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***The Examination of Certain Theories of Human
Perfection in Relation to their Authors'
Valuation of Human Materiality***

By Michael Khatib

**A dissertation presented to the school of Graduate Studies and Research
of the University of Ottawa in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this work is to show that in order to determine an author's valuation of human materiality it can sometimes be more fruitful to look at the author's ethics than the author's philosophical anthropology. This is because it is with respect to ethics that the question of human development is usually dealt with more thoroughly and it is, therefore, with respect to ethics that a clearer view of an author's valuation of material existence can be ascertained.

A negative valuation of material existence is a basic attitude that in effect implies that material existence has no place in man's ultimate good. And because the valuation of man's material nature has to do with the extent to which the body is seen as having an integral role in the achievement and enjoyment of man's final end I use the concept of spiritual dualism to help describe the role that an author allows human physicality to play in human perfection and thus, in turn, the author's valuation of human materiality. I take spiritual dualism to refer to any theory of human perfection which maintains that the process of human perfection is a movement of the soul towards its own final good and where that movement of the soul is a movement away from, in spite of and, to varying degrees, against the body.

The bulk of this thesis consists in the analysis of various authors' theories of human perfection in an attempt to reveal the author's valuation of human existence, which can be put in terms of whether the author is a spiritual dualist or not. The authors which

we look at consist of both, authors who seem to have a negative valuation of material existence, as well as those that seem to have a positive valuation (such as Weil, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, as well as certain Medieval ascetic women and desert fathers). In some cases the initial appearance is shown to be correct and in some cases it is shown to be incorrect. I also provide a detailed analysis of Simone Weil's philosophy, bringing to light the positive value she placed on the material aspects of human existence in relation to man's final end.

One of the conclusions of this study is that a theory of human perfection is affected by the author's anthropology. The role that the body is permitted to play in human perfection is, at least in some measure, determined by the extent to which the body is seen as being ontologically independent from the soul. This indicates that, at least with respect to the authors examined, there is a strong relationship between anthropological dualism and a negative valuation of man's material nature.

But this relationship is logical or theoretical in nature and we cannot expect this logical necessity to be reflected straightforwardly in an author's work. Some authors might hold, in a contradictory way, an anthropological dualism while having a positive valuation of the body. We try to show that this contradictory stance indicates an author's conflict of values and can sometimes even be seen as leading to a movement away from anthropological dualism in the author's writings even where the conflict is not addressed explicitly. Or, an author who is, for example, an anthropological dualist while having a positive attitude towards the body might only realize the incompatibility of these positions while developing a theory of human perfection. And, thus, the development of a

theory of human perfection can sometimes be seen as a catalyst for an author's movement away from a strong anthropological dualism. One cannot consistently be an anthropological dualist (i.e., hold an anthropologically dualistic theory) **and** have a theory of human perfection without it implying a negative valuation of man's material nature.

The terms 'anthropological dualism' and 'anthropological monism' are often applied to a philosopher on the basis of his or her anthropological description of the structure of human beings, without taking into consideration the place that the author gives to our material nature in the achievement and enjoyment of human perfection. I maintain, however, that in order to properly assess an author's anthropological statements about the nature of human beings it can sometimes be beneficial to examine them in the light of statements (or attitudes) about the role that our materiality plays in the development of human perfection in order to see how accurately the author's valuation of human materiality corresponds to those anthropological statements.

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this work is to show that an examination of an author's theory of human perfection¹⁶ can, in certain cases, contribute to an understanding of an author's valuation¹⁷ of man's¹⁸ material nature. Gaining an understanding of an author's valuation of man's material nature is philosophically significant, for, that valuation is an important element of that author's philosophy as a whole.

An understanding of an author's philosophy as a whole depends in an important way upon having access to an author's valuation of material existence because that valuation reveals what at the level of anthropology¹⁹ might well be assumed, namely the

¹⁶ For the intentions of this thesis I take the phrases: 'human perfection', 'spiritual perfection', 'spiritual development' and 'human ethical development' as synonymous. My intention is twofold. First, I treat 'spiritual perfection' or 'spiritual development' like ethical development in the sense of assuming that theories of spiritual development or perfection are susceptible to straightforward philosophical analysis even though they might involve assumptions that are to a certain extent religious in nature. Second, without intending to limit one to the other, I take theories of ethical development and theories of spiritual development as being identical in the sense of being theories of achieving what is good for human beings (although the 'good' in question might be radically different in conception).

¹⁷ A negative valuation of material existence is a basic attitude that in effect implies that material existence has no place in man's ultimate good. Part of the slippery character of negative and positive valuations is that they are not typically 'absolute'. For example, an author might develop his or her theory of spiritual development with a vague or unspecified negative valuation of man's physicality and although the theory rests upon that negative valuation, the theory is difficult to argue against because the exact nature of the negative valuation is, even to the author him or herself, vague and ill-defined. In this scenario the author's anthropological theory is never directly implicated in any explicit or implicit valuations.

¹⁸ I use the term 'man' to refer to human beings in general.

¹⁹ For the purposes of this thesis I use the term 'anthropology', in a very limited way, to refer to a conception of human nature as a certain relation between parts such as soul and body. I do not

nature of the world (for example, the extent to which it is conceived of as being in itself good), the dynamic insertion of man into that world in view of achieving his final end and the relationship of man with the Good. In other words, to the extent that philosophy requires an analysis of human, material existence, anthropology can only tell us that we are material (in what precise sense and to what extent), but cannot tell us how the fact of being material is significant to human existence and happiness.

This thesis, that it can be useful to look at an author's theory of human perfection in order to get an understanding of an author's valuation of man's material nature, is significant because simply approaching an author's views on man's material nature exclusively through an examination of the author's anthropological formulations of the ontological nature of man (which seems to be the only alternative to an analysis of the author's theory of spiritual development), is inadequate. Straightforward anthropological analysis is inadequate for one or more of the following reasons: (1) because the author sometimes may not elucidate an anthropology in the traditional sense; (2) because even where the author has elucidated a traditional anthropology there sometimes exists a tension in the author's writings between the author's conception of human development and the author's anthropological formulations; (3) because a traditional anthropological doctrine does not, in itself, make explicit the valuation of man's physical existence that an author might nevertheless be assuming. An anthropological analysis does not reveal this valuation because the valuation has to do with the conception that the author has concerning how man achieves and enjoys his final end and therefore more properly requires an analysis of the author's theory of human perfection.

wish to imply that philosophical anthropology in general never deals with questions relating to man's final end. I also maintain that anthropology, in the sense that I use it, (referring to anthropological formulations of the ontological nature of man) involves a certain 'descriptive' methodology which can be distinguished from the more dynamic considerations of ethics which deals with the question of what the ontological nature of man means within the context of existence (and the achievement of man's end).

The scope of this thesis is limited to the authors that I examine. I do not wish to claim, as a universally applicable methodology, that an examination of an author's theory of human perfection will always (without exception) lead to a better understanding of the author's valuation of man's material nature, since there could always be some idiosyncrasies of a particular author's theory of man's spiritual perfection that make such a study unfruitful. I have, however, taken care to select authors who fall into a wide range of general types of philosophy in order to at least give my thesis the possibility of being more generally valid.

The methodology that I will follow is generally to investigate certain authors' theory of human perfection in order to show (1) what valuations of man's material nature are assumed in the theory and (2) that the specific author's anthropology does not reveal these valuations and even, in certain cases, that the anthropology might seem to imply valuations that contradict those indicated by the examination of the author's theory of human perfection.

In order to help make an author's theory of human perfection more susceptible to philosophical analysis I introduce the notion of 'Spiritual Dualism'. I take spiritual dualism to refer to any theory of human perfection which maintains that the process of human perfection is a movement of the soul towards its own final good and where that movement of the soul is a movement away from, in spite of and, to varying degrees, against the body. Because valuation of man's material nature has to do with the extent to which the body is seen as having an integral role in the achievement and enjoyment of man's final end I use the concept of spiritual dualism to help describe the role that an author allows human physicality to play in human perfection and thus, in turn, the author's valuation of human materiality.²⁰

²⁰ I do not wish to imply that I hold this strategy to be the only possible one or even the best one. It does, however, yield valuable results within the scope of the authors that I examine.

The concept of spiritual dualism can be broken down into its key components which can also serve as questions to ask oneself about a theory of human perfection. In this way the concept of spiritual dualism can be used as a way of characterizing that theory with respect to the answers that one gets. The key components of the concept of spiritual dualism are: (1) that the author has a theory of human perfection; (2) that the theory of human perfection implies that perfection is the movement of the soul; (3) that the movement of the soul is exclusively a movement toward the soul's final good; (4) the movement is tantamount to a movement away from the body; (5) a movement in spite of the body and (6) perhaps even a movement against the body. I then can use these components to formulate questions that I can, so to speak, put to an author. The author's 'answer' to these questions will, I maintain, help us to understand the author's valuation of human materiality by allowing us to describe and categorize the position of the authors examined.

This way of analyzing an author's theory of human perfection can be illuminated, perhaps, by considering its relation to the two aspects of what Gilbert Ryle calls 'philosophical analysis'. First, one could ask what the definition of spiritual dualism enables us to do that we were unable to do before, i.e., what questions it enables us to ask that we were unable to ask before and what answers we are able to get that we could not get before.²¹ I have just enumerated some of these questions. One could liken the situation to that of cross-examining a witness in a courtroom trial. Asking an author simply if he or she has a negative valuation towards the body, without specifying what that means to the author, is like asking a witness if he or she murdered the victim. The witness could say 'no' even if they had in fact hired someone to commit the murder for them. The cross-examiner was not asking the right questions. So too, if we simply look at

²¹ See Gilbert Ryle, "Thinking Thoughts and Having Concepts," in Collected Papers, vol. II, (London: Hutchinson, 1971), p. 448.

what formal place is given to materiality in the author's conception of human nature, the author could seem to have given a positive role to man's material nature (by holding that, for example man's materiality is a genuine 'part' of his nature), while, in fact, holding that the body plays only an accidental role in human perfection.

Second, one could look at a theory of spiritual perfection as involving a whole map of interrelated concepts.²² Someone who was to ask whether an author has a negative valuation of the body without seeing how the concept of 'valuation' related to the concepts of 'integral role'; 'accidental role'; 'human perfection'; 'soul's perfection'; 'movement away from the body'; 'movement in spite of the body'; or 'movement against the body', would not really understand the question, and consequently, could not tell what constitutes an adequate answer. Therefore, in analyzing an author's writings, I will try to determine the role that the author allowed the body to play in human perfection by looking at how the author related these key concepts to each other.

Analyzing an author's theory of human perfection and determining the role that an author allows human physicality to play in human perfection allows us to put into question what the author might himself or herself explicitly say about the body in his or her anthropology.²³ For instance, if an author who makes positive statements about the body also holds that the body has only an incidental role to play in human perfection, we are justified in suspecting that, despite the author's positive statements about the body, he or she is nevertheless committed to a negative valuation of the body.

The bulk of our thesis consists in the analysis of various authors' theories of human perfection in an attempt to reveal the author's valuation of human existence, which can be put in terms of whether the author is a spiritual dualist or not. The authors which

²² See René Meyer, *Aspects of Mind*, (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993), p. 11.

²³ This is in accord with what Ryle saw as the task of philosophy. See William Lyons, *Gilbert Ryle: An introduction to his Philosophy*, (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1980), p. ix: "[Ryle] derived a view of philosophy as the activity of laying bare the logical categories which underlie and are often distorted by the surface grammar of our ordinary speech or scientific speech."

we look at consist of both, authors who seem to have a negative valuation of material existence, as well as those that seem to have a positive valuation. In some cases the initial appearance is shown to be correct and in some cases it is shown to be incorrect.

Despite the fact that this thesis is dedicated to different authors, it must be stressed that the thesis is primarily intended to suggest that knowing an author's theory of human perfection can help us arrive at an understanding of his or her (often implicit) valuation of human materiality. The thesis is not primarily concerned with the truth of any of the doctrines examined. Therefore we always try to point out the significance of knowing a particular author's valuation to an understanding of the author's doctrine in general.

The analysis of various authors' theories of human perfection helps to show (a) that the fundamental principles upon which anthropological dualism is founded do in fact exclude the body from playing an essential role in man's perfection; and (b) that there is really no other way to have a positive valuation of the body except by assigning to it an essential role to play in the development of human perfection and, consequently, by recognizing that it is an essential component of the human being. Of course, this is a logical necessity and does not preclude authors from holding in a contradictory way, for example, an anthropological dualism while having a positive valuation of the body.

Section I (Chapters I–III) introduces the issues of anthropological dualism and valuation with the aim of showing that, to a certain extent, early Christian anthropological formulations tended to be tied up with valuations of man's material nature. Augustine (in his reaction to Manichaeism) is used as an example of the attempt by philosophers to consciously separate theories of spiritual perfection (and valuation) from anthropology. I suggest, however, that there remained certain links between anthropology and theories of spiritual perfection (and therefore valuation). Section I also presents the definition of spiritual dualism in reference to certain historical theories of human perfection. The presentation of authors in this section, like Plato, Augustine and the monastic tradition in general, is simply meant to crystallize the notion of spiritual dualism. These authors, more

or less, epitomize the notion of spiritual dualism. There is no shortage of established scholarship to show that, for example, Plato and Augustine reject that man's material nature is an inherent element of human (final) perfection. Also, a preliminary look at Weil's philosophy is used to illustrate how an examination of an author's anthropology can be misleading and is in itself inadequate in determining the author's valuation of material existence. Weil overwhelmingly seems to have a negative valuation of material existence but, in Section II, we show that Weil had a positive valuation of man's material nature and, consequently, that she was not really an anthropological dualist.

