

NOEL BOULTING

INTENTIONALISM AND GOD'S FICTION

Can the world be conceived as an artwork as Simone Weil sometimes suggests? And does this suggestion not imply examining the relation between the creator's intentions and what is created? Three approaches will be explored so as to ascertain Simone Weil's response in terms of her Decreation thesis. The first approach can be labelled a *phenomenological* perspective, employing an insight from Sartre's existentialism, the Frankfurt school of philosophy and the German Literary tradition, illustrating her concern for the significance of human experience. The second approach, the *ontological*, is illustrated through claims made by Luria – the Jewish mystic – and Von Schelling – arguably the founder of ecological philosophy – in establishing her claim on behalf of what “--- is absolutely independent of us”, namely the Creator, Divine intentions, and subsequently with what is Decreated. A third approach, an *epistemic* one, is manifested in her advocacy of Platonism and her serious concern with atheism alongside an advocacy of her experimental ontological proof: an appeal is made to what can be identified with the help of the intelligence and the imagination. Given then an explication of these three approaches, which, and how far, can any of them best provide the strongest illumination in dealing with our original question: how can creation be cast as God's fiction?

1. INTRODUCTION

Can the world be conceived as an artwork? Can it be cast as something created, an artefact? Isn't such a notion presupposed when Simone Weil claims: “Creation is a fiction of God's.”<sup>1</sup> For her, of course, human beings treat themselves and others as though “they possess being”, whereas from the perspective of what has Being, regarded as constituting Divine existence – from now on the term *existence* will be used to distinguish it from a human sense – humans endure non-being. But fictions require an author or creator. And one of the disputes in aesthetics, which may throw light on theological considerations, is the extent to which it makes sense, in seeking to interpret some fiction, artwork or artefact, to understand the intentions of its creator or author. Indeed, the idea that the meaning of what is created “--- is to be identified with or found in the intention of its author”<sup>2</sup> defines that idea: Intentionalism. Thereby, it is a theory which presupposes that the intentions of the empirical creator – whether stated or implied – determine the meaning or the way in which what is created should be interpreted. So what the empirical human being says or implies were his or her intentions in creating the work render its meaning since, without considering them, what is created would remain ambiguous or even meaningless. Such a stance would be opposed to the idea that what is created in itself might throw light on a creator's possible meanings to which s/he might not have access. But Intentionalism was severely undermined by Wimsatt and Beardsley's notorious article “The Intentional Fallacy”<sup>3</sup>. Despite the controversies following its publication, it is a presupposition of this paper

---

<sup>1</sup> Simone Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*. Trans. by R. Rees (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2015) 218.

<sup>2</sup> R. Shusterman, “Interpretation, Intention, and Truth” *Journal Of Aesthetics & Art Criticism*, Vol. 46: 399-411 (Blackwell Publishing, 1988) 399.

<sup>3</sup> M.C. Beardsley & W.K. Wimsatt, Jr., “The Intentional Fallacy” *Sewanee Review*, Vol. 54, Nos. 3/4: 468-88 (1987-8).

that in interpreting what has been created, attention has to focus upon the intentions realized by the artefact, not the psychological state of its creator, though the intentions discerned within that artefact may throw light on its creator's intentions. That presupposition is well illustrated by remarks of Jean Paul Sartre – a former student of Simone Weil's teacher, Alain (Emile Chartier). Sartre claims that in creating an artwork he “--- may be at the origin of a concrete existence.” It is mine, he says, since the work has its existence “through me” and remains so in its “continuous creation”. But once created it is not mine, in that sense, since now “--- it must of necessity exist also *in itself*, must perpetually renew its existence *by itself*.”<sup>4</sup> Once created it stands independently of its author.

Given the nature of that aesthetic debate, and in order to address the problem of the relationship between what has been created and its creator within a theological perspective, this paper will consider the issue from three different perspectives. First, the relationship will be considered from the standpoint of what is being created as the author's creation, bearing in mind the conditions generating his or her activity, a phenomenological perspective. Secondly, a more objectivist standpoint will be taken in considering how the status of the creation might be cast ontologically. Thirdly, examining the debate in epistemic terms may help in grasping how these two previous perspectives might be related to each other. Incidentally Simone Weil employs a similar trichotomy in writing to Father Perrin: a phenomenological perspective is akin to her third domain, “experiencing the compulsion of God's pressure”; the ontological perspective would capture her first domain, what “--- is absolutely independent of us”; the epistemic perspective is manifested in her third domain, “--- easily recognized by the intelligence and the imagination.”<sup>5</sup>

## 2. THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

One of the central themes in her writings is a claim advanced by the Frankfurt school of philosophy, a movement encompassing the ideas of Adorno and Horkheimer through to Apel and Habermas: “Man has freed himself to a great extent from bondage to nature. --- But our liberation from nature is compensated by enslavement to society. For we are fed, clothed, etc. by society, like a child by its parents: we are eternal minors.”<sup>6</sup> So we are imprisoned by what Margolis casts as intensionalities underpinning the structures and institutions which sustain our culture. And by the intensional Margolis designates “--- any form or structure of meaning, significance, sense, symbolic or semiotic or rhetorical or similar function or role assigned to a suitable vehicle (a sentence or semaphore signal or artwork or action or custom or text – or thoughts, if thoughts may be singled out).”<sup>7</sup> So for Simone Weil, “--- what we call the world are the

---

<sup>4</sup> J.P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. by H.E. Barnes, (New York: Routledge, 1972) 576.

<sup>5</sup> Simone Weil, *Waiting on God*, trans. E. Craufurd (Glasgow: Collins Fount Paperback, 1983) 13-14.

<sup>6</sup> Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, 19.

