki D. T., 1964, pp. 39-8). According to Suzuki, though Zen may be an "*irreligion*" compared to Semitic religions, it still is a religion with its own zealots and devotees (Suzuki D. T., 1964, p. 40). Zen also should not be understood as a mere way of "*meditation*" in the way that some "*new age*" people, Hindus, or some Buddhists would because the meditation that is taught in Zen involves "*freedom from all unnatural encumbrances*" meaning that one does not fixate their mind on a certain concept, God and not even nothingness. After all, as the fish swim and the birds fly what one must do in daily life is enough. This is why some Zen masters like Dogen defended the idea of "*shikantaza*" or "*nothing but (shikan) precisely (ta) sitting (za)*" and *"[a]ccording to Dogen Zenji, shikantaza*" is "*resting in a state of brightly alert attention that is free of thoughts, directed to no object, and attached to no particular content*" (Fischer-Schreiber, 1994, p. 321). Suzuki argues

[120] Even in the Lankavatara Sutra the Buddha dismisses the trustworthiness of words and language and declares that they offer no help in the way to liberation.

for a similar thought regarding what Zen is to that of Dogen, which is that "*Zen wants to have one's mind free and unobstructed; even the idea of oneness or allness is a stumbling-block and a strangling snare which threatens the original freedom of the spirit*" (Suzuki D. T., 1964, p. 41).

In conclusion, it is quite clear following the first chapter of this dissertation why Simone Weil might have been interested in Japanese Zen Buddhism and Suzuki's experience and scholarly interpretation of it. What Suzuki is talking about in terms of the practice of meditation in Zen is a form of what Weil was perhaps trying to say with her concept of *attention* which also involves a lack of words and is elusive to language or her understanding of *the self* and the concept of the *power to say I* which relates to the egolessness of the Zen master, the bodhisattva and the Buddha[s]. This subject will be clearer in the third chapter when I will try to talk about the relationship between the individual and God and what Simone Weil might have understood from such a relationship. With these final remarks one may better understand what Suzuki means when Zen is not a philosophy nor is it a religion:

> (…)Zen is pre-eminently practical. It has nothing to do with abstractions or with subtleties of dialectics. It seizes the spade lying in front of you, and holding it forth, makes the bold declaration, "I hold a spade, yet I hold it not." No reference is made to God or to the soul; there is no talk about the infinite or a life after death. This handling of a homely spade, a most ordinary thing to see about us, opens all the secrets we encounter in life. And nothing more is wanted. Why? Because Zen has now cleared up a new approach to the reality of things. When a humble flower in the crannied wall is understood, the whole universe and all things in it and out of it are understood. In Zen the spade is the key to the whole riddle. How fresh and full of life it is – the way Zen grapples with the knottiest questions of philosophy! (Suzuki D. T., 1964, pp. 61-2)

3.4 The Ancient Greeks and Plato's God

After having gone through what Weil has read but only referenced in her notebooks, we may now continue with a study of what she has read and written, beginning with the

Ancient Greeks and Plato in particular. With such a quest, it will be easier to decrypt Weil's mysterious notes on God.

3.4.1 Searching for God in Ancient Greece at the time of Plato

In contrast to this section's title Weil says that God is never searched but it is Christ who seeks us [in *God's Quest For Man*[121]] (Weil, Intimations of Christianity, 1958). Nevertheless, unlike the silence of and towards the supreme being in Zen, the Ancient Greeks had many deities that at one time or the other were considered the supreme however a specific creator God was never named because the gods of the Ancient Greeks all represented a force of nature and however strong a force of nature was considered to be was the power that particular god held. Gods in Ancient Greece also had different cults in different places and were known for different deeds. For example, Poseidon was the god of the sea and was known as "*Soter of Sunium*" or the savior of "*Sunium of Athens*" where he was known for protecting sailors and helping Greeks with naval victory over Persians at Salamis in 480 (Mikalson, 2022, p. 32). On the other hand, as Albert Henrichs points out, an "*oracle of the Klarian Apollo*" gives a rather "*elaborate*" definition in almost a direct answer to Pindar's question "*What is god? [τί θεός;]*": *"Self-engendered, untaught, without mother, unshakeable, admitting of no name, with many names, dwelling in fire – this is god. We are but a small portion of god, (his) messengers"* (Henrichs, 2010, pp. 19-20).

This question of "*what*" instead of "*who*" holds as a great precursor of later Plato's term *theology* [θεολογία][122] for the matter. The meaning of the word is "*talking about the gods/god*" and was an "*expression in various forms of poetry, especially hymns, long before the gods became the subject of philosophical discourse*" (Henrichs, 2010, p. 22), which means that Greeks always talked about gods and it may also be argued that almost

[121] *Quête de l'homme par Dieu* (Weil, Intuitions pré-chrétiennes, 1951)
[122] Henrichs mentions that, even though *theology* was frowned upon by some "historians of Greek religion" because of "its Christian connotations" the word is perfect for what is discussed here as a "pagan" religion as Plato himself mentions in the *Republic*, 379a: "ὀρθῶς, ἔφη: ἀλλ᾽ αὐτὸ δὴ τοῦτο, οἱ τύποι περὶ θεολογίας τίνες ἂν εἶεν; [All right. But what precisely are the patterns for theology or stories about the gods? (Plato, Complete Works, 1997, p. 1017)]"

all the artwork they produced were in one way or another had something to do with gods or a particular god[123].

With Homer and Hesiod being mentioned the most by Plato when it comes to conceiving the gods or their deeds it is only natural that Herodotus considered them the creators of the Greek pantheon:

> However, it was only the day before yesterday, so to speak, that the Greeks came to know whence each of the gods originated, whether all of them had always existed, and what they were like in their visible forms. For I take it that Homer and Hesiod lived no more than four hundred years before my time. They are the poets who composed a theogony for the Greeks and gave the gods their names and epithets, distinguished their honors and functions, and indicated their visible forms. (Henrichs, 2010, p. 27)

Homer and Hesiod were criticized by Plato for depicting gods in *ungodly* situations and associating them with human emotions, perhaps only for a fictional or poetic effect, and they might have even been aware of this. However, Plato insisted that whatever the case, people were so inflicted with such ideas that they had skewed views of gods and therefore had difficulty distinguishing between right and wrong, distancing them from a virtuous life[124]. Plato had a problem with this, because the poets depicted gods as they struggled with each other (Hesiod, 1988, pp. 21-2), having children from each other as well as mortals giving birth to demigods like Heracles (Silk, 1985), they had bouts of jealousy (Hamilton, 1969, pp. 64-5), fear (Homer, 1991, p. 96), rage against the hubris of mere mortal thinking that they were better than gods (Heatherington, 1976, p. 228). Plato acknowledges the poets for their skill of rhyme, melody, and meter but disparages them for their brashness over their knowledge of gods and heroes in terms of their nature and behavior:

> However, we haven't yet brought the most serious charge against imitation, namely, that with a few rare exceptions it is able to corrupt even decent people,

[123] Hegel believed that art was "the main form of pre-Christian religion" which he called *Kunstreligion* especially the art of the Greeks (Rockmore, 1997).
[124] This critique can be found throughout Plato's works but most frequently in the *Republic*.

> for that's surely an altogether terrible thing(…) When even the best of us hear Homer or some other tragedian imitating one of the heroes sorrowing and making a long lamenting speech or singing and beating his breast, you know that we enjoy it, give ourselves up on following it, sympathize with the hero, take his sufferings seriously, and praise as a good poet the one who affects us most in this way. (Plato, Complete Works, 1997, p. 1210, Republic, 605c-d)

Plato's critique shows us that though Homer and Hesiod shaped the mythology of the Hellenic peoples they sure were not authors of divine texts. Plato most likely meant that these texts, though depict gods and their stories, did not correctly portray their natures because Homer or any other poet did not have the ability to *imitate* them.

On the other hand, the gods of the *Hellenes*, of "*the Olympian Faith*" (Sale, 1972), were indeed the "*Twelve Gods*" Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Athena, Apollo, Artemis, Aphrodite, Hermes, Demeter, Dionysos, Hephaistos, Ares (Burkert, 1985, p. 125). All the gods of the Greeks, and later Romans, were associated with one or more natural phenomena or *forces*: Ares with war; Hephaistos with fire and smithing; Dionysos with wine and "*intoxicated ecstasy*" (1985, p. 161); Demeter with harvest and earth; Hermes with being a cunning trickster and a messenger of gods as well as the inventor of fire; Aphrodite with sexuality and act of love; Artemis with animals and hunting; Apollo healing and light as well as plague and knowledge; Athena with warfare, wool-working, hope, and *phronesis*[125]; Poseidon with the sea; Hera with women, motherhood, children and marriage; Zeus, the most powerful of them all, with thunder, clouds, and sky (or heaven). Of all the gods that are depicted in tragedies on stage, Zeus was the only one that was avoided as he was considered "*the only god who could become an all-embracing god of the universe*" who was "*all-powerful, all-accomplisher, and cause of all; 'ruler of rulers, most blessed of the blessed, of the perfected most perfect power, happy Zeus'*" and Aeschylus also described Zeus as "*Zeus is aether, Zeus is earth, Zeus is sky, Zeus is everything and what is still higher than this*" (1985, p. 131). It is no wonder that the name itself, "*Zeus*," gives us a greater understanding of what he represented because etymologically it appears "*in the Indic sky god Dyaus pitar, in the Roman*

[125] Often translated as "practical wisdom" (Liddell et al., 1889).

Diespiter/Juppiter, in the Germanic Tues-day, and the root is found in the Latin deus, god, dies, day, and in the Greek eudia, fair weather" (1985, pp. 125-6). Against all the inconsistencies in the myths, Zeus was, indeed, at least etymologically, seen as *the God* for the Hellenes, comparable to the Abrahamic understanding of *God*. Simone Weil also proclaims that Zeus is seen "*as the supreme God, that is to say, the only God, as being above all the God of Moderation, and of the chastisements that punish excess, the excess and the abuse of power under all their forms*" (Weil, Intimations of Christianity, 1958, p. 57). With this in mind, we may now look at how Plato uses the word *God* instead of *gods* or a particularly named god and how with such an understanding his theology and cosmology come to light.

3.4.2 Plato's Theology according to Simone Weil

Simone Weil is certainly not the first nor the last philosopher to study Plato in the light of Christian theology as this has been discussed extensively in the history of philosophy, by the likes of Augustine of Hippo[126], and is still being discussed today (Hampton & Kenney, 2021). One of the most important ideas of Plato that also influenced philosophy of religion is that "*traditional Greek religion before Plato*" saw human beings as separate from gods, and, instead, "*assigned to human beings the goal of assimilating themselves to god*" (Brisson, 2007, p. 41). This idea is significant in Weil's thinking, the idea that we as human beings must let go of our desires in any way "*touch the absolute good*" (Weil, Gravity and Grace, 2003, p. 13).

Plato's works, according to Simone Weil, are the only sources we have on Greek spirituality. Weil strongly defends that he was "*a mystic*" who tried to spread the word of the Greek "*tradition of mysticism*" (1958, p. 74). This tradition, says Weil, goes back to the beginning of Greek history, which is "*with an atrocious crime: the destruction of Troy*" (1958, p. 74). The destruction of Troy gave the Greek people a sense of remorse and misery which shaped their religious beliefs and culture entirely because the *Iliad* presents a "*bitter*" and "*poignant*" picture of "*human destitution*" (1958, p. 75). This destitution results in a culture that is made up of "*a search for bridges to relate human misery and divine perfection*" including their art, poetry, philosophy, and science; in other

[126] See his *Confessions* (St. Augustine, 1998)

words "*they invented (?) the idea of mediation*" (1958, p. 75). Though the mysticism of the Greeks is most completely found in Plato, Weil shares an Orphic hymn as well as talking of "*divine knowledge*" in "*the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil*" which is depicted as "*all white*" in the "*Quest of the Holy Grail*" (1958, pp. 75-6):

> Thou shalt find near the dwellings of the dead, on the left, a spring / near which there soars an all white cypress tree. / Do not go to that spring, do not approach it. / Though shalt find another which flows from the lake of memory, / a jet of cold water. There are sentinels before it. / Say to them: I am the daughter of Earth and of the starry sky / but I have my beginning in heaven. This you know yourselves. / A deadly thirst consumes me. Ah, give me quickly / of the cold water that brims from the lake of memory. / And they shall allow thee to drink from the divine spring / and henceforth though shalt reign among the heroes. (1958, p. 75)

This fragment was found on a gold tablet, *The Petelia tablet*, buried with the dead in Italy and it speaks of the journey of the soul into Hades, or the underworld, passing the "*well/lake of memory*" which is known as Lethe or Forgetfulness because "*in death we forget, forget the sorrows of this troublesome world, forget the toilsome journey to the next*" (Harrison, 1908). According to Weil, the idea in this Orphic text is also found in Plato: "*That we are children of Heaven, which is to say, of God. That earthly life is a forgetting. That here below we live in forgetfulness of the supernatural and transcendent truth*" (1958, p. 76). This "*forgotten truth*" is what we as the "*children of Heaven*" "*thirst*" for and if the thirst is great enough "*then the water will be accorded us*" (1958, p. 76). For Weil, this is the main principle of Plato and Plato's understanding of the divine, which is that there is a sacred forgotten truth that humankind must thirst for, live, and die for in order to be able to turn back to heaven whence we came.

Weil states that there are "*two known facts*" about Plato, the first of which is:

> That he is not a man who discovered a philosophic doctrine. Contrary to all other philosophers (without exception I believe), he constantly reiterates that he has invented nothing, that he only follows a tradition which sometimes he does, sometimes he does not, name. One must take his word for this. (1958, p. 76)

This tradition that Plato is inspired by is "a superior synthesis" of Socrates, the Orphic tradition, "*the tradition of the Mysteries of Eleusis*, *the Pythagorean tradition (which is the mother of Greek civilization),*" and the "*traditions of Egypt and other Oriental countries*" (1958, pp. 76-7). How much of these traditions inspired Plato is a mystery on its own because we have no access to any of them completely, still Weil claims that Plato made this clear in his works and that they were not hidden. The second fact known about Plato is that we only have a certain version of his works:

> Of Plato we possess only those popularized works which were destined for the larger public. They are not to be compared with the parables of the New Testament. Yet the fact that a certain idea is not found in them, or not explicitly, does not permit the conclusion that Plato and the other Greeks did not possess that idea (1958, p. 77)

This claim by Weil is major to her understanding of Plato's philosophy as a whole because she is not convinced that the works, we have available to us are all that he wrote and that there must have been "*esoteric*" teachings and writings that were meant for his students and fellow philosophers as well[127]. According to Weil, *"[w]e must try to penetrate to the heart of these works by basing our thought upon indications that are often brief and by assembling scattered texts*" because "*Plato is an authentic mystic and even the father of Occidental mysticism*" and gives an example from *Theaetetus*, 176a (1958, p. 77). In this passage, Socrates talks about a certain way of "*assimilation in God*" or becoming God-like[128] by fleeing this life as soon as possible and that one may achieve this by being just and holy with "*the help of reason*" (1958, pp. 77-8). Weil says that, in the *Theaetetus*, 176a, there are three possibilities: "*he [Plato] is joking*," he is referring to "*the divinity (cf. Elohim)*," or he is referring to "s*omething analogous to angels: finite beings but perfectly pure*" (1958, p. 77). If Plato was speaking of God in this dialogue and if the God in the sentence "*God is perfectly just*" is taken as true then, Weil interprets, evil only arises with contacting evil or with "*separation from, God*" because the "*Ideas of Plato*

[127] This controversial claim is still being discussed and both sides of the argument have credible proponents. For a detailed anthology on the "Tübingen Interpretation" see *The Other Plato: The Tübingen Interpretation of Plato's Inner-Academic Teachings* by Dimitri Nikulin (2012). For criticism of the "esoteric" teachings of Plato, see Harold Cherniss (The Riddle of the Early Academy, 1945)

[128] "φυγὴ δὲ ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν: ὁμοίωσις δὲ δίκαιον καὶ ὅσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι" (*Theaetetus*, 176b).

are the thoughts of God, or God's attributes" (1958, p. 78) which may also be concluded as to why there are no *negative* Ideas [eidos] since they are "*God's attributes*." The answer to the question of what justice is answered as "*the Christ*" by Weil and to this she adds *Republic*, book 2, 360e-361a-c as Plato's answer:

> (Compare with Hippolytus of Euripides.) Let us take nothing either from the injustice of the unjust man or from the justice of the just man, but consider each one in his perfection. [Everything succeeds for the unjust.](…) Take the just man, simple and generous, who, as Aeschylus says, does not want the appearance but the reality of justice. Let us then take away all appearance(…) Let him be naked of all except justice that he may be proven in his justice by the fact that he be not softened (τέγγεσθαι) by dishonour and its effects, but unwavering unto death, going through life in the appearance of injustice but in the reality of justice(…) the just man being so disposed will be whipped, tortured, enchained, his eyes will be burnt out and at the end of all his sufferings he will be impaled [crucified] then he will know that what he should desire is not the reality, but the appearance of justice (1958, p. 79).

The image of a naked person in this passage means that the person is either dead in this life or the next because the clothes that the person wears or the identifying body that one has tampered with are not visible in death. The appearance of justice is again repeated in *Gorgias*, 523a, where Socrates speaks of an account that might be thought of as a fable that he believed to be true. When Zeus took over from his father Chronos/Pluto people were judged on the day of their death in their clothes, in their own bodies. As soon as Zeus found out that the judges, who were themselves clothed or *living*, demanded that both the people who just died as well as the judges be naked or *dead* so that the souls may be judged correctly:

> At present wrong judgments are pronounced. That is so because those who are judged are clothed, in that they are living. But while many of those who are judged have criminal souls, they are dressed in beautiful bodies, in nobility and wealth, and when the judgment takes place, many witnesses accompany them to testify that they have lived righteously. All this makes an impression upon the

> judges. And moreover, the judges themselves are clothed. The eyes, the ears, the whole body act as a veil before their souls. Their own clothing and that of the accused blinds them. So, first of all, men should not know, as at present they do know, the hour of their death. Let Prometheus be told to put an end to that. Then let all come naked before the judges, which means they must be judged after they have died. The judge also should be naked, that is, he should be dead. By the soul alone he should weigh the naked soul of each one immediately after death, abandoned by all its kin, having left upon earth all earthly array so that the judgment may be right. (1958, pp. 80-1)

Therefore, the judging of the dead as they are dead in complete nakedness, or rather without their earthly selves or bodies, means that a person is weighed against their sins and the weight of their souls is determined in purity because the soul manifests the sins that the person chose to commit in their lifetime as they are separated from their bodies. After such a judgment the souls are then sent to places as per their lives, those souls who lead a righteous life go to the Isles of the Blessed (523b) and those who were sinners go to Tartarus (523b). This image, again, is also present in the New Testament where souls are judged after death: "*Then I saw thrones, and those seated on them were given authority to judge*" (Revelation 20:4). Weil believes that judgment shows the true nature of the one that is judged and that nudity associated with death "*is the purest mysticism*" because "*truth is secret*" and can only be revealed "*in nakedness and that nakedness is death*" (1958, pp. 81-2). This is why Plato talks of death in relation to "*the pursuit of wisdom*" and that death should be the main goal in order to reach the truth in *Phaedo*, 64a-67d:

> Those who devote themselves as they should to the pursuit of wisdom, have no other goal than to die and to remain dead(…) Death being nothing else than that state of the soul when it is separated from the body(…) The soul of him who seeks wisdom scorns the body and flees it in order to be alone with itself. (1958, p. 82)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the death of the ego with the body and all earthly desires is the way to reach truth, wisdom or as the Buddhists say, *enlightenment*.