Section II (chapters IV–IX) is an in-depth exposition of Weil's philosophy and in particular her theory of spiritual perfection. We do not try to present Weil's doctrines in an historical way.²⁴ We do not, for example, discuss at any length the historical background against which she wrote and by which she was, no doubt, influenced. We are not interested in Weil's philosophy in itself but, rather, in the fact that we can show, through an analysis of her theory of spiritual perfection, that in spite of appearances, she was not a spiritual dualist and, consequently, that she could not be considered as an anthropological dualist (given the necessary link between anthropological and spiritual dualism). Further, we are not interested, for the purpose of this thesis, in refuting commentators who have held (at least in an implicit way) the opposite opinion. First of all, the analysis of Weil's thoughts about human perfection are not very developed in the secondary literature and we believe that no one has given as good an analysis as we have here (or else we would not have needed to). And secondly, we are not interested in analyzing her spiritual or anthropological dualism or monism for their own sake. We are only interested in the fact that we can demonstrate that her stand on human development is inconsistent with anthropological dualism. In other words, we are interested in justifying the validity of looking at an author's theory of human perfection in order to

²⁴ See Appendix I for an explanation of my treatment of Weil.

better see whether he or she positively or negatively valued materiality.

We first present the Weil that everyone knows in Chapter II²⁵ and then, in Section II, examine her theory of spiritual perfection in order to show that this examination is able to bring out aspects of her theory of human perfection that do not fit that traditional picture of Weil. We are thus able to present a different, revised view of Weil's philosophy through a better understanding of her valuation of man's material existence.

The treatment of Weil's philosophy took as much space as it did because we needed to provide a detailed analysis of her philosophy to show that she did not just say non spiritually dualistic things on occasion, but that she has a very well developed theory of human perfection which supports these non spiritually dualistic statements and which, at the same time, prove that spiritually dualistic statements are incompatible with her philosophy. Thus, to a certain extent, the section on Weil is so long because we not only had to show that non spiritually dualistic statements are more characteristic of her philosophy than spiritually dualistic statements, but also we had to actually present Weil's theory of human perfection itself. It was useful to use Weil's philosophy for this purpose because there is simply no established tradition of Weil scholarship whose results we could have assumed, as was possible for authors like Nietzsche and Kierkegaard.

Because, as it turns out, Weil has such a positive valuation of man's materiality, the model of spiritual monism that develops from the analysis of her thought is used as the standard of spiritual monism against which other philosophers are examined.²⁶ According to a spiritually monistic position, the ultimate end of man can be achieved only because of man's materiality. In other words, it is only as a material being that man can be

²⁵ For an example of an interpretation of Weil that characterized her thinking along spiritually dualistic lines, see Jacques Cabaud, *Simone Weil: A Fellowship in Love*, (New York: Channel Press, 1964), pp. 225-226.

²⁶ I do not wish to suggest, here, that the philosophy of Weil is itself any sort of standard that can be used to judge other philosophers but, only that, from the analysis of her thought, it was possible to develop the model of spiritual monism that was later applied to other authors. Its importance as a test-case justifies the rather long exposé that was devoted to this analysis.

good. Not only is man's material aspect crucial to the achievement of his ultimate good but, also, crucial to the enjoyment of that good and, as such, man's ultimate good includes as much the perfection of man's material aspect as his spiritual aspect.

Section III (Chapters X–XII) provides further examples of the validity of giving a philosophical analysis of a theory of human perfection in determining an author's valuation of human materiality. While Section II (on Weil), was intended to justify this approach by showing the valuable results that it can yield, Section III, is meant to demonstrate the versatility of this approach, i.e., its applicability to different types of philosophy.

Beginning with a discussion of the significance of asceticism to an understanding of an author's theory of human perfection in Chapter X, we then examine, in Chapter XI, the theories of human perfection of Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche who, for various reasons, would be expected to have a positive valuation of man's materiality. Examining their theories of human perfection allows us to see the extent to which such an examination can be effective in revealing any implicit valuations of the material aspects of human existence that these different authors might have. Chapter XII then examines the theories of human perfection of certain medieval and early Christian religious ascetics which, in spite of what would have been expected, do not prove to be spiritually dualistic (that is, do not involve a negative valuation of material existence). I examine the body-centered asceticism generally shared by certain medieval women and, also, touch upon the Desert Fathers for a further example of a rigorous asceticism that involves a movement away from a negative valuation of material existence.

As Sections II & III serve very different purposes, this is not more of a thesis on Weil than on any of the other authors. It is not a thesis on any of the specific authors but, rather, on the usefulness of giving a philosophical analysis of theories of human perfection. We are not, then, concerned with the truth or philosophical value of the doctrines of the particular thinkers presented but, rather, with the usefulness and validity

of examining an author's theory of human perfection in providing insight into the value that a thinker might have placed on man's materiality and, in turn, a better understanding of that author's writings in general.

One of the conclusions of this study is that, at least with respect to the authors examined, there is a strong relationship between anthropological dualism and a negative valuation of man's material nature.²⁷ The examination of an author's theory of spiritual perfection helps reveal this relationship between anthropological dualism and a negative valuation towards material existence which eludes the more direct approach of examining the author's anthropology itself.

When the necessary aspect of the relationship between anthropological dualism and a negative valuation is left out, the relationship has the appearance of being accidental. This study helps make the implications of anthropological dualism explicit, so as to make it difficult (at least in theory) for someone to consistently hold an anthropologically dualistic position *in abstracto* without also accepting (and defending) the negative implications of that theory. A negative valuation of material existence is a basic attitude that in effect implies that material existence has no place in man's ultimate good. When an author is forced to see the implications of his or her anthropology, it is possible that that author will change his/her anthropological doctrine.

But this strong relationship is logical or theoretical in nature and cannot be straightforwardly applied to an author. Some authors might hold, in a contradictory way, an anthropological dualism while having a positive valuation of the body. This is the case with some of the authors we will look at in Chapter XII. We try to show that this contradictory stance indicates an author's internal conflict of values and can even lead to a

²⁷ I use the term 'strong' to mean a logical relationship of necessity where the presence of one thing would require the presence of the other. I did not use the phrase 'positive relationship' because I wanted to avoid confusion with the characterization of positive and negative valuations.

movement (even an unconscious one) away from anthropological dualism even where the conflict is not addressed explicitly. Or, an author who is, for example, an anthropological dualist while having a positive attitude towards the body might only realize the incompatibility of these positions while developing a theory of human perfection. And, thus, the development of a theory of human perfection can sometimes be seen as a catalyst for an author's rejection of anthropological dualism as, we shall see, was the case for Simone Weil who in fact went from being an anthropological dualist to being an anthropological monist as a result of the development of her theory of spiritual perfection. One cannot consistently be an anthropological dualist (i.e., hold an anthropologically dualistic theory) **and** have a theory of human perfection without it implying a negative valuation of man's material nature. One could, however, like Descartes, be an anthropological dualist without having a theory of human perfection at all and, thus, the issue of whether human perfection is conceived of as implying a negative valuation would not arise.

Our analysis also shows that a theory of human perfection is affected by the author's anthropology. The role that the body is permitted to play in human perfection is, at least in some measure, determined by the extent to which the body is seen as being ontologically independent from the soul. This, we will see, is because 'ontological independence' translates into the domain of theories of human development as 'theological independence' whereby the soul and the body have different destinies and moral affinities.

SECTION I

Dualism and Method

The aim of this section is twofold: (1) to show that an investigation of certain authors' anthropological formulations (of the type which relate to the constitutive nature of man) does not, on its own, fully reveal the author's valuation of human existence and (2) to introduce the notions of spiritual dualism and spiritual monism which can be helpful in characterizing an author's valuation of human existence.

Anthropological formulations of human nature, considered as an attempt to determine the component parts of man and how they relate to each other, do not deal with the question of man's final end. In these cases, where the author displays this sort of traditional anthropology, the study of man's final end can in certain cases be more easily seen through an examination of the author's ethical theory. I will show that, at least in the cases that I examine, it is more properly existential considerations (belonging in general to the domain of ethics) concerning the achievement of man's final end which can act as a bridge connecting the author's anthropology and the assumptions at the basis of his or her conception of man's end.

To achieve the two aims of this section, I will attempt to define anthropological dualism as an historical or traditional position in philosophical anthropology which holds that man is a composite of two irreducibly distinct substances (Chapter I). I will also suggest that, at least to a certain extent, early Christian attempts at formulating anthropological descriptions of man's component parts and how they relate to each other was driven by a concern to move away from negative valuations of materiality that had previously (in Platonism or Neo-platonism, for example) been a factor in deciding the

place of the body within man considered as a whole.

I then provide an exegesis of Weil's description of the nature of man and her conception of the conditions for spiritual perfection (Chapter II). This will allow us to show that when one undertakes to understand Weil's (or anyone else's) conception of spiritual perfection solely from the point of view of anthropology, one can be led to certain inadequate conclusions about her conception of the task of spiritual perfection. Finally, on the basis of this analysis, I will give a definition of spiritual dualism and provide historical illustrations of this sort of dualism (Chapter III), and show, not only that an examination of an author's theory of human perfection can indicate his or her valuation of human materiality (while an examination of the author's anthropological formulations would have been inconclusive), but also that the negative valuations that some early Christian philosophers like Augustine tried to move away from are still present in the medieval monastic tradition (as an example) and remain connected (although in an indeterminate way) to anthropological formulations by way of ethical assumptions involved in theories of human perfection.

CHAPTER I : Anthropological Dualism

'Dualism' is a very broad term. According to the Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics,²⁸ it was first used in the seventeenth hundreds by Thomas Hyde to describe the Manichaeian conception of the cosmos as radically divided into Good and Evil forces that were, at the same time, consciously active principles in opposition to each other.²⁹ Apparently, it was Anaxagoras who first separated mind from matter, not to emphasize Good and Evil, but simply the 'mixed' and the 'unmixed' or the pure and the impure. It is unclear to what extent, if any, these were thought of as being in opposition.³⁰ It was Christian Wolff (1679-1754) who first used the term to describe a conception of man as consisting of two separate substances: body and soul.³¹

Dualism, in the anthropological sense of body and soul being distinct realities, can be traced back to Plato.³² For Plato, the soul is a distinct reality from the body and it is the soul that is, properly speaking, the man:

And our faith in the legislator should extend particularly to his statements when he tells us that soul is utterly superior to body, and that what gives

²⁸ R. Eucken, "Dualism (Introductory)," in Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, (New York: Scribner, 1912), Vol.5, pp. 100-114.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 100.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 100.

³¹ Ibid., p. 100.

³² Although Plato wanted and even needed to be an anthropological dualist, there is some question as to the possibility of Plato actually being an anthropological dualist. According to Plato's own metaphysics, the body cannot truly be a distinct reality because as an object it has at best a dubious reality. All Plato's attempts at anthropological dualism are based on the unworkable analogy of the body and soul to a material object and the form it is a copy of. But what is important here is that our tradition of anthropological dualism can be traced back to the anthropologically dualistic formulations of man's nature found in Plato's works.

each one of us his being is nothing else but his soul, whereas the body is no more than a shadow which keeps us company. So 'tis well said of the deceased that the corpse is but a ghost; the real man — the underlying thing called the soul — departs [...]³³

In addition to being an anthropological dualist, i.e., to holding that the body and the soul are separate realities, Plato also held that the soul was designed to rule the body like a mistress rules a slave:

Whereas he made the soul in origin and excellence prior to and older than the body, to be the ruler and mistress, of whom the body was to be the subject.³⁴

Plato thought the realm of ideas to be closer to the good than the sensible world and thus in a sense, better, truer and more authentic. In other words, the fall of the soul into a body was a fall into a world less real than that which it had known. Plotinus develops this tendency in Plato's thought to the extent that he is able to declare, unlike Plato, that matter is equivalent to evil.³⁵

Plotinus retained Plato's dualistic conception of man but also left behind some of Plato's subtlety in his conception of matter.³⁶ Whereas, for Plato, matter was itself the manifestation of the limit of reality, for Plotinus, it was more of a positive something which limits reality in the sense of being something that affects (diminishes) the reality of what comes into contact with it. For Plato, matter does not cause multiplicity or evil in

³³ Plato, Laws, (The Collected Dialogues of Plato, ed. by E. Hamilton and H. Cairns, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 959^a (p. 1503). All references to Plato's works are to this edition except where otherwise noted. See also, Alcibiades, I, (tr. by W.R.M. Lamb, Cambridge: The Loeb Classical Library, 1964), 129^c-131^c. All references to this work are to this edition.; Cratylus, 400^{a5}-400^{b3}; Phaedo, 115^c.

³⁴ Plato, Timaeus, 34^c (p. 1165).

³⁵ For example, Plotinus, Enneads, (tr. by A.H. Armstrong, in Plotinus, Loeb Classical Library no.440-446, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), I, 7.3 (p. 273), states that: "We must say that life in a body is an evil in itself." All references to Plotinus' Enneads are to this edition.