<sup>7</sup> J. Margolis, *Interpretation Radical But Not Unruly: The New Puzzle of the Arts and History* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1995) 13, 48.

meanings we read. --- they seize us as if they were external.”<sup>8</sup> Yet even if they exist for humans, and are treated as real by them, they remain unreal. This stance remains a constant refrain throughout her writings: “The artist, the scholar, the philosopher, the contemplative should really admire the world and pierce through the film of unreality which veils it and makes of it, for nearly all men at nearly every moment of their lives, a dream or stage set.”<sup>9</sup> So, if an artist remains imprisoned by such ‘readings,’ how could something be created to embody such value claims as those on behalf of truth, the good, or the beautiful? After all, the “--- sky, the sea, the sun, the stars, human beings, everything that surrounds us is in the same way something that we read.”<sup>10</sup>

One way of overcoming this problem is suggested by Idris Parry in “Kafka, Rilke and Rumpelstiltskin”.<sup>11</sup> That suggestion would be in the spirit of Simone Weil’s philosophy. In considering the Rumpelstiltskin story, attention is drawn to the fact that within creative activity, what is crucial is finding “--- the right name, an odd name, suddenly found and plucked out of the darkness to bring power and release and happiness.” Rilke’s essay *Primal Sound* is referred to where the idea of ‘the five fingered hand of the senses’ is raised. Each fingered sense – tasting, touching, feeling, seeing and hearing – only covers a certain range of experience. Do they cover “the whole of possible experience”? What about the gaps in between? If we are living in a kind of “bright pool of light”, the intensity of the darkness beyond seems much more intense. Isn’t this where the realm of existence is to be found, as opposed to what our senses and cultural institutions – arising out of human consciousness – are considered to be so important since we take them as existing to govern our readings of the world?

Of course, Simone Weil would reject the idea that we live in ‘a bright pool of light’ implied by the use of those five senses within our present cultural world. Rather, that world is constituted by a kind of opaque greyness where good and bad can be regarded as entwined together. But she would endorse completely Parry’s emphasis placed upon the importance of attention in human creative activity: “Attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty, and ready to be penetrated by that object.--- Above all our thoughts should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object that is to penetrate it.”<sup>12</sup> So consider what she says about a writer composing a poem: the pursuit of the good or a concern for virtues “--- becomes in every respect similar to artistic creation. That poem is good which one writes while keeping the attention orientated towards the inexpressible, *qua* inexpressible.”<sup>13</sup>

Such a stance is not to be limited merely to literary creations but

---

<sup>8</sup> Simone Weil, “Essay on the Concept of Reading” *Simone Weil: Late Philosophical Writings*, trans. by E.O. Springsted & L.E. Schmidt (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015) 22.

<sup>9</sup> Weil 1983, 125.

<sup>10</sup> Weil, “Essay on the Concept of Reading,” 22.

<sup>11</sup> I. Perry, “Kafka, Rilke, and Rumpelstiltskin” *Speak Silence* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1988) 11-12.

<sup>12</sup> Weil 1983, 72.

<sup>13</sup> Simone Weil, *The Notebooks of Simone Weil*, Vols. II, trans. by A. Willis (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), 417.

extends towards both the performative and plastic arts, even if these must be distinguished.<sup>14</sup> In addition she remarks: "A true painter, through paying attention, becomes what he looks at. And while he is in this state his hand moves, with the brush attached." With respect to the performative arts, she points out how the object, towards which attention is directed, can be war or passion, serving as examples as two forms of destiny.<sup>15</sup> In this context Miklos Vetö claims that in the case of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, for example, attention is focussed upon horror, and Shakespeare's attention through contemplation upon it "--- uncovered the beauty in it, which is none other than the reality of that horror expressing the human condition".<sup>16</sup> But war, passion, and horror are inexpressible in the sense that their character goes beyond/transcends what can be expressed simply through their impersonal nature, even if manifested in what human beings do. Accordingly, the writing of a poem, for example, is good to the degree "--- one writes while keeping the attention orientated towards the inexpressible, *qua* inexpressible"<sup>17</sup> thereby allowing the poet to escape common-place 'readings "--- by raising himself above the persona and entering into the impersonal", as she puts it in her 1943 essay "Human Personality" (Weil 1962, p. 15). But that notion of the impersonal carries the idea of the unintelligible which contemplation has to face, an unintelligibility "which lies above significance, not that which lies below it" and can be accessed through the development of "the intuitive faculty".<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless "Perfection is impersonal" and thereby characterizes "the realm of the sacred".<sup>19</sup>

### 2.1 *Difficulties with the Phenomenological Perspective*

Simone Weil's over-riding significance rendered to contemplation, however, faces at least two difficulties. The first lies in what might appear to be an inconsistent treatment of the idea of imagination. The second is in regard to how such a stance can release that sense of the impersonal. Given that creative attention "---means really giving our attention to what does not exist" in an act of "renunciation" of the usual readings both of him/herself and what s/he experiences,<sup>20</sup> how can we be sure that anything is released?

#### 2.1.1 Imaging or Imagination?

The first difficulty can only be indicated, deserving a paper in its own right. Clearly, she nor anyone influenced by her thinking can avoid feeling an exile in a world committed to the idea of distraction at all costs, since her sense of attention demands "no distraction or dreaming." In the context of skilled activity, for example, one must be completely attentive to what one is doing so that a specific "kind of discipline is needed for using the mind with support from the imagination." In scientific education, teaching the "gymnastic of the imagination" is important, but when she cites "the representation of heaven and hell" so as to characterize the relative

---

<sup>14</sup> J. Margolis, "The Identity and Individuation of Works of Art," *Art and Philosophy*, (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1980) chp 4.

<sup>15</sup> Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, 361-2, 47.

<sup>16</sup> M. Vetö, *The Religious Metaphysics of Simone Weil* (1971), trans. by J. Dargan (New York State University Press, 1994) 102.

<sup>17</sup> Weil 1976, Vol. II, 417.

<sup>18</sup> Weil 1976, Vol. II, 465.

<sup>19</sup> Simone Weil, "Human Personality," in *Selected Essays*, trans. by R. Rees (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 14.