According to Weil, the "*double image of nakedness and death*" goes back to what the ancients called "*The Mysteries*" and it goes back to "*the Babylonian text of Ishtar in Hell*" (1958, p. 83). The Semitic version of the story involves Ishtar and the Sumerian original is Inanna, the story is about the "*queen of heaven*, *the goddess of light and love and life*" who descends to the "*nether world*" to "*free her lover Tammuz*" and dies at the hands of the god of the underworld only to be resurrected by the god of wisdom Enki (Kramer, 1998, p. 76). The same story is found in Ancient Egypt as Osiris is brought back to life by Isis, Thoth, and Horus defending him before a "*Divine Tribunal*" and he is "*vindicated as a possessor of maat (truth, justice)*" (Pinch, 2004, p. 179). The visit to and return from the underworld is again found in the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice which was penned by Ovid in the tenth book of *Metamorphoses* (Ovid, 1922) and in the *Georgics* of Virgil (Vergil, 1900) where Orpheus descends to Hades in order to save his new wife whom he lost on their wedding day, however, though he returns unharmed as being the favorite of the Olympian gods, his wife Eurydice dies. Finally, Dionysos is part of the mythology of *double-birth*[129] or seeing death and returning to life as well. The story of Dionysos' birth, death, and rebirth is a major story in the Orphic religion as well as for the Neoplatonists. It is about the son of Zeus, who was killed by the Titans, who were led by Hera, whom she hated for being out of wedlock, and brought back to life again by Zeus (Guthrie, 1993, p. 107). All these stories about going to hell and back are seen as an "*initiation*" by Simone Weil and they are comparable to the "*double image in Christian spirituality*: *Death, St. Paul. Nakedness, St. John of the Cross and St. Francis*" (1958, p. 83). Plato, in the light of "*the Orphics and the Pythagoreans*," says "*the body is the tomb of the soul*" in the *Gorgias*, 493a, and *Cratylus*, 400c (1958, p. 83). This is why one must flee the body, for, pure justice is supernatural and beyond humanity's reach (1958, p. 83). Weil interprets this as Plato *warning* against the dangers of the body rather than expressing fear or hate towards embodiment because it is again by God that human beings are in this

[129] This will be discussed more in detail after introducing Jesus Christ in the New Testament, however, it should be noted that Dionysos and the cult of Dionysos was a great influence as well as a rival belief in the early years of Christianity: "… when Christianity was establishing itself in the ancient Mediterranean world, the cult of Dionysos was its most geographically widespread and deeply rooted rival. And so the Christian church, while enclosing the revolutionary ethics of its gospels within the necessity of social control, was influenced by Dionysiac cult as well as opposing it (Seaford, 2006, p. 4).

world; only in this world can they live righteously and finally through, symbolic or real, death, reach God.

Another warning that Plato gives us in his writings is "*society*," which, as Weil suggests, is of "*first importance*" and is evident in all of his works (1958, p. 84). Plato's warning towards society, or the Great Beast[130], is something that can surely be traced to the trial, judgment, and the death or execution of Socrates[131], since the part of society that Plato warns, in the end, accuses and kills his beloved teacher for corruption of the youth. In the sixth book of the *Republic*, Weil gives an example of a passage that gives an explicit account of this:

> Do you believe as the vulgar[132] do that only a few young men are corrupted by the sophists? Do you believe that this corruption, accomplished by a few sophists, a few private persons, is worth the trouble of mention? It is those who speak thus who are themselves the greatest sophists, it is they who administer mass education, they who form the character they desire in men and women, youths and old men.
>
> When is that he asks? That, says Socrates, is when a great crowd is gathered in an assembly or tribunal, a theatre, or place of arms, or any assembly, and blames or praises words or actions with much tumult. They blame and praise to excess, they scream and clap their hands till the very rocks, and the place where they are assembled echoes, redoubling the tumult of blame or of applause.
>
> In such a situation what would be the state of heart of the young man?(...) Do you believe that any private sophistry or single individual could successfully stand up against that? No, certainly, and it would be great foolishness even to try.

[130] This concept is used in Weil's notebooks and even has its own chapter in the *Gravity and Grace* which she takes from the sixth book of *Republic* where the *Great Beast* is described as "to think and act in conformity with the prejudices and reactions of the multitude to the detriment of all personal search for truth and goodness" (Weil, Gravity and Grace, 2003, p. 164).
[131] See *Apology, Crito* and *Phaedo*.

> For there is not, there never was, there never will be, any other teaching concerning morality than that of the multitude. At least no other human teaching. For concerning what is divine there must be exception. This must be well understood. Whatever is saved and becomes what it ought to be, so long as cities have their present structure, if one means to speak truly, must be considered saved by the effect of a predestination which comes from God[133]. (*θεοῦ μοῖραν*) (1958, pp. 84-5)

The reason why I have chosen to include an *almost* full quotation from Weil's writing is because her understanding of what Plato means by warning against society and the *providence* of God is quite understandably open to discussion in many ways, especially considering the post-Enlightenment interpretation of Plato's works and the anti-mystic scholars of Plato as mentioned before. Nevertheless, the words quoted by Weil, especially the one spoken by Socrates as "*there is not, never was, nor ever will be, any other teaching concerning morality than that of the multitude [or that of human]*" [οὔτε γὰρ γίγνεται οὔτε γέγονεν οὐδὲ οὖν μὴ γένηται ἀλλοῖον ἦθος πρὸς ἀρετὴν παρὰ τὴν τούτων παιδείαν πεπαιδευμένον, ἀνθρώπειον] and following this with "*concerning what is divine there must be exception*" [θεῖον μέντοι κατὰ τὴν παροιμίαν ἐξαιρῶμεν λόγου: εὖ γὰρ χρὴ εἰδέναι] is quite telling. Expectedly so, Simone Weil takes two understandings of morality from these lines: "*social morality and supernatural morality, and only those who are illumined by grace have access to the second*" (1958, p. 85). As Plato says, God protects those who embrace this second kind of morality that comes from God and this is why Weil considers his wisdom to be "*a search for God by means of human reason*" (1958, p. 85). This search is impeded by society and its views on beautiful, good, evil, just and unjust and these views are imposed on the ignorant person who "*knows nothing in reality*" and whenever something pleases the "*animal*" it is said to be "*good*" and whatever displeases it is "*bad*" without ever realizing that these are only desires of the "*great beast*[134] *which is the social animal*" (1958, p. 86). Weil, sees this "*great beast*" Plato talks

[133] This is also an arguable translation, which is why Weil included the original Greek in parentheses and the original "θεοῦ" followed by "μοῖραν" is definitely the singular masculine genitive noun which would mean *God's, of God or from God.*

[134] θρέμματος [creature] μεγάλου [big] [Republic, 493a]

about as the same "*beast of the Apocalypse*" and this beast is what prevents a person from reaching God; the beast appears to Christ in the Gospel of Luke:

> He showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, All this power I will give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it (1958, p. 86).

Weil believes that Plato deems society as "*essentially evil*," so a desire to educate and transform society is aimed towards making it "*less evil*" and the ideal city in the *Republic* "*is purely symbolic*" (1958, p. 86). The fact that we live in a society enslaved by the beast ourselves makes it difficult for us to understand how much of our beliefs are formed by it and questioning this may lead to lying to oneself for this very reason. It is also impossible for one to be "*egoistical*" according to Weil because one way or another we are part of a "*collective*" (Weil, Gravity and Grace, 2003, p. 164). However, Weil does not consider that all the "*opinions of the great beast*" are wrong or bad, just that these opinions are "*formed by chance*," thus there are certain things that the great beast may view as bad that are in reality good, *vice versa* (1958, p. 87). Even if these opinions are similar to what they are in reality, they still are far from the truth and are completely based on contingent circumstances. Weil's example is a person who wants to steal but resists, though to whom the person obeys in resisting may be twofold: to the great beast or God (1958, p. 87). The second fact that Weil considers is that education is "*made up exclusively of things which at one or another epoch have been approved by the great beast*" which makes it quite difficult to distinguish virtues that are free of the great beast's "*reflection*" except "*humility*" which Weil describes as "*that key to the supernatural which is also mysterious, transcendent, indefinable and unrepresentable*" (1958, p. 87).

Since, everything that comes down in history is also dependent on the great beast, it is quite difficult to see which of them are contingently true and which of them are in reality completely wrong and the part that which the great beast has a hold of inside of us is devoid of God's grace which is the only way a person can also live virtuously in this life and find themselves with God in the next. There is but one way that grace may be received despite the beast and that is *love*[135], which is why Plato uses images of love: "*The*

[135] Also, the title of the next chapter of this dissertation.

fundamental idea of these images [The Republic, Phaedrus, The Symposium] is that love is the disposition of the soul to which grace is given, which alone is able to receive grace, love and none other than love. Love of God is the root and foundation of Platonic philosophy" (1958, p. 88). Consequently, Weil finishes this piece with a response of Plato to Protagoras[136]: "'*Nothing imperfect is the measure of anything*.' And: '*God is the measure of all things*'" (1958, p. 88).

Apart from the mystic remarks towards God, Plato also wrote specifically of God in *Timaeus* which Simone Weil touches on. In *Timaeus*, Weil saw that Plato chose to see God as an artist and humanity as the artwork:

> All that is made comes of necessity from a maker. It is completely impossible that without a creator there should be a creation. If the artist looks at what is eternally interchanging, and when using that as a model, he reproduces the essence and meaning of it, perfect beauty is thereby of necessity accomplished. If he looks at what passes, if his model is transitory, what he makes is not beautiful (1958, p. 89).

In opposition to the "*clockmaker*" argument, Weil wants to stress that Plato saw God much more than a craftworker who made a world that was based on some readymade design. Rather, God is an artist who created something unique that serves no specific purpose that might be understood by the commoner. The distinction between design and art here is invaluable. The fundamental is that a designed object serves a simple purpose intended for the said object from the very beginning. The simple purpose of the clock is to show time and it is precisely the reason why such an object was thought of and designed in the first place. A clock has no other purpose than to show time, perhaps when we think of wearable watches they might also be used as items of fashion, however, that is beside the point. A clock has a singular and simple purpose, hence the mechanics and the appearance no matter what *style* it bears, it is still an object that informs the time of the day. An artwork, on the other hand, does not have a singular and simple purpose; an artwork mostly has no purpose, matter of fact any work, object, or image that has a clear purpose may as very well not be considered a work of art. The description of God that

[136] "Man is the measure of all things" (1958, p. 88).

Plato provides in *Timaeus* is that of an artist for this very reason. The universe is a creation, and a creation must have a creator, however, this creation is not so simple that one, such as a human being, may work out its purpose, therefore the analogy of the work of art and the artist is much more fitting.

Moreover, Weil indicates that a work of art that has "*true beauty*" must come from "*a transcendent inspiration (the transcendent model simply signifies the veritable source of the inspiration)*" (1958, p. 89). This analogy, unlike the clockmaker, is "*experimentally*[137]" verifiable because it is a human activity that has "*something of the supernatural*" (1958, p. 90). This sensation is dependent on the experience that one feels from beauty which itself is from the idea of the *beautiful* and those who have not experienced such a feeling may also be deprived of the path that leads to God (1958, p. 89). The experience of the sense of beauty has *mystical* power to it that is not explainable in words, an experience that is *covert* but also completely understandable:

> In comparing the world to a work of art, it is not only the act of creation but Providence itself which is found to be assimilated in the artistic inspiration. That is to say that the world, as in the work of art, there is completion without any imaginable end [finalité]. All human creations are adjustments of means in view of determinate ends, except the work of art, in which there is adjustment of means, where obviously there is completion, but where one cannot conceive of an end (1958, p. 90).

The finality here, Weil states, is "*transcendent*" because the creation of the work itself is part of the work and though there is a complete object before us it is simultaneously still being created and, thus, the "*end is God Himself*" (1958, p. 90). This analogy takes us to "*love*," Weil reminds us, because:

> One can use a watch without loving the watchmaker, but one cannot listen with attention to a faultlessly beautiful song without love for the composer of the song and for the singer. In the same way the watchmaker does not need love to make

[137] "Cela se vérifie expérimentalement" (Weil, Intuitions pré-chrétiennes, 1951, p. 25).

> a watch, whereas artistic creation (that sort which is not demonic but simply human) is nothing but love (1958, pp. 90-1).

This "*love*" will be the topic of the third chapter, and we must establish the nature of God first to understand God's love, therefore let us now continue with how God, most likely, chose to create the universe in Weil's reading of the *Timaeus*.

Timaeus, in his speech, distinguishes between that which came into existence [γιγνόμενον] and that which always is, changeless and has no beginning [τί τὸ ὂν ἀεί, γένεσιν δὲ οὐκ ἔχον] (*Timaeus*, 27d-28a). What is meant by these two is simply the difference between *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge as Timaeus explains: that which has no beginning is reached by reason [νοήσει μετὰ λόγου] while that which came into being is grasped with the help of sensation without reasoning [δόξῃ μετ᾽ αἰσθήσεως ἀλόγου δοξαστόν]. The question here is whether a perfectly good God would base creation on ideas [εἶδος] that always were in existence as long as God existed, or base creation on phenomena that existed as an act of some other creation:

> If this world is beautiful, if the artist is good, obviously he has looked towards the eternal; in the other case, of which it is blasphemous even to speak, towards the one that passes. It is indeed entirely manifest that he looked towards the eternal. For the one (world) is the most beautiful of works, and the other (God) the most perfect of causes. Therefore, this world of becoming has been executed in the likeness of that unchangeable being who is possessed of intelligence and reason [*Timaeus*, 29a] (1958, p. 91).

This is the first step that Timaeus takes to describe God's creation of the universe [κόσμος]. The next step is to search for the intention of such a creation and thus begins this passage, which can only be compared to the Christian belief of humans created in the image of God:

> Let us now determine for what reason the composer composed this becoming and this universe. He was good, and, in him who is good, never in any case, never in any manner, was envy found. Being without envy, he wanted all things to be made as much as possible like himself(…) God willed that all things should

> be good and that nothing should be deprived of that value which is its own [*Timaeus*, 29d-30a] (1958, p. 91).

A perfectly good being is assumed to *will* only the best for every other being, hence, the *will* to create in reflection of what the creator knows to be perfect:

> Let us admit that this world is a living being who has a soul, that it is a spiritual being and that in verity it has been engendered such by the Providence of God. This being admitted, it must next be disclosed which is the one among living creatures in whose likeness the composer has composed the world. It cannot be anything which is essentially incomplete. That would be unworthy, for whatever resembles imperfection cannot be beautiful. To him whose being comprises all living creatures, considered individually and in their species as parts, this world bears the greatest resemblance. This being contains in himself all living spirits, just as the world comprehends in itself ourselves and all visible creatures. For God wanted the world to resemble completely that one among spiritual beings who is absolutely beautiful, absolutely perfect in every way; and He composed a living visible being, unique, having within Himself all living beings who are related to Him by nature(…) In order that by unity, the world should be like the absolutely perfect being. For this reason, the creator did not create two worlds, or numberless worlds; for there has been born, there exists, there shall exist, a single heaven which is this one, who is the only begotten son [*Timaeus*, 30b-31a] (1958, p. 91).

According to Weil, Plato is speaking of the "*Soul of the World*" when he says the "*world, or heaven*," by which he does not mean that the visible world is God as in pantheism, but that the visible world is only analogous to the body of God but not of the soul (1958, p. 92). This heaven that is "*unique*" is translated as "*the only begotten son*" [fils unique (Weil, Intuitions pré-chrétiennes, 1951, p. 27)] rather than *that unique thing which has come into being*[138] ["*μονογενὴς οὐρανὸς γεγονὼς ἔστιν καὶ ἔτ' ἔσται*," 31b] and may be regarded as a controversial interpretation. However, Weil, here, is expanding the

reference to the word *monogenes* and utilizes the word in the manner of Proclus[139] and the Gospel of John[140]. The "*Soul of the World*" is the master that "*commands the material world*," and so the trinity[141] in Plato is interpreted as "*the Father*, *the Only Son*, *and the Model*" (1958, p. 92). The third in the trinity of Plato is interpreted as "*the Model*" and Weil suggests that to better understand what this means and how it relates to the Holy Spirit one may turn and read the analogy of the artist at the beginning of *Timaeus* and simply think of the word as another for "*inspiration*" such as the model that is "*the link between the artist and the picture*" (1958, p. 93).

Next, comes the image of the cross and "*God torn apart*" in the description of the composition of the universe:

> The Soul[142] [i.e. of the World] he places in the centre; he spreads it out across the whole and even beyond the corporeal universe, enveloping it, and, by rolling it in a circle in a circular heaven, he establishes it one, unique, solitary, capable by its own virtue of being its own companion, having need of nothing other than itself, known and loved sufficiently itself by itself. In this manner he begets this happy God: the world [34b] (…) He has established the Soul [of the World] first among members of the body in age as in dignity, and has given it to the body as a mistress and a sovereign to be obeyed [34c] (…) This whole composition he split in two by its length, then he applied the parts one upon the other, by the middle as in the letter X[143]; he bent them in a circle and attached one to the other opposite the point of crossing, then he enveloped them in the movement which turns in an identical manner upon the same centre [35a].

This passage shows that the composition of the universe or "*the Soul of the World*" is "*made of a synthesis of the divine substance itself and the principle of matter*" (1958, p.

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[139] Since Proclus views *Timaeus* as a "theological work" and he interprets the creator as the Father and the universe as the Son (Proclus, 2007)

[140] "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" [Οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον ὥστε τὸν υἱὸν τὸν **μονογενῆ** ἔδωκεν] (John 3:16).

[141] "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of **the Father** and of **the Son** and of **the Holy Spirit**" [πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα **τοῦ πατρὸς** καὶ **τοῦ υἱοῦ** καὶ **τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος**] (Matthew 28:19)

[142] ψυχή

[143] οἷον χεῖ

93). Creation is, in other words, an act in which God is split into two in the manner of the cross that is also folding onto itself in a circular motion which is the result of time and space:

> When the composer had realized his whole conception of the Soul [of the World], he next spread throughout the interior the whole corporeal universe and he adjusted the two by making the centres meet. He spread the Soul from the centre throughout, even to the confines of heaven, and he enveloped the whole sphere of heaven outside. The Soul, turning upon itself, began the divine beginning of an inextinguishable and wise life for the totality of time. And the visible body of the heavens was born; and the invisible Soul, which shares in proportion and in harmony, was born as the perfection of begotten spirits, begotten of the perfection of eternal spirits [36d-37a] (1958, p. 93).

Weil, states that the use of the word harmony here is in the sense of Pythagoreans who understood it as "*the unity of contraries*" and the two contraries that unite here are God and the creature, while the Son is acting as a "*mediator*" that "*establishes a proportion between them*" (1958, p. 95). This "*heavenly proportion*" of the trinity and the "*circular motions*" of God within it are faultless and one must be inspired by these motions in their own movements of intelligence (1958, p. 96). Weil adds, that "*the Word*" must be understood "*as the orderer of the world*" for us to "*imitate*" (1958, p. 96). Once one imitates this motion of God, one sees that though creation is partly from *necessity*, it is also in part from the mind which has the power to rule over *necessity* and one must always trust this divine within them in life (1958, pp. 97-8). This "*desire for infinite good*" is present in all human beings and placing this "*knowledge of truth at the center of the soul*" means to "*imitate the order of the world*" (1958, p. 101). However, this means that one must also understand the truth of necessity which includes "*contradictions*, *sorrows*, *ills*, *obstacles*" and see them as "*reason for loving*" because there is a "*mysterious bond between suffering and the revelation of the beauty of the world*" (1958, p. 101):

> O divine heaven, swift wings of wind, / O rivers and their sources, O seas and / numberless smiling waves, and thou, / mother of all, earth, / and that one who

> sees all, disk of the sun, / I call upon you / to see in me what sufferings the gods bring / to a god (*Prometheus*, vv. 88 sqq.) (1958, p. 102).

Consequently, Weil believes that the "*essential idea*" of Plato's *Timaeus* "is that the foundation, the substance of this universe wherein we live, is love" (1958, p. 102).

In conclusion, Weil's understanding of Plato and Plato's theology is similar to that of early Christians, Gnostics, and some Neoplatonists in that his words are taken as they are and not as *allegorically* or *metaphorically* contrary to the widely accepted contemporary education and teaching of Plato. Apart from this, Weil believes that Plato is only carrying a tradition forward that has reached him through Pythagoreans and those who belong to the religious cult of Orpheus where the vision of God is quite distinct from that of Homer and Hesiod as well as the myths behind them. In this sense, as mentioned before, there is no doubt an influence of Plato so deep in Christian philosophy and theology that one may not in some cases distinguish between the two. Weil believes that Plato's thought belongs to that ancient tradition where Christianity originated, but only Gnostics, Manicheans, and Cathars stayed faithful to this (Weil, Pensées sans ordre concernant l'amour de Dieu, 1962, p. 47). Simone Weil's faithfulness to Plato's doctrine was also the reason she criticized the Catholic church and never truly became part of it though identified as a person who followed the teachings of Jesus Christ and the New Testament:

> The range of sacred text accorded to stories full of ruthless cruelty has always kept me away from Christianity, especially since for twenty centuries these stories have never ceased to exert an influence on all currents of Christian thought; if, at least, by Christianity one understands as the churches of today. St. Francis of Assisi himself, as pure of this defilement as possible, founded an Order which, as soon as it was created, almost immediately took part in murders and massacres. I have never been able to understand how it is possible for a reasonable mind to regard the Jehovah of the Bible and the Father invoked in the Gospel as one and the same being. The influence of the Old Testament and that of the Roman Empire, whose tradition has been continued by the Papacy, are in

my opinion the two essential causes of the corruption of Christianity[144] (1962, p. 47).