³⁶ See Plotinus, Enneads, VI, 7.5(24); IV, 7.22,(25); IV, 4.18,(13s). See also, Audrey Rich, "Body and Soul in the Philosophy of Plotinus," Journal of the History of Philosophy 1 (1963), pp. 1-15.

things — it is that multiplicity and evil. For Plotinus, however, matter is a principle of determination. As such, matter is the cause of multiplicity and consequently evil, since unity is equivalent to good. Matter individuates being and, as a principle of negative infinity, causes a loss of reality to what it individuates. Because of the hierarchical structure of reality, an individual soul can never be happy until it returns to unity:

Chez Plotin l'individuation et l'ensomatose procèdent du même mouvement de chute. L'âme universelle se fragmente en entrant dans des corps. Les âmes particulières se soucient de leur corps, et ainsi elles oublient leur réalité antérieure une et universelle. [...] Devenir un être particulier est donc une aliénation et une chute; c'est un processus négatif. [...] À l'individuation par la matière correspond le dualisme substantiel âme-corps, et une certaine conception du salut qui est "retour", "conversion", détachement du souci et ainsi libération de l'illusion du multiple.³⁷

It is not matter per se but, rather, the unreality of matter that makes the movement from unity to multiplicity a movement away from being, self-identity and happiness. The basic aim of Plotinus' philosophy is to overcome emanation through conversion. Claude Tresmontant contrasts the Plotinian conception of the origin of an individual man, as a fall of a soul into multiplicity, to the Hebrew notion of individual beings created directly by God:

La multiplicité des âmes est voulue telle pour elle-même, et réalisée par un acte positif. La multiplicité des êtres n'est pas engendrée par une individuation qui résulte de la rencontre d'une réalité une avec un *principium individuationis*, une "matière" qui divise et sépare (cwra) ce

³⁷ Claude Tresmontant, Essai sur la pensée hébraïque, (Paris: CERF, 1962), pp. 99-100. See Plotinus, Enneads, IV, 8.4 (pp. 409-410): "But they change from the whole to being a part and belonging to themselves, and, as if they were tired of being together, they each go to their own. Now when a soul does this for a long time, flying from the All and standing apart in distinctness, and does not look towards the intelligible, it has become a part and is isolated and weak and fuses and looks towards a part and in its separation from the whole it embarks on one single thing and flies from everything else; it comes to and turns to that one thing battered by the totality of things in every way, and has left the whole and directs the individual part with great difficulty; it is now applying itself to and caring for things outside and is present and sinks deep into the individual part."; Enneads, V, 8.7 (p. 261): "[...] for he has ceased to be the All now that he has become man; but when he ceases to be man he 'walks on high and directs the whole universe' [...]"; Enneads, VI, 5.12.

qui antérieurement était un.³⁸

According to Tresmontant, the Hebrews did not feel that they needed to transcend themselves as individuals to find ultimate happiness, but only as sinners. The end with which they were created is found within each individual and is realized in that person's relationship with God but, crucially, as that individual.

For Plotinus, the individual results from a fragmentation from the One. Thus the good to be achieved implies a return to that lost unity, and does not involve soul at an individual level. Tresmontant argues that love, the relation between man and God, does not make sense in a Plotinian framework, since it is resolved into a return to the One. Yet in the Hebrew/Christian framework, love serves to perfect the individual as individual.³⁹ Here we can see the obvious (yet conflicting) presence of valuations involved in both ancient Hebrew and Plotinian views on human nature.

Anthropological dualism was not a problem for the Hebrews but became a problem for Christians insofar as they were influenced by non-Hebrew sources.⁴⁰ The substantial character of both soul and body gave rise not only to the problem of the unity of the two substances, but also to the problem of deciding which one was the true self.⁴¹ Historically, it is not only a philosophical problem having to do with exactly how body and soul are to be brought together but, also, a problem having to do with the need to achieve a unified picture of man for theological or philosophical reasons, while dealing with the different moral aspects of each part.

³⁸ Tresmontant, Essai sur la pensée hébraïque, p. 99.

³⁹ Tresmontant, Essai sur la pensée hébraïque, p. 104.

⁴⁰ Tresmontant, Essai sur la pensée hébraïque, pp. 102-3.

⁴¹ See, for example, Augustine, The Catholic and Manichaean ways of Life, tr. by Donald A. Gallagher and Idella Gallagher, in The Fathers of the Church, vol.56, (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1966), I, 4.6 (p. 7): “[...] we are composed of body and soul, what should be determined at this point is what man himself is. Of the two that I have mentioned, is he body alone or soul alone? What do we call man, then? Is he soul and body like a centaur or two horses harnessed together? Or shall we call him the body alone in the service of a governing soul [...] Or shall we say that man is nothing but the soul, inasmuch as it rules the body, just as we say that the horseman is not the horse and the man together, but the man alone from the fact that he guides the horse? This is a difficult problem to solve [...]”

The problems involved in reconciling these ontologically separate and morally distinct 'things' are fundamental because the dualism results from conceiving of and defining the soul on its own, and conceiving of and defining the body, likewise, on its own or, at best, as the instrument of the soul. These two morally and ontologically distinct things are then supposed to be joined in a quasi-temporal process of incarnation. As Bruno Huisman and François Ribes put it:

La conception de l'âme elle-même [...] est le point de départ de toute théorie de son union avec le corps. Le corps lui-même ne fait problème qu'au moment où il est le lieu où s'incarne une âme. Il faut penser le corps non comme une donnée à partir de laquelle se déterminerait la nature et l'éminence de l'âme, mais à l'inverse concevoir le corps comme une sorte d'obstacle, de résidu négatif, auquel se heurte l'âme lorsque celle-ci vient à se trouver comme prisonnière dans un corps. Dire qu'une âme unie à un corps est une âme incarnée, c'est admettre une existence préalable de l'âme, c'est poser en principe l'antériorité ontologique de l'âme sur le corps.⁴²

So, by defining the soul in and of itself, within this context of the body's moral ambiguity, the body is then seen as a limiting principle when they are brought together.

As the Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics notes:

[...] matter gradually came to be regarded as something obstructive and evil — something from which the individual must try his best to deliver himself. Thus arose the ascetic ideal of life, and, hand in hand with it, a rigid dualism.⁴³

⁴² Bruno Huisman & François Ribes, Les philosophes et le corps, (Paris: Dunod, 1992), p. 219. See also, E. Gilson, Introduction à l'étude de saint Augustin, (Paris: Vrin, 1949), p. 57. However, this quotation from Huisman and Ribes leaves open the significant question of whether or not the soul, even defined on its own, would determine the body as a limit to the soul if there was not already present a negative valuation of materiality. The passage quoted seems to imply that simply the fact that the soul is defined on its own determines the body to be conceived of as a limit to the soul. I think that it is important to also ask what the impetus to define the soul on its own is in the first place because it would seem to be due to a negative valuation of materiality. And, if so, it would more legitimately be said that the negative valuation of the body leads, in the first place, to the conception of the body as a limit on the soul and, in the second place, to the definition of the soul on its own.

⁴³ R. Eucken, Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, p. 100.

But this sort of unmitigated dualism was seen by some early Christian writers as incompatible with scriptural doctrines as, for example, the physical incarnation of the Word of God.⁴⁴ But they did not really have a way around it. According to Benedict Ashley, the gains in respect to the understanding of man's spirituality that the 'Platonic' dualism provided the early Christians outweighed the losses on the side of an adequate conception of man's totality.⁴⁵ The best that the early Christians could do to overcome the Gnostic ontologization of matter's limiting effect was to place all the blame for matter's limiting effect on the original fall of man. In so doing, they were able to retain the Manichaean characterization of matter as evil but strip it of its metaphysical and theological implications by locating the origin of matter's evil effect in an historic event taking place as a result of a movement in the soul of the first man. In this way, the evil of matter is not naturally (necessarily) synonymous with matter since evil only results as a corruption of nature due to a primordial movement of Adam's soul, and not of his body (or matter itself).

Although the body, as a creation of God, could not be 'bad' by nature, our post-fall bodies were fallen and could be considered 'bad' not by nature but by virtue of their fallen state. So, not only did the early Christians retain the 'Platonic' anthropological dualism, but they also found a way of hanging on to the negative attitude towards the body without actually calling the body, in itself, evil. The evil effect of matter came to be seen as originating in a movement of the soul and, thereby, became purely ethical rather than metaphysical in nature, while, at the same time, in effect, the body was still held to weigh

⁴⁴ The 'push' to move away from an absolute dualism was, I think, more a reaction against the Gnostics and Manichaeans themselves, than a need to avoid this absolute dualism itself. Thus the movement away from the more absolute dualism was as much a political as a philosophical or theological issue.

⁴⁵ Benedict Ashley, Theologies of the Body, (Massachusetts: The Pope John Center, 1985), p. 104.

the soul down.⁴⁶

This point is illustrated well in P. Courcelle's article, "Tradition platonicienne et traditions chrétiennes du corps-prison."⁴⁷ Courcelle traces out the history of the metaphor of the body as the soul's prison. Within the context of Christianity, the metaphor was used to mean that the body, in its post-fall materiality, is the punishment for the soul's original sin.⁴⁸ As punishment, the body is not only a weight on the soul but, also, a source of sin for the soul. Variations of this metaphor were accepted by the entire Christian world, with very few exceptions, as Épiphane de Chypre and Jerome.⁴⁹ However, after Augustine, and due, in part, to his influence, it is the corruptibility of the body and not the body itself which is the punishment for original sin. Corruption of the body then becomes the weight which imprisons the soul. Thus, for example, Courcelle says that although Prosper of Aquitaine compares the fall of man to being thrown into a prison, that prison is yet the body:

il précise que la prison d'où le Psalmiste prie Dieu de tirer son âme est celle des tentations; car elles étrécissent l'âme et lui ôtent toute liberté. Mais il admet aussi que cette prison soit le corps, où nous habitons; car,

⁴⁶ What is interesting in relation to this point is the way that early Christians, influenced by neoplatonism, interpreted the two biblical texts: *Letter to the Galatians* 5, 17: "caro concupiscit adversus spiritum" and *Wisdom* 9, 15: "corpus quod corrumpitur aggrauat animam". The opposition between 'flesh' and 'spirit' (in the semitic sense) was interpreted as an opposition between 'body' and 'soul' (in the greek sense). However a complete study of this question falls outside the scope of this thesis.

⁴⁷ P. Courcelle, "Tradition platonicienne et traditions chrétiennes du corps-prison", *Revue des études latines* XLIII (1965), pp. 406-443.

⁴⁸ We will see further down how Augustine distinguished between the body itself and the corruptibility of the body - where the latter results from the fall and is associated with the sin of the soul and also with the threat that the body poses for the soul. This post-fall materiality, as distinct from man's pre-fall materiality is what I shall refer to as material finitude. It is this type of human materiality that the medieval monastic tradition and the medieval ascetic woman (both of which we will deal with in the thesis) held to be associated with sin.

⁴⁹ See Courcelle, p. 433, where he says that some, like Virgil, seem to have held, not that the body results from the soul's sin, but that it is the cause of the soul's sin. See also, Courcelle, pp. 427-431, and p. 420, where Courcelle describes how, for Origen, although the soul is put in a body because of its sin, the body corrupts the soul, and a corrupted soul retains the mark of sin even after the death of the body.

sans être mauvais par lui-même, il appesantit l'âme [...]⁵⁰

Of course, the official doctrine for Christians was that the body could not be in itself bad or the source of evil since it was created by God. But this doctrine seems to complement another, implicit view, that the body could not be the source of evil for the soul because it is so much inferior to soul. Thus, seeing the limitations and negativity of matter as stemming from the soul only serves to support even further the complete detachment of the soul from the body, in that it is because it would contradict the absolute dignity and transcendence of the soul to be affected by something as base as the body that the source of evil cannot be the body:

It was a basic axiom of Augustine's view of the soul and body that while the soul can act on the body, the body cannot act on the soul. This is a consequence of the user-tool model in terms of which he understood their relation. The tool cannot wield its user; the inferior in nature has no power to effect or induce any modification in the higher.⁵¹

Thus the attempt by early Christian writers to mitigate the negative attitude towards the body which is characteristic of the absolute anthropological dualism attributed to Plato in fact entrenched even deeper the dualistic separation of body and soul in man. Platonic anthropological dualism's effect of making matter a limiting principle was transformed by Augustine.⁵² Augustine successfully shifted the source of the body's limiting feature from being due to the material nature of the body itself, to being due to the sin of the soul: the body's limiting feature is a consequence of the soul's sin:

Saint Augustin donne à l'incarnation une signification profondément tragique. L'existence humaine est marquée par un dualisme dont, à la

⁵⁰ Courcelle, p. 432. See also, *The Book of Wisdom*, 9:15, The Jerusalem Bible, (New York: Doubleday, 1966), p. 1018: "[...] for a perishable body drags down the soul [...]"

⁵¹ R. A. Markus, "Augustine," in Encyclopedia of Philosophy, (New York: MacMillan & The Free Press, 1967), vol.1, p. 198-207.

⁵² Although this chapter is on anthropological dualism in general, it will nevertheless be useful to use St. Augustine's writings as a way of making the notion of dualism more concrete.

lumière de son expérience personnelle, saint Augustin souligne le caractère inéluctable: au péché nul n'échappe.⁵³

Prior to this shift in the location of the source of evil, which Augustine perfected, the limiting effect of matter was kept on the superficial, factual level of terrestrial existence. For example, for Ambrose and Jerome, it was the fall itself that resulted in the taking on of worldliness such as society, sexuality and hunger. None of these are proper to our nature. But, for Augustine, the only direct consequence of the fall was man's twisted will. All the other effects of the fall are caused by man's twisted will. By placing the source of matter's limiting feature in the individual's soul as a symptom of a diseased will, Augustine gave to matter's limiting feature the depth and universality of the sin with which Augustine diagnosed the soul.

Even once the Christian tradition was supposed to have dealt with the Manichaean or 'Platonic' ethical element in dualism, the anthropological dualism that remained was still a multifaceted phenomenon which, in effect, remained related to negative valuations of human materiality. Edward-Henry Wéber, in his book La personne humaine au XIIIe siècle, presents four definitions of anthropological dualism that Alexander of Hales identified as being derived from Augustine:

a) That there are two substances in man: that of the soul and that of the body (which meant for Alexander of Hales, that there were two substantial forms in man).

b) That the soul is intellectual, i.e., rational and is alone destined to beatitude even united to the body . (Although this is more of a definition of soul, the dualism is implied in the way that soul is defined separately and differently than body.⁵⁴)

⁵³ Huisman & Ribes, Les philosophes et le corps, p. 221.