<sup>20</sup> Weil 1983, 103, 105.

presence or absence of the Divine, she casts that representation as a kind of approximation the imagination can grasp.<sup>21</sup> So, on the one hand, imaginative activity can be regarded as valuable, yet on the other, like Sartre, she regards it as reprehensible: too often it is used as compensation for what we are forced to endure. So religion is invoked as such a source and thereby for Simone Weil “--- is a hindrance to true faith”.<sup>22</sup> Remember Sartre’s elaboration of the effects of second degree consciousness<sup>23</sup> in *The Psychology of the Imagination* where we invent a story for ourselves to explain the absence of what we desire so that by some magical act in such degradation of consciousness, in its second degree, we are taken away from what really exists. Here, the notion of a compensatory imaging – “uncontrolled imagination” filling “the void”<sup>24</sup> – must be distinguished from the idea of imagination taken in some positive sense as opposed to the way “it lies” in “--- fantasy or as something arbitrary”.<sup>25</sup>

### 2.1.2 A Matter of Faith

Her reply to the second difficulty – how can we be sure that anything is released in the state of contemplation – that difficulty reminds us again of the importance of attention: “Attention alone – that attention which is so full that the ‘I’ disappears – is required of me. I have to deprive all that I call ‘I’ of the light of my attention and turn it on to that which cannot be conceived”.<sup>26</sup> This claim implies that sense of the impersonal, which she characterizes as the good, and “--- is something which you never get by your own effort, but neither can you desire it without getting it”.<sup>27</sup> Like Hobbes, then, she hooks what is good to what is desired: “If there is a real desire, if the thing desired is really light, the desire for light produces it. There is real desire where there is an effort of attention.” Unlike Hobbes, however, where the existence of the self initiates what the human thinks is good, attention dissolves the self for something transcendent to be initiated in Platonic terms. Putting religious belief on one side, for any human being who forwards an act of sheer attention so as to grasp the truth, s/he “--- acquires a greater aptitude for grasping it” even if “no visible fruit” is immediately apparent.<sup>28</sup> So, against Hobbes, she claims that the good is never achievable through one’s own efforts yet “neither can you desire it without getting it”. But this claim does come down to a matter of faith: “It is impossible really to desire the food and not obtain it”.<sup>29</sup> That claim is sustained by the insight that for any person, at any age and in any circumstance, there is the expectation in the bottom of one’s heart that “--- good not evil will be done to him” and that such an indomitable expectation is what “--- is sacred in every human being”.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, 11, 46 & 142.

<sup>22</sup> Weil 1976, Vol. I, 238.

<sup>23</sup> N.E. Boulting, “Sartre’s Existential Consciousness: Implications for Subjectivity,” *Philosophy in the Contemporary World*, vol. 5, no. 4 (1998) 11-23.

<sup>24</sup> Weil 1976, Vol. I, 139.

<sup>25</sup> Simone Weil, *Lectures on Philosophy*, trans. by H. Price (Cambridge University Press, 1979), 51.

<sup>26</sup> Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. by E. Crawford & M. Von der Riche (London: Routledge, 1999) 118.

<sup>27</sup> Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, 142.

<sup>28</sup> Weil 1983, 68.

<sup>29</sup> Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, 42.

<sup>30</sup> Simone Weil, “Human Personality,” in *Selected Essays*, trans. by R. Rees (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 10.

Yet that expectation can never be satisfied by what is naturally found within everyday experience – cast by Simone Weil as Necessity – but only by what transcends it, the supernatural. Indeed, most human beings acknowledge at some stage in their life that there is “--- no final good here below.” That insight is normally ignored or obfuscated by some lie or, again, by taking a morbid stance towards sadness without really facing up to such melancholia! But for those who seek the supernatural in order to overcome the contradictions initiated through Necessity,<sup>31</sup> they are required “--- to turn away from the fleeting things of time with all their souls, to use the expression of Plato”.<sup>32</sup> So the opposition: “What is contradictory for natural reason is not so for supernatural reason, but the latter can only use the language of the former”.<sup>33</sup>

At this point, however, surely Simone Weil is mistaken in asserting that “Within the universe there is no good, but the universe is good”.<sup>34</sup> Whilst the universe is good because in relating to it, human beings can gain access to that impersonal, transcendent sense of the good, there must be good within that universe itself, since, as Simone Weil points out elsewhere: “Stars and blossoming fruit- trees: utter permanence and extreme fragility alike give an equal sense of eternity”.<sup>35</sup> Thereby “--- there is not any department of human life which is purely natural. The supernatural is secretly present throughout. Under a thousand different forms, grace and mortal sin are everywhere”.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, it is that supernatural element, it has been argued, which makes great art possible: “It is the triumph of art to lead to something other than itself.” And it is that supernatural element too which is “innocent of evil” and thereby can be cast as “impersonal” to be labelled “God.” Yet at the same time the Divine is to be represented as “--- personal, to be responsible for good”,<sup>37</sup> since what is created provides access to the supernatural. Thereby “God could create only by hiding himself. Otherwise there would be nothing but himself”.<sup>38</sup> To interpret that claim, however, leads attention towards a more objective ontological perspective.

### 3. THE ONTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

What significance is to be attached to the idea of the Divine’s self hiding? For Simone Weil this amounts to saying that “--- in creating God renounces being all.” A bit of Divine being is abandoned to what is distinct from the Divine.<sup>39</sup> To sustain that claim is to reject a traditional account of creation where the Divine is supposed to have generated something out of nothing. In other words, the Divine does not create but rather decreates. What can this mean? Although such a doctrine had been previously articulated, for example by Luria and Von Schelling, there is no credit offered by Simone Weil to either of these thinkers in this regard, nonetheless reference to their

---

<sup>31</sup> Weil 1976, Vol. II, 379.

<sup>32</sup> Weil 1983, 162.

<sup>33</sup> Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, 109.

<sup>34</sup> Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, 209.