Having said this, we may now explore who the "*Jehovah*" of the Old Testament is in order to compare it with the New Testament and finally summarize Simone Weil's understanding of God and religion.

3.5 The God of the Old Testament

The depiction of God in the Old Testament is interpreted in quite a few ways in different sects of Judaism and Christianity. There is, of course, also the fact of historicity and the stories of the Old Testament being similar to those of the ancient religions of Mesopotamia[145]. It should be noted that it is not in the scope of this dissertation to fully study and analyze all the historical influences of the Jewish and Christian faiths and understandings of the Bible. Thus, I shall attempt to search for a brief description of God in the Old Testament in relation to Simone Weil's own understanding of God, and from there, her criticism of the said text shall be made clearer.

3.5.1 The Name of God in the Old Testament

The Old Testament, which is the name that the Christians give to the "*Holy Scriptures of Judaism*" which became part of Christianity from their Jewish origins (Barton & Muddiman, 2001, p. 5), begins with the following: "*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth*" (Genesis 1:1). The word "*God*" here is *ὁ θεὸς* in Greek, *Deus* in Latin, and אלוהים [Elohim] in the original Hebrew. While Greek and Latin seem similar, they are from different roots. The Greek is based on a Mycenaean word with identical meaning and, interestingly, Latin is based on Ζεύς (Beekes, 2011). *Elohim,* on the other hand, is only one of the names used for God in Hebrew and the meaning is the *plural*

[144] Le range de texte sacré accordé à des récits pleins de cruautés impitoyables m'a toujours tenue éloignée du christianisme, d'autant plus que depuis vingt siècles ces récits n'ont jamais cessé d'exercer une influence sur tous les courants de la pensée chrétienne; si du moins on entend par christianisme les [64] Églises aujourd'hui classées dans cette rubrique. Saint François d'Assise lui-même, aussi pur de cette souillure qu'il est possible de l'être, a fondé un Ordre qui a peine créé à presque aussitôt pris part aux meurtres et aux massacres. Je n'ai jamais pu comprendre comment il est possible à un esprit raisonnable de regarder le Jéhovah de la Bible et le Père invoqué dans l'Évangile comme un seul et même être. L'influence de l'Ancien Testament et celle de l'Empire romain, dont la tradition a été continuée par la papauté, sont à mon avis les deux causes essentielles de la corruption du christianisme.

[145] See (Smith, 1952).

"*gods*" most of the time referring to *the* God and at other times to plural deities (Strong, 1890). The origin of the singular version of the word *Eloah* is traced to the Semitic *'il-* meaning "*god*," which also forms the origin of the word *Allah* [*al-'ilahu, 'the god'*] in Arabic (van der Toorn, Becking, & van der Horst, 1999). Another origin suggested for this word is from *El*, an ancient Mesopotamian deity (Matthews, 2004, p. 79). The other word that is used in the Old Testament is YHWH [יהוה]: "*These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the **Lord** God made the earth and the heavens*" (Genesis 2:4). This word, both referred to in English as Yahweh or Jehovah was read as "*Lord*" because of the commandment that restricts using God's name in vain (Exodus 20:7). This word's origin is quite controversial as there are no definite sources to where it comes from, though there are some hypotheses such as that it comes from a deity worshipped in Ancient Egypt in 14th century BCE and nomads took the name to Israel (van der Toorn, Becking, & van der Horst, 1999, p. 917).

3.5.2 The Nature of God in the Old Testament

The God that is presented to us in the Old Testament is one of many attributes, desires, behaviors, and interestingly, also controversially, even emotions. The Old Testament presents Yahweh "*as the God who created the world, and as the only God with whom Israel is to be concerned*;" additionally, in the early days of Judaism Yahweh was not considered "*the only God there is*" which only began as a belief "*around the time of the Exile*" (Barton & Muddiman, 2001, p. 9). For example, in Psalms 82 there is a passage that suggests Yahweh is head of a divine council that consists of other gods:

> God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment: "How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked?(...) I say, 'You are gods, children of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, you shall die like mortals, and fall like any prince' [Psalm 82:1-7[146]]

In the first sentence, we see that the word *Elohim* is used both as God and gods which is also translated into Greek as singular ὁ θεὸς, singular vocative, and θεῶν, genitive plural,

[146] Henceforth all Bible references are of the *New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition* (1989)

respectively. However, the Old Testament is concerned only with the actions of Yahweh, no other god, and that there is a "*covenant*" between him and the people of Israel that was mediated by Moses (2001, p. 9). As per this agreement, Yahweh intervenes in the matters of the Israelites, especially in their exile from Egypt as well as communicating with them and their prophets directly (2001, p. 10).

Concerning the attributes of God in the Old Testament there are many passages from scripture that would act as a guide so that there is no commentary or misunderstanding. Thus, in the manner of Plato, we may begin with God being *good* which is simply expressed in Psalm 25: "*Good and upright is the Lord*" (Psalm 25:8). God is good and *does* good as seen in all of Genesis as well as Exodus 18:9: "*Jethro rejoiced for all the good that the Lord had done to Israel, in delivering them from the Egyptians.*" God is eternal: "*But you, O Lord, are enthroned forever; your name endures to all generations*" (Psalm 102:12). Furthermore, as David praises, God is gracious, merciful, powerful, faithful to his word, just in all his ways, is always near whenever he is called and watches over those who love him (Psalm 145). God is immutable: "*For I the Lord do not change*" (Malachi 3:6). God is omnipotent: "*Ah Lord God! It is you who made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you*" (Jeremiah 32:17); "*Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases*" (Psalm 115:3). God is omnipresent: "*But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you*" (Kings 8:27). God is omniscient: "*Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure*" (Psalm 147:5); "*Then the spirit of the Lord fell upon me, and he said to me, Say, Thus says the Lord: This is what you think, O house of Israel; I know the things that come into your mind*" (Ezekiel 11:5). God is self-existent: "*I AM WHO I AM*" (Exodus 3:14); "*Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God*" (Psalm 90:2). God is sovereign: "*Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods, because he delivered the people from the Egyptians*" (Exodus 18:11)[147]. On the other hand, God is wrathful, vengeful and jealous: "*Therefore in my anger I swore, 'They shall not enter my rest.*'" (Psalm 95:11); "*When the Lord heard your words, he was wrathful and swore*" (Deuteronomy 1:34); "*You shall not bow down to*

[147] Examples of God's attributes in the Old Testament are taken from the Blue Letter Bible website ("The Attributes of God - Study Resources")

them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me" (Exodus 20:5); "*For the Lord your God is a devouring fire, a jealous God*" (Deuteronomy 4:24); "*because the Lord your God, who is present with you, is a jealous God. The anger of the Lord your God would be kindled against you and he would destroy you from the face of the earth*" (Deuteronomy 6:15); "*Vengeance is mine, and recompense, for the time when their foot shall slip; because the day of their calamity is at hand, their doom comes swiftly*" (Deuteronomy 32:25).

Having listed all the relevant passages from the Old Testament, it is clear that the God that is depicted is somewhat contradictory in terms of phrases that are quoted as God's own. The most common arguments that come to mind start with the *problem of evil* and the fact that God is perfectly good and vengeful, wrathful, and jealous at the same time, none of which are considered to be a virtue by any philosopher or theologian that comes to mind. Marcion of Sinope, who supported the idea that the Old Testament could not have come from a good God, claimed that "*St. Chrysostom, in commenting on the Sermon on the Mount, would find it necessary to remind his hearers that the Law did not come from the devil*" however the Catholic church opposes this idea saying that though the "*manifestation*" of God may have changed it is still the same God in both the Old and the New Testaments (Aloysia, 1946, pp. 407-8). Some scholars also interpret the *fear* that is used in the Old Testament as meaning to "*worship*" Yahweh as opposed to other gods (Bamberger, 1929, p. 44).

Simone Weil, on the other hand, refuses such an argument because of her unquestionable belief that God is good in the absolute sense of the word or rather good as an *idea* exactly as Plato described. Weil describes the "*God of Israel*" as "*natural and carnal*" (Raper, 1968, p. 62). As mentioned before, Weil supports Plato's teaching concerning things that are of "*necessity*," of the "*body*" and how we must be careful approaching them, for, they may never be *true* to God's divinity and may hinder one's ability to receive God's grace. Weil sees not a "*supernatural*" but a "*natural*" God that is bound to earth, which I shall describe in detail at the end of this chapter. Before, doing so we must now briefly look at the God of the New Testament.

3.6 The God of the New Testament

As with the previous section, I shall introduce the depictions and descriptions concerning God in the New Testament beginning with nature and deeds. The content of the New Testament, again similar to the Old Testament, varies in different denominations of Christianity, however here I will be using the Catholic version[148] since that is what Simone Weil refers to.

The concept of God in the New Testament is quite different than the one of the Old because of two reasons: the first is that the "*Father in Heaven*" never speaks directly as in the Old Testament, and the second is now there is more than one manifestation of God as in Jesus Christ, the son, God, the father, and the Holy Spirit. The nature of God is more complex than that of the Old Testament however addressing God is similar: God [ὁ θεός] or Lord [κύριος]. Before we can ask if God even has a nature[149], which is a very valid question that should be considered, we must first understand what the New Testament has to say about it.

Thomas Aquinas lists eight attributes of God's essence in the first part of *Summa Theologica*: simplicity, perfection, goodness, infinity, omnipresence, immutability, eternity, and unity. From simplicity he understands that God is whole and not partial, John 4:24 says "*God is a spirit*" and therefore God has no "*composition and motion*" (Aquinas, The Summa Theologiæ, 2017). Perfection and goodness, according to Aquinas, are strongly related because by the perfect we understand the good and vice versa, and it is said so by Jesus in Mark 10:18 that "*No one is good but God alone*," and in Matthew 5:48 that God is perfect, "*Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect*." God is infinite: "*And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever*" (Revelation 4:2). God is omnipresent: "*And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age*" (Matthew 28:20); "*For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own*

[148] The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that we can come to know God with certainty by reason alone: "Our holy mother, the Church, holds and teaches that God, the first principle and last end of all things, can be known with certainty from the created world by the natural light of human reason (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2019, p. 14)." The Church still accepts that the: "human mind, in its turn, is hampered in the attaining of such truths, not only by the impact of the senses and the imagination, but also by disordered appetites which are the consequences of original sin (2019, p. 14)."

[149] (Plantinga, 1962)

poets have said" (Acts 17:28). God is immutable and eternal, Aquinas points out, in the way that Augustine, similarly to Plato, says that God is the "*first mover*" and existing without "*potentiality*" God has no "*movement and change*," according to Hebrews 13:8 "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever*." Regarding unity, Aquinas understands that God is one and the "*infinity of God's perfection*" proves this very idea as claims Mark 12:29: "*Jesus answered*, "*The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one*." Aquinas then distinguishes God's intellect, will, and power from that of his essence, thus listing God's omniscience, omnipotence, love, justice, and mercy. God is omniscient having been established as perfect earlier, Aquinas refers to Aristotle's understanding of the soul being in all things and that intellect is separated from matter; since God is *the* highest form of soul, God must also have perfect knowledge: "*God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything*" (1 John 3:20). Just as there is intellect in God there is also will, and will is dependent on the intellect however unlike human beings, God only has will that is good (Aquinas, The Summa Theologiæ, 2017): "*For it is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish*" (1 Peter 2:15). God is omnipotent because it simply is necessary for a perfect and infinite being to also have infinite power: "*For nothing will be impossible with God*" (Luke 1:37); Jesus looked at them and said, "*For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible*" (Matthew 19:26). As it is said: "*God is love*" (1 John 4:16) since according to Aquinas "*love is the first movement of the will*" and should not be thought of "*acts of the will and appetite*" that are secondary to those that are good (Aquinas, The Summa Theologiæ, 2017). Aquinas acknowledges Aristotle's kinds of justice in *Nicomachean Ethics* and says that not the "*commutative justice*" which is concerned with business but the "*distributive justice*" is God's justice: "*If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds live in reverent fear during the time of your exile*" (1 Peter 1:17). And finally, God is merciful for Jesus Christ died and reborn in return for forgiveness of sins of humanity: "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*" (1 Peter 1:3).

Though the wrath of God is not presented as in the Old Testament, we are still reminded of God's anger and vengeance in passages: "*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the*

truth" (Romans 1:18); "*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God's wrath*" (John 3:36); "*Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell*" (Matthew 10:28).

With the help of Thomas Aquinas, we have established the foundational understanding of God's nature and being through verses in the New Testament. As with the section of the Old Testament, there are still many things left to discuss in terms of commentary of the scripture, the vast philosophical writing, and arguments on multiple ends of disagreement and different sects and denominations of Christianity. Thus, the relevant sects and variations of tradition shall be noted fittingly.

3.6.1 The Trinity

In the Nicene Creed where the idea of the Trinity was established, Jesus Christ is referred to as:

> "the only-begotten Son of God, Begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father; By whom all things were made; Who, for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, And was made man" (Schaff, 1919).

In Christianity, especially the Catholic faith, Jesus Christ is not only a savior that God appoints as a prophet but also the Son of God born of a virgin mother, Mary, with the "*intervention of the Holy Spirit*" (O'Collins, 1999, p. 35). This means that there are three persons that make up the divine nature of God in the New Testament. The Father who is in heaven, the Son "*of the living God*" (Matthew 16:16), and the Holy Spirit who the Son is from ["*the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit*" (Matthew 1:20)]. The Holy Spirit is also what Jesus Christ baptizes with according to John the Baptist: *"I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire"* (Matthew 3:11).

Thomas Aquinas, explains what Catholics understand from the Trinity in the eighth chapter of the fourth book of the *Summa Contra Gentiles*:

> It was shown from divine Scripture that the essence and divine nature of the Father and Son are numerically identical, and according to this each is called true God, it must be that the Father and Son cannot be two gods, but one God. For, if there were many gods, a necessary consequence would be the partition in each of the essences of divinity, just as in two men the humanity differs in number from one to the other; and the more so because the divine nature is not one thing and God Himself another.

Additionally, the Holy Spirit is also God only in a different form:

> Now, divine Scriptures' authority not only tells us about the Father and the Son in divinity, but together with these two also numbers the Holy Spirit. For our Lord says: "Going, therefore, teach ye all nations: baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Mat. 2.8:1g). And 1 John (5:7) says: "there are three who give testimony in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost" [Chapter 15, Book 4] (Aquinas, Summa Contra Gentiles).

3.7 Simone Weil's God

Simone Weil, a self-proclaimed lover of Jesus Christ and the Catholic faith, though she strongly criticized the organization of the church itself (Perrin & Thibon, 2003, p. xii), always claimed that her belief was nothing but fundamentally Christian. What was perhaps misunderstood in her studies of different religions, ancient and contemporary, and gnostic views of Christianity was that she saw something common in all but never intended to have an eclectic understanding of religions of multiple cultures. What she saw common in all of them was that the story of Jesus Christ and the God that she saw as loving and perfect in the New Testament was sometimes hidden and at times explicitly apparent. This view, or stance or belief, was perhaps what we may, if we must, call a kind of *perennial philosophy*[150]. When viewed in this vein, Weil's religious endeavor is quite

[150] See *The Perennial Philosophy* by Aldous Huxley (Huxley, 2014).

challenging and embracive as opposed to the exclusionism that she saw in organized religions and political parties.

Having introduced the skeletal formations of religious thought that inspired Weil to search for God, truth, beauty, and good we may finally attempt to decrypt the ideas that make up her philosophy of religion and how her understanding of God plays a key role in all of it. The difficulty in describing God in Weil's writings is quite a difficult undertaking because of the interconnectedness of her concepts. This means that, often, some concepts must be referred to partially or multiple times.

Simone Weil's God is "*beyond ideas just as Plato's Good is*" (Weil, Lectures on philosophy, 1978, p. 181), the God of Plato and the God of Descartes (1978, p. 219), supernatural (Weil, Gravity and Grace, 2003, p. 10), is love, I (2003, p. 31), formless (2003, p. 56), whom we love (2003, p. 75), torn (2003, p. 89), 1 (2003, p. 93), inspiration (2003, p. 100), absent (2003, p. 106), weak because he is impartial (2003, p. 111), extremely merciful (2003, p. 145), beautiful (2003, p. 151), Christ (2003, p. 170).

3.7.1 The God and a God

Gravity and Grace, being a collection of notes is made up of mainly short aphorisms or references to other works that Weil has read, sometimes without a clear indication of what exactly. However, it is possible to extract a few strong statements that give a clear picture. The very first of these strong statements is under the section titled *To Accept the Void*:

> 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. It is not so with the God of the Christians. He is a *supernatural* God, whereas Jehovah is a *natural* God. (Weil, Gravity and Grace, 2003, p. 10)

Having mentioned this before, Simone Weil clearly and distinctly separates between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament going so far as to claim that "*the God of the Christians*" is only present in the New Testament and the God of the Jews, Jehovah or Yahweh, is natural and bound by the physical laws of nature like entropy. Right from the beginning, we must clarify why Weil distinguishes between the

two texts and with such strong language. This idea, of course, goes back to Plato but the separation of Christian and Jewish Gods goes back to the *Gnostics*.

Gnostics were an early sect of Christians who simply refused the belief that the Old Testament is portraying the same God in the New Testament. They believe that *knowledge* [gnosis] is the only way to salvation and to do this one must first know themselves without any intervention of a "*priest*" (Barnstone & Meyer, 2003, p. 1). In the early days of Christianity, until the 3rd century A.D., there were no unified churches or scriptures that were considered infallible and holy (Layton & Brakke, 2021, p. xvii). Most of the scripture that was read in early churches were geographically varying, in most cities "*a very short bible*" by Marcion would be read, while in Egypt there existed an aristocratic community reading Old Testament along with the New Testament as well as "*Gospel According to the Hebrews, Revelation of Peter, Preaching of Peter, Epistle of Barnabas…*", and in northern Mesopotamia, the Syrian Christians would be seen as venerating St. Thomas as their "church father" and read the "*Gospel According to Thomas*" as well as a combined version of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John (Layton & Brakke, 2021, p. xx).

3.7.2 The Gnostic Creation Myth

The scriptures of the early Christians before the official foundation of unified churches are difficult to determine now. It may be asserted that the Gnostic scriptures were defeated by the more popular ones that are accepted by the official churches today as they were banned and mostly lost. The early Gnostic scripture, along with the story of creation, was mostly influenced by Plato, especially the *Timaeus*. According to the "*Gnostic Myth*" God "*expands*" from "*a solitary first principle into a full non-physical (spiritual) universe*," and from this movement, the material universe is created with "*stars, planets, earth, and hell,*" which results in the creation of "*Adam, Eve, and their children,*" and thus humanity (2021, p. 13). During all of this, the divine power fills "*the spiritual universe,*" however some of that power gets stolen by "*a nonspiritual being ("Ialdabaoth")*", through deception the power transfers to humanity, or "*the Gnostics,*" and finally the "*gnostic souls*" get "*summoned by a savior and return to god*" resulting in God recovering the missing power (Layton & Brakke, 2021, p. 13). With this creation myth, the Gnostics are

able to explain the evil in the world, why God must interfere through a savior, as well as why God, currently, is not omnipotent. This story also answers the question of how "*a perfect original source*" results in a "*less perfect being*" (2021, p. 15).

The second part of the story is a version of what is depicted in the *Timaeus*. A craftsman god makes a material universe "*copying patterns provided by the spiritual universe*" (2021, p. 16). The craftsman in Gnosticism is a "*morally ambivalent*" being who is not pure evil and "*loves the good*" but is flawed because of "*ignorance and self centeredness*" (2021, p. 16). The maker, or the craftsman god, is set apart from the "*ultimate first principle,*" the good itself, or simply God.