⁵⁴ See, for example, Seneca, The Stoic Philosophy of Seneca, trans. Moses Hadas, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1958), p. 253: "Look unfalteringly, then, to that decisive hour which is the body's last but not the soul's. [...] The envelope of skin, which is your last covering, will be stripped off; the flesh and the blood which is diffused and courses through the whole of it

c) That, unlike the body, soul is a similitude of all things. (Crucially, here, the soul is an image of God and/or the divine Trinity, whereas the body is not, and it is similitude to the Trinity that provides the soul with the possibility of a beatitude that the body cannot share.)

d) That the highest part of the soul or spirit (mens) is the highest or most authentic part of man. This principle supports the implied claim, that the real 'me' of any man is the soul, i.e., the interior man.⁵⁵

Only the first of these four definitions, where it is the ontological separateness or distinctness of the body and the soul that is at issue, is purely anthropological. The three other definitions are a mixture of anthropological dualism with theological factors pertaining to the 'drama' of salvation.⁵⁶ The theological factors result in a shift in focus from the ontological separateness of the soul and body to their operational independence. The independence could itself either be with respect to religious destiny or spiritual affinity and refers to the respective operations of soul and body.

Thus, the three 'theological'⁵⁷ definitions can be seen to have an anthropological element and to this extent are reducible to the first definition because the themes of destiny and spiritual affinity, which emphasize independence, involve the assumption of a possible, and in some cases, eventual, actual separation, i.e., for the 'saved' in an afterlife.⁵⁸ This is easy to see with the second definition, since the body is corruptible and

will be stripped off; the bones and sinews which are the structural support of the shapeless and precarious mass will be stripped off."

⁵⁵ Edward-Henry Wéber, La personne humaine au XIIIe siècle, (Paris: Vrin, 1991), pp. 18-19. See, for example, Augustine, Confessions, X, 6.9.

⁵⁶ Ashley, p. 127: "In Augustine this interest in subjectivity as such becomes what today we call 'existential', that is, it thematizes the drama of the soul faced with the crises of the 'free' decision."

⁵⁷ Richard Zavalloni introduces this terminology in distinguishing different approaches to the question of the plurality of substantial forms in man according to the different sorts of concerns that different approaches (for example philosophical as opposed to theological) would bring to the question. See his introduction to Richard de mediavilla et la controverse sur la pluralité des formes. (Louvain: Presse universitaire, 1951).

⁵⁸ In one sense, the soul and the body are already ontologically separate but, in another sense, united operationally and, thus, existentially. After death the soul will engage in only its 'proper', purely spiritual operations, rather than as in this life (where the soul also operates in conjunction

subject to death but, because of the soul's supernatural destiny, the soul lives on through God's grace. In this life the body and soul are united operationally but are in fact already ontologically separate.

Although Augustine holds a doctrine of the resurrection of the body, for him it is not the resurrection of a human body (to the extent that a human body is essentially characterized by materiality - even in the sense of pre-fall materiality), but of a 'spiritualized' body. And even the spiritual body of the resurrection, though no longer corruptible, is still not spirit and remains ontologically distinct from the soul in the same way that the terrestrial body is distinct from the soul according to the first definition. Augustine, for example, says explicitly that the spiritual body remains ontologically distinct from the spirit:

The risen body will be flesh and not spirit, yet it will be a flesh so responsive to the spirit that it will be a spiritual body [...]⁵⁹

The fourth definition, that the soul is the principal part of man, is reducible to the third definition, since the fact that the soul is the principal part is due to its being an image of the Trinity. And the second definition is also equivalent to the third because the soul's supernatural destiny is revealed by, and to some extent due to, the soul containing an image of the Trinity.

Thus, in some sense, the theological aspect of these three definitions can be brought into relation with the ontological aspect of the first definition. With this in mind, it will be useful to expose certain themes in Augustine's writings that, despite being,

with the body). Even further, perhaps the soul can only perform its proper operations when it is free from having to operate for the sake of bodily existence. In the context of operation, the anthropological dualism becomes the dualism between caring for the body and caring for itself, and the two were not seen as being compatible.

⁵⁹ St. Augustine, *City of God: XVII-XXII*, tr. by Gerald G. Walsh, S.J., & Daniel J. Honan, *The Fathers of the Church*, vol.24, (New York: The Fathers of the Church, 1954), XXII, 21 (p. 473). All references to this work are from this edition.

perhaps, more akin to the three theological definitions of dualism, can illustrate the actual presence of an anthropological dualism in Augustine.

Despite being of a theological nature, these following themes relate to the eventual actual separateness of the body and the soul, as distinct substances, corresponding to the first definition of dualism. These themes are the following:

- a) That man is composed of two distinct substances, body and soul.⁶⁰
- b) That the soul is incorporeal and transcends the body, conceived as a distinct reality and as an instrument, tool, or servant of the soul.⁶¹
- c) That man, **i.e. the soul**, is a rational substance made to rule a body.⁶²

⁶⁰ See Augustine, The Literal Meaning of Genesis, 2 vols., tr. John Hammond Taylor, S.J., Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation, no.41-42, (New York: Newman Press, 1982), XII, 35.68 (vol.2, pp. 228-29). All references to this work are from this edition.; The Catholic and Manichaeian ways of Life, tr. by Donald A. Gallagher and Idella Gallagher, in The Fathers of the Church, vol.56, (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1966), I, 4.6 (pp. 7-8): Augustine is here saying that man is said of both body and soul together but more properly it is soul. "For whether it be both body and soul or soul alone that goes by the name of man, that is not the supreme good of man which constitutes the supreme good of the body. But whatever is the highest good either of the body and soul together or of the soul alone, that is the supreme good of man." Also, Augustine says explicitly: "For although they are two things, soul and body [...]" All references to this work are from this edition.; The Magnitude of the Soul, tr. by John J. Mahon, in The Fathers of the Church, vol.4, (Washington, DC.: Catholic University of America, 1947), 13.22 (p. 83): "It seems to me to be a certain kind of substance, sharing in reason, fitted to rule the body." All references to this work are from this edition.; On the Immortality of the Soul, tr. by Ludwig Schopp in The Fathers of the Church, vol.4, (Washington, DC.: Catholic University of America, 1947), 2.2 (p. 17): "Our reason, to be sure, is of a better quality than our body; our body, in turn, is some kind of a substance [...]" All references to this work are from this edition.; The Trinity, tr. by Rev. Arthur West Haddan, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, vol.3, ed. Philip Scaff, (Grand Rapids: WM.B. Eerdmans, 1956), VII, 5.10 (p. 111): "For body subsists, and so is substance [...]" All references to this work are from this edition.; City of God: XVII-XXII, XXII, 24 (pp. 523-4): "The original good includes two quite different things: the procreation of the body and the inbreathing of a soul."

⁶¹ See Augustine, City of God: VIII-XVI, tr. by Gerald G. Walsh, S.J., and Mother Grace Monahan, O.S.U., The Fathers of the Church, vol.14, (Washington, DC.: Catholic University of America, 1952). X, c.6 (p. 126): "If, then, the body, which is less than the soul and which the soul uses as a servant or a tool [...]" All references to this work are from this edition. See also, The Trinity, VII, c.5; I, c.10.

⁶² See Augustine, The Magnitude of the Soul, 13.22 (p. 83); The Catholic and Manichaeian ways of Life, I, 27.52 (p. 41): "Man as he appears to us is a rational soul, making use of a mortal and earthly body."; Tractates on the Gospel of John, tr. John W. Rettig, in Fathers of the Church,

d) That the body is subordinate, as what is ruled is subordinate to what rules.⁶³ (Note that this differs from 'c' since 'c' follows from the nature of the soul whereas 'd' follows from the nature of the body.)

e) That man is a soul that uses a mortal body made from dirt.⁶⁴

f) That soul is spiritual.⁶⁵

g) That body traps the soul and binds it to this earth.⁶⁶

h) That the soul is the superior part and the body the inferior part of man.

vol.79 (Washington DC.: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), XIX, 5.15 (p. 156): "What is human nature? A rational soul having a body." All references to this work are from this edition. It is interesting to note that Augustine's definition of the soul (from The Magnitude of the Soul, 13.22, see note 33) is the same as his definition of man from The Catholic and Manichaeian ways of Life, I, 27.52. It is also interesting to note that the strong identification of soul with man actually weakens the anthropological dualism in that if the body, as a separate substance, has no place in man, and man is restricted to soul, then man consists of only one substance: soul.

⁶³ See St. Augustine, Confessions, tr. V. Bourke, in The Fathers of the Church, vol.21, (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1953), X, 6.9 (p. 271): "'Who art thou?' And I answered: 'A man.' Here are the body and soul in me, standing ready to serve me; the one without; the other within [...] But, the better is what is interior." All references to this work are from this edition. See also, The Magnitude of the Soul, 13.22; The Catholic and Manichaeian ways of Life, I, 27.52; On Music, tr. by Robert Catesby Taliaferro, in The Fathers of the Church, vol.4, (Washington, DC.: Catholic University of America, 1947). VI, 5.13.

⁶⁴ See Augustine, The Catholic and Manichaeian ways of Life, I, 27.52; Magnitude of the Soul, 22.38 (pp. 101-102): "But the soul's impulse makes use of the sinews as ropes to move the weight of the body. [...] Hence it is understood how far superior the soul is to its own body, even in performing actions that are done through the body."

⁶⁵ See Augustine, The Literal Meaning of Genesis, VII, 19.25 (vol.2, p. 19): "In seeking for the source of the soul [...] no corporeal material should be considered. As God by the excellence of his nature surpasses every creature, so does the soul surpass every corporeal creature."

⁶⁶ See Augustine, City of God: XVII-XXII, XXI, 10; Against the Academicians, tr. by Sister Mary Patricia Garvey, (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1957), I, 3 (p. 16): "Take my word for it, you will greatly rejoice, because the gifts of this world by which the unwary are enslaved are attractive to you even though you have almost completely lost them. They strove to ensnare me also while I was daily singing their praises [...] For she [philosophy] teaches — and teaches rightly — that nothing at all should be cherished and that everything should be despised which mortal eye can see, or any sense can appropriate." Although Augustine later changed his opinion about the body imprisoning the soul (Retract., 1.3) one must ask whether it was because his attitude towards the body became less negative or more negative. As we have pointed out, the fact that the body can affect the soul (for good or evil) indicates a higher level of reality of the body than does a position according to which the body is totally unable to act on the soul.

And that the soul is the perfection of the body.⁶⁷

i) That the body is an obstacle for the soul's intellectual, or rational, contemplation.⁶⁸

Even when Augustine wants to say that soul and body are unified in man, the unity is put in terms of the spatial metaphor of a non-separateness of two distinct objects: "Man is neither the body alone, nor the soul alone [...]"⁶⁹ This presupposes that the body and the soul are distinct things which can be considered separately and affirms only that each by itself cannot be considered 'man'.⁷⁰ Or, as Ashley puts it, though not explicitly referring to Augustine, the body is ontologically distinct from the soul but should be considered part of man for purposes of definition:

Since the body has been created by God and vivified by the infusion of the 'breath of life' (Gen. 2:7) the body is also good and inseparable from the human person.⁷¹

The emphasis that I have placed on the issue of separateness of body and soul served to bring out the philosophical element of dualism in a context where man is described according to philosophical and theological definitions or formulations mixed together. Augustine has been introduced in this section mainly to help make the philosophical significance of anthropological dualism to the theological (or ethical)

⁶⁷ Augustine, City of God: VIII-XVI, XIII, 24; On the Immortality of the Soul, 2.2; The Catholic and Manichaean ways of Life, 5.7.

⁶⁸ Augustine, The Literal Meaning of Genesis, VII, 14.20 (vol.2, pp. 228-29): "But the soul itself is of a quite different nature, so that when it wishes to understand the divine or God, or simply to understand itself and consider its own virtues, it turns away from this light of the eyes in order to have true and certain knowledge, and recognizing that this light is no help for its purpose, in fact is even something of an obstacle, it raises itself up to the vision of the mind."; City of God: XVII-XXII, XXII, 11. See also, On the Immortality of the Soul, 1.1 (p. 16): "That which is understood is so always; nothing, however, pertaining to the body is so always. Truly, the body is not able to be of aid to the soul in its striving towards understanding, since it cannot even be of hindrance."

⁶⁹ Augustine, City of God: VIII-XVI, XIII, 24.

⁷⁰ See footnote 35 above where I show that Augustine's definition of the soul and of man are the same.

⁷¹ Ashley, p. 581 (my emphasis).

notions of man's ultimate end more concrete.

CHAPTER II : Simone Weil

Introduction

In the preceding chapter we saw that the anthropological point of view is that whereby any dualistic aspects of theological formulations of human nature and human perfection are reduced to a purely anthropological conception. Being reduced to purely anthropological categories means that the dualism is restricted to the issue of ontological separateness between soul and body. In this chapter we will approach Simone Weil's thought solely from an anthropological point of view.

The scope of this study will be Weil's use of the language of anthropological dualism in describing the nature of man and the task of spiritual progress. It will illustrate that when one undertakes to understand Weil's (or anyone else's) conception of spiritual perfection solely from the point of view of anthropology, one can be led to certain false conclusions about her conception of the task of spiritual perfection that are what I shall characterize (in Chapter III) as spiritually dualistic.

Creation

In order to understand Weil's conception of the body and how it relates to the soul in the context of spiritual development (always bearing in mind that the analysis is limited to the anthropological perspective), we must understand how Weil conceived of creation. This is important because the body's relation to the soul closely mirrors the relation

between the world and God that is determined by the nature of creation.