<sup>35</sup> Weil 1999, 108.

<sup>36</sup> Weil 1983, 129.

<sup>37</sup> Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, 44, 112.

<sup>38</sup> Weil 1999, 38.

<sup>39</sup> Simone Weil, *Intimations of Christianity* (London: Ark Publications, 1987) 183.

doctrines may prove enlightening.

### 3.1 *Cosmotheism or Creationism: Luria and Von Schelling*

When Issac Luria died at 38 in 1572, he left no written texts. It was left to his disciple Chaim Vital to record his doctrines.<sup>40</sup> Luria's cosmogonic speculations invoked the conception of *tsimtsum*, employed not only to characterize "concentration", but rather "retreat" or "withdrawal". This conception amounts to a response to the question 'How can a world exist if God is to be identified with everything?', that is to say Cosmotheism. Or, again, "How can God create anything out of nothing, given there is nothing?": Creationism. In the interests of this paper, only the first step of Luria's response is significant, rather than the way the Divine instigates Genesis through rays of light being sent forth. God allows the world to exist by withdrawing himself into himself, a kind of recoil movement so as to limit his existence, thereby becoming an exile from what is left of himself by that act of self-limitation. Accordingly, nothing would exist if God had not withdrawn himself into himself. The power of this *tsimtsum* doctrine lies in at least two directions. Firstly it implies that in everything that exists there is a trace of existence, and secondly it answers the question of how it is possible that what is not Divine in itself – namely existence – can come to be, that which stands outside the Divine. Nonetheless, this *tsimtsum* doctrine, implying a process view within existence besides the notion of a separate existence, faces further difficulties, particularly the problem of evil, a difficulty which plagues any speculation concerning God and existence.

Von Schelling seeks to face the latter difficulty, again by objecting to Creationism, the attempt "--- to remove God far indeed from all Nature". Accordingly, the spiritual becomes "befouled through any contact with the latter" thereby blinding "--- one's eye to the origin of evil". His alternative distinguishes the *ground* of the Divine nature from the *Divine itself* so as to overcome Cosmotheism or Spinoza's Pantheism. But *the Divine's ground* which the *Divine has in itself*, is "not God considered absolutely".<sup>41</sup> Andrew Bowie suggests an analogy to illustrate this relationship: consider Freud's conception of the Id and the Ego as akin to the *ground* and the *Divine in itself*.<sup>42</sup> The ego develops beyond the Id just as the *Divine* develops out of its *ground* even though the *Divine* is embedded in the *ground* just as the Ego is in the Id; in neither case can the one be reduced to the other. That *ground* is nature cast as visible mind, interpreted as what stretches beyond, even if it includes, what is understood to be subject to natural causes. From the standpoint of everyday existence located in the natural world "God has in himself an inner ground of his existence that in this respect precedes him in existence". But from the standpoint of existence "God is again the *prius* (what is before) of the ground in so far as the ground, even as such, could not exist if God did not exist *actu*." If we sustain this existence standpoint, what constitutes that *ground* is the idea of "becoming". But from this standpoint of existence that constitution – the nature of existence "appropriate to the nature of things" – differs from God "*toto genere* or infinitely". That constitution then is "divided from God" since it must arise

---

<sup>40</sup> G. Scholm, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1955) 253, 260-4.

<sup>41</sup> F.J.W. Von Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations in the Essence of Human Freedom*, ed. by J. Love & J. Schmidt (New York State University Press, 2006) 26-27.

<sup>42</sup> A. Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1993) 96.

“in a ground different from God”, a ground “--- in that which in God in himself is not *He Himself*”<sup>43</sup> cast at the level of existence. What makes God divine is that nature – visible mind – is needed so that God can be grasped as transcending it. The difficulty here in grasping Von Schelling’s Platonic stance lies in the fact that what cannot be articulated clearly provides the basis for what can be so articulated, the former thereby prior to the latter, even if the latter is to be seen as the *ground* – interpreted as the intelligible world’s emergence – for God’s actuality.<sup>44</sup>

Within that *ground* – the emergent world of which we are aware – there is “the very spirit of evil” “awoken in creation” by what he calls “the dark ground of nature”. Evil can then be cast as “--- nothing other than the primal ground (*Urgrund*) of existence” striving towards “actuality in created beings”. But being merely a “ground active in nature”, from the standpoint of existence it is “without being itself” and thereby “--- can never become real.” It “--- serves only as ground so that the good, developing out of the ground on its own strength, may be – through its ground – independent and separate from God who has and recognizes himself in this good which, as such (as independent), is in *him*.”<sup>45</sup> In this context Von Schelling speaks of “--- the undivided power of the initial ground” – referred to by him as gravity – which initiated “--- a creation for itself with the divine powers it contained”. Yet each time it

“--- sank back into chaos” “--- because God perceived the will of the ground as the will for his revelation and, according to his providential vision, recognized that a ground independent from him (as spirit) would have to be the ground for his existence, he let the ground be active in its independence; or, expressed in another way, he set himself in motion only in accordance with his nature and not in accordance with his heart or with love.”<sup>46</sup>

How this state of affairs is overcome with what he calls “the will of love”<sup>47</sup> would take us into issues regarding his theological perspective; our present concern lies rather in the way he regards that duality within the Divine.

### 3.1.1. Matter, Necessity and Gravity

There is evidence that Simone Weil had access to Von Schelling’s ideas<sup>48</sup> but it is unlikely she was aware of Luria’s insights given her rampant anti-Semitism.<sup>49</sup> Now there are some affinities between the stances of Luria and Von Schelling. Clearly Von Schelling wishes to reject both Creationism and Cosmotheism. At the level of existence, he seeks to separate the ground of the Divine from Divinity cast at the level of existence; he gives ontological priority to the latter. Luria’s stance would endorse these claims but Von Schelling’s starting point is Nature – visible mind – and its relationship to the Divine, as opposed to Luria’s speculations regarding

---

<sup>43</sup> Von Schelling, 28.