The creation story of the Cathars, which Simone Weil was fascinated by (Weil, Pensées sans ordre concernant l'amour de Dieu, 1962), was quite similar to the general Gnostic story of the second century. In the text titled *The Secret Supper*, which the Cathars used as part of their Gospels (Barnstone & Meyer, 2003, p. 740), Jesus tells John the Apostle of the creation:

> He said: "Among the virtues of heaven and at the throne of the Father invisible; he was regulator of all things and sat with my Father.' He [Satan] it was who presided over the virtues of the heavens and those who attended on the Father. His power descended from the heavens even unto hell, and arose even unto the throne of the Father invisible. He had wardship of those splendors which were above all the heavens. And he pondered, wishing to place his throne upon the clouds and to 'be like the Most High.'" When he had come down to lower air, he described an angel seated upon the air, to whom he said, 'Open to me the portals of the air'; these the angels opened for him. And passing down, he described an angel who guarded the waters, to whom he said, `Open to me the portals of the waters'; the angel opened them to him. And descending further, he found the whole earth covered with water; walking beneath this, he came upon two fish, lying upon the waters. These, indeed, were yoked together, and they bore up the whole earth at the bidding of the Father invisible. And passing down further still, he found great clouds holding the massed waters of the sea. And descending lower, he found his hell, which is the Gehenna of fire; but thereafter he was

> unable to go further down, because of the flame of the fire which was raging (Wakefield & Evans, 1991, p. 458).

The Gospel of the Secret Supper holds the idea that Satan commands "*the evil of the prison of earthly matter*" and that human beings must return to the "*creator of good, who is the true lord*" (Barnstone & Meyer, 2003, p. 741). God is completely separated from evil and, thus, a possibility of free will arises as such that Adam and Eve erroneously choose to follow that evil embodied, Satan (2003, p. 741).

God's incapability of evil is supported by the fact that he is perfectly good and only wills to do good in another Cathar scripture, *The Book of the Two Principles*, which is more like "*a scholastic argument*" rather than a narrative like the Gospel of the Secret Supper. The very first idea that is proposed in the book is that God of the Bible is not the creator of this world:

> About creation, I wish to confess that our lord god is the creator and author, but not of the elements of the world, which are impotent and empty, and as Paul said in Galatians, "How can you now turn back to the impotent and empty elements under which you suffer a new slavery?" also says in Colossians, "If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations: 'Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch'? All these regulations refer to things that perish with use (2003, p. 755).

Therefore, Cathar scripture strongly defends and accepts that there is evil in this world but that evil cannot be *from* God and God is not *omnipotent* but only all-powerful regarding the good (2003, p. 752). With this argument, also with references to the canonical Gospels of the New Testament as well as to the Old Testament, the Cathars eliminate the problem of evil and, like Simone Weil, believe that mystical truths are hidden in contradictions, or rather these contradictions force us to new realizations such as that evil must not be merely opposite good but be understood in terms of a different kind of existence.

3.7.3 Gravity, Grace, and the Void

Similar to the creation myth of the Gnostics, Weil describes a dual force in the universe. She calls these forces *gravity* and *grace*. While the concept of gravity is similar to the nature and being of the crafter god of the Gnostics, grace is of the God, the first principle; in other words, gravity is the power of Yahweh, while grace is the power of God of the New Testament: *"All the natural movements of the soul are controlled by laws analogous to those of physical gravity. Grace is the only exception"* (Weil, Gravity and Grace, 2003, p. 1).

Everything that belongs to the physical universe is a slave to the force of gravity, while everything that belongs solely to the spiritual universe is empowered by grace. Since we as human beings are *souls* who are embodied and bound to earth, we have two forces that guide us and our life. On the one hand, we have a soul that is part of the spiritual universe and will depart our body and may join God, on the other hand, we have a body that is part of the physical universe which may be a prison if we were to feed its desires.

For one to return to God and receive God's grace, which is another way of saying reaching *enlightenment* in Zen, or the *wisdom* of Socrates, or emancipation from suffering, one must go against the laws of nature and endure "*not to exercise all the power at one's disposal*" (2003, p. 10). Grace, being supernatural, is able to open a void within us as well as fill that void, however, this void must not be sought, because that "*would be tempting God*" (2003, p. 23).

Weil, views God as the "*absolute good*" and because of this God is beyond "*being or existence*" as we understand it in the natural world (Raper, 1968, p. 57). The world that is supposedly of God is also absent of God. One who searches for God in this world finds nothing: "*This world, in so far as it is completely empty of God, is God himself*" (2003, p. 109). God is absent in this world because if he was indeed naturally existent then there would be no affliction, and hence no evil, however, affliction exists and it is the only thing that human beings have that God does not (2003, p. 80). Affliction creates a vacuum in the soul that can only be filled with grace or rather only through grace one may endure it and "*go on loving in the emptiness*" (Taubes, 1955, p. 9). We must consider God to be "at an infinite distance" because of evil and the affliction it causes humanity, because

only through thinking of him at an infinite distance may God be innocent of evil (2003, p. 109). This idea "*is the mystery of mysteries*" because what we see *necessity* as "*other than good*" becomes "*the good itself*" and "*all consolation in affliction separates us from love and from truth*" (2003, p. 109). Therefore: "*He who puts his life into his faith in God can lose his faith. But he who puts his life in God himself will never lose it*" (2003, p. 110). We may find this way of thinking in the writings of Gnostics as well it is "*the secret of gnosis*" to know God is to know oneself:

> Abandon the search for God and the creation and other matters of a similar sort. Look for him by taking yourself as the starting point. Learn who it is within you who makes everything his own and says, "My God, my mind, my thought, my soul, my body." Learn the sources of sorrow, joy, love, hate (. . .)If you carefully investigate these matters you will find him in yourself (Pagels, 1981, pp. xix-xx).

Simone Weil takes this thought further suggesting that atheism is a way of purification. Similar to Kant's famous example of antinomy (Kant, The Critique of Pure Reason, 1998, pp. 490-1), the mind may suggest and prove that God, or a necessary supreme being, both exists and does not exist through different but sound arguments. Kant found that this is because the mind, or pure reason, is not capable of such arguments because of its very nature, and instead one must try to see that God's existence is reasonable and necessary in the practical use of reason (Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, 2002). Weil, a rationalist, and a strict Platonist, nevertheless, believed that such contradictions open the way to the truth that is hidden from us in this *natural* world and the individual that is driven to atheism through such inquiries, in the end, is nearer to God than the one who blindly accepts God's existence (2003, p. 115). This is because the individual who accepts God's existence without reaching "*where God exists*" is still driven by gravity, while the individual who denies the existence of God in nature is correct to assume so, therefore searches for another way to the truth which would bring them into the realm of the supernatural, provided that the individual is not driven by the powers of gravity (2003, p. 115). The part that "*is not made for God*" that we possess, which is the body, *must* deny God's existence so that the part that is made for God, which is the soul, may draw closer to grace (2003, p. 115). "*Christianity without the supernatural*," secularism, and

humanism, Weil suggests, are "*the errors of our time*" because of the very reason that affliction and evil are wrongly attributed to God which is outside of the realm of discussion (2003, p. 115).

The idea of purification through atheism stems from the notion that at its core, the truth of mysticism is of contradictions. Simone Weil, states that "*the contradictions the mind comes up against – these are the only realities: they are the criterion of the real. There is no contradiction in what is imaginary. Contradiction is the test of necessity*" (2003, p. 98) and her prime example for such a claim is the image of the cross. Because the image of the cross shows the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who is also God the Father and the Holy Spirit, in pain, misery, and desperation while on the other hand the supreme being who is the essence of good itself. How, then, Weil defends this position? She takes a similar stance to that of the Gnostics saying that good and evil are not on the same plane of existence, hence are not polar opposites of each other. This realization comes with the questioning of the existence of evil in a world, supposedly, made by a perfect being. This contradiction itself shows us that, as Weil suggests, there must be a truth beyond what we realize *naturally*. The truth is that good and evil may not exist in the natural world in the same way that we understand what those words come to mean. In order to explain this idea further, Weil gives the example of the Pythagorean idea of the good:

> [T]he good is always defined by the union of opposites. When we recommend the opposite of an evil we remain on the level of that evil. After we have put it to the test, we return to the evil. That is what the Gita calls 'the aberration of opposites'. Marxist dialectic is based on a very degraded and completely warped view of this (2003, p. 100).

> Therefore, it must be understood that these contradictions exist on different planes as the "mystery of the cross of Christ" shows us "for it is both a free-will offering and a punishment which he endured in spite of himself" because if we believed this image to only be "an offering" we would desire the same fate which is against our very nature to desire "in spite of ourselves." (2003, p. 103)

How then should we see ourselves and find a way out of the pull of gravity? Simone Weil suggests the following:

> We are a part which has to imitate the whole.
>
> The ātman. Let the soul of a man take the whole universe for its body. Let its relation to the whole universe be like that of a collector to his collection, or of one of the soldiers who died crying out 'Long live the Emperor!' to Napoleon. The soul trans- ports itself outside the actual body into something else. Let it therefore transport itself into the whole universe.
>
> We should identify ourselves with the universe itself. Everything that is less than the universe is subject to suffering. (2003, p. 140)

3.7.4 Critique of Christendom and the Church, and the Way Out

Simone Weil believed that Christendom lost its way and became a religion of Jehovah[151], because the church did not accept the idea of God's "*absence and non-activity*" and instead had taken up the Old Testament understanding of Providence (2003, p. 159). Comparing Israel to Rome, Weil thought that both civilizations had a religious understanding that reduced it to "*a social mechanism*" without the divine (Raper, 1968, p. viii). The Old Testament is missing the most important thing which is that God is good and everything else is secondary to this knowledge[152]. The Old Testament, along with Judaism, rejects the idea of the Incarnation and so there can never be a personal contact with the supernatural, since "*there is no Mediator*" (2003, p. 160). In a letter, Weil remarks that she supports the idea of Hebrews losing the notion of good and evil because they worshipped power, and only Gnostics stayed true to the tradition that Plato carried forward, while Romans spread a "*baseness of heart*" throughout the region, which is why Roman Empire and the Old Testament are the causes of "*the corruption of Christianity*" (Weil, Pensées sans ordre concernant l'amour de Dieu, 1962, p. 64). This is because, there was nothing but gravity in Rome, and the God of the Hebrews was "*heavy*" (2003, p. 167). The only way to mend such corruption, according to Weil, is to adopt Plato's

[151] Which was seen as an antisemitic idea by some (Chenavier, 2021).
[152] "La connaissance essentielle concernant Dieu est que Dieu est le Bien. Tout le reste est secondaire" (Weil, Pensées sans ordre concernant l'amour de Dieu, 1962, p. 47).

teachings again just like the Gnostics, especially the Cathars[153] of the 12th century (1962, p. 65).

Simone Weil attributes the "*poisonous idea of progress*" to the Jewish people being involved in Christianity which led to Europe being "*uprooted*" thus having to go through "*the Enlightenment, 1789 [French Revolution], secularism*" to finally reaching "*colonial conquest,(...)capitalism, totalitarianism*" (2003, p. 162). This "*lie*" in the form of progress in the end even led to antisemites cultivating this "*Jewish influence*" (2003, p. 162). Furthermore, "*primitive Christianity*" came up with the idea of progress "*through the notion of a divine education*" which was claimed to enable one to "*receive the message of Christ*" but instead all this turned against and corrupted Christianity (2003, p. 164). Weil concludes this idea by saying that the French Revolution was devoid of "*supernatural love*" that made it "*entirely empty…with no possibility of ever becoming real*" (2003, p. 163).

What, then, did Simone Weil suggest as a solution to this corruption? Her interest in Gnosticism, mysticism, and ancient religions, is said to have, come together to form a fundamental understanding that does not stray from her Christian belief but supports it (Kotva, 2020, p. 123). It is suggested that Weil's interest was aimed at: *"Catharism as a pure Platonic-Christian religion untainted by either of what she considered the two principal sources of corruption in Christianity: the "terrible violence" of Yahweh the God of Israel and the unfettered powerlust of imperial Rome"* (Kotva, 2020, p. 124).

Weil believed that the height of mysticism and philosophy was only evident in the ancient tradition that Plato portrayed, even though she thought that it was incomplete because we have no access to the original ideas of Pythagoreans and before (Weil, Pensées sans ordre concernant l'amour de Dieu, 1962). The closest to "*pure Christianity*" that she found was the ideas of Catharism which itself was based on Platonist and Gnostic ideals and mystical truths as it was:*"The last living expression in Europe of pre-Roman antiquity, a pure religion of spiritual love which attempted vainly to resist Imperial Christianity and its God of war"* (Kotva, 2020, p. 128)

[153] The Cathars were a dualist sect that believed God of the New Testament to be the source of good, and evil must have a separate source (Barnstone & Meyer, 2003, p. 727).

Weil, in one of her letters to Father Perrin, writes that she never "*sought for God*" which may be the reason why she dislikes such an expression, and instead, she saw the problem of God as something that could not be solved:

> I decided that the only way of being sure not to reach a wrong solution, which seemed to me the greatest possible evil, was to leave it alone. So I left it alone. I neither affirmed nor denied anything. It seemed to me useless to solve the problem, for I thought that, being in this world, our business was to adopt the best attitude with regard to the problems of this world, and that such an attitude did not depend upon the solution of the problem of God. (Weil, Waiting for God, 2009, p. 62)

Weil's youthful agnosticism, though devoid of God, contained something of a Christian way of life which she says that she was born with (2009, p. 62). This led to her not searching for God but searching for truth in a world filled with affliction, and finally to the realization that they are one and the same. The Gnostic Gospel of Thomas[154] also shares such a view: *"Yeshua[155] said, Seek and do not stop seeking until you find. When you find, you will be troubled. When you are troubled, you will marvel and rule over all [and having ruled, you will rest]."* (Barnstone & Meyer, 2003, pp. 44-5)

Suffering, according to Weil, is the only thing that humanity has that is superior to God and this suffering must be loved because of its very existence and not be seen as a utility, similar to that of the *void*. The simple acceptance of suffering and its existence of it in the natural world is also the acceptance that there must be something other than suffering as it is in heaven (Weil, Gravity and Grace, 2003, p. 81). Unlike the Hindus, Weil suggests that one must not *seek* to escape suffering or suffering less but let it *be* similar to the idea one might find in Zen. Because such acceptance of affliction leads us to the recognition of what is real that seems impossible (2003, p. 81). Suffering is the source of knowledge as in the time of the Greeks, with the meaning of *pathos* being both suffering and "*modification notable transformation into an immortal being*" (2003, p. 83). Suffering, not only leads us to knowledge but also leads us to love because it is the only way that

[154] Said to have been written by St. Thomas himself in the city of Urfa. (Layton & Brakke, 2021, p. 537)
[155] Semitic form of Jesus.

we can endure it: *"We must attain to the knowledge of a still fuller reality in suffering which is a nothingness and a void. In the same way we have greatly to love life in order to love death still more"*. (2003, p. 84)

4. LOVE

In this chapter I will begin combining the earlier two chapters into what we may say Weil's ultimate purpose: love. Simone Weil makes clear distinctions between carnal love and love of God, or heavenly love. In this sense she reminds us of some earlier mystics and the overall concept of ancient mysticism. She warns us of false mysticism (2009, p. 173) and believes that mistaking carnal love for heavenly love at times is quite dangerous. According to Weil, love is not an emotion or feeling, but rather a force or energy that compels us to seek the good of others (2003). In her view, love is not self-seeking or possessive, but rather it is other-oriented and self-sacrificing (2003). One of the most important concepts in Weil's philosophical understanding is attention (2003). Weil believed that true love involves paying attention to others and their needs, rather than being focused on our own desires (2003). In other words, love requires a kind of radical self-forgetfulness/self-effacement, in which we put aside our own interests and focus solely on the well-being of the other person (2003). The role of suffering is also important in her understanding of love (2009). She believed that true love involves a willingness to bear the suffering of others, and to share in their pain (2009). In this way, Weil's understanding of love is closely linked to her belief in the value of compassion and empathy (2009). Another important aspect is the idea of equality (2003). Weil argued that true love involves treating others as equals, regardless of their social status or circumstances (2003). This means recognizing the inherent dignity and worth of every individual and seeking to build relationships based on mutual respect and understanding (2003). And finally, the concept of beauty is also another aspect of her understanding of love which is also, surely, inspired by Plato:

> Carnal love in all its forms, from the highest, that is to say true marriage or platonic love, down to the worst, down to debauchery, has the beauty of the world as its object. The love we feel for the splendor of the heavens, the plains, the sea, and the mountains, for the silence of nature which is borne in upon us by thousands of tiny sounds, for the breath of the winds or the warmth of the sun, this love of which every human being has at least an inkling, is an incomplete, painful love, because it is felt for things incapable of responding, that is to say for matter. Men want to turn this same love toward a being who is

> like themselves and capable of answering to their love, of saying yes, of surrendering. When the feeling for beauty happens to be associated with the sight of some human being, the transference of love is made possible, at any rate in an illusory manner. But it is all the beauty of the world, it is universal beauty, for which we yearn. (2009, p. 171)

Weil's Christian beliefs are based and exemplified in the ancients as she recalls Pherecydes[156] saying that during creation Zeus transforms himself into "*Love*" and brings "*harmony, and love, and he has sown in all things the identity and the unity which spreads throughout the universe*" (Weil, 1958, p. 89). God creates not out of necessity or some master plan but out of pure love, and this is the only way everything makes sense for Simone Weil, otherwise there is always an ulterior motive imposing human characteristics on the most divine being which itself is a paradox all together. The only way there is to get out of such self-imprisoning thinking is that love, in its most unconditional and purest form, is the binding and creative force behind God's work of art. This kind of love could only ever be experience or understood through mystical experience such as what Weil calls *attention* or the act of praying which she compared with George Herbert's poem *Love* which she learns in her days in Solesmes in 1938:

> (…) It is called "Love". I learned it by heart. Often, at the culminating point of a violent headache, I make myself say it over, concentrating all my attention upon it and clinging with all my soul to the tenderness it enshrines. I used to think I was merely reciting it as a beautiful poem, but without my knowing it the recitation had the virtue of a prayer. It was during one of these recitations that, as I told you, Christ himself came down and took possession of me. (Weil, Waiting for God, 2009, p. 69)

This experience breaks Weil's arguments on "*insolubility of the problem of God*" and she realizes that there is a potential for a personal connection between a human being and God (Weil, 2009, p. 69). After her experience with Herbert's poem she began reading the mystics and started to believe that Plato was a mystic and "t*he Iliad is bathed in Christian*

[156] In her own words: "A Syrian who was perhaps the master of Pythagoras at the beginning of the sixth century B.C." (Weil, 1958, p. 89)

light, and that Dionysus and Osiris are in a certain sense Christ himself" (Weil, 2009, p. 70). As we have seen previously the Christian light in the ancients or the ancients in Christ is very much a main theme of Weil's writings and notes. This is quite understandably demonstrated through simple comparisons of texts and ideas. However, the base concepts of Self, God, and in this case, Love are such strongly biased words that it is difficult to tear away from the everyday *flimsy* uses and shift our focus on philosophy. We must again try and search for the meaning through Weil. This is why it is appropriate in this chapter to begin with Weil's true inspiration: Plato. For, her understanding of love and mysticism are completely founded within Plato's concepts in the light of Pythagorean doctrines. Weil is so passionate about Plato, Pythagoras, the Greek tragedies, or rather the Greek philosophical, poetic, and mystic knowledge, that, most of her writing is devoted on these three along with lines and ideas from the Gospels and Christian mysticism in her work *Intuitions pré-chrétiennes* [Translated as *Intimations of Christianity among the Ancient Greeks* by Elisabeth Chase Geissbuhler].

4.1 Love in Plato

Just as we have established again and again Plato is the pinnacle of Weil's philosophical stance. Plato and his works have influenced her from the beginning even before she turned to Christianity and mystical thought, or perhaps it was her interpretation of Plato and the ancients that helped her view Jesus Christ and Christianity in such a way just as it did the Gnostics. Plato was very influential in mystical philosophy especially for early Christianity. One of the most important concepts that Plato deals with, according to Weil, is *love* and this is no secret and needs no explanation other than the fact that the original Ancient Greek version of the *Symposium* was the only book she took with her to work at the fields and at the factory often reading and explaining it to other workers (Simone Weil: An Anthology, 2005).

According to Plato in the *Symposium*, eros, or passionate love, is a desire for the eternal and the good (Weil, Intimations of Christianity, 1958). Weil saw this idea as being closely linked to her own belief in the value of attention and the need to seek the good of others. Plato also suggests in the *Symposium* that true love involves a willingness to give everything up for the sake of the beloved and to seek *good*ness above all else. Weil

emphasizes this idea of self-sacrifice in her own philosophy of love, her thought relies on the importance of self-effacement and unconditional love, especially the love of God despite of anything that may be logically argued against such love.