There is a strong presence in Weil's thought of a dualism between creation and God. The radical otherness which separates God⁷² and creation is characterized as the absolute difference between necessity and the good:

La contradiction essentielle de la condition humaine, c'est que l'homme est soumis à la force, et désire la justice. Il est soumis à la nécessité, et désire le bien. Ce n'est pas son corps seul qui est ainsi soumis, mais aussi toutes

⁷² I assume that Weil's notion of God is that of Augustine's except for some significant differences particularly in the way Weil conceives of God operating in the world. With respect to the question of her concept of God, see D. Z. Phillips' article entitled "God and Concept-formation in Simone Weil," in *Simone Weil's Philosophy of Culture*, ed. by Richard Bell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 80, where Phillips explains that the concept of God is not formed through experience of an object but through an experience of need for absolute good. We are therefore wrong to think, for example, that the term God is meaningless because it is supposed to be a name of something but that no existing object is named by it. David McLellan, gives this description of Weil's notion of God in his book entitled *Utopian Pessimist: The Life and thought of Simone Weil*, (New York: Poseidon Press, 1990), pp. 198-199: "This contradictory approach was present in her concept of God. Necessity as a principle of order in the world presented one face of God: it was an image by which the intelligence could grasp the indifference and impartiality of God. This led Weil to describe God as ultimately impersonal [...] But Weil at the same time described necessity as 'the veil of God' (NB, p. 266) because God was manifested by the universe but also hidden [...] The other face of God was that of love. It was under this aspect that God was a hidden God [...]" In this thesis I deliberately avoid going into the details of Weil's conception of God, ultimately because to do so would risk becoming too theological in perspective. The thesis nevertheless attempts to analyze, from a philosophical perspective, some aspects of Weil's conception of God insofar as these aspects directly relate to an understanding of her conception of spiritual development. From the point of view of the soul (i.e., from a spiritually immature standpoint) God is seen as power and as being outside of the realm of mechanical necessity which is, for the soul, equivalent to evil. The need to reconcile the principle that 'God is Good' with the evil of the world (from the soul's point of view) acts as a catalyst forcing the development of Spirit which goes hand in hand with realizing that finitude does not equal evil and that the Good is to be found outside a dialectic of power. See p. 26 (God as equivalent to Plato's notion of the Good); pp. 57-60 (I describe why Weil thought that it was incorrect to ask for a clear description or conception of God, i.e., that such would be a function of our particular level of spiritual development. This shows that, for Weil, God was more of a limiting concept than a positive concept that had a definite meaning); pp. 64-65. ("The absolute good that Weil posits as a transcendent end, is for her, roughly equivalent to God."); pp. 77 ff. (I describe Weil's notion of God as being a dichotomy between notions of 'God-in-his-power' and 'God-in-his-powerlessness'); pp. 221 ff. (In the section entitled 'Asceticism, Spiritual Dualism and Spiritual Monism' I show how the development of the desire for the good in a person (i.e., love) overcomes the opposition between power and powerlessness in relation to God.)

Weil conceives of the essence of creation as material necessity: "Nous sommes un point dans cette distance. L'espace, le temps, et le mécanisme qui gouverne la matière

⁷³ Simone Weil, Oppression et liberté, (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), p. 209. Henceforth OL. David McLellan, gives this description of necessity in his book entitled Utopian Pessimist: The Life and thought of Simone Weil, (New York: Poseidon Press, 1990), pp. 197-198: "From her earliest years the idea that the world was governed by necessity had great force for Weil. And throughout the *Notebooks* she constantly reminded herself of Plato's injunction 'not to confuse the necessary with the good'. Nevertheless necessity for Weil presented itself under two aspects which are difficult to reconcile. On the one hand, she talked of the 'pitiless necessity of matter (FLN, p. 103), an apparently arbitrary combination of blind forces [...] On the other hand, Weil sometimes referred to necessity as the law-like network of relationships that underlay and knitted together the material world whose author in some sense was God [...] The way in which matter was formed and ordered gave some clue to the nature of the Good. Thus she could go as far as to say that 'Necessity, insofar as it is absolutely other than the Good, is the Good itself' (GG, p. 99), which amounted to deifying necessity." See also, McFarland, p. 46. In general, necessity is a cornerstone of Weil's philosophy. For her, it is not just a physical notion but, rather, also a metaphysical and a moral one. Necessity is a metaphysical concept for Weil in the sense that necessity is the condition of existence of the physical world. Necessity is a moral concept in that it is, at the same time, absence of good and presence of good. Understanding what she means by necessity and how Weil sees the soul's perception of necessity changing as a function of spiritual development is one of the main focuses of my explanation of her philosophy. See pp. 72-73 (Necessity is defined as 'what is other' in the sense of what we fail or refuse to acknowledge as real. This otherness is a threat because it imposes a sense of finitude upon the soul, i.e., makes it realize that it cannot be Totality. Necessity is then the result of an attitude of the soul perceiving otherness as evil to the extent that the 'other' cannot be subsumed under the control of the will. Necessity can only be overcome by the 'conversion' of the soul into spirit); pp. 87 ff. (An extended treatment of necessity in relation to consent to God's will). Weil's notion of necessity can be seen as a reaction to the philosophy of Brunschvicg, although not in the way that one might at first think. Brunschvicg was an idealist but it was not the fact of being an idealist that bothered Weil. What she found objectionable about this sort of philosophy is the assumption that man is an essentially free intellect and consequently that external reality (being constituted by the free self) is wholly accessible to man's intellect and wholly controllable by man's agency. Weil felt that this was a philosophy of the 'bourgeois class' who never come face to face with the crushing otherness of reality. Weil would hold that if the external reality is constituted from outside of the self, then the self could not be radically free because reality is not wholly accessible or controllable. This illustrates the close connection, for Weil, between reality being determined by an alien mechanism and the inner self also being determined by an alien mechanism. See André Bremond, "Léon Brunschvicg's Religion of the Spirit," in Thought vol.65 no.258 (September, 1990): 235-248. See also, Murdoch, Iris, Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals, (New York: Penguin, 1993), p. 108, where Murdoch describes Plato's understanding of the material world in a way that is similar to Weil's conception of necessity. For example, she says that for Plato the material world is pointless, there is no finality to it, it is not real, it is not the end of anything and, crucially, it obeys an alien law.

sont cette distance."⁷⁴ The very reality of this sensible world is limited to only the reality which blind mechanical necessity can have.⁷⁵

Creation, being the distance between Good and the necessary, results from an abdication on the part of God from the 'allness' which would extend goodness universally and leave no room for necessity. God has left man vulnerable to the blind forces of necessity. God is unable to intervene in the domain of necessity. Weil claims that in creation, God 'chained' himself down by allowing there to exist a mechanism of necessity that He is unable to interfere with:

Dieu abandonne notre être tout entier, chair, sang, sensibilité, intelligence, amour, à la nécessité impitoyable de la matière et à la cruauté du démon, sauf la partie éternelle et surnaturelle de l'âme.⁷⁶

At least to some extent, Weil's conception of the distance between God and the world is meant to mirror the dualism between body and soul that is closer to our own experience (as she understands it):

La pensée humaine modèle toujours l'univers sur les rapports entre l'âme et le corps, mais choisit entre ces rapports.⁷⁷

Weil preferred this view of the nature of creation because it crystallizes the absolute materiality of man's natural existence (including the body and the soul) that is opposed to the supernatural vocation of the highest part of the soul. The individual man is nearly always, 'but not quite always' determined in both body and soul, by necessity.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Simone Weil, Attente de Dieu, (Paris: La Colombe, 1950), pp. 110-111. Henceforth AD.

⁷⁵ See Simone Weil, Gateway to God, (Glasgow: Fount Paperbacks, 1974), p. 51. Henceforth GG.

⁷⁶ Simone Weil, La Connaissance surnaturelle, (Paris: Gallimard, 1950), p. 49. Henceforth CS. See also, Simone Weil, Cahiers, 3 vols., 2nd. ed., (Paris: Plon, I-1970, II-1972, III-1974), II, p. 76. Henceforth CAH.

⁷⁷ CAH, I, p. 100. The body and soul can be seen to be related in different ways, as master to servant, as completely distinct, as unified in one substance (as in the case of materialism). Weil is referring to the different anthropological conceptions that are possible.

⁷⁸ See OL, p. 210.

Just as the divine is present in the world, because of God's abdication, as only the smallest mustard seed, so too, there is only the slightest part of the soul that can tear itself free of necessity.⁷⁹ One can almost say that there is only a 'hint' of freedom in the 'supernatural part'.

Body and Soul

This notion of God's creation is modeled on the relation between the body and the soul, which are as distinct as are God and creation. The fact that both the body and the soul are within the natural order does not diminish their ontological separateness. The situation of the created soul with reference to the body, mirrors the situation that God is in, in relation to creation. For Weil, creation is equivalent to an incarnation of God. Just as Christ was made man so too in creation God is made matter:

Déjà avant la Passion, déjà par la Création, Dieu se vide de sa divinité, s'abaisse, prend la forme d'un esclave.⁸⁰

God did not only abandon man to necessity, but equally, God himself is subject to it: "Impuissance de Dieu. Le Christ a été crucifié; son Père l'a laissé crucifier; deux aspects de la même impuissance."⁸¹ Thus, just as Weil conceives of God and Christ as powerless with reference to necessity, so too is the incarnate soul. The body is subject to necessity because it shares the same nature as matter. But the soul is subject to necessity by external constraint:

Voir chaque être humain comme une bouteille où il y a un génie. Les bouteilles se déplacent (et parfois se rencontrent, se heurtent), par les mouvements incohérents imprimés du dedans.⁸²

⁷⁹ See CAH, II, p. 123.

⁸⁰ CS, p. 14. See also, CAH, II, p. 75.

⁸¹ CAH, II, p. 76.

⁸² CAH, I, p. 157 (text is boxed). In the Gorgias this use of the image of a jug in the description of man is attributed to 'some Sicilian or Italian'.

Art de se mouvoir dans la bouteille: comme apprentissage d'un métier. En faire un instrument, un outil, un bâton d'aveugle.⁸³

Carnal attachment, although a constraint, is the original state that the soul is born into. It is what is natural for the soul although at each moment we consent to it. The mystery, for Weil, is that the soul could ever bring this natural situation into question.

The greatest illusion for the soul, is its natural belief that it can move within the created order, that it can exist carnally, free from the material mechanism that is absolute sovereign in that realm:

Ce qu'offrait Satan était imaginaire [...] L'âme mortelle est sujette à la nécessité. Croire la partie mortelle de l'âme affranchie de la nécessité est une erreur.⁸⁴

The source of this illusion lies in the natural superiority of the soul. Weil analyzes this superiority of the soul over the body with reference to the fact that the body is restricted, in its sensibilities, to the present, whereas the soul embraces time (past and future). Weil compares the soul to a pilot and the body to a boat.⁸⁵ This analogy has the sense that the boat is only where it is at each moment, but the captain is able to span where the boat has been and where it will be. It is only the soul's relationship to the body that gives to the body the appearance of being able to span time.⁸⁶

Our very creation is equivalent to original sin. Weil's theory of human origin has much in common with Plotinus' theory of the descent of the soul into the body, being at once, due to sin and divine sanction.⁸⁷ Weil is, however, concerned with creation only

⁸³ *CAH*, I, p. 158 (text italicized).

⁸⁴ *CAH*, II, p. 122.

⁸⁵ The soul is, thus, naturally in a state of disincarnation. See *CAH*, I, p. 103. This example is reported by Aristotle in *De Anima*. II, 1, 413^a 8-9.

⁸⁶ See *CAH*, II, p. 112; 123.

⁸⁷ See Rich, p. 3: "However, in the spirit of Platonic myth, Plotinus continues to employ the metaphor of descent in his efforts to account for the departure of the soul from its original disembodied state. It is guilty, he suggests, of some error [...] which consists in a desire to be

from the moral point of view and is not at all concerned with metaphysical implications. She is interested in accounting for the moral rather than the physical context in which man finds himself.

According to Weil, for the soul to exist it must desire to be other than God but, at the same time, for the soul to exist God must consent to be less than all:

La création et le péché originel ne sont que deux aspects, différents pour nous, d'un acte unique d'abdication de Dieu.⁸⁸

Dieu nous a demandé "voulez-vous être créés" et nous avons répondu oui. Il nous le demande encore à tout instant, et à tout instant nous répondons oui. Sauf quelques-uns dont l'âme est divisée en deux; pendant que presque toute l'âme dit oui, un point de l'âme s'épuise à crier en suppliant: non, non, non!⁸⁹

And, in desiring to be other than God, the soul consents to worldly desires, i.e., it consents to be ruled by necessity:

La pesanteur qui gouverne entièrement sur terre les mouvements de la matière est l'image de l'attachement charnel qui gouverne les tendances de notre âme.⁹⁰

As a result of this desire to exist, the soul not only takes on 'carnal' attachments, but avoids anything that is good:

Toute la partie médiocre de l'âme, craignant la mort d'une crainte plus

independent of the Universal Soul (IV, 8.4), a voluntary inclination (IV, 8.5) toward the material world which results in its "fall" and the loss of its wings. [...] But though this entry into the material world can be regarded as voluntary in so far as it is the soul's own act, and "sinful" in so far as it involves separation from the perfection of the Whole, nevertheless, on a higher level, it is seen to be determined. For it is a universal law in the Plotinian system that the higher must give itself to the lower, and that soul must impart itself to body in order to realize its own implicit powers and to contribute to the perfection of the Cosmos." Notice also, in Plotinus, there is the same tension, as in Weil, between the soul sinning and the soul coming to be through sin.

⁸⁸ CS, p. 91.

⁸⁹ CS, p. 168.