<sup>44</sup> N.E. Boulting, “The God of Religion and the God of Philosophy,” *Process Studies*, vol. 50.1 (2021).

<sup>45</sup> Von Schelling, 44.

<sup>46</sup> Von Schelling, 45.

<sup>47</sup> Von Schelling, 42.

<sup>48</sup> S. Pétrement, *Simone Weil: A life* (London: Mowbrays, 1976) 69.

<sup>49</sup> T.R. Nevin, *Simone Weil: Portrait of a Self-Exiled Jew* (North Carolina University Press, 1991) chp. 9.

*tsimtsum*, the Divine's character itself. Curiously, despite her access to Von Schelling's ideas, Simone Weil's position seems closer to that of Luria. Consider the way she separates existence – employing Von Schelling's term 'gravity' for her own purposes – from existence, thereby avoiding his inclusiveness in regarding both existence – the natural realm – and existence as part of some larger whole, the Divine in itself. But even if Simone Weil may have adopted the term 'gravity' from Schelling's writings, that term is not only cast as a sense of darkness as opposed to light – “Two forces rule the universe: light and gravity”<sup>50</sup> – as he does, but rather with a fuller meaning. But to grasp that meaning requires examining, no matter how briefly, two other notions of hers: her materialism and Necessity.

Her notion of matter goes beyond Marx's sense of analysing “social matter”: “Marx was right to begin by positing the reality of social matter, of a social necessity”. But for her, Marx did not consider “psychological matter”: the way societal subjects become imprisoned in society's ‘readings’. She rejects physicalism, too, so that her notion of matter is characterized as “--- a mechanical system of forces subject to blind and rigorous necessity” where thought can be regarded as non-tangible matter, a notion which might be captured by Margolis's claim on behalf of the intensional. Hence: “Materialism accounts for everything, with the exception of the supernatural.”<sup>51</sup> But how is Necessity to be characterized?

For Simone Weil “Necessity is the obedience of matter to God.”<sup>52</sup> Hence, Necessity “--- is the mediator between matter and God”.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, everything humans take to be real is in fact “--- subject to necessity”<sup>54</sup> whilst a role for mathematics “--- is making felt the possibility of certainty about what one does not understand,”<sup>55</sup> since through its pursuit one can gain insight into laws governing necessity. So the Platonic sense of Good is to be identified with the Divine so that “(in) order that Good may pass into existence, God must be able to be the cause of what is already entirely caused by Necessity.”<sup>56</sup> In this way “God is conceived as the indirect cause of everything, but as the direct cause only of what is purely spiritual. Therefore, as regards indirect causality He is all-powerful; but this omnipotence defines itself as an abdication in favour of necessity.” Thereby she adopts Determinism since everything that constitutes existence “--- is subject to necessity.”<sup>57</sup> Now if our perspective remains at this level, namely the phenomenological, necessity's mechanism appears to be “--- quite blind”. But from an ontological perspective, things appear quite differently: “What seemed to be necessity becomes obedience. Matter is entirely passive and in consequence entirely obedient to God's will.”<sup>58</sup>

Given “Gravity as the outstanding example of force”<sup>59</sup> there are only

---

<sup>50</sup> Weil 1999, 1.

<sup>51</sup> Simone Weil, *Oppression and Liberty* (London: Ark Publications, 1988) 179, 178, 177.

<sup>52</sup> Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, 90.

<sup>53</sup> Weil 1987, 186.

<sup>54</sup> Weil 1988, 178.

<sup>55</sup> Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, 86.

<sup>56</sup> Weil 1976, Vol. 1, 99.

<sup>57</sup> Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, 296, 143.

<sup>58</sup> Weil 1983, 87.

<sup>59</sup> Weil 1976, Vol. I, 71.

two possibilities: Gravity that “--- makes things come down”<sup>60</sup> or it can be neutralized by Grace - “a supernatural operation of an infinitely small quantity of good”. Indeed, “--- the purely human virtues would not spring up out of man’s nature without the supernatural light of grace.”<sup>61</sup> In that case, existence “--- is the meeting-place of opposites: good would not exist without evil.”<sup>62</sup> Moreover, any force in existence is determined absolutely by necessity, the latter constituted by relations cast as thoughts in character. Thereby, “what is supreme in the world” - force - is dominated by thought which constitutes the human being as “--- a thinking being.”<sup>63</sup> So human beings are apt to expand themselves “to the maximum extent”<sup>64</sup> in the exercise of a will to power: “Men only love riches, power and social considerations because they reinforce the faculty of thought in the first person.”<sup>65</sup> But there are two forms of gravity: moral gravity - just characterized - and natural gravity. The latter accounts for what happens “--- unless there be supernatural intervention.”<sup>66</sup> Thereby, humans will always be controlled by laws akin to physical gravity, so that exercising accepted ‘moral’ gravity is inevitable unless real moral energy can be raised by something outside the self, namely Grace to lift the human spirit.<sup>67</sup>

### 3.2 Simone Weil on Cosmic Decreationism

In this ontological examination of existence, Weil’s Platonism has been revealed: “Plato always looks upon the perfect as more real than the imperfect”, while humans are subject directly to existence rather than existence.<sup>68</sup> And, as argued, her position is akin to that of Luria since she casts Creation as Decreation: “Creation is abdication”, a voluntary act whose effects are known and willed.<sup>69</sup> Existence, therefore, is an aspect of the Divine, made subject to Necessity. But existence is separate from existence, Divinity itself, even if existence is haunted by existence in that “Necessity is the screen set between God and us so that we can be.” So “God could only create by hiding himself. Otherwise there would be nothing but himself.”<sup>70</sup> In this way our world “--- is God’s language to us. The Universe is the Word of God, the *Verbum*.”<sup>71</sup> In the beginning was the Word! Indeed, she compares “the beauty of the world” to that of a work of art arguing, that just as in the latter case, “--- when it is perfect, there is something essentially anonymous about it”, so the former “--- proves that there is a God who is at the same time personal and impersonal, and neither just the one nor the other.”<sup>72</sup> In other words, just as “--- the triumph of art” leads to “---- something other than itself”<sup>73</sup> so what has been decreed can lead to its creator.