The *Symposium* is unusual among Plato because it lacks a dialectical argument throughout the work and has a limited role, despite the fact that the various speakers often disagree with each other (Warner, 1979, pp. 329-30). Also it is important to note that Plato delivers the famous speech through Socrates but he tells that the words and the teachings belong to Diotima, a priestess from Mantinea who taught him about the "*art of love*" (201d). The use of rhetoric in this dialogue can be seen as an example of the "*noble rhetoric*" that was introduced in the *Gorgias* and further in the *Phaedrus* which is controlled by dialectic and concerned with truth, but is able to adapt to the needs of a particular audience in order to persuade through means beyond dialectical argument. In the latter part of the dialogue, Plato also incorporates a commentary by Alcibiades that reinforces Diotima's conclusions about love through its practicality (1979, p. 330).

Simone Weil has a different approach to the text than the traditional interpretation and likens the literary structure and style to Aeschylus' tragedy *Prometheus* and suggests that this is quite obvious when the two works are read one after the other in their original Greek. This is because the love that is described by Aristophanes in the *Symposium* is similar to the love that is felt by Prometheus in Aeschylus' tragedy: *Love* that is the subject here is, according to Weil, the "*Son of God*" or "*the egg of the World*" (Weil, 1958, p. 106). She not only compares Prometheus to the Christ but also suggests that Socrates is Silenus, the "*attendant of Dionysus*," the same Dionysus that she compares to Osiris, "*the god whose passion was celebrated, the judge and savior of souls, the Lord of the truth*" (Weil, 1958, p. 107). In this sense, Socrates, through Weil's Plato, is the companion of the protector of truth whichever name is attributed to the said protector, in our case: Jesus Christ.

4.1.1 Prometheus as a Christ figure in Aeschylus' Tragedy

Before we try to figure out what Weil means when she compares Aeschylus' Prometheus to the kind of love that is handled in the *Symposium*, surely, we must try and understand, even briefly, Prometheus that is presented by Aeschylus. The name "*Prometheus*"

[Προμηθεύς] in Greek means the "*forethought*," or "*providence*" as Weil translates (Weil, 1958, p. 60) πρό (before) + μανθάνω (to learn, to know) (Liddell et al., 1889). Referencing Hesiod, Weil points out that Prometheus in Greek mythology was the "*arbiter at a contest between the gods and men*" (*Theogony,* 535 as cited in Weil, 1958, p. 60) and as a result Prometheus gives the better part of the animals to men.

However, the infamous act of Prometheus as punished by Zeus in the end is him stealing the fire, or practically knowledge, and gifting it to humans. Thus, it is not only about defying a simple order by Zeus not to gift humanity the power to start fires but includes a long list of skills:

> First of all, though they had eyes to see, they saw to no avail; they had ears but they did not understand; but, just as shapes in dreams, throughout their length of days, without purpose they wrought all things in confusion. They had neither knowledge of houses built of bricks and turned to face the sun nor yet of work in wood; but dwelt beneath the ground like swarming ants, in sunless caves. They had no sign either of winter or of flowery spring or of fruitful summer, on which they could depend but managed everything without judgment, until I taught them to discern the risings of the stars and their settings, which are difficult to distinguish.
>
> Yes, and numbers, too, chiefest of sciences, I invented for them, and the combining of letters, creative mother of the Muses' arts, with which to hold all things in memory. I, too, first brought brute beasts beneath the yoke to be subject to the collar and the pack-saddle, so that they might bear in men's stead their heaviest burdens; and to the chariot I harnessed horses and made them obedient to the rein, to be an image of wealth and luxury. It was I and no one else who invented the mariner's flaxen-winged car that roams the sea.
>
> Wretched that I am – such are the arts I devised for mankind, yet have myself no cunning means to rid me of my present suffering. (Aeschylus, 2001)

Aeschylus presents Prometheus inspired mostly by Hesiod as the chief god of knowledge and love. Prometheus gifts all that he has as an act of unconditional love and as a result

he finds himself in a miserable position in the hands of Zeus. For his acts, Prometheus is chained by Hephaestus to a rock and as he continues his speech about his salvation in the hands of Io's descendants (namely Hercules) and Zeus' fall from reign, Hermes appears indicating that Zeus has heard what is said by Prometheus and demands that he reveal more about the marriage that will end Zeus and threatens him with what is to befall Prometheus. Prometheus calmly claims that he knows all that awaits him and he is ready for the earthquake, storm, lightning and the eagle that will eat his vital organs only for them to be restored endlessly. Prometheus' last words are: "*O holy mother mine, O you firmament that revolves the common light of all, you see the wrongs I suffer!*" (Aeschylus, 2001).

Prometheus' speech at the end of the play suggests that Prometheus "suffers for love" and even the last word in Greek is *πάσχω* which reminds Weil of *passion* as in the Passion of Christ (Weil, 1958, p. 65). Weil claims that the Greeks were troubled with what "*a saint of the Middle Ages*" wept for which is "*the thought that Love is not loved*" since the same was true in Sophocles' Antigone when she proclaims "*that having shown piety she suffered impious treatment*" (Weil, 1958, p. 65). Furthermore, Weil analyzes the grammatical qualities of Aeschylus and finds similarities with Pythagorean wisdom, especially that of mathematics; when Aeschylus uses a very rare word *arthmon* meaning *union* referring to Prometheus' and Zeus' future reconciliation a pun meant to reflect *arithmon* or *number* and another instance is within Prometheus' last speech in which he holds mathematics above all the arts [ἔξοχον σοφισμάτων] he lists (Weil, 1958, p. 66).

Prometheus' suffering and punishment is the result of his love for humanity. His rebellion to the tyrannical Zeus is in a way a gift of salvation for human kind because he saves them from Zeus' wrath, instead directing all that rage upon himself and having paid the debt of the theft humanity is free from destruction by Zeus. This is no doubt easy to compare and interpret in line with what is told of the Christ in the Gospels. This tragedy and the depiction of Prometheus and Zeus is also unique, as Weil also points out, because Zeus is portrayed as the God of Wisdom elsewhere and seems like he completely lacks wisdom here. Weil's interpretation for this is that Prometheus must be seen as "the Wisdom of Zeus" and that "*Zeus and Prometheus are one and the self-same God*" (Weil, 1958, p. 68). Weil goes on to explain the link like so:

> (…) one must interpret the words 'He decreed as sovereign law: By suffering comes understanding' as a link with the passion of Prometheus. The Christian likewise knows that he must go by the Way of the Cross to be united with divine Wisdom. Without Prometheus, Zeus would have a son more powerful than himself and would thus lose his domination. It is not by might, it is by wisdom that God is the ruler of the world. The idea of a situation where God would be separated from his Wisdom is very strange, but it appears also, although less insistently, in the story of Christ. (Weil, 1958, p. 69)

This interpretation suggests that the depiction of Zeus in the tragedy is an allegorical device to compare one's self separated by one's wisdom. The search for wisdom within oneself is full of suffering and without suffering one cannot reach the truth that wisdom provides and once one reaches that truth only then one can be whole which is the goal of Plato's philosophy championed by Simone Weil as well as the whole story behind the Gospels. She believes that one cannot reject the similarity between Greek thought and the Gospels both of which only strengthen and "*confirm*" Christian dogma (Weil, 1958, p. 71).

Another example Weil provides is one from the tragedy called the *Suppliant Women* again by Aeschylus where "*the thought that the supplication of a sufferer comes from God himself(...) The Greeks stated that thought by an admirable expression, 'Zeus suppliant', not Zeus the protector of suppliants but 'Zeus the suppliant'*" (Weil, 1958, p. 71). Weil gives the following lines from the tragedy to support her claim:

> *Ζεὺς μὲν ἀφίκτωρ ἐπίδοι προφπόνως*... [1]
> May suppliant Zeus look with mercy.
> *ἱκτηρίας, ἀγαλματ'αἰδοίου Διός*. [192]
> The wands of supplication, images sacred to Zeus who has right to our respect.
> (Lines 1 and 192 from *Suppliant Women* by Aeschylus as cited in Weil, 1958, p. 71)

Unlike other translations, like that of Herbert Weir Smyth (Aeschylus, 2001) or Liddell-Scott (Liddell et al., 1889), Weil claims that the epithet of Zeus is not the "*protector of suppliants*" but "*suppliant*." This suggests, according to Weil, that the ancient Greek

thought of suffering is in line with that of the Gospels and that "*There is, then, no greater sacrilege than insensitiveness toward those who suffer*" which is reminiscent of Revelation 6:16 as Weil quotes: "*They shall say to the mountains and to the rocks: Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.*"

4.1.2 Plato's Pythagorean doctrine and the importance of Divine Love

Symposium is especially renowned for Socrates' climactic speech at the end where he begins by stating that love is a desire for what is good and beautiful (Plato, 1997). He asserts that love is a way of reaching out and connecting with the eternal, and it is this connection that gives love its value. Love involves a process of self-improvement and self-discovery/knowledge. In seeking the good and the beautiful, we are forced to confront our own limitations and imperfections, and this process of examining oneself leads to personal growth and understanding. Furthermore, Plato suggests that love is a way of connecting with others (*metaxu*) and finding meaning in our relationships with them. Through love, we are able to see the goodness and beauty in others, and this helps us to appreciate and value them more.

Weil suggests that the subject matter of the *Symposium* is the divinity that is called Love which comes from the Orphic tradition that she compares with "*the Soul of the World*" and "*therefore the Son of God*" (Weil, 1958, p. 106). Having discussed the character of Prometheus and his suffering she also notes that the setting of the dialogue is a "*banquet where there is hardly a question of food, but where there is ceaselessly a question of wine*" and of course the comparison of Socrates to Silenus (Weil, 1958, p. 107), which is also related to the comparisons made between Dionysus and Jesus Christ in the Gospels.

In her essay titled "*The 'Symposium' of Plato*" Weil begins with a few relevant lines from the dialogue regarding Love as a physician which is the same comparison that Christ makes with him and his intention on Earth. Jesus says in Luke 5:31-2: "*Jesus answered, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.*'" In the same vein Aristophanes' "*dissertation*," as referred to by Weil, suggests the following: *"Of all the Gods, Love is the greatest friend of men, their defender and the physician of those ills whose healing*

would be the supreme felicity for the human species," (Symposium 189d, as cited in Weil, 1958, p. 108)

Love is also the reason why Zeus wanted to punish humans for their insolence, just like God in the Old Testament, but did not completely destroy them, he cut them in half instead because according to the myth as told in the dialogue humans once had two of everything that they have one of now and it was the "*original sin*" that put them in this situation. On the other hand it was because of love of humanity that Zeus conceded to Demeter in the "*Eleusinian hymn to Demeter*" when she threatened "*to stop the growth of the wheat, thereby causing men to die of hunger*," which can be compared to the covenant between God and Noah in Genesis 9 after Noah's sacrifice and it is only because of "*love for God*" that humanity may find purpose and which is why "*God allows man existence*" (Weil, 1958, p. 108-9). Following this idea, Weil suggests that, Plato presents human beings as merely a symbol of a human being because the other half is always lacking and the only way to find the other half is through *Love*.

Aristophanes' discourse, says Weil, "*is obscure(...) an evidently willful obscurity*" however we should take away something important from his speech which is that we should be united as one but "*our affliction is to be in a state of duality, an affliction due to an original contamination of pride and of injustice*" (Weil, 1958, p. 110). Humanity has an "*essential defect*" which is being separated from their other halves and "*carnal union is the deceitful appearance of a remedy*" (Weil, 1958, p. 110). However, this affliction of duality is not only because that we are separated from another human being but "he who loves is other than that which is loved" and this is simply a "*separation of the subject and the object*" (Weil, 1958, p. 110). For there to be unity the subject and object or the lover and the loved must be the same and, according to Weil, only God fits such a description therefore: "*God can only love himself. We can only love something else*" (Weil, 2003, p. 62). It is vital to understand here that carnal, platonic, or a friendly love are not the thesis of Plato's argument in this work, but a divine unity above all. Weil believes that Plato is purposefully cutting the myths short and desires to lead to a more esoteric knowledge that is also present in the *Timaeus* with the idea of "*the Soul of the World*" for when a person is able to ascend to heaven in order to unite with God:

> (…)the complete being is(…) 'known and sufficiently loved himself by himself' at once subject and object. It is just this state which Plato points to when he says that he who loves will make but one with him who is loved, this unique being must be at once the subject and the object, otherwise love would disappear and there would be no felicity. (Weil, 1958, p. 112)

However, being a complete being is only ever could be achieved by God, a human being can only be a *part* of it by a way of "*union of love with God*" (Weil, 1958, p. 112). Thus, such an option for a human being, the option that opens up to a person by what the person has lost by sin is a "'*happy fault', just as it is called in the Catholic liturgy, felix culpa*" (Weil, 1958, p. 112). Weil believes that the analogy between Love and Prometheus that Aristophanes talks about in his speech is because both the love and the anger belongs to the same God. Zeus, in the myth and in Aeschylus' play, is both "t*he greatest friend of men*" as Prometheus and an angry God because humanity betrayed him, but he does not completely "*exterminate*" humanity because of Prometheus, or rather because of his love for humanity. Zeus, instead, bestows humanity an illness that which can only be treated by Love as a physician (Weil, 1958, p. 113).

Moving on to Agathon, a tragic poet, we see more evidence that "Love is the equal of Zeus" as he says: "*I affirm that of all the Gods, Love is the most joyful, the most beautiful and the most perfect*" (Weil, 1958, p. 113). Weil reminds us that though these superlatives may be seen as relative they are "*absolute superlatives, for in Plato there is no childish polytheism*" (Weil, 1958, p. 113). Agathon further confirms the reign of Love [Eros] over all other gods and claims that if not for Love who acts as a link and a peacekeeper among gods and that Love is the youngest of gods for we no longer know of the past war stories in the present: "*195c(...)φιλία καὶ εἰρήνη <ἦν>, ὥσπερ νῦν ἐξ οὗ Ἔρως τῶν θεῶν βασιλεύει" [it would have been friendship and peace among them, as it is now since Love has reigned over the gods]* (Weil, 1958, p. 114). The same thing is told in the tragedy of Aeschylus; Prometheus stops the war between Zeus and the Titans and helps Zeus take over and Agathon proclaims that "*Love… has taught each god to exercise this proper function*" and names Love "*the King of the Gods*" which, according to Weil, is a point Plato was "*very willing to indicate*" (Weil, 1958, p. 115). In Agathon's speech there is something even more important which is that Love is proportionate and its relation to the

idea of might and that might is always disproportionate. Weil gives the following lines as an example:

> 196b. The most important is that Love neither causes nor submits to injustice, be it among the gods or among men. For, when suffering happens to him he does not suffer by force, for force cannot reach Love. And when he acts, he does not proceed by force, for each one consents to obey Love in everything. That agreement which is made by mutual consent is righteous, according to the laws of the 'City royal'. (Weil, 1958, p. 116)

These lines, Weil believes, "*are the most beautiful in Plato*" because it reflects the core of Greek thought which is "*the recognition of might as an absolutely sovereign thing in all of nature, including the natural part of the human soul(...) and at the same time as an absolutely detestable thing*" (Weil, 1958, p. 115). Might, is both the most sought of and the most hated because Greeks knew that however you might be in proximation with might you lose because both the wielder and the inflicted of might is a victim of *gravity* that pulls one away from the divine. Weil summarizes the idea as such:

> (…) this double understanding is perhaps the purest source of love for God. For to know, not abstractly but with the whole soul, that all in nature, including psychological nature, is under the dominance of a force as brutal, as pitilessly directed downward as gravity, such a knowledge glues, so to speak, the soul to prayer like a prisoner who, when he is able, remains glued to the window of his cell, or like a fly stays stuck to the bottom of a bottle by the force of its urge toward the light. There is correlation between the words of the devil in the Gospels: 'all this power will I give thee, for that is delivered unto me' and 'Our Father which art in heaven'. (Weil, 1958, p. 117)

Weil claims that this knowledge is also present in the *Iliad* where *force*[157] makes "*all that submits to or that exerts*" part of its "*degrading empire*" (Weil, 1958, p. 117). It is only God who can truly escape this force and only partly some humans "*who, by love, have transported and hidden a part of their souls in Him*" (Weil, 1958, p. 117).

[157] This word in French can also be translated as strength, power or might.

In her essay called *The Iliad or the Poem of Force* (*L'Iliade ou le poème de la force*) Weil proposes that "*the true heroes, the true subject, the center of the Iliad is force*" (*Simone Weil's The Iliad, or, The Poem of Force,* 2003). As James P. Holoka aptly summarizes in his translation:

> The author of the Iliad, Weil argues, neither lionizes victors nor denigrates losers; Homer well knows that force is the only winner, and all humans alike are its hostages. Even the gods, who appear to enjoy the questionable luxury of dispensing the short-lived "successes" of individuals and armies, are constrained by fate. "One may not debase God to the point of making Him a partisan in war. The same applies to the Old Testament. There God is a partisan. In the Iliad, the gods are partisans, but Zeus takes up his golden scales." (*Simone Weil's The Iliad, or, The Poem of Force,* 2003, p. 9)

Considering that Simone Weil was an active member of the French front against the Nazi regime, it is not surprising that she was interested in how and why fascism was so popular in her time as it did other philosophers of her time, especially her French nationals and Sorbonne classmates such as Sartre, de Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty and Albert Camus to name a few of the popular ones. Unlike the rest of her contemporaries, as mentioned before, Weil searched for a more spiritual and mystical answer to the question of the historicity of violence, fascism and strong nationalism. Weil traced the roots of the problem to the Roman Empire, just after the mesmerizing Greek civilization full of worries and warnings regarding the dangers of *force* or *power* that corrupts the soul to the point of no return. Hence, she believed that the Greeks knew exactly what could result in a civilization such as the Romans. She describes the central theme of the *Iliad* as *force* which is both destructive and transformative. The danger of force was all too apparent in the Roman Empire, according to Weil, she even thought that the origin of the modern fascist state stemmed from Ancient Rome: "The analogy between the systems of Hitler and of ancient Rome is so striking that one might believe that Hitler alone, after two thousand years, has understood correctly how to copy the Romans" (*Simone Weil's The Iliad, or, The Poem of Force,* 2003, p. 9-10). As mentioned in other chapters Weil believed that early Christianity also got affected from this imperialism and the lures of the force since the Church also tried to use force to convert the masses. Weil believed that

only the Greeks were able to convey the truth about the force in their tragedies, philosophies, and poems:

> In Latin literature how seldom do we hear the human accent which sounds so often in Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and in Greek prose… When they were not glorifying power the Latin poets, Lucretius and Juvenal always excepted, were chiefly concerned to sing of pleasure and love… but the astonishing baseness of the elegists' conception of love is closely related, in all probability, to the worship of force, and it contributes to the overall impression of brutality (*Simone Weil's The Iliad, or, The Poem of Force,* 2003, p. 10).

Weil viewed the *Iliad* as a profound meditation on the dangers and consequences of force, which she defines as the ability to turn a human being into a mere thing or object: "*For is that which turns anybody who is subjected to it into a thing [La force, c'est ce qui fait de quiconque lui est soumis une chose]*" (Weil, "L'Iliade ou le poème de la force.", 1940). Not only does it change one into a thing, it may be said, as Weil notes, that it makes a person into a corpse which the poem constantly tries to show us:

> (…)the horses
> Rattled the empty chariots through the files of battle,
> Longing for their noble drivers. But they on the ground
> Lay, dearer to the vultures than to their wives. (Weil, "The Iliad or, The Poem of Force.", 1945)
>
> Weil, points out that it is a logical contradiction for a "person's being" to be a thing but "what is impossible in logic becomes true in life" which is another example of why Weil believes that contradictions are not possible in imagination but quite possible in reality (Weil, 1945).