⁹⁰ Simone Weil, Pensées sans ordre concernant l'amour de Dieu, (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), p. 17. Henceforth PSO.

violente que celle causée par l'approche de la mort charnelle, se révolte et suscite des mensonges pour se protéger.⁹¹

L'âme incapable de supporter cette présence meurtrière de Dieu, cette brûlure, se réfugie derrière la chair, prend la chair comme écran. En ce cas, ce n'est pas la chair qui fait oublier Dieu, c'est l'âme qui cherche l'oubli de Dieu dans la chair, qui s'y cache.⁹²

This identification of the soul's end with worldly attachments goes against the soul's real supernatural vocation. It is a false non-dualism in which the body and the soul come together in their aims and joys. It is false because according to their respective natures, body and soul have different joys:

Le "paradis terrestre" serait-il *désirable*? Rien n'y apprendrait à l'homme le principe même de la maîtrise de soi, à savoir traiter son propre corps comme une *chose*. Il n'aurait pas d'autres règles de vie que ses passions...⁹³

Weil says that the sovereign good can only be possessed by the soul when it detaches all its desire from the things of this world.⁹⁴ This detachment from worldly things, in effect, serves to establish the separation of the soul from the body and the world in general, because this desire of the soul, directed at the good, is capable of raising the soul.⁹⁵

Not only does the soul rise above necessity and the body, but the body sinks lower into necessity. "En laissant place dans l'esprit à Dieu, on abandonne la chair à la nécessité."⁹⁶ This type of desire of the soul for the good is an operation in which the body has no part to play nor can the desire for the good have any vestige of the carnal. It raises the soul "hors de cette misérable chair".⁹⁷

⁹¹ AD, p. 189.

⁹² PSO, p. 40.

⁹³ CAH, I, p. 32. See also, CAH, I, p. 211.

⁹⁴ See CS, p. 285.

⁹⁵ See AD, p. 91.

⁹⁶ CAH, II, p. 132.

⁹⁷ AD, p. 43.

Weil goes so far as to analyze the acquisition of virtue, or goodness of the soul, as a function of the soul's movement away from worldly attachments. Weil takes the Platonic notion of the good to be equivalent to God. It is not that the things of this world are evil or bad in themselves, but they are not good either, and so with respect to the task of becoming good, the things of the world are in opposition to the good:

Tout le désir que la nature a mis dans l'âme humaine et attaché à la nourriture, à la boisson, au repos, au bien-être physique, aux plaisirs des yeux et des oreilles, aux êtres humains, doit être enlevé à ces choses et dirigé exclusivement sur l'obéissance à Dieu.⁹⁸

Chaque fois qu'on se fait violence dans cet esprit, on avance peu ou beaucoup, mais réellement, dans l'opération du dressage de l'animal en soi.⁹⁹

Because the movement of desire away from the 'bodily' is only achieved by a movement of desire towards God, we can say that the movement towards God (Weil equates God and the good) is equivalent to a movement away from the body. This not only implies that the good is reserved exclusively for the soul, but also that the body has no positive role to play. Whatever role it does have can only be one by negation.

The only use that Weil conceives for the body is, in fact, as a source of repulsion. When the body is revealed in its true nature (free from imaginary distortion) and we see that its existence is limited to toil and fatigue,¹⁰⁰ the soul is more inclined to look elsewhere for fulfillment: "User de notre corps comme d'une chose morte, comme d'un outil en bois."¹⁰¹ The body, as 'some dead object', has no significance for the soul except as a tool for procuring the means of the soul's survival (until it is spiritually mature).

⁹⁸ *CS*, p. 86.

⁹⁹ *CAH*, III, p. 40 (text italicized).

¹⁰⁰ See *CAH*, I, p. 240.

¹⁰¹ *CAH*, II, p. 348.

Weil also conceives of the body as a prison and a tomb for the soul.¹⁰² When the body is in a great deal of suffering, and the soul is attached to the body, in a carnal sense, then the soul dies. When the body is suffering, and the soul is attached to the body, it suffers also, to such an extent that the soul can actually be annihilated:

Parce qu'elle peut tuer, la force peut aussi sans tuer faire de l'homme, encore vivant, une chose. État violent, mort et vie. Le plus faible n'a guère le choix qu'entre cet état et celui de cadavre.¹⁰³

If some aspect of the soul (i.e., one's life) is detached from worldly desires, it becomes a transcendent part of the soul, a part that does not suffer with the body. With the actual death of the carnal part of the soul, the higher part is cut free from the world once and for all. The analogy that comes to mind is that of a man whose leg is caught in a trap and who saws it off to free the rest of himself.

In fact, given that the way that the life of the soul is dependent on the detachment from the world and the body, the detachment actually establishes the ontological dualism in the sense that the soul becomes a separate or independent being through its proper attachment, i.e., to the good. When the body is suffering and the soul rises above it, then, remaining attentive to the good:

[...] l'âme peut, sans quitter le lieu et l'instant où se trouve le corps auquel elle est liée, traverser la totalité de l'espace et du temps et parvenir devant la présence même de Dieu.¹⁰⁴

So, we cannot say that for Weil, the body is completely useless, but it is

¹⁰² See CS, p. 189. See also, Plato, Cratylus, 400^{b-c}; Gorgias, 493^{a-b}.

¹⁰³ CAH, I, p. 23. Here we have another indication that Weil's main focus is moral rather than metaphysical. For Weil, soul is not some spiritual substance but, rather, refers to a certain aspect of life of a person, certain strivings, a sense of self respect, a sense of being a moral agent, being able to care or desire, to love or hate...

¹⁰⁴ AD, p. 121.

nevertheless useless to spiritual development, since the body can be used only by the part of the soul that is already developed (spiritually speaking) and can only be used to annihilate the remaining part that is not spiritually developed:

L'âme doit avoir été divisée en deux avant qu'une partie puisse ainsi utiliser le corps contre l'autre.¹⁰⁵

Attachment of the soul to God transports the soul out of the necessity of the world. It is only once the soul is free of the world, and bodily attachment, that the soul can be virtuous. The realm of virtue is outside this world. One can only be really virtuous to some other person if one's virtue is directed at the transcendent aspect of that other person (that is equally outside of this world). Thus, the very conception of ontological dualism is a necessary requirement for virtue. One must view the other as a soul trapped within a body in order to act towards the person in a virtuous way. For example, Weil writes:

Aimer le prochain comme soi-même implique qu'on lit en tout être humain la même combinaison de nature et de vocation surnaturelle. L'esprit dans une bouteille. La pensée enchaînée. Cette lecture va contre la pesanteur, est surnaturelle.¹⁰⁶

Weil defines man as a 'mind (pensée) tied to a body'¹⁰⁷ and says that in order to consider another human being as having a value in itself, we must see that person as a soul only, even their body.¹⁰⁸ This goes further than a disregard for the person's bodiliness and consists in an active exclusion of the body from the person itself. It seems that, for Weil, we cannot have any relationship to any body (including our own) which does not detract from the soul's relationship to God.

¹⁰⁵ CS, p. 189.

¹⁰⁶ CAH, II, p. 217. See also, p. 216: "la captivité de l'esprit dans la chair".

¹⁰⁷ See CAH, I, p. 235.

¹⁰⁸ See CAH, I, p. 40.

Considered as a tomb and a prison, the body is incapable of causing, even indirectly, the development of the soul. As being the very condition for our creation, as something to hide behind from God, the body represents the constant possibility for the continuation of this evil.

The body is, in this sense, actually a source of moral degradation for the soul. The body is a source of moral degradation in the way that narcotics are. Of course, the narcotics are not in themselves the cause of the degradation, but they are more than just an occasion.¹⁰⁹ Narcotics are a sort of 'sinister occasion' in that they effectively do provide the escape for which they are sought in the same way that the body does. Weil herself puts it like this:

Ces animaux sont très rusés pour se faire obéir du corps en faisant surgir des prétextes qui semblent ne pas venir d'eux. Pour être sûr que le corps leur désobéit, il faut s'imposer des choses inconditionnellement pour une longue durée ou répétées souvent. Car on peut être sûr que ces animaux, instables et capricieux, un jour n'en voudront pas. De sorte qu'en persévérant assez, on est sûr de finir par les contrarier.¹¹⁰

There is something evil in the way that the body and narcotics do so well what they are sought for — almost too well. Just as one does not hesitate to call for the eradication of narcotics, even though they are not bad in themselves, so too, Weil's writings seem to call for the very eradication of the body.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have approached Weil's thought solely from the anthropological point of view. This, as we saw, means that theological formulations of human nature and

¹⁰⁹ The notion of addiction plays a key role in, for example, Augustine's analysis of relationship of concupiscence between body and soul. Flesh is for Augustine a sort of habit of the soul towards the bodily in general. Addiction weighs down the soul. Recall also, *The Book of Wisdom*, 9:15.

¹¹⁰ CS, p. 191.

human perfection are reduced to a purely anthropological conception which puts the emphasis, in the discussion of dualism, upon the issue of ontological separateness between soul and body. In other words, we have looked at Weil's theory of spiritual perfection from the perspective of anthropology rather than looking at her anthropology from the perspective of her theory of spiritual development.

By putting the emphasis on the anthropological perspective in Weil's writings, we were able to present her thought as being strongly anthropologically dualistic. In turn, this construal of Weil as a strong anthropological dualist led us to develop a picture of Weil's theory of spiritual development that was totally hostile towards the body and which placed all the importance upon the soul.

Weil certainly began her intellectual career with anthropologically dualist assumptions, and she continued to use the language of anthropological dualism throughout her life. However, in Section II, we shall show that, in fact, Weil was not an anthropological dualist and that the portrayal of her theory of spiritual perfection in this chapter is incomplete. We will do this by looking at her anthropology from within the context of her theory of spiritual development. This will be accomplished by applying the notions of spiritual dualism and spiritual monism that will be introduced in the following chapter on Weil's theory of human perfection.

This misconstrual of Weil's anthropology and theory of spiritual development serves to introduce the notion of spiritual dualism that will be presented in the next chapter because spiritual dualism shares these characteristics of an emphasis on the soul and an hostility towards the body.

This chapter has also provided an illustration of the link between a dualistic anthropology and a spiritually dualistic understanding of human perfection. This will be further illustrated by other historical examples in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III : Spiritual Dualism

The purpose of this chapter is to define spiritual dualism and to show, through historical cases, how an examination of theories of spiritual perfection can bring out the connection between anthropological dualism and a negative valuation of human material existence.

In the first chapter of Section I, we saw that it is possible to investigate an author's philosophy in a way that is limited to the sphere of anthropology. This sort of limited investigation, that passes over the issue of the operational independence of the body and the soul, passes over the issue of what is at the basis of the anthropological conception, and crucially, the connection between anthropological formulations and an attitude towards matter or material existence.¹¹¹

Where the ultimate good of man is at issue, the theme of operational independence takes on a connotation of value that is not present at the level of anthropological analysis (where the issue of ontological separation carries no inherent value judgment). In other words, even in the context of man's ultimate good, the affirmation of an ontological separateness of body and soul does not necessarily imply that either one is better than the other. One could say, for example, that it is simply due to the immaterial nature of the soul that it is more closely related to the divine than the body.

¹¹¹ Recall from note 58 above that operational independence implies that the soul and the body are ontologically separate but operationally united. What is crucial, though, is that the operational unity of body and soul is limited to this life and activities that physical existence makes necessary. The issues of independent destiny and kinship for body and soul indicate that after death the soul will engage in only its 'proper', purely spiritual operations, rather than as in this life (where the soul also operates in conjunction with the body). The body's destiny and kinship are for Augustine at best ambiguous, and for Plato they are non-existent.

But, within the context of the ultimate good of man, the operational independence becomes related to theological themes that carry with them inherent value judgments, like those of the respective destinies and affinities of the soul and body. Thus, with reference to the above example, when being related to the divine is the very best situation for a created thing, one is led to conclude that the soul is better (in an ontological sense) than the body since it is able to be more closely related to the divine (even if this is due solely to its nature and not to merit). And further, one is justified in putting the needs of the soul above those of the body because the soul is able to achieve an objectively higher end than the body.

With respect to the theme of the independence of the soul in achieving some end, the question is not simply one of being able to accomplish some end either using or not using some means. Given that the independence of the soul implies not only that the soul contains on its own what is required but, also, that the body contains none of the good that is required (and in fact is seen as an hindrance to the operation of turning towards God), the body is not just useless to the soul but, in fact, less good relative to the end in question. However, because the end in question is the good itself (which is the end aimed at in spiritual development), the body is less good and the soul more good in an absolute sense. Within the context of spiritual development, the value hierarchy is intrinsic to the analysis itself.

Thus the type of dualism that pertains to the theological context and deals with issues of independence which involve an inherent value hierarchy and which seems to fall outside the purely anthropological definition of dualism requires its own definition. As I have not found such a definition anywhere in the literature on the subject, I will offer my own. Let us call this type of dualism 'spiritual dualism'. Moreover, let us say that spiritual dualism is that conception of spiritual development as a movement of the soul towards its supreme good that is in spite of, away from, and to some extent against the body.

This formulation of the notion of spiritual dualism is derived from the

anthropological conception of the body as a tool for the soul. As a tool, the body is unable to act on the soul in a way that makes the soul better. When this analogy is carried over into the theological realm, we can see that the body cannot act on the soul to raise it in any way, because what is more perfect cannot receive perfection from what is less perfect. What is higher cannot use what is lower to achieve what is higher than itself. In order to rise, the soul requires something even higher than itself. The soul can only use what is lower to achieve ends that are lower than, or equal to, itself.

Thus, basic to spiritual dualism is the claim that it is only the soul that has a supernatural destiny and that the soul is intrinsically better than the body, since the supernatural destiny depends upon the intrinsic spiritual affinity of the soul and constitutes the supreme good of man.

The sense in which spiritual development is in spite of the body lies in the consideration that, if the soul depended in any way on the body for religious development, it could not succeed. Spiritual development is an independent operation of the soul.