---

<sup>60</sup> Weil 1999, 4.

<sup>61</sup> Weil 1988, 167.

<sup>62</sup> Weil 1976, Vol. I, 327.

<sup>63</sup> Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots*, trans. by A. Willis (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978) 277.

<sup>64</sup> Weil 1976, Vol. I, 83.

<sup>65</sup> Weil 1987, 175.

<sup>66</sup> Weil 1976, Vol. I, 152.

<sup>67</sup> Weil 1999, 3, 1.

<sup>68</sup> Weil 1976, Vol II, 384.

<sup>69</sup> Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, 120.

<sup>70</sup> Weil 1999, 33, 38.

<sup>71</sup> Weil 1976, Vol. II, 480.

<sup>72</sup> Weil 1976, Vol. I, 241.

<sup>73</sup> Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, 44.

#### 4. THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

A concern, however, for the relationship between a creator and its creation leads us to consider what Simone Weil once called the “second domain” placed as it is under “the rule of the will” focusing upon what can “easily be recognized by the intelligence and the imagination” through which we make our choices.<sup>74</sup> It is this domain which is real for human beings even if “Existence cannot be proved” but rather only “observed as a fact.”<sup>75</sup> On the other hand, the Divine cannot be conceived, yet for that reason it “--- is not an illusion”.<sup>76</sup> And that is because she can sustain what she calls her “experimental ontological proof”:

“I have not the principle of rising in me. I cannot climb to heaven through the air. It is only by directing my thoughts toward something better than myself that I am drawn upwards by this something. If I am really drawn up, this something which draws me is real. No imaginary perfection can draw me upwards even by the fraction of an inch. For an imaginary perfection is mathematically at the same level as I am who imagine it – neither higher nor lower. What draws me up is directing one’s thoughts towards a veritable perfection.”<sup>77</sup>

Consequently, cognitions directed towards that perfection brings the thinker “nearer to the good”, a claim tested through experience. But because it is only an individual’s subjective experience, this “object of proof” remains still a matter of faith. Yet is it not odd to focus one’s mind on what does not exist rather than upon what is commonly regarded as existing? Following Plato, her reply is that existence transcends existence: “It makes no sense to say the good exists or the good does not exist; one can only say: the good.” So, whereas in the case of existence – say a desire for gold – there is a desire and something different – gold – “the desire for good is itself a good”.<sup>78</sup> But now, at least two difficulties have to be faced.

##### 4.1.1 *The Advocacy of Atheism*

For Simone Weil, Atheism is a purification. This stance emerges in her claim that for a person who lacks an experience of the Divine, s/he who denies Divinity may be closer to the Divine than a religious Christian. By the latter, she means someone who has faith in something which serves as a consolation for the unhappiness of everyday life. Now that something is a human construction to count as Divine created by the imagination to fill the void created by God’s perceived absence. So, for those who are not open to the supernatural dimension, which haunts everyday existence, “--- the atheists are right and the believers wrong.”<sup>79</sup>

The atheist can demand, however, why is there affliction which can be hooked to “social degradation or the fear of it in some form or another.” Thereby, the Divine “appears to be absent” so that anyone who might

---

<sup>74</sup> Weil 1983, 13-14.

<sup>75</sup> Weil 1976, Vol. II, 374.

<sup>76</sup> Weil 1976, Vol. I, 327.

<sup>77</sup> Weil 1999, 99.

<sup>78</sup> Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, 307, 316.

<sup>79</sup> Weil 1999, 115.

believe becomes “hardened and discouraged,” regarding themselves as cursed from an epistemological point of view. Here, according to her Decreation thesis, the creator God is at a distance from Divine creation, what the creator has separated from himself. And the only Divine response to such affliction is silence:

“This is the Word of God. The whole creation is nothing but its vibration. When human music in its greatest purity pierces our soul, this is what we hear through it. When we have learnt to hear the silence, this is what we grasp more distinctly through it.”<sup>80</sup>

#### 4.1.2 Absence as Non-Presence cast aesthetically

Such an aesthetic response can furnish a deeper route towards Divine awareness. Given that what has been created through the Divine decreasing itself, we can witness “(s)tars and blossoming fruit-trees: utter permanence and extreme fragility give an equal sense of eternity.”<sup>81</sup> Whereas the former renders that image of eternity positively, the latter characterizes it negatively. But here, the issue is an aesthetic one: a complete opening of one’s experience to what might transcend it, hence her interest in the artwork where one can be transformed by everyday experience: “Beauty is something that one desires without wanting to devour it. We simply desire that it should be.”<sup>82</sup> But that psychological defence carries a danger hinted at within it. The individual may seek to possess, to own or to consume what offers the possibility of such transcendence. Instead, “(p)urification is the separation of good from covetousness.”<sup>83</sup>

Nonetheless, what that knowledge of beauty provides is evidence that “the supernatural is secretly present throughout” the natural.<sup>84</sup> Thereby, in answer to the question “Why is this thing beautiful?”<sup>85</sup> she can reply that “--- there is something: Real presence.”<sup>86</sup> But left like that, we have a *mystical* grounding for the aesthetic dimension as a cognitive response. Indeed, it might be argued that this dimension is simply an end in itself not a means to provide anything else. Accordingly, present “--- in all human pursuits” it is “the only finality”:

“Only beauty is not the means to anything else. It alone is good in itself, but without finding any particular good or advantage in it. It seems itself to be a promise and not a good. But it only gives itself, it never gives anything else.”<sup>87</sup>

Yet this is not her final word. Perhaps the atheist might succumb to the promise offered by mysticism, but elsewhere she converts that aesthetic cognition into a theological justification to render not simply an aesthetic mysticism, but an *aesthetical theism*.<sup>88</sup> The Divine comes to find a person and

---

<sup>80</sup> Simone Weil, *On Science, Necessity and the Love of God*, trans. by R. Rees, (London: Oxford University Press, 1968) 171, 172, 174-5.