Force changes the lives of both the victorious and the defeated. It is a power that is present in every aspect of human experience from a personal to a societal level. Force, according to Weil, leads to suffering, humiliation, and the dehumanization of both parties of the struggle where no true *winner* is established. Force is corrosive just like an insecticide that kills everything it touches along with the insects. There could be different forms that stem from force, and they are distinctly presented in the *Iliad*: through physical,

psychological, and moral powers. The brutality of war is an example of physical force where warriors turn into *objects* by death or injury. While we may see psychological force through manipulation and domination, causing emotional and mental suffering towards one. Gods represent moral force and despite their immortal nature they are susceptible to the same desires as mortals are. The kind of force Weil analyzes in the poem is not only present but inevitable in some circumstances bringing tragic consequences. Weil believes that force leads to a vicious cycle where victims of one time might very well become perpetrators themselves in the future which can be seen all too well in human history where victims become the evil they once experienced when they gain enough power to be able to take it upon themselves. This cycle results in a culture of violence. Weil believes that the Greeks and *the Iliad* in particular draws attention to the human cost of force and the importance of recognizing the dignity and humanity of others, even in the face of conflict. In this sense, according to Holoka, Weil convincingly shows us that the *Iliad* is a "*mirror of reality – socially, politically, morally*" (*Simone Weil's The Iliad, or, The Poem of Force,* 2003, p. 10). In the poem we are reminded that it is impossible for individuals that rely too much on strength that destiny provides to not perish in the end just as Achilles, his dear friend and all those Trojans and Greeks on both sides of the war perished. One must also realize that a strong person is never entirely strong nor the weak person entirely weak and both are unaware of this reality (Weil, 1958, p. 34). The weak person things that they are of a different "*species*" than the strong and vice versa, however in the end they are quite similar in the face of force because of the lack of thought in their actions, thus there is no place for "*justice or prudence*" (1958, p. 34). This is the reason how Achilles can decapitate twelve Trojan children as if cutting flowers, because there is no place for thought when his actions are so reliant on force (1958, p. 34). Achilles easily chooses to stay and fight and die in glory instead of a long lasting life back at home when he is provided with the dilemma after the death of his friend because he refused to fight with Agamemnon, he may have never thought in the beginning that his own life along with his dear friend's were to reach an end as objectified as a result of blind force in this battle: "*Thus it is that those to whom destiny lends force, perish for having relied too much upon it*" (1958, p. 34). Weil explains the Greek idea as the concept of retribution that punishes abuse of power with geometrical strictness which is the "*principal subject of meditation*" for them (1958, p. 35). The core idea that is presented as Nemesis is the

basis of the philosophies of the Pythagoreans, Socrates and Plato on humanity and the universe (1958, p. 35). This Hellenistic thought is similar to the concept of Karma, according to Weil, in countries where Buddhism influenced, however the West is bereft of it. While the West focuses on geometry regarding matter, the Greeks were the first of the geometricians regarding virtue (1958, p. 35). This understanding makes it clearer what Plato might mean when emphasizing geometry above all sciences, because it enables one to not only think about matter but ethics as well.

Having said that, Plato, too, emphasized this double nature of force when he attested that the only "*faculty of the human soul which force cannot touch(…) is the faculty of consent to the good, the faculty of supernatural love*[158]," because no sense of wickedness can arise from this faculty and it is the "*only principle of righteousness in the human soul*" (Weil, 1958, p. 117-8). Therefore, God is Love and God acts because God is God but only if he is let by "*consent*" and for this Weil proposes that God "*not only acts*" but "*submits*" because the Greek word for "*to be modified, to submit, to suffer*" is πάσχειν from which the word for passion πάθημα comes from: "*Love is modified, submits, suffers, but not by constraint. Therefore by consent*" (Weil, 1958, p. 118). Prometheus loves and helps Zeus with consent but also consensually acts against him: "*ἑκὼν ἑκὼν ἥμαρτον, οὐκ ἀρνήσομαι" [by my own will, my own will – I will not deny it]* (Aeschylus, 2001, line 266). Prometheus accepts that what he has suffered is not by force but by his own will just like the Christ on the crucifix (Weil, 1958, p. 118). Weil thinks that these concordances like "*the perfectly righteous one, Prometheus, Dionysus, the Soul of the World, on the one side, and on the other Love*" are necessary confirmation of the Gospels and only help one's faith and "*makes apparent beneath all these names a single and same Personage, who is the only Son of God*" (Weil, 1958, p. 119). Agathon, furthermore, establishes that Love is so powerful and wise that "*he even makes poets of others*" not only in art but in skills as well "*Apollo invented archery, medicine, prophecy, being guided by love and desire, thus he is also the pupil of Love*" and all gods are Love's pupils in whatever they are said they can forge into being (Weil, 1958, p. 122). Weil goes on to claim that Plato's four virtues of justice, temperance, courage and wisdom are sourced and inspired by "*Supernatural Love(…) and they cannot proceed from elsewhere*" (Weil,

[158] "οὔτε γὰρ αὐτὸς βίᾳ πάσχει, εἴ τι πάσχει—βία γὰρ Ἔρωτος οὐχ ἅπτεται…" (*Symposium*, 196c) The word *βίᾳ* is used by Plato which means *bodily strength, force* (Liddell et al., 1889).

1958, p. 123). Intelligence and desire also proceed from this "*Supernatural Love*" and Weil explains it as such:

> It is not the natural capacity, the congenital fight, nor is it the effort, the will, the work, which in the intelligence has sway over the energy capable of making it fully efficacious. It is uniquely the desire, that is, the desire for the beauty. This desire, given a certain degree of intensity and of purity, is the same thing as genius. At all levels it is the same thing as attention. If this were understood, the conception of teaching would be quite other than it is. First one would realize that the intelligence functions only in joy. Intelligence is perhaps even the only one of our faculties to which joy is indispensable. The absence of joy asphyxiates it. (Weil, 1958, p. 123).

After Agathon, Socrates delivers a speech that is not of his own teachings but that of a wise Mantinean woman called Diotima who was very knowledgeable in matters of love (Symposium, 201d). It is important to note that despite scholars who believe that Socrates and Plato hated mysteries and religion Symposium is a very good example that it is not necessarily so (Weil, 1958, p. 124). Socrates' account of the dialogue between him and Diotima begins with trying to make Socrates "*understand that Love, being the desire for good, for beauty and for wisdom, is neither good nor beautiful, nor wise, although, of course, it is not ugly, nor evil nor ignorant*" and instead Diotima says that "*Love is a daemon [δαίμων]*" (Weil, 1958, p. 124). The Greek word δαίμων is both according to Weil and Liddell et al. may come to mean God, individual gods or angels, or demon in the sense we use it today (Weil, 1958, p. 125 & Lidell et al., 1889). Diotima defines them as a "*species*" between God and humans and its function is "*to interpret and to transmit human messages to the Gods, and divine messages to men, from one side the supplications and sacrifices, from the other commandments and answers to those sacrifices*" (Symposium 202e as cited in Weil, 1958, p.125). It is not clear, according to Weil, whether Plato meant that there was only a single entity or more but the word that is used within the work gives a better explanation:

> The word ἑρμηνεῦον, he who interprets, compares Love and Hermes, the interpreter, the messenger of the Gods, who accompanies souls into the other

> world, the inventor of the lyre, the god who was an infant prodigy… In these lines Love appears as the ideal priest. It must not be forgotten that this god who is priest and mediator, who is between the divinity and man, is the same who is, according to Agathon's speech, at least equal to Zeus(…) Plato affirms here, as categorically as possible, that apart from divine mediation there can be no relationship between God and man." (Weil, 1958, p. 126)

So now we see that Love is, until now, a manifestation of different gods or perhaps an aspect of God that is explained in various ways since an aspect may have more than one utility. However, the most important thing about Socrates', or rather Diotima's, speech is that Love is a golden mean, or the proportionate as mentioned before. Just before Socrates begins Diotima's teachings he asks Agathon whether a person who has something would desire that very same thing, i.e., a strong man would not desire to be strong. Diotima tells us the myth of the birth of Love saying that during the banquet of Aphrodite's birth, Want becomes pregnant with Love and the father is Resource, who is the son of Wisdom (1958, p. 127). Love is "*between the knowing and the ignorant. The cause of this is in his birth. For his father is wise and resourceful, his mother wants wisdom and wants resource*" (1958, p.127). Weil translates πόρος as "*resource*" but it has another primary meaning which is "*way, passage, path*" and notes that this should also be taken into account since "*The Chinese call God Tao, which is to say Way. Christ said: 'I am the Way'(...) In the Prometheus of Aeschylus there is a play of words upon this verbal root*" (1958, p. 127):

> τὴν πεπρωμένην δὲ χρὴ αἶσαν φέρειν, 'I must endure the fate which has been given me' (perfect past participle of πόρω). θνητοῖς γὰρ γέρα πορὼν, 'having given a privilege to mortals'. πυρὸς πηγὴν(…) ἣ διδάσκαλος(…)πέφηνε καὶ μέγας πόρος, 'the source of fire(…) which appeared as an instructress and a great resource (or a great treasure, or a great gift) (lines 103, 108, 111). (1958, p. 127)

These word plays that Aeschylus used are compared to "*the Heraclitan trinity(...) Zeus, the Word…the fire*" and it appears also in the New Testament "*He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire*" (Matthew 3:2 as cited in Weil, 1958, p. 128). Simone Weil, suggests that one may argue "*Poros is the Holy Ghost*" because of Plato's interest in the myth of Prometheus. Weil points out that "*Poros is the son of Metis, Wisdom*" and in

Hesiod's works Earth or Gaia, mother of Prometheus, who is Themis in Aeschylus' tragedy warns Zeus one day that "*Wisdom was destined to have a son stronger than he who would dethrone him*" as a result Zeus eats his pregnant wife Metis and Athena is born from his head. This child, according to Weil, is Poros and Athena is "*the Goddess of the olive tree*" and olive oil is associated with the Holy Spirit in Catholicism (1958, p. 128). Athena is also the only one other than Zeus strong enough to handle "*the Aegis*." Thus, Weil believes that the Symposium shows Love "*as the author of the most complete harmony in the Pythagorean sense*" because there is so much hypertextuality within and between the works written and referenced by Plato. Finally, it is appropriate to summarize with Socrates' own words:

> To sum up, all desire is desire for the good and for happiness(…) There is a doctrine which says that those who seek the other half of themselves are the ones who love. My theory affirms that love has for object neither the half nor the whole, unless such happens to be the good. For men will consent to have their feet and their hands cut off if these seem evil to them. I do not think that anyone cherishes what belongs to him, unless he calls that the good which is his own, and belongs to him, and unless he names evil that which is not his own. There is no other object of love for men than the good(…) Briefly, it is by means of love that one perpetually desires to possess the good. (Symposium, 205d as cited in Weil, 1958, p. 130).

This final thought is not understood as a mere refutation of Aristophanes but a confirmation of the main idea that human beings are incomplete and that there is only one way to be complete which is "*the good*" and the only good is God. The only way to reach the good is with the love of the good which also comes from God (1958, p. 130). This is why Weil constantly references the Delphic maxim ordering one to know oneself, in order to know the good so as to stimulate the love for the good which will in the end lead one to the truth.

Simone Weil asserts that the idea that is studied in the *Symposium* continues in the *Republic* especially where Plato compares "*love of the good*" with "*the power of sight*:"

> [The good is] what every soul seeks, the motive of all its actions, whose importance is sensed, but the soul, being at a loss, is unable completely to grasp its essence. Thus concerning the good the soul cannot have a firm belief as it has about everything else. This is the reason why the soul lacks other things also, and the usefulness which they may have. (*Republic VI*, 505e as cited in Weil, 1958, p. 132)

It has been established so far that Simone Weil shows a clear interest of the light, the good, God, the individual, knowledge and truth in Plato's works and this comparison of the good and the light leads to the following:

> The instruction [of the soul] is not what some declare it to be. For they affirm that knowledge, not being in the soul, they will put it there, as if one might put sight into blind eyes. Whereas the theory which I will expound teaches that the faculty of understanding, and the organ of this faculty, is innate in the soul of each one. But it is as if one were unable to turn one's eye towards the light, away from darkness, without turning the whole body. Likewise it is with the whole soul that one must turn oneself from what is becoming (the temporal) until the soul becomes strong enough to endure the contemplation of reality, and all that is most luminous in that reality; which we have already declared to be the good. The art of conversion consists in this, that it is the easiest and most rapid method of bringing someone to turn round. This is quite a different thing from a method for putting sight into the soul, which we know it has already. But that sight is not well directed, and it does not look where it should. It is this that the soul must find a means to learn. (*Republic VII*, 518b-d as cited in Weil, 1958, p. 132)

Weil points out that Plato uses the word μηχανή and says that it is a recurring word also in the tragedies with salvation or redemption as a theme and adds that the following from the *Symposium* says much about egoism: "*my theory is that love has for object neither the half, nor the whole, of man's self(…) there is nothing that men love except the good*" (1958, p. 133). So, according to Weil and her interpretation of Plato, one cannot truly love oneself but perhaps a "*shadow of love for himself*" which is just an illusion in a way. The allegory of the cave, says Weil, does not depict knowledge as the sun or the sight as

intelligence. Instead, the sun symbolizes "*the good*" and sight "*is then the faculty which is in relationship with the good*" (1958, p. 134). The same idea is present in the *Symposium* as well where the faculty is love. From here, Weil believes that Plato means love when talking about the eyes and sight and through this imagery one can arrive at the idea of the impossibility of egoism because "*the eyes cannot see themselves*" (1958, p. 134).

Furthermore, Plato presents the stages of the soul through Diotima where we see the way a person can reach the divine or the beauty itself:

> [210c] That he may see the beauty of the sciences and look at last toward the fullness of beauty(…) [211a] On turning to the vast sea of the beautiful to contemplate it, he shall beget vast doctrines, full of many beautiful and great thoughts in a generous philosophy, until, being thus fortified and ripened, he discerns a unique science which is this one of beauty. [210e] For he who has come to this point in amorous education, by considering beautiful things in their correct order, arriving at the accomplishment of love suddenly shall contemplate a miraculous sort of beauty(…) This is first of all eternally real, neither begotten, nor mortal, which neither waxes nor wanes. Moreover this is not a beauty which is beautiful from one side but ugly from another, beautiful at one time but not at another, beautiful in one reference, and ugly in another, beautiful for some, ugly for others. And this beauty will not appear to him as a face, or as hands or anything corporeal; not as a theory, nor any science, nor will it appear as dwelling in any thing, or in any living being upon earth or in heaven or anywhere. But this will be beauty itself, by itself, with itself, of a unique nature, eternally real. All beautiful things have part of this beauty, but in such a way that when they are born or perish, beauty itself suffers no increase, no decrease nor the least modification. [211b] He who undertakes the contemplation of this beauty has very nearly attained to perfection. [211c] (…) he knows at last what beauty is. [212a] Do you believe that the life of a man who searches into such a matter, who uses the appropriate organ to contemplate and to unite himself with it, can be mediocre? Consider this; what we have here is the only being who sees the beautiful with that faculty capable of seeing it. To him it will be given to beget,

> not sham virtues, for he has not laid hold upon a phantom, but real virtues, because he has laid hold on the real. And in creating and nourishing true virtue, it is accorded him to be the friend of God; and if ever a man became immortal that man will become so. [212b] In this work it would be difficult for human nature to find a better collaborator than Love.

Weil believes that these passages are a strong example of how people are mistaken when they disregard Plato's mysticism because he proposes a "*spiritual marriage with the beautiful" and the beautiful is nowhere to be found except in God, as God. Weil goes as far as to claim that even the Trinity is hidden in these lines when Plato says 'αὐτὸ καθ'αὐτὸ μεθ'αὐτοῦ'"* [itself, by itself, with itself] (1958, p. 145). This is arguably an amazingly simple explanation of what Trinity means and the confusion that arises when one is to explain the Trinity as three different aspects of the same being, which is, as Weil notes, how "*St. Thomas defines the Trinity*" (1958, p.145). The idea of the Trinity appears also as a "*Pythagorean Doctrine*" in Plato's works which Weil compares to the Gospel of St. John:

> It is impossible that the disposition or arrangement of two of anything, so long as there are only two, should be beautiful without a third. There must be come between them, in the middle, a bond which brings them into union. The most beautiful of bonds is that which brings perfect unity to itself and the parts linked. It is geometrical proportion which, by essence, is the mosty beautiful for such achievement. For when of three numbers, or of three masses, or of any other quantity, the intermediary is to the last as the first is to the last, and reciprocally, the last to the intermediary, as the intermediary to the first, then the intermediary becomes first and last. Further, the last and the first become both intermediaries; thus it is necessary that all achieve identity; and, being identified mutually, they shall be one. (*Timaeus,* 31c as cited in Weil, 1958, p. 157)

> Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one… that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may

> be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17:11,21-3)
>
> I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. (John 10:14-5)
>
> As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. (John 15:9-10)
>
> Love(…) is a great 'daimon', and that which is 'daimon' is intermediary between God and man(…) being in the middle of the one and the other, it fills the distance in such a manner that the whole is bound together in itself. (*Symposium*, 202d as cited in Weil, 1958, p. 158)
>
> That he may see the beauty of the sciences… turning toward the vast sea of the beautiful. (*Symposium*, 210d as cited in Weil, 1958, p. 158)

With this relationship between the Gospels and Plato, or Plato's "*Pythagorean Doctrine*" in mind we may now move on to Simone Weil's idea of Attention, Metaxu and end goal of her philosophical understanding as a result.

4.2 Metaxu, Attention and Simone Weil's Mystical Ambition

In one of her letters Simone Weil claims that there are three domains regarding the will of God: things that are absolutely independent of us, things that are under the rule of the will, and things that are not entirely independent of us but are not under the rule of the will either (2009, p. 43). In the first domain, Weil suggests that we must love absolutely everything, including evil in all its forms and our own past sins and sufferings, as well as the suffering of others. This requires a deep sense of the presence and reality of God in all external things. In the second domain, Weil advises that we must carry out our duties clearly and without hesitation, and when our duties are not clear, we must sometimes follow arbitrary rules and sometimes follow our inclinations, but only to a limited degree.

The danger lies in introducing the unlimited into a domain that is essentially finite. In the third domain, Weil asserts that God rewards those who think of him with attention and love by exercising a pressure on them that is proportionate to their attention and love. The goal is to attain a state of perfection in which the pressure of God possesses the whole soul. At any stage, however, we must do nothing more than we are irresistibly compelled to do, even if it is in the direction of goodness. Weil also reflects on the nature of the sacraments, which she sees as having both a specific and mysterious value as a contact with God, and a purely human value as symbols or ceremonies. Finally, Weil says that prayer is a way of seeking and finding the will of God. She wants to convey the understanding of the will of God and our relationship to it emphasizing the importance of love, attention, and self-sacrifice in aligning ourselves with the will of God and suggests that the sacraments and prayer can be valuable tools in this process. It also highlights the dangers of introducing the unlimited into the finite, and the importance of being attentive to and obedient to the will of God in all aspects of our lives.

4.2.1 Metaxu

One of the most important concepts that Weil wrote about is *metaxu* [μεταξύ] which she finds the foundation of in Plato's works. The literal meaning of the word μεταξύ, regarding a place, is, in the midst, betwixt, between, while regarding a time, between, meanwhile (Liddell et al., 1889). Though Plato has not used the term in his works the concept is taken by Weil from fragments of his works like the allegory of the cave in the *Republic* where the philosopher may be seen as the link between the two realms of inside and outside of the cave, the theory of ideas where again the philosopher is the link between the world of sensible objects and the ideas, the *Symposium* and Diotima's teaching of Love as the link between God and humans, the *Meno* and the concept of *anamnesis* where the soul is the intermediary between ideas and the body, the *Phaedrus* and the idea of the tripartite soul as discussed before.

Simone Weil, inspired by the theme of intermediaries in Plato's works uses the concept of *metaxu* to explain various relationships and links between human beings, things and most importantly God or other divine beings. In her notes, she describes the concept as the true way of reaching God, because these connections can also serve as "barriers" or

they can serve as food for our souls (Weil, 2003, p. 145-7). For example, the bridges that Greeks used are not known to us in the present time because while they were intended spiritually we treat them materialistically. The only way that we can discover the true purpose of such bridges is to love God "*with a supernatural love*" so that we may see "*means simply as means*" and nothing more (Weil, 2003, p. 146).

For example, power and "*money, power's master key*" are means at their purest form and thus they are perceived as ends rather than simple means by some oblivious to the truth (2003, p. 146). Instead, suggests Weil, we must see that the world we are in is a "*realm of necessity*" and it "*offers us absolutely nothing except means*" (2003, p. 146). On the other hand, there is contradiction in human desires as with the desire to eat when hungry, for instance, subsides once we are full, but desire can also serve as a way to reach the supernatural if one were to experience the supernatural even once. Therefore, desire is evil in nature, and it fools us into going the wrong way but without desire we would not have the motivation to search for higher experiences and in the end reach the divine. When used as a means, desire can help us grow and develop. If one were to be too exhausted to even desire, it would be impossible for them to ever reach the divine let alone illusory pleasures. When desire is aligned and its axis is fixed, the *metaxu*, which "*form the region of good and evil*" feed the soul in the manner of "h*ome, country, traditions, culture, etc.*" and without it "*a human life is not possible*" (2003, p. 146-7).