Spiritual dualism implies, furthermore, not only that the body possesses nothing that is necessary for spiritual development, but that it also presents a hindrance for that development. The sense in which the body is a hindrance upon the soul is that for the soul to acquire spiritual goodness, it must direct its aims away from the body because bodily attachment, if not bad in itself, is bad with reference to spiritual gains. It is in this sense that spiritual dualism implies that spiritual development is a movement of the soul away from the body.

Moreover, spiritual dualism to some extent involves a movement of the soul that is against the body. Here the sense of the soul being against the body stems from the observation that the body is so much a hindrance that the soul cannot just move away from it effectively. It cannot do so because of its close association with the body which is itself due to the soul's situation of being incarnate. Therefore the soul, due to its own weakness, imposes constraints upon the body to limit the ability of the soul to use the

body in ways that constitute a temptation for itself.

The nature of spiritual dualism requires that an inquiry into the presence of spiritual dualism in some particular author must go beyond simple formulations of anthropological dualism. Although such an inquiry must go beyond an anthropological analysis, it nevertheless cannot be entirely separated from the anthropological context. Spiritual dualism is not a metaphysical theory or conceptual position, but an attitude that needs to be linked to the anthropological context in which it might occur. As R. Bultot says:

Le mépris du monde que professe un auteur ne peut se définir à priori à partir des concepts néotestamentaires ni sur la base de quelques citations scripturaires rencontrées dans son oeuvre et considérées isolément. La signification et la portée véritables de cette doctrine n'apparaissent que compte tenu de l'anthropologie qui la sous-tend, des jugements de valeur particuliers sur les différentes réalités terrestres, ainsi que des jugements généraux portés sur celles-ci et sur la condition actuelle de l'humanité.¹¹²

Simone Pétrement gives a theory of dualism that helps determine what formulations, besides those of anthropological dualism, are relevant to an investigation of spiritual dualism.¹¹³ Although we cannot address the issue, Simone Pétrement argues that all dualism (not simply anthropological dualism) involves a more complex structure than that of a simple positing of two distinct and irreducible principles. Her argument is that any dualism (positing of distinct principles) can be traced back first to a metaphysical belief in a transcendent reality that is unknowable or mysterious and then, secondly, to a conception of human existence which involves the necessity of a passage or transformation, i.e., that there is something inadequate with the natural condition:

comme un éveil ou une libération, comme un passage à une connaissance

¹¹² R. Bultot, Dialogus De mundi contemptus vel amore, (Louvain: Éditions Nauwelaerts, 1966), p. 28

¹¹³ Simone Pétrement, Le dualisme chez Platon, les Gnostiques et les Manichéens, (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1947).

plus haute, à une vue plus étendue.¹¹⁴

Thus an anthropological dualism between body and soul is an aspect or image of the dualism between the world and the transcendent reality, in that the soul is distinguished from the body only on the grounds of a kinship to that transcendent realm which the body does not share.

To understand the anthropological dualism of an author we must keep it within the context of the larger dualism between this existence and a transcendent reality, keeping in mind always the fundamental question: what is it about man's physical existence, according to the author, that makes it inadequate? We will look at how Plato's answer to this question set the context for Augustine's anthropological doctrine and influenced the monastic tradition.

Plato

Since Plato's anthropological dualism was so influential, it will be useful to investigate Plato's reasons for thinking that this natural life is flawed. For, chances are that he was influential in this aspect also. Given the textual uncertainty surrounding the question of anthropological dualism in Plato's writings,¹¹⁵ Pétrement suggests that we are

¹¹⁴ Pétrement, Le dualisme chez Platon, les Gnostiques et les Manichéens, p. 5. Pétrement, however, failed to see that a conception of human existence which involves the necessity of a passage or transformation will only stem from the assumption that there is something inadequate with the natural condition in cases of spiritual dualism.

¹¹⁵ It is entirely debatable whether Plato is, strictly speaking, a dualist. Simone Pétrement (p. 11) points out that it is certain that Plato held that matter in no way issues from the divine, indicating that it is irreducibly distinct from what does come from the divine (cf. Republic, 379^b, 379^c, 380^c, for highly ambiguous statements that god is not the cause of all things). But it is not certain whether he regarded matter as a positive reality, or simply as non-being. Pétrement grants that matter is for Plato non-being but she says that he also, or at different times, conceived of non-being as somehow or in some sense real. Of Plato's immediate followers, Speusippus was not a dualist and Xenocrates was. Aristotle (Metaphysics, N, 1087^b5) claimed that Plato held a fundamental dualism between matter and the One. Aristotle also claims (Metaphysics, A, 988^a10) that Plato associated one contrary with the Good and the other with Evil. Aristotle might

more likely to find the essence of Plato's dualism in his conception of man or soul as being between two worlds.¹¹⁶ It is this aspect which is the source of anthropological dualism in Plato's thought and in our philosophical tradition.

At the root of Plato's discomfort with natural existence is his negative attitude towards matter. For example, if we look at Theaetetus 176^{a-b} Plato writes:

Evils, Theodorus, can never be done away with, for the good must always have its contrary; nor have they any place in the divine world, but they must needs haunt this region of our mortal nature. That is why we should make all speed to take flight from this world to the other, and that means becoming like the divine so far as we can [...]¹¹⁷

And in the Republic necessity is contrasted with the good:

[...] knowing nothing in reality about which of these opinions and desires is honorable or base, good or evil, just or unjust, but should apply all these terms to the judgments of the great beast, calling the things that please it good, and the things that vexed it bad, having no other account to render of them, but should call what is necessary just and honorable, never having observed how great is the real difference between the necessary and the

have gotten this from Plato's Laws, X , 896^e (p. 1452): "And is this done by one single soul, or by more than one? I will answer for both of you. By more than one. At least we will assume not fewer than two, one beneficent, the other capable of the contrary effect." See also, Laws, IV, 709^b, where Plato, suggesting that God is not the only absolute force in the universe, says that God alone governs the all, and with him chance and circumstance; and Laws, IV, 715^e-716^a, where Plato says, monistically, that God is the beginning, end and middle of all that is. Plato also denies the possibility of an evil god in Statesman, 270^a but, in Theaetetus, 176^a says that there must be some contrary to the good. Despite this textual support, I must agree with Claude Tresmontant, (p. 103), that: "Du point de vue platonicien, ce qui est séparé est, nécessairement, bon. Un être pur de tout contact avec le sensible serait par nature bon. L'idée qu'il puisse y avoir des anges mauvais est, dans un système platonicien, un non-sens." By the second century AD the platonic school was thoroughly dualistic (cf. Pétremont, p. 12), with Plutarch, Atticus and Numénius of Apamée all taking up the idea of an evil soul in matter. But, by the third century, dualism was seen by the academy as a barbaric doctrine and Plato was seen as having held there to be only one true reality.

¹¹⁶ Pétremont, p. 22.

¹¹⁷ Theaetetus, 176^{a-b} (pp. 880-881).

good [...]¹¹⁸

Further, in this passage from the Statesman, matter, or what is bodily in general, is seen as resistant or an impediment to the good, in the same way that necessity is:

At first it [the universe] remembered his instructions more clearly, but as time went on its recollection grew dim. The bodily element in its construction was responsible for its failure. This bodily factor belonged to it in its most primeval condition, for before it came into its present order as a universe it was an utter chaos of disorder. It is from god's act when he set it in its order that it has received all the virtues it possesses, while it is from its primal chaotic condition that all the wrongs and evils arise in it — evils which it engenders in turn in the living creatures within it.¹¹⁹

Pétrément shows that for Plato matter is not only irreducibly other than god (Timaeus, 51^d-53^c), but that it implies the absence of god or the good. Matter is, in short, the principle of evil, but Pétrément is careful to distinguish the principle of evil as the cause or source of evil from being itself evil.¹²⁰

Plato's negative attitude indicates a deep abhorrence for the material aspects of human existence.¹²¹ At any rate, it is the material aspect of our natural existence that drove him to envisage another, better, life. The fact that in this life the eye of the soul is

¹¹⁸ Plato, Statesman, 493^c. Also Symposium, 197^b: "in the beginning there were many strange and terrible happenings among them, because Necessity was king [...]" At Cratylus, 400^d Plato defines necessity as what is contrary to our will and as such the source of error and ignorance. Pétrément (p. 40) explains that in the Timaeus the causes which produce the world are divided into necessary causes and divine causes. The imperfection of certain divine work is explained by the fact that necessity is not capable of causing greater perfection (cf. 75^{a-b}). Necessity in opposition to the good mixes with it to give rise to the world (cf. 47^e-48^a).

¹¹⁹ Plato, Statesman, 273^{a-d}.

¹²⁰ See Pétrément, p. 42. That matter is for Plato the cause of evil can be shown from Phaedo, 66^b-67^b and Republic, 611^b-612^a.

¹²¹ While Plato might not have been abhorrent to all aspects of human existence he was nevertheless abhorrent to all material aspects of human existence. There are elements even in the Phaedrus (250^c, for example) and the Symposium (for example, the beauty of material objects being not actually good but useful in escaping this world, or the fact that Socrates is portrayed as being unaffected by wine which hints at his otherworldliness) to support this.

"lost and blind",¹²² "sunk in the barbaric slough"¹²³ indicates that the soul is in this life separated from its proper nature, and that it belongs in another world.¹²⁴ As Pétrement aptly says:

Le sentiment d'une différence infinie est peut être le sentiment fondamental de l'attitude dualiste. C'est le sentiment que la vérité, par rapport à la vie ordinaire, est autre et par là divine.¹²⁵

According to Plato, death is a release and a relief for the soul.¹²⁶ It is the oppressive, abhorrent and evil nature of matter that makes the body a prison or tomb for the soul and urges the soul to flee as fast as possible from this bodily life.¹²⁷ According to Courcelle, this metaphor has:

une tradition d'origine orphique repensée successivement par les Pythagoriciens, par Platon et Xénocrate, par les Stoïciens, le moyen-platonisme et le néo-platonisme (et les écoles gnostique et manichéenne). La prison de l'âme est soit le corps, les plaisirs sensuels ou les passions,

¹²² Plato, Republic, 527^e.

¹²³ Plato, Republic, 533^d.

¹²⁴ Pétrement, p. 50. See also Phaedo, 80^b: "The soul is most like that which is divine, immortal, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble, and even self-consistent and invariable, whereas body is most like that which is human, mortal, multiform, unintelligible, dissoluble, and never self-consistent." Plato refers in various ways to the realm above: Republic, 509^d: "the intelligible order and region"; 526^e: "to the region where dwells..."; 527^b: "directed upward"; Phaedo, 80^d: "to a place that is, like itself, glorious, pure, and invisible"; 114^b: "upward to their pure abode."

¹²⁵ Pétrement, p. 125.

¹²⁶ Plato, Laws, 828^d: "for union of soul with body, as I would assure you in all earnest, is in no way better than dissolution."

¹²⁷ Plato, Phaedrus, 250^c: "and pure were we, without taint of that prison house which now we are encompassed withal, and call a body, fast bound therein as an oyster in its shell."; Gorgias, 493^a: "And perhaps we are actually dead, for I once heard one of our wise men say that we are now dead, and that our body is a tomb, and that that part of the soul in which dwell the desires is of a nature to be swayed and to shift to and fro."; Cratylus, 400^c; Theaetetus, 176^{a-b}; Phaedo, 80^e (p. 64): "will it, if its very nature is such as I have described, be dispersed and destroyed at the moment of its release from the body, as is the popular view? Far from it, my dear Simmias and Cebes. The truth is much more like this. If at its release the soul is pure and carries with it no contamination of the body, because it has never willingly associated with it in this life, but has shunned it and kept itself separate as its regular practice [...]"

soit le monde matériel ou les biens de Fortune, soit les Enfers. La métaphore prend place dans la tradition chrétienne: elle y est admise jusqu'au temps de Prudence et saint Ambroise. Mais la controverse origéniste donne conscience d'un antagonisme entre le vieux mythe orphique relatif aux Titans et l'histoire judéo-chrétienne du péché d'Adam. Pourtant la métaphore reste vivante au Moyen Age, où les auteurs ecclésiastiques l'entendent uniquement au sens moral et ascétique.¹²⁸

It is worth quoting one passage from Phaedo at length because it sums up well Plato's antagonistic and hostile attitude towards the body. The intensity of Plato's hatred of the body indicates that his anthropological dualism developed out of his attitude towards the body rather than the other way around:

So long as we keep to the body and our soul is contaminated with this imperfection, there is no chance of our ever attaining satisfactorily to our object, which we assert to be truth. In the first place, the body provides us with innumerable distractions in the pursuit of our necessary sustenance, and any diseases which attack us hinder our quest for reality. Besides, the body fills us with loves and desires and fears and all sorts of fancies and a great deal of nonsense, with the result that we literally never get an opportunity to think at all about anything. Wars and revolutions and battles are due simply and solely to the body and its desires. [...] We are in fact convinced that if we are ever to have pure knowledge of anything, we must get rid of the body and contemplate things by themselves with the soul by itself. It seems, to judge from this argument, that the wisdom which we desire and upon which we profess to have set our hearts will be attainable only when we are dead, and not in our lifetime. If no pure knowledge is possible in the company of the body, then either it is totally impossible to acquire knowledge, or it is only possible after death, because it is only then that the soul will be separate and independent of the body. It seems that so long as we are alive, we shall continue closest to knowledge if we avoid as much as we can all contact and association with the body, except when absolutely necessary, and instead of allowing ourselves to become infected with its nature, purify ourselves from it until God himself gives us deliverance.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Courcelle, p. 406. See also, by the same author, "Le corps-tombeau", Revue des études Anciennes LXVIII (1966), pp. 101-122.

¹²⁹ Plato, Phaedo, 66^b-67^b.