<sup>81</sup> Weil 1999, 108.

<sup>82</sup> Weil 1976, Vol. II, 335.

<sup>83</sup> Weil 1999, 22.

<sup>84</sup> Weil 1983, 129.

<sup>85</sup> Weil 1968, 197.

<sup>86</sup> Weil 1976, Vol. II, 360.

<sup>87</sup> Weil 1983, 122.

<sup>88</sup> N.E. Boulting, “Necessity, Transparency and Fragility in Simone’s Conception of Ultimate Reality and Meaning,” *Ultimate Reality and Meaning*, vol. 22 no.3 (1999) 242.

does so by snaring his or her senses through experiences of the beautiful manifested in “the beauties of Nature”, beautiful human beings or beautiful human creations “--- emanating from souls” into which the Divine has entered.<sup>89</sup> But perhaps this discrepancy can be overcome by claiming that the case for mysticism arises from taking a phenomenological stance with respect to the relationship between creation and its creator, whereas it becomes converted into a theology when an ontological perspective is taken: from the creator towards what has been created.

## 5. IMPLICATIONS FOR DECREATION AND ITS CREATOR

Can these three perspectives – labelled herein as the phenomenological, the ontological, and epistemic – be reconciled? For Von Schelling the phenomenological has to be taken seriously in speaking of a ground cast as ‘becoming’. This domain is prior given the human being’s place in existence, even if the Divine transcends the conditions within existence. Moreover, Simone Weil endorses his claim that the Divine is the direct cause of what is purely spiritual. But for her and for Luria, the Divine is rendered with ontological priority. Otherwise, things are subject to what Von Schelling originally called gravity. From this perspective, following Luria and Von Schelling, what is decreed from the Divine, in an act of self-abdication, allows an emergent to manifest both good and evil. Finally, epistemically, an ontological argument was identified, growing from human cognition, where the awareness of the experience of beauty can carry the human being towards Divine realization.

From these implications, three stances can be inferred. Existence is the only reality so that any sense of the supernatural is denied by the atheist. Such a stance can be taken by the adoption of scientism<sup>90 91</sup>: only that which can be measured or for which there is scientific evidence can be said to exist. A second stance can be taken by the agnostic, who might well tolerate some form of mysticism. Something may transcend ordinary, everyday existence, but that cannot be articulated even if we are ensnared by the beauties of the natural world. The third stance is theological, grounded in the ontological argument. But all three stances adopt a Von Schelling type response: we start with what has been decreed and pass to its creator.

Such a phenomenological approach carries at least two advantages. We avoid the entanglements of Intentionalism whilst, at the same time, making a transition from what is known to the unknown, rather than from the unknown to further unknowns! Such a transition can be found in Plato’s allegory of the cave, interpreted through the epistemic stages outlined in his Divided Line. But in so doing the passage to the Good, a destination to which this ascent leads, implies nothing about Divine omnipotence or omniscience which the ontological stance – God to Decreation – might entail. So why, then, in terms of her Platonism, does Simone Weil seek to endorse these two claims regarding omnipotence and omniscience? Is it not because she wishes to sustain the truth of such

---

<sup>89</sup> Weil 1976, Vol. II. 448-449.

<sup>90</sup> N.E. Boulting, “Scale Relative Ontology and Scientism,” *Philosophica*, vol. 46 (2015).

<sup>91</sup> N.E. Boulting, “To Be Scientistic or to Advocate Scientism: That is the Question,” *Sociology Study*, vol. 10 no. 4 (2020).

traditional theological precepts and interpret her Platonism within them? Surely once Decreation has occurred, what has been decreed has a life of becoming, which Von Schelling may have ascertained, outside the control of Divine power. Is this not how the status of the decreed is to be understood given the initial Divine abdication? In that case, how can evil be a direct Divine responsibility if what exists arises from what has been decreed? The Divine can only be held responsible for the original act of Decreation, not for what is created within the ongoingness of decreation itself, unless it is assumed that the Divine had complete access to what would 'become' in the future, or that Divine power could be employed to alter what has been decreed from Divinity itself. The latter can not apply since it would deny the tenets of Divine abdication whilst it is difficult to see how knowledge of existence would imply knowledge of what becomes *actualized* within *existence*. But two other considerations are available to reinforce these conclusions. The first would be to consider Simone Weil's stance towards the writings of St. Paul. The other would be to return to issues arising from the Intentionalism controversy indicated at the beginning of this paper, as a conclusion.

#### 5.1 Reservations about St. Paul

St. Paul wrote "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (1 Cor. 15: v 14). Simone Weil rejects this claim: "Surely those who are called blessed are they who have no need of the resurrection in order to believe, and for whom Christ's perfection and the cross are in themselves proof."<sup>92</sup> Indeed, she goes further arguing that the crucifixion is much more significant because it opened the door to what is the case: on one side "the Father and the Son, on the other the Creator and creation." So a door to truth is "half-opened. The resurrection closed it again." That closure occurs because, as a result of the Resurrection, emphasis is placed upon Divine power and glory so that "--- today, across twenty years of adoration, the degradation which is the very essence of the Passion is hardly felt by us." For her, then, it is the Crucifixion, not the Resurrection "--- where Christ's Divinity is concentrated." But in our secular world, it is a "glorious Christ" who triumphs on entering God's Kingdom thereby obfuscating the significance for the Christian of the dying Christ on the Cross.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, that kingdom of heaven hardly seems a desirable place since it appears to be described as a "--- paradise like the court of a sovereign!"<sup>94</sup> Thereby the church is cast "--- as a domain of the Prince of the World."<sup>95</sup>

Now how was it possible for power's adulation, might, and kingdom to come about, given the way she interprets Christianity's significance? An emblem on display in the exhibition "*Imagining the Divine*" (19<sup>th</sup>. Oct. 2017 – 18<sup>th</sup>. Feb. 2018) at Oxford University's Ashmolean Museum provided the clue: Christ's first depiction Christ presented him in the image of a Roman Emperor! For Simone Weil "--- Christianity must have been poisoned by the Roman Empire---." Indeed, it was the Romans who adopted Christianity as the "non-national form of the Jewish religion" accounting for the way "---- the Old Testament was preserved" with the addition of "--- the passages of

---

<sup>92</sup> Weil 1978, 257.