Metaxu, the mediators that connect us to the divine, are blessings of the earth for humans. According to Weil, it is only possible to appreciate the *metaxu* of others if we value our own. As an example, if we are to appreciate other countries, we must not view our own country "*as an idol*" but rather a step towards something greater such as God (2003, p. 147). In order to be harmonious with the natural world our faculties should be free, independent and from a single foundation. Here, Weil is a proponent of harmony with nature as were the Greeks in ancient times, as was Plato's philosophy borrowed from the Pythagoreans. Plato's idea of specialization, according to Weil, referred to the specialization of human faculties, connecting the spiritual and acting as a bridge, or *metaxu*, yearning for a higher purpose beyond itself. With this notion in mind, the Greek civilization did not share the common adoration of force and instead used the temporal *metaxu* as a bridge: "*Among the states of the soul they did not seek intensity but purity,*"

meaning that they did not try to conquer others or nature but find ways to live in harmony – this of course is valid in the mystic teachings of the Greeks and may not be the common sense of the tyrants for example. The idea that Weil is trying to convey with the idolatry here is also further explained in her notes as coming "*from the fact that, while thirsting for absolute good, we do not possess the power of supernatural attention and we have not the patience to allow it to develop*" (2003, p. 60). On the other hand, she believes that idolatry is a necessity in the cave because without an idol one works in the void where one turns to "*false gods*." Idolatry again is related to the concept of force, in the sense that it is a double-edged sword, a weapon that goes both ways but may be avoided if true aims and actions are utilized.

From a different perspective, in *The Need for Roots*, Weil talks of metaxu in terms of art, religion, tradition and society as intermediaries and also as "needs of the soul" that she believes are essential to live a human life. These needs are related to her concept of *metaxu* because they are the intermediaries between humans and the divine. These intermediaries are listed as: order, liberty, obedience, responsibility, equality, hierarchism, honor, punishment, freedom of opinion, security, risk, private property, collective property, and truth. These needs are different than "*desires, fancies or vices, and foods from gluttonous repasts or poisons*" because "*needs are limited, in exactly the same way as are the foods corresponding to them;*" they may be seen as foods of the soul (Weil, Need for Roots, 2003, p. 11). Order is "*the first need of all*" and "*stands above all needs*" because it provides structure, harmony, and stability that allow the soul to find peace and meaning in life and can be compared to the golden mean as Weil reminds us (Weil, Need for Roots, 2003, p. 11). While another "*indispensable*" food, liberty is viral because humans must be able to make choices and express themselves without bondage, however not eating "*disgusting or dangerous things*" is limitation of liberty only to a child. Obedience is important because without it there would be no morality nor spiritual principle that help create a sense of purpose and helps a human being in the proper direction however this authority must not be understood as a dictator; thus, there are two kinds: obedience to rules and obedience to human beings as leaders (Need for Roots, 2003, p. 12). Responsibility helps one to feel useful and "even indispensable" (Need for Roots, 2003, p. 14). Equality helps recognize the inherent value in everyone providing for equal opportunity in society. Hierarchy, on the other hand, though may seem

anachronistic to equality at first, serves as the organizer of society providing a place for each individual devotion to superiors as "*symbols*" but not as individuals (Need for Roots, 2003, p. 18). Honor is important that represents the respect of oneself and others in social harmony and provides self-worth. Punishment is needed for a sense of justice including fair consequence for one's actions, of which there are two kinds: disciplinary and penal, while the former is "*security against failings with which it would be too exhausting to struggle if there were no exterior support*" and the latter is important for an individual that fell outside the law to be included again within the law by way of paying of debts only possible through individual's consent (Need for Roots, p. 19). Freedom of opinion is similar to liberty but important because engaging in open dialogue in the manner of Plato's tradition is needed for intellectual exploration and growth. An important thing to realize about freedom of opinion is that it is only so for individuals, "*associations*" may not be free: "*they are instruments, they must be held in bondage*" since "*only the human being is fit to be free*" (Need for Roots, p. 31). Security is essential because it "*means that the soul is not under the weight of fear or terror*" (p. 31). Only exception to this would be brief moments, what Simone Weil means by security is protection from permanent fear or terror which are "*mortal poisons*" (p. 31). Risk is also an essential need of the soul because "*the absence of risk produces a type of boredom which paralyzes*" and this paralysis, again, is detrimental to the development of the soul (p. 32). Private property is vital because the soul would be "*isolated, lost*" without a space where familiar objects are present that feel "*like an extension of the bodily members*" (p. 33). Collective property is also vital because shared spaces promote the growth of community and social harmony. Finally, the most sacred of the needs of the soul is the truth. Truth is vital in the search for knowledge, especially the search for knowledge of the self which in the end will have the ability to reach God through realization of love as *metaxu*.

All the needs of the soul, which are all a *metaxu*, represent different ways for human beings to interact with divine truth. Through the satisfaction of these needs humans can feel rooted and connected to one another as well as to the spiritual world. *Metaxu* help human beings grow spiritually as individuals and as a society. Weil's distinction from the traditional libertarian, conservative or socialist ideology is her emphasis on the individual as well as the community equally in harmony so as to reach a balanced world. According to Weil, a method for inspiring people is a new concept however, she believes that Plato

talks of a similar thing in the *Republic* and other works. On the other hand, Montesquieu or Rousseau never explicitly work on such a matter. Weil also notes that this idea should not be viewed as a "*mystery*" that only God can provide.

4.2.2 Attention

Simone Weil's concept of attention is one of the foundational ideas of her philosophical pursuit. Attention, in its literal meaning comes from the Latin *attendo*, "*I wait for, I listen carefully, I pay attention*" (Lewis & Short, 1879) which is essentially the same in French, attention in the sense of mental focus, vigilance, consideration, interest. The concept in regard to Weil's understanding may be seen as a sort of *meditation* where the mind focuses on a particular thought. Weil in her notes speaks of how geniuses do not *try* to find a solution but the solution of a problem comes to them in a state of complete attention that is effortless and without worry, this she calls *extreme attention*: "Extreme attention is what constitutes the creative faculty in man and the only extreme attention is religious. The amount of creative genius in any period is strictly in proportion to the amount of extreme attention and thus of authentic religion at that period.

Weil believes that we do not need to understand new things but by patience and attention the truth will seem evident to our whole self (2003, p. 116). This method is the only way to cure "*faults*" as opposed to the will. The way to virtue, poetry or the solution of a problem should not be to try with extreme will at all costs and push ourselves but the calmer approach of attention an absolute example of which is prayer that is guided by faith and love (2003, p. 117). This method is opposed to devotion with a clear object that takes over the whole pursuit and is a misguided way to reach the truth. The only way to utilize attention is to desire without an object, as mentioned in other chapters. This thought is similar to the Buddhist understanding of removing oneself from attachments of all kinds. Weil suggests the same, where one should not be focused on the object of desire through will but the object which should be the idea of good itself through unmixed attention. To this Weil adds as we have seen from her analysis of the *Symposium*: "*Love is the teacher of gods and men, for no one learns without desiring to learn. Truth is sought not because it is truth but because it is good*" (2003, p. 118). Attention is connected to desire but instead of will by "*consent*" as discussed regarding Prometheus and his actions

before. Through this consent, attention enables one to be able to liberate oneself from the 'I' as it disappears and all our attention may turn "*to that which cannot be conceived*" otherwise (2003, p. 118).

However, the concept of attention should not be regarded as a mere method of learning or education because it is a practice of ethics and spirituality in totality. Attention is vital in all aspects of human life, not only for understanding ideas but also for empathy with others in regard to the essential needs of the soul. Attention is also the way to realize the nature of *metaxu* in the path to reaching the divine. The practice of attention is only possible if one is able to endure the difficulty and affliction that comes with such supernatural truths, which is why attention must be rooted in love and faith so that one may pass by all the suffering and attachment of beings and things that gravitate one toward the earth instead of heaven. Weil believes that turning our attention towards the good, God or to a lesser degree something absolutely beautiful will prevail against evil in the end. As long as this is the case, the individual will not need to fear because the realization alone will grow the eternity in the soul like a seed if one takes care of it (2003, p. 119).

4.2.3 Weil's mystic ambition

So far, the concept of mysticism has been used presupposing a definition that encompasses all who devote their time or life to the search of the spiritual and the divine through unorthodox interpretations of holy ideas or esoteric philosophies. However, it is important to categorize what this *mysticism* means and why Weil is so comfortable to label Plato as one of the last mystics of the Ancient Greek tradition. Mysticism or the mystical pursuit may be defined as an attitude "*determined by the fundamental experience of the inner self which enters into immediate contact with God*" this is as Aquinas puts it a "*cognition dei experimentalis*" or "the knowledge of God through experience" (Güney, 1996). As a proponent of the same idea Weil supported the notion that the only way to explain or experience such an act is only possible through love.

Weil find that there is an act close to prayer that is representative of such an experience called mysticism which is *work*. In previous chapters this idea was exemplified from another perspective however now it will be much more complete to revisit this idea and

gather all the things that Weil tries to convey in all of her work. It is most peculiar or rather in some ways quite expected that Weil worked as factory worker or participated in manual labor at a farm, but her thoughts regarding the nature of manual labor supports her acts or her acts are reflections of her thoughts. Weil believed that just as it is with desire and force, work is a double natured concept and/or action that may be utilized in completely opposite ways in terms of its monotony. Monotony according to Weil: *"(...)is the most beautiful or the most atrocious thing. The most beautiful if it is a reflection of eternity – the most atrocious if it is the sign of an unvarying perpetuity. It is time surpassed or time sterilized"*. (2003, p. 179)

If viewed from the proper angle monotonous work could be a way to spirituality. However, without the idea of the good and the beautiful, for example in the manner of poetry or religion, a worker is nothing but a slave:

> Workers need poetry more than bread. They need that their life should be a poem. They need some light from eternity. Religion alone can be the source of such poetry. It is not religion but revolution which is the opium of the people. Deprivation of this poetry explains all forms of demoralization. (2003, p. 181)

What Weil describes here is the same idea that she advocated in *The Need for Roots* where the essential needs of the soul included a way for a person to feel purposeful, responsible, needed and placed properly without fear and with love filled within their soul. Weil's solution to the problem of her age or the problem of the modern and contemporary age which has only changed its shape but not its core is finding a meaning in spiritual experience through the method of attention and by wholly understanding the teachings of the ancients whether it be the Greeks or the same ideas in the Gospels. As mentioned before, this understanding is not merely intellectual but spiritual because the individual *understands* with their whole being, the understanding is gifted to them in the moment of complete undisturbed attention which may be during a purposeful work that is filled with the idea of the *good* in the sense that Plato recognized it or it may be through a lonely experience of contemplation. All that binds these experiences together into a mystical sensation is the pure unconditional love that fills the soul and without any worry of the

object of their desire, only the desire of desiring the good. This is also similar to what Kant says in the first section of his Groundwork regarding good and good will:

> There is nothing it is possible to think of anywhere in the world, or indeed anything at all outside it, that can be held to be good without limitation, excepting only a good will. Understanding, wit, the power of judgment, and like talents of the mind, whatever they might be called, or courage, resoluteness, persistence in an intention, as qualities of temperament, are without doubt in some respects good and to be wished for; but they can also become extremely evil and harmful, if the will that is to make use of these gifts of nature, and whose peculiar constitution is therefore called character, is not good. It is the same with gifts of fortune. Power, wealth, honor, even health and that entire well-being and contentment with one's condition, under the name of happiness, make for courage and thereby often also for arrogance, where there is not a good will to correct their influence on the mind, and thereby on the entire principle of action, and make them universally purposive; not to mention that a rational impartial spectator can never take satisfaction even in the sight of the uninterrupted welfare of a being, if it is adorned with no trait of a pure and good will; and so the good will appears to constitute the indispensable condition even of the worthiness to be happy. (Kant, 2008, Ak 4:393-4)

Kant's idea of the good will is echoed in Weil's work especially since Plato has also been an influence for both. Weil claims that "*the absolutely just Love of the Symposium is the same as the divine model of the Theaetetus and the perfectly just man of the Republic*" this is because the pursuit of the good is attached to a pure desire of the good without conditions or expectation, methodically *attention*, which is then linked to the divine as *metaxu* through love.

Weil concludes her essay on the Pythagorean Doctrine with the thought of mysteries that are impossible to reach through reason:

> (…)God, by so disposing the corporeal senses for our use, has given us a perfect model of the love we owe Him. He has included a revelation in our sensibility itself. As in looking at the box from any point of view we no longer see all the

> acute or obtuse angles, the uneven lines, but only a cube, so in experiencing any event in the world, and no matter what state of soul in ourselves, we need hardly perceive them, but only see through them a single, fixed and unchanging order of the world. This order is not a mathematical form but a Person; and that Person is God(…) As soon as we analyze it [all human life], we find a tissue of mysteries completely impenetrable to the intelligence. These are images of supernatural mysteries of which we can have an idea only by means of this resemblance. Human thought and the universe constitute the books of revelation *par excellence*, if the attention, lighted by love and faith, knows how to decipher them. The reading of them is a proof, and indeed the only certain proof. After having read the *Iliad* in Greek, no one would dream of wondering whether the professor who taught him the Greek alphabet had deceived him." (Weil, 1958, p. 200-1)

We can see in her words that she explicitly defines the result of contemplation of the supernatural mysteries having "tissue of mysteries" and the only way to decipher them is through supernatural experience through attention with love and faith yet again. This is a simple formula to a very complex concept that eludes words or logical thought. It is also why Weil claims that philosophy, in order to progress, needs mysticism because such thoughts though a human being is able to ponder cannot grasp completely. This experience is also illustrated in Plato's Allegory of the Cave in the seventh book of the Republic where the one who gets out of the cave would look at the moon at night more easily and with less pain than to first try to look at the sun after such a long time in the cave. This is a painful process indeed and reaching the truth is not so immediately easy as it is to derive a formulaic idea from Plato, however the experience of an individual contemplating the beautiful and the good finally reaching the divine is aptly depicted in the *Republic* as Simone Weil also thinks so. What Weil does is to decipher Plato's words into her own and compare these ideas with that of the Gospels leading to the discovery that the ideas of the Greeks are also present in the New Testament as well as in some other religions and philosophers. Even though we find again cryptic and esoteric lines in Weil's notes, it becomes clearer in her essays and especially after noticing the exact places of which the notes are referring to. Weil, in the end proposes a simple method to cope with affliction as did the Buddha, albeit more passively. Weil's method is an active

passivity where one devotes oneself to the search of knowledge through intellectual growth but does not rely on that simple ideal. Buddhist's would probably reject this method as well and most likely would label it as some other form of attachment since the only truth to be found in the physical world is just another illusion.

Weil, on the other hand thinks that her mystical pursuit, based on the tradition last represented by Plato and Christian teachings, will lead just about anyone, in proper circumstances, to the truth, which is the divine, or that which cannot be expressed through philosophical treatises. However, one must also wonder the viability of such a utopic sounding harmonious living that resembles a Woodstock daydream where both the individual and the society flourishes with intellectual growth full of people enjoying manual labor in order to contribute to the economy that only exists for the people themselves in a unified aim to reach God and become once again part of the heavens as the Gnostics told in their biblical stories. Of course, in some regards, Weil truly tried to accomplish this dream of hers in her personal life however successful that may have been is open to argument with gaps in our knowledge on the details of her mind beyond letters, essays and notes. One must also note that Weil was no the first nor the last to advocate a mystical pursuit in philosophy guided by a mystical interpretation of Plato and the Orphic mysteries. Nevertheless, her work and total grasp on the Greeks and religious imagery certainly makes for a stunningly convincing case for the mystical Plato and the esoteric teachings. In conclusion there is but one question left that must be considered before closing which is of course the God as the *other* or God *needing* an *other* or God perceived as the perfect but also the *decreated* in regard to humanity. According to Weil, this idea is only available to those with mystical experiences through the proper practice of attention, love and faith however it is important to philosophically consider this after all.

4.3 God as the Other Within

The concept of the *Other* is never explicitly titled or subtitled in Weil's works. However, this does not mean that the concept itself is apparent in her thought. God is even referred to as just another being or an individual in some of her explanations, of course not to be seen as a *mere* being but *a* being or of course *the* being. It must be first established however silly it might seem that Weil considers the existence of God, there is *a* God, and

in the manner of Cartesian reasoning there is also a self that is the 'I' whether that would be the 'I' writing this or the 'I' that represents Weil thinking about this in the past. No matter, there is an 'I' and another 'I' or the divine 'I' which is God. God would perceive 'I' who is writing this as another, something *other* than God's self and same goes for the individual that contemplates the existence or the very being of God as well. According to Weil, or rather Weil through Plato, these two beings are able to connect through a concept which has been established as *metaxu*. So far, these determinations are all within the chapters of this dissertation. What was also mentioned but not completely analyzed was the concept of *decreation* which makes for a very interesting argument regarding the nature of God and the reason of human existence as well.

As it has been said before concept of *decreation* is that God, out of pure and unconditional love gave a part of Himself in order to create humanity. The exact details of such an act is not explicit in Weil but was described explicitly in the section on the Gnostic creation myth. In order not to re-analyze without aim I will focus on the act of *decreation* and the concept of God's perfectness and purity. One of the questions that arise through Weil's depiction and definition of *decreation* is simply whether God is still perfect after the act of creation or if everything is still part of God in the manner of a pantheist argument, which we know Weil absolutely rejected, or perhaps the alternative that is not explained in Weil's short lifetime. Weil says that God can only love himself and that we can only love another which is because we are not capable of loving ourselves, this is only possible through God. God can only love us through his love of himself, since we are created by God (2003, p. 32). Weil's argument against a pantheistic theory of *creation* is that there exists a *deifugal* force, as mentioned before, because "*otherwise all would be God*" (2003, p. 33). Again, in her notes, Weil claims that God renounced being everything, thus the reason for creation and decreation. This means, logically that God is not everything at the moment, also meaning that we are *other* to God as God is *other* in regard to us. However, this logical thinking again is rejected by Weil saying that "everything which is grasped by our natural faculties is hypothetical. It is only supernatural love that establishes anything. Thus, we are co-creators. We participate in the creation of the world by decreating ourselves" (Weil, 2003, p. 33-4). From this line we understand that Weil means that what God has created as humans, we should decreate and join God again. This is similar to the Buddhist idea of letting go of attachments in the manner of ourselves or

rather having an ego death that was also what Plato describes in some of his dialogues as established before according to Weil. Decreation is a way of opening up space for the divine, for grace to enter our being and move us beyond our reason, to a supernatural experience that will open up new knowledge that we may have never been able to reach otherwise. Thus, God is the ultimate Other or the "*eternal Thou*" similar to what Martin Buber describes in his work *I and Thou* (Buber, 1996).

This view of God as the Other but connected to us or us connected to God from within through various *metaxu* helps see our capabilities, limitations and needs as human beings as well as setting a mysterious path to the divine. This way of thought not only grounds the reason for ethics in Weil's view but also grounds the reason for the nobility of the pursuit of knowledge and the necessity of work and religious connection since all of these things assist the bridges that connect us to God in the end. It is also why there is evil in this world, as a response to the famous problem of evil, because God is not this world nor is God nature, God is simply the divine Other that shows humanity the way but does not intervene directly in the thoughts and actions of human beings since they are also established as necessary for the soul's development according to Weil. Though the concept of the nature of God is not properly defined or explained by Weil, nor so clearly by Plato and rather cryptically, because this is the intention of Weil's endeavor in philosophy. She accepts the fact that there are things that are outside of reasoning and philosophical understanding, but she does not deny the way to reach them as opposed to Kant. Weil truly believes that there is a way to reach beyond the mind's capabilities and it is only through mystical experiences and divine love. Weil believes this because she claims she experienced it and says that it is not something open to be described in writing but gives us an idea through fragments in order for us to be inspired to take the same route.