<sup>93</sup> Weil 1987, 195, 142, 143 & 142.

<sup>94</sup> Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, 239.

<sup>95</sup> Weil 1976, Vol. II, 299.

St. Paul on the transfer of the Covenant" from Jews to Gentiles justifying  
"“go ye and teach all nations”".<sup>96</sup>

This rejection of the notion of power and might may account for the limit she places on Divine power: "Because he is the creator, God is not all-powerful. Creation is abdication." But she does not criticize St. Paul for chiding those "--- having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof; from such turn away" (2 Tim 3 v 5). So he speaks of God as "--- what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power" (Eph. 1 v. 19) (cf. 2 Th. ch. 1 v 9). Christ is even cast as "the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1 v. 24). But instead she asserts that God "-- is all-powerful in this sense, that his abdication is voluntary. He knows its effects and wills them." Yet the Divine is "--- all-powerful here below for saving those whose desire is to be saved by Him": a "spiritual" power.<sup>97</sup> The danger remains, however, of representing the Divine "--- to oneself as all-powerful" representing "--- oneself to oneself in a state of false divinity" because of the danger of the imagination filling Divine abandonment with a projection! But different senses of power can be delineated: the "spiritual" or generative sense, coercion and a legislative sense.<sup>98</sup>

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

What the previous discussion has established is that for Simone Weil, the Creator is not only responsible to Divine decreation but in addition is responsible for not interfering in the way that Decreation manifests itself, except to provide the possibility of grace to inspire those who choose the life of a Christian or those who may be adopting such a life but without acknowledging that they are Christians. But though it is clear that the Decreation thesis does make the Divine responsible for what is created through decreation, does it have to incorporate the further sense of responsibility for everything that happens as that Decreation unfolds itself?

This tension between the idea of a Creator and what has been decreed is solved by Simone Weil by unpacking the ontological perspective. Methodologically, we start with the Creator and Divine intention(s) to make sense of the decreed, the central tenet of Intentionalism. Such a strategy has one clear advantage: it can provide "--- both the security and possibility of achieving objective truth and convergence in literary interpretation---" as Shusterman puts it about human creations.<sup>99</sup> Thereby, a vast domain for interpreting the work in terms of what the Divine might have desired through decreating can be considered: not feeling fully fulfilled; feeling alone in a Divine expansiveness; wishing to create entities which in their desire for Divine love would focus their attention appropriately towards what had made their existence originally possible.

Yet there are at least two difficulties with this strategy. First, as in the

---

<sup>96</sup> Weil 1976, Vol. II, 215, 239.

<sup>97</sup> Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, 120, 100.

<sup>98</sup> N.E. Boulting, "Conceptions of Power and God: A Possible Peircian Lesson for Process Theology," *Process Studies*, vol. 34.1 (2005).

<sup>99</sup> Schusterman, 400.

case of Shakespeare, there is a screen between the Divine and the human being in that we have no direct access to either. So what is the use of considering the significance of Intentionalism as a philosophical doctrine? The second difficulty lies in the fact that the notion of the Divine thereby has to be constructed in terms of what can be found in Scripture. But that move invokes two further hazards. The first is that what is to be found in Scripture itself will be subject to interpretation. Secondly, today as Benjamin once put it, “the services of theology” can only provide something “--- small and ugly and has got to be kept out of sight”<sup>100</sup> in a completely secular world, save in a religious institution or on a five to eight BBC Radio 4 broadcast!

If the ontological or theological stance invoked by Intentionalism is thereby weakened, what about the epistemological strategy? Within God’s fiction, appeal can still be made to Simone Weil’s experimental ontological proof, the essence of Platonism and of her conception of Christianity: “One cannot really aim at perfection unless it is really possible; so this is the proof that the possibility of perfection lies in the world”<sup>101</sup> as something beyond a human being’s individual existence and toward which a subjective aim can be directed. But it is one thing to establish the notion of such perfection, another to explicate its nature. And here, as has been suggested, there are three possibilities: the atheists stance – in invoking the placebo effect to account for the results of striving for perfection<sup>102</sup> – existence is all there is, there isn’t any more; the agnostic – we know not what might transcend human existence – who may invoke mysticism; s/he who has faith in the Divine whose nature may be a subject for interpretation. Putting the latter on one side, it is the phenomenological stance which can best provide human beings with a perspective that can endorse Simone Weil’s readings. It provides a stance opposing the standard way of regarding existence in secular or consumerist terms; it can focus upon celebrating the aesthetic dimension; it can provide a key in accounting for human creativity; it places emphasis upon just what is destructive about a life made subject to human distractions. All these awarenesses gained through an examination of her writings, however, do not require submitting to what are commonly regarded as religious truths nor the authority of a particular church dogma. Rather, for her, it can be concluded that whilst standard religion crucifies Divine awareness, the pursuit of philosophical inquiry can resurrect it.

---

<sup>100</sup> W. Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” *Selected Writings*, Vol. 4 1938-1940, trans. by E. Jephcott (et. al.) (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, Harvard University Press, 2003) 389.

<sup>101</sup> Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, 342.

<sup>102</sup> E. Vance, “Mind Over Matter,” *National Geographic*, vol. 230 no. 6 (2016) 30-55.