However, there is still an inconsistency regarding God as the divine Other as proposed by Weil. On the one hand she claims that God absolutely transcends the physical world and impossible to be grasped by human intelligence, God is distinct from creation in the sense that God does not desire as it is a human characteristic. On the other hand, Weil claims that God is always present and feels the suffering of humanity, and at one time he even sacrificed himself as the Christ and walked the earth, that God is reachable through

metaxu, through love, affliction, and empathy. These two polar views in her thought may be present in any Catholic mystic who advocates the reality of the Trinity and that Jesus Christ is one aspect of God along with the Holy Spirit and the Father who is in heaven, but Weil's detailed analysis of the formulaic journey of reaching the divine give way to more questions than solutions. To these contradictions, Weil argues that they are the only way to determine whether something is real or imaginary, as discussed before. Such view of contradictions blocks the way to further arguments and discussions as they are one of those mechanisms that enable the owner of the argument to escape logical scrutiny and reminds us of the paradoxical sayings of sophists present in Plato's works. It is claimed by philosophers of religion that even God cannot take part in a logical impossibility hence the definition such as a sphere square or a triangle with two points. However, God is never described regarding capabilities or limitations in Weil's works. Simply anything that may seem impossible for us is possible for God as it is in Matthew 19:26. If, however, all things are possible with God then that would mean conditional love would be possible for God or evil would be possible for God which is completely rejected by any Catholic including Simone Weil since the very definition of God as a supreme being is that God is the absolute good, and absolute good is devoid of evil. To this, Weil responds as saying that evil and good are not opposites but simply exist on different planes meaning that evil can only exist on earth guided by *gravity* and the absolute good is only possible in heaven because God is absolutely good. However, we are not presented with the extent of such limitations as to where such a line would be drawn regarding the separation of earth and heaven. These thoughts, again, lead to many cliché, paradoxical and pseudo-philosophical questions such as the question of when exactly a sand dune may be called a sand dune.

5. CONCLİSİON AND DİSCUSSİON

What, then, have I shown with such an undertaking as this dissertation regarding Simone Weil's mystical pursuit of knowledge of the self and the divine other, God? Are the enlightenment era philosophers correct in thinking that faith only limits philosophical investigation or does Weil's mysticism succeeds in providing us with a solution or at least the path to some kind of solution regarding the problem of God? This dissertation was derived by the hope that perhaps Weil provided an alternative way of doing philosophy that might lead to the true knowledge that Plato puzzlingly teases us with in his works. The metaphysical bridge or bridges, *metaxu*, fueled with Love connects God to human beings and human beings to other human beings but is this connection enough or rather is this connection truly the aim of human life?

In her notes regarding the "*meaning of the universe,*" Weil suggests that "*we should identify ourselves with the universe itself*" and that "e*verything less than the universe is subject to suffering*" (Weil, 2003, p. 140). In her conception of the universe, she finds the Hindu term of *atman*, which we have discussed in the previous chapters, is the key to understanding the universe, i.e., that the universe is nothing but an extension of our bodies and that all the beings and inanimate objects should be regarded as parts of us. This does not mean that we should love everyone equally, similarly as we do not love every part of ourselves equally. The only way to escape the suffering that is caused by the self appears to be viable through the transition of the self into "*one*" which is what the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita shows us and, in a way, the Lankavatara Sutra as well. This is exactly where Weil's pursuit reaches the logical contradiction, the very contradiction she holds dear as the indicator of truth or reality. This conception is, of course, wholly mystical and ineffable in that we may not truly analyze it in philosophical terms. This anti-climactic proposal serves as a rather disappointing end to a passionately laid idea of love. Perhaps this is the reason why Plato kept these thoughts within the circle of philosophers and students close to him and away from public. Otherwise, these contradictions are open to various interpretations.

On the other hand, it is quite comfortable to be on the side of the logical rationalists who reject mystical teachings. They simply reject any mystical argument as being outside the

field and concern of philosophy. Kant defended the idea that God or religious beliefs are not subjects healthily examined by reason and they should be taken as things left to the practical use of the mind. Weil, however, thought that the only way to reach philosophical understanding of the world was through religious contemplation and through the love of God in pure attention. In comparison with the intellectual rigor that constant rational seeking of the positive sciences requires that is employed by the more passive acquisition of knowledge, Weil suggests, is a better way to reach the truth that is outside the reach of philosophy and positive sciences. This, rather experiential method of proving the use of religion and mystery is again quite impossible for philosophical investigations to consider, at least in the way that we understand it so far in this dissertation. There are some things that elude the human mind that may be shared among human beings but are rather difficult to note down, and on the other side of the discussion anything that is difficult or impossible to write down are not worthy of being written down because they are not the subjects of investigation through language and philosophy, something Wittgenstein supported in his early works, for example. [159]

Having said that, Weil's conception of the Other is based on her belief that the self can connect with God through *metaxu* which leads to recognizing and embracing God as the ultimate Other. Her understanding of *metaxu* is the key to the individual's ability to connect with God in this world which is absolutely impossible in any other way and *metaxu* are made of traditions, art, culture, ethics and so on. This supports the Greek idea of including and embracing art, craft, skill, work and politics as part of their lives and not as something separate from life itself as an individual or as a community. However just because there is a metaphysical connection of God and human beings does not sufficiently explain the complexity of the unity or the clash of the immortal and the mortal, the finite and the infinite or the 'I' and the Other. The interaction of beings on a similar plane does not provide a sufficient example of interaction of beings on different planes of existence in which the gap will be void upon death. In other words, the relation between human beings cannot be a measure for the relation between an individual and God. The latter is also an important subject that is explained through myth in Plato, as we have seen, but never explicitly defined by Weil. How does the plane of existence transform and how

[159] In his lectures on religious belief Wittgenstein claimed that religion was a way of life and it is not based on evidence or arguments (Martin, 1991).

does a mortal being transcend this realm to the next, and how does the transcending nature of the soul binds itself to the extremely limited nature of the body? These questions remain as part of the post-Enlightenment prejudice and skepticism towards religion within the scope of scientific inquiry. Despite this, Weil proclaims that faith can be a way to fuel the individual's will to live a fulfilling life of pursuit of knowledge and productivity that leads to the gift of the love of God, however as long as the latter is not grounded within the realm of the former, the connection remains a hypothesis of metaphysics and nothing further.

On the other hand, Weil's mystical method of philosophy provides a way of comfort in the face of impossible problems that logic cannot fathom, let alone solve. If her suggestion is taken without further investigation, or rather practically, then it certainly serves as a project of inspiration as she suggests in her book *The Need for Roots*. Weil's philosophical approach can be seen as a way to emancipation for the individual stuck in a society where the individual is seen as being nothing other than a number on a business report. This approach is also criticized for being elitist. The criticism stems from the idea that only a group of individuals hold the path to enlightenment and happiness. Weil has faced it in her lifetime and rejected such a stance herself. She even accused the Communist Party and its members especially Leon Trotsky and Stalin (Pétrement, 1976) for trying to create an elitist and authoritarian society. However, the question of elitism in the sense of the individual who is worthy of connecting to God has never been examined in detail by Simone Weil in her essays or notes. It seems that the claim always is that anyone who has not lost their soul to extreme affliction or evil always has the opportunity to succeed, but as we have seen in other sections, Weil criticizes some individuals and groups of people, especially the members of the state of Israel and the Jewish faith, as having no hope in doing this because they have beliefs in false gods. Of course, one of the requirements of such a connection with God is *believing* in the said God but then again one is left with the question of the perfectly good God that excludes certain individuals.

Hence, it appears that no matter how we try to handle the problem, even though it is quite possible to continue doing this for every logical aspect of Weil's philosophy, we will not be able to reach a point that is satisfactory in either side of the argument except this: when the mind deals with absolutes, it is left with nothing but antinomies as Kant wisely warned

us. There is no particular way that will be satisfactory for either party of such arguments when the subject matter is that of the absolutes like the good, the perfect and the divine. It is important, then, that we reiterate perhaps the reason why Plato would have chosen to keep such discussions outside the view of the public lest he be criticized in the same way. And perhaps the only way to reach such contemplations of absolutes is once an individual has gained enough information on the things that the mind can investigate and inquire into. Thus, I must conclude, again, rather anti-climactically in not being able to determine whether it is wise or sufficient for one to turn to mysticism as opposed to any other understanding of philosophy. Having said that, in the end, Simone Weil certainly makes one question these matters and offers a helping hand in the way she thinks is appropriate and that is what binds philosophers in the pursuit of knowledge: the proposal of a question and a proposal of a probable solution that may or may not lead to a firm grounding of concepts and ideas.

On that note, it is also vital that I must once again take the question of the individual on one side and the Other on the other in regard to Simone Weil's propositions. The idea of "*the Other*" is of course discussed in various parts of philosophy in the tradition of Hegel, Husserl, Sartre and Levinas. However, in the case of Weil's metaphysical understanding of epistemology and love, it is safe to say that the ultimate Other is God. As discussed in the first chapter, the Self according to Weil seems rather eclectic, though she denies that interpretation regarding her views. She believes that her philosophy is in line with Plato and Descartes and the doctrine in the New Testament which is of course only accidentally related to that of the early Christians or Gnostics. The individual Self is two-fold and dualistic according to Weil. The Self is the culmination of the body and the soul, it is the very representation of the reality of the world which is also dualistic if we were to think in terms of basic concepts. There is a force which is physical and belongs to the physical world that is also what the world is made of, and there is love or grace which is how we can envision God in our current form. God exists around the physical but not *of* the physical force that is the gravity, rather the physical force of gravity is *because* God chose creation instead of idle eternity. Thus, the Self has two aspects of Being that is present within an inseparable (*individual*) being. The Self may choose to free itself of gravity and be light enough to join God in Heaven or may choose worldly pleasures and sink deep within the darkness of Hades. The Self is one, if we were to take Simone Weil in her word

exemplifying the story of Krishna and the concept of Atman in her notes. This is not to say that individuals are all one but that individual human beings are all *of* the One which means that all of their Self-ness is shared or rather can be combined in another plane of existence that makes up the heavens. This means that there is only one true Other which is the divine Other. The Other as another mind or an individual is only a fact of worldly existence which is only real when one is living. But when one dies, there cannot even be an Other, Other than God because the being has left the physical aspect of one's existence. This may very well be the reason why Weil focuses on the individual as a person rather than an individual within a community, though in her political philosophy, she does support the idea of many individuals working for a common goal like in the resistance of the Second World War. Weil is only individualistic when it comes to philosophy that is concerned with the ultimate question of existence. She believes that through *attention* which is only possible for one to engage alone is the way to freeing oneself from the sense of self filled with the weight of gravity. She was, as known, quite critical of the Church as an organization because it moves as a single entity denying people of their own individual experience with God as she has experienced herself. Though she did experience this religious epiphany in *a* church she is skeptical of *the* Church, which quite important to differentiate.

When it comes to the divine Other, God, an individual is alone. There is no one else because either everyone is of the same shared essence of Self or that every individual must journey alone, spiritually, in order to come to meet this Other on their own. Why, then, if God is the creator of all, there are things that are *other* than God? How can we conceptualize the Other that is the individual if that individual was once part of God and now is still part of God ideally but not physically? There are two ways to think of this then, namely, that the physical separation is only an illusion similar to that of the Hindu and the Buddhist philosophies or that God truly is separated from humanity and other physical beings which means that God is *less* than before, which was the belief of some Gnostic communities, Marcion of Sinope, for example. Simone Weil is not so clear on this, on the one hand it seems like she supports the Hindu and the Buddhist philosophies claiming the one and only existence of all things and on the other hand, she says that gravity as a force is separate than grace but of course must always bow down in the face of grace. Even though the light of God is stronger than that of the Demiourgos, there is

still a lopsided duality here. Considering that Simone Weil also holds God above all else, it is safe to say that the same uneven duality is present in her understanding. Though, God is all powerful, it is up to the individual to choose their path between *gravity* and *grace*. Only if the individual chooses *grace* themselves is it possible for them to be good and reach the good itself, otherwise the soul is heavy with the burden of sin and must stay on the physical plane of existence.

Moreover, we see two kinds of the Other as mentioned before, similar to Buber's understanding but different because Weil does not include objects and considers everything else to either be part of God, part of earth or part of the individual. There is the Other as another mind or another individual and the Other as the eternal, the divine, God. While the two kinds of "*other*"s exist together in the world, there is only one kind of other after death, one might say. It is understandable that Weil does not want to see the physical to be superior to the supernatural regarding Christian metaphysics but there is an uncertainty as to the dynamics of the human being as created by God and the earthly force of gravity, being separate but not clearly divided. If we take the point of Gnostics, it would be easier to come to the conclusion that God by *origin* encompasses all there is, both by act and nature of being because all comes from God. However, Simone Weil supports the Roman Catholic dogma of the Trinity, and that God is of three aspects but one, and there is a physical force that is separate from God and humanity, call it Hades, the Devil, the material world or else. The concept of Trinity suggests that God is present as a supernatural being, the Father, a natural being in the form of a human being, the Son, and the link between the two or perhaps the *metaxu* that Weil thinks of, the Holy Spirit. In the end, there is a group of the Self, even if we think of individuals as a group there is no way that we get out of the psychology of the "*I*" in front of every thought that we may possibly hold. The "*I*" is one and the divine is the other. Even if we were to criticize Weil because of her individualistic alignment, she still thinks that politics and the way we must understand ethics is just as important as divine knowledge in a way so that our souls are not heavy with any burden. Then, again, this life is only a fleeting glimpse of what there is *outside* of our existence or capability of knowledge as we are currently in the world. In this sense, the divine is the only Other that really *matters* and everything that is done or should be done, according to Weil, is in the end, for the divine Other and not the individual Other. This is why Weil had problems with communities acting together like the Church

or the Communist Party, perhaps. Because the one and only reason we may think of while on this Earth is to believe that we must study knowledge for love of God. This love of God, only accidentally bases the rules of ethics one must abide by because it is not *for* the Other, the individual. The individual Other is only temporarily the Other and they also have the responsibility for the "*I*" that is on the other side. Weil is clear in that whatever antinomies the mind of the pure reason comes up with are only because there is only one way to reach God and that it is the act of love, and this is only possible as an individual from *within* and not by the sole reason of being humans. It is because we are humans that we must suffer. It is because we are humans that we must quickly turn to God and reject all that is part of the worldly illusions. Buddha set out to reject the material so that one were to escape from pain, and not because there is a God that is mightier than he that he must join in order to fulfill an assignment. However, it is only also accidental that we escape suffering through the love of God and the act of attention or extreme prayer. Hence, it is not the main objective of Weil to escape from suffering. The escape comes as a result of total acceptance of the love of God and devotion to this pursuit through philosophy and in one's daily life.

Furthermore, it may be argued that Weil's philosophical understanding and her pursuits in practice suggest a rather individualistic or egotistical outlook. It is necessary not to jump to conclusions and oversimplify complex concepts out of context. However, whether the intention is there or not, the practice is certainly centered around the individual. This individualism is not extreme in the sense that anything may be done practically to justify the individual's goals, which should be the same for everyone and that is reaching God. One of the many reasons is because there is a strict religious law that prohibits the individual from doing anything that may threaten another individual's body and soul. This law is grounded in the cyclical understanding of God's love for God and the individual's love for God. Weil claims that this equation also means that God loves us through "*Himself*." Therefore, all manners of ethical decisions are based on the idea that connects every individual together and through love to God. There is of course another reasoning which is the negative side of things: gravity. Gravity is the force that drags the soul down to the Earth, preventing it from reaching the heavens. As we have seen, Weil believes that all kinds of force are always part of gravity or rather we may even go as far to say of *evil*. Thus, not only does an individual gain from keeping away

from the use of force but also would lose more than necessary in the hopes of using force for personal gain in this world. This cyclical reasoning, though not something empirically provable, still is a sound logical argument whereby it is in the best interest of the individuals to pursue the knowledge of the good and living life through God's grace. In this sense, just as Plato would claim, it would appear that *evil* arises from ignorance. Individuals act with the force of gravity because they do not know that grace is better or that God is the only way for them to be peaceful, happy and away from all suffering.

Though Weil's philosophy is individualistic, her life does not seem to be so from the outside. She devoted her life to teaching and acting for the betterment of people as much as herself. She rejected her family's wealth and donated most of what she earned to those in need. She was even ready to go on a suicide mission to save Jews trapped in Nazi territory despite her hate for the Jewish religion and morals. It is certainly not possible to delve into the mind of another to retrieve opinions and it is just as unlikely for anyone to truly know what anyone is precisely thinking even if that person left hundreds of pages of personal notes and essays. There are two ways to interpret Weil's acts: the first is the rational and the other cynical. Rationally, Weil's religious views and the teachings of Jesus Christ implore the individual to not only think of themselves but also think of those in need because the people who are already on the path to good do not need any further guidance. In this way, it is natural and reasonable for Weil to act selflessly even though she knew the only way to save herself was not through saving others. Even if these acts were thought necessary in the eyes of God. Whether or not Weil sought personal gain would not matter. The second interpretation regarding her works and acts in life would be cynical and distrustful toward her suggesting that no matter how much an individual try to be selfless, there is always that dreading "I" hovering over everything that the individual thinks or does. The Self is not something that one may run away from or disregard. Weil suggests that in the state of extreme prayer or *attention* one is almost in a trance able to let go of the sense of self and become egoless. This practice is almost like a superpower for Weil because she knows that the only way to kill the sense of Self or the *ego* is to die physically. However, we have seen that just like the Buddhists, Plato suggests that it is possible for one's ego to die in this world and become selfless. Weil repeats this thought in her notes suggesting that the only permitted suicide would be to kill the *ego* and the only way to do it is through God's grace which appears to us only

through *attention* and not through the intellect in the act of thinking or in the act of active meditation. The passive activity of *attention* lets one see beyond their sense of self and Weil claims that this is how an individual would both be in line with their own interests and of others'. The cynical criticism toward this would be to suggest that there is no way to demonstrate this in reality. The *ego* death is only possible in the mind of the individual and cannot be projected to another individual. The argument is only sensible when one were to accept every metaphysical proposition that Weil points to. The possibility of the existence of such powers and acts sure sound like magic and there could be no other way to live if these acts and powers were demonstrable.

Ultimately, the problem here is not whether these beliefs are demonstrable or not or that they are provable in Weil's own life story. The problem is whether Weil's method of philosophical pursuit of knowledge grounded in a mystical theory and practice of religion is necessary, contributory and/or conceivable. It is certain that Weil provides us an alternative way to think and to live. However, it is very questionable whether we truthfully reach any *knowledge* that philosophy is not able to reach or rather if the *knowledge* suggested by Weil is philosophical knowledge or mystical knowledge. There are other arguments hidden here such as the question of purpose of philosophy or different definitions of what philosophical knowledge is. Weil's claim that logical contradictions are truth seems like escapism. It is true that there is ambiguity in the world and in our minds, but these ambiguities are only pointed to in philosophy. The ambiguities suggest other questions and arguments. Weil holds these contradictions as the *only* way to reach truth because there is no place for contradictions in our minds. The suggestion of mystical knowledge and the mystical pursuit and practice of religion is not unique to Weil, but she certainly utilizes this idea especially masterfully as she grounds ethics. It is only when we start thinking outside of her works that we realize the extreme romanticism of Weil that almost seem naïve though she obviously did not live a naïve life herself. She was, in fact, one of those few people who lived according to their teachings and who did not break their oaths to themselves. Apart from everything, her devotion is quite remarkable when compared to philosophers who tried to do the same. Perhaps, in the end, it is not right to ask whether her methodology is *useful* as the concept itself suggests that an idea should be *used*. Weil truthfully lived as she preached or at least tried as hard as humanly possible. However, we should also question whether an idea or a philosophical approach should

always be categorized or analyzed in terms of its usefulness or practicality. Sometimes, philosophical arguments make mysteries and ambiguities clearer and sometimes they just make us aware of such mysteries and ambiguities. The very awareness of problems is sometimes just as *useful* for human beings as problems with clear philosophical solutions. A mystical approach toward things that philosophy cannot logically reach may be the only way for an individual to live a fulfilling life. On the other hand, there is also the danger of having the individual alienate themselves from life all together in their extreme pursuit of mystical knowledge. Nietzsche criticized religious morals for this very reason and it is something that should not be forgotten. We do not know for certain that mystical truths exist or even exist in the way a certain religious teaching describe the way they exist, but the existence of individual life on this Earth whether illusory or real is the only experience close to the idea of philosophical truth an individual may reach without much effort; and even this is heavily argued in philosophy.

In conclusion, Simone Weil's mystical view of life and the philosophical pursuit of knowledge provides another escape for the individual from the suffering in this world while also heavily guarding the necessity of thinking good and doing good while on this Earth. Weil's intention was to ground every possible truth in logic through philosophy and reach beyond what philosophy is unable to achieve through belief or a certain kind of belief. Her way of believing was not only a set of rules in order for an individual to be happy in the afterlife but also a complete immersion of oneself into what she called God's grace. Perhaps we should not label this as Weil's philosophical method but as her method of living. Because Weil's life uniquely exemplified her mystical teachings even if those teachings were not unique to her. This alone is worthy to have a listen to her elegy.

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