Augustine

We have looked, in the first chapter, at Augustine's writings on anthropology and have analyzed them from the point of view of anthropology, focusing on the theme of separateness. However, the full significance of his anthropological dualism will only become apparent when we look at Augustine's conception of anthropological dualism within the context of his writings on spiritual development. Within that context the same formulations of man's nature can be analyzed from the perspective of the theological 'drama' of salvation, which emphasizes the independence of the body and soul.

In the theological context, independence of body and soul refers to their divergent destinies and different affinities, spiritual or worldly. The intrinsic spiritual affinity of the soul is based on its higher perfection (potential or actual) and its natural superiority over the body in its operations. This superiority is based on the analogy of the body as a tool, as referred to above and as E. Gilson writes concerning Augustine: "Pour lui, comme pour Plotin, le rapport de ces deux substances est un rapport d'ouvrier à outil [...]"¹³⁰

At the basis of Augustine's anthropological dualism is the negative attitude towards matter that he inherited from Plato. Augustine may have been more directly influenced by Ambrose, in whose opinion one ought to fly from temporal things and ascend to the eternal and invisible realm or, in other words, shun the things of sense.¹³¹ Augustine himself says much the same:

Recognize in thyself something within, within thyself. Leave thou abroad both thy clothing and thy flesh; descend into thyself; go to thy secret chamber, thy mind [...] For not in the body but in the mind was man made

¹³⁰ Gilson, Introduction a l'étude de saint Augustin, p. 74.

¹³¹ Ambrose, Isaac or On the Soul, tr. Michael P. McHugh, The Fathers of the Church, vol.65 (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1972), 3.6 (p. 14): "Moreover the perfect soul turns away from matter [...] It is attentive to things divine but shuns earthly matter." See also, Margaret R. Miles, Augustine on the Body, AAR Dissertation Series 31, (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1979), p. 20.

in the image of God.¹³²

Let [the mind], if it can, raise itself for a little above the body and above those things which it is wont to perceive through the bodily senses and let it contemplate what that is which uses the body as its instrument.¹³³

[...] by degrees I passed from bodies to the soul.¹³⁴

Despite Augustine's negative attitude towards the body, there was one way that he differed from Plato: in his metaphysical position. Augustine makes the unconscious distinction between metaphysical reality and existential fact, according to which the body is at one and the same time a creature of God and, nonetheless, the enemy of the soul. Metaphysically, the body is real and good in its own right, but experientially it is fallen in nature.¹³⁵ Thus, for Augustine, although technically the bad influence of the body is due to the soul's own weakness (and ultimately one can hope that the tension will be eased once the soul is clothed by a spiritual, glorified body), it was nevertheless justifiable to hold that, in this state of our terrestrial existence, what is according to the body is contrary

¹³² Augustine, Tractates on the Gospel of John, XXIII, 10.

¹³³ Augustine, Letters: vol.III (131-164), tr. Sister Wilfrid Parsons, The Fathers of the Church, vol.20 (New York: The Fathers of the Church, 1953), letter 137, 2.5.

¹³⁴ Augustine, Confessions, VII.17.

¹³⁵ It is important to remember that, for Augustine, although man's fall was a fall of the soul, it affected not only man's body but all of the physical creation. There were, in effect, two created worlds, one before the fall and the other after the fall. Augustine, City of God: XVII-XXII, XXI, 8 (p. 358): "For, this very human flesh that was so constituted by its nature before the fall that it could never suffer death has been so differently constituted since the fall that, as things now are, it must suffer death. This is its nature as we know it now. It is stricken with mortality. We may argue, therefore, that in the resurrection it will once more be differently constituted from what it is now."; See also, Ibid., XX, 16 (p. 291): "This conflagration will utterly burn away the corruptible characteristics proper to corruptible bodies, as such; whereupon our substance will possess only those qualities which are consistent with bodies immortalized in the marvelous transformation - to this end, that the world, remade into some better, will become fit for men now remade, even in their bodies, into something better."; City of God: VIII-XVI, XIV, 3 (p. 351): "On the one hand, our corruptible body may be a burden on our soul; on the other hand, the cause of this encumbrance is not in the nature and substance of the body, and, therefore, aware as we are of its corruption, we do not desire to be divested of the body but rather to be clothed with its immortality."

to the nature of the soul and, by implication, to the ultimate good of man"¹³⁶

There is one very important difference between Augustine and Plato which eventually separated the neo-platonic school of Plotinus (and its Christian successor the pseudo-Dionysius) from the monastic tradition that dominated the Christian scene and which, for the most part, was defined by Augustine. This difference has to do with the way in which Augustine envisaged the life of spiritual development. We can say that Augustine gradually moved from conceiving spiritual development as a steady ascent of the soul or intellect, living and abiding more and more in 'that realm above', to conceiving spiritual development as a hopeless struggle against the force of habit.

The struggle against the force of habit is hopeless because it is rooted in precisely our fallen state of nature. With the help of grace, one can keep oneself from falling even further into sin by resisting the force of habit but, no matter what 'good' things one does while under Grace, one cannot move even one inch towards goodness. Grace does not make one good in the sense of a change in one's inner nature. The natural tendency towards concupiscence is not even eliminated by Grace. For, Grace does not restore man's nature to its pre-fall condition but only serves to suspend the effects of man's fallen state in the sense that if grace were taken away from someone, he or she would revert to his or her fallen state without undergoing another actual fall.

For Plato, one could indeed direct one's love towards something bodily but, for Plato, love did not have the 'sticky' quality that it had for Augustine. For Plato, there is no fatalité to this love, one could stop with a great deal of effort. Because the task is finite the effort needed is finite. For Augustine, however, the bodily direction of love becomes an insurmountable addiction, stemming from the very nature of man's fallen state.

Augustine writes in his Confessions:

And sometimes you allow me to experience a feeling quite unlike my

¹³⁶ Miles, Augustine on the Body, p. 87.

normal state, an inward sense of delight which, if it were to reach perfection in me, would be something not encountered in this life, though what it is I cannot tell. But my heavy burden of distress drags me down again to earth. Again I become prey to my old habits, which hold me fast. My tears flow, but still I am held fast. Such is the price we pay for the burden of custom!¹³⁷

Augustine slowly came to feel that this habit of the world was simply unshakable in this life. Peter Brown describes the shift towards this pessimism with reference to Augustine's appreciation of Paul. Augustine had at first seen Paul as a sort of Platonist, who was describing a life of ascent to the divine that was achievable in a perfect life of pure contemplation. But as his own experience developed, he came to see in Paul's writing only the unresolvable discord between flesh and spirit.¹³⁸ Or, as Miles puts it:

It is no longer for Augustine a simple matter, however difficult in practice, of removing one's attention from the valueless objects of the life of sensation and of identification with eternal spiritual truth; the spiritual life itself is a process, intimately related to the process of time, and weaving through time in brief flashes of vision and insight, but never, in this life, to be free of consuetudo carnalis, the danger of losing itself in sensation.¹³⁹

There is not much place in Augustine's thought for asceticism. A very particular attitude towards man's physical nature results from the union of Augustine's view of body and soul and his sense of being trapped in the world by addiction. The soul cannot help but interact with the body, but the body can but hinder the soul. There is no redeeming aspect to the relationship of body and soul wherein the body serves to ease the addiction that holds the soul captive. Thus the best practical strategy is to arrange one's living conditions such that the harmful aspects of the soul's interaction with the body are minimized, while maximizing those areas of activity that best emulate the purely spiritual operations that the soul will engaged in when it no longer has to operate in bodily ways.

¹³⁷ Augustine, Confessions, X, 40.

¹³⁸ Peter Brown, Augustine of Hippo, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 151.

¹³⁹ Miles, p. 35.

To this end, monastic life incorporated the satisfaction of bodily needs, like eating, into the official daily routine by regulating even the minutest detail of that process. This incorporation of the fulfillment of bodily needs into the sphere of regulated activity was balanced with purely spiritual exercises of meditation on biblical phrases, for the overall desired effect of creating an external situation that forced the soul from the outside into the perfect life that it was not strong enough to achieve on its own.

We have seen that according to Augustine, the fallen state of the soul was mirrored in nature. When the will became disobedient to reason, nature also lost its obedience to the rational order of creation. Thus the austerity of the monastic life was actually meant to eliminate from the life of the monk or nun, in effect, all aspects of this disobedience and chaos from the body (as part of the natural order) that are the result of the fall. This sense of austerity tries to make the body into something spiritual by eliminating the unruliness of the body's natural sensibilities and desires. As Augustine himself says:

What is soundness of body? It is to be insensible to nothing. [...] Therefore, not to be devoid of sensation like a stone or a tree or a corpse, but to live in the body without being sensible of its weight — this is to be sound in body.¹⁴⁰

But, surely, when it is a question of morals — when we ask what kind of life we must lead in order to attain happiness — the commandments are not for the body, and we are not concerned with bodily discipline. In a word, good morals pertain to that part of us which inquires and learns, and these are acts of the soul. Therefore, when we are dealing with the attainment of virtue, the question is not one which concerns the body.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Augustine, Sermones, (Migne, J.P. Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Latina. Vols. 38-39. Paris, 1844-1864), CCLXXVII, 5-6 [translation is from Miles, Augustine on the body, p. 39. See also, p. 9.]. In other words, the soundness of body consists in the soul living in a body in such a way that the soul does not feel the need for a body.

¹⁴¹ Augustine, Catholic and Manichaean ways of Life, 5.8.

Augustine's position is straightforward: the good of the body is the soul¹⁴² and the good of the soul is virtue or, in other words, the proper love of God.¹⁴³ Because of Augustine's negative attitude towards the body, he does not envisage for it any good of its own. There is no way in which one can be virtuous in body or love God in a bodily way. Augustine draws this sharp contrast between having a body and serving God in the very first lines of his Confessions:

To praise Thee is the wish of man who is but a part of Thy Creation, man who carries about with him his own mortality, who carries about the evidence of his sin and the evidence 'that Thou resisteth the proud'. And yet, to praise Thee is the wish of man who is but a part of Thy creation. Thou dost bestir him so that he takes delight in praising Thee: for Thou hast made us for Thee and our heart is unquiet till it finds its rest in Thee.¹⁴⁴

For Augustine, then, there is no place for the body in the soul's spiritual development. Does this mean, then, that there is no place in Augustine's theory of spiritual development for asceticism? Although the austerity of the monastic life, as envisioned by Augustine, was ascetic in a certain sense, it was actually antithetical to an asceticism which attempts to use bodily suffering to somehow help the soul. In effect, the Augustinian sort of austerity attempts only to eliminate or neutralize the body and does not attempt to use the body or suffering as a means in any way.

¹⁴² Augustine, Catholic and Manichaeae ways of Life, 5.7.

¹⁴³ Augustine, Catholic and Manichaeae ways of Life, 15.25. See also, City of God, book XIX, I (pp. 187-188): "The reason for this is that no one has any right to philosophize except with a view to happiness. Now, what makes a man happy is the supreme good. Hence, there is no reason for philosophizing apart from the supreme good." There is thus a clear sense that, for Augustine, man had no proper good. Man's good was 'the good' and 'the good' was outside of man's nature (and outside of the material realm).

¹⁴⁴ Augustine, Confessions, trans. by Vernon J. Bourke, in The Fathers of the Church, vol. 21 (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1953), pp. 3-4.

The sense of being trapped in an addictive relationship to this world served as the basic inspiration for monastic theology, which lasted from roughly the time of Augustine to the rise of Scholasticism.¹⁴⁶ The principles of monastic theology reflected the wisdom that any addict knows: one can abstain and do what is possible to keep the object of addiction out of one's mind, but one is never free of that addiction. The life of the monk, as envisioned in monastic theology, was an ongoing attempt to keep the object of

¹⁴⁵ The monastic period can be seen as starting in Egypt around 250 AD with Anthony the Great in lower Egypt and with Pachomius in upper Egypt. These were followed soon after by monastic thinkers like Basil (d.379), Jerome (d.420), Augustine (d. 430) and, of course, St. Benedict. The tradition continued in the Eastern and Western Churches until the rise of scholasticism (and the rise of cities and universities).

¹⁴⁶ Of course, I do not wish to imply that every individual monk embraced the ideals of monastic theology nor do I wish to suggest that monasteries had no other animating principles than those of monastic theology. Further, I do not wish to suggest that medieval culture was characterized by an attitude of contempt for the world but, rather, that an attitude of contempt for the world is characteristic of monastic theology and thus my claims about the attitude of contempt for the world are restricted to the monastic context of theories of spiritual development. M. D. Chenu, in his Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century [tr. by J. Taylor and L. K. Little (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968)], gives examples of how individual monks in the twelfth century developed interests that fell outside of those traditionally condoned by the ideals of monastic theology and also examples of how monasteries themselves took on more 'worldly' social functions. Chenu points out [p. 5] that in the twelfth century there was a type of 'renaissance' due to the 'discovery' of nature as an "external, present, intelligible, and active reality [...]" Although this interest in the study of nature was perhaps a factor which influenced the development of the scholastic period, this is probably not so much due to the study of nature becoming scholastic theology but, rather, that the study of nature demonstrated that a rational, philosophically and theologically justifiable doctrine was possible which nevertheless took its inspiration from something totally other than the principles of monastic theology [cf. Chenu, p. 48]. Chenu [p. 26] quotes and discusses Alan of Lille [Contra haereticos, i.14 (PL, CCX, 319)]: " 'For it was fitting,' says Alan of Lille in answering the question why man was created, ' that corporeal as well as incorporeal nature should come to participate in the divine goodness, should relish that goodness, and live in joy.' It comes as no surprise that Honorius of Autum was the proponent of this naturalistic thesis as against one of the spiritualist themes of monastic theology." Thus while Chenu demonstrates very well that the principles of monastic theology did not determine every avenue of thought within monastic life he nevertheless points out also that the more humanistic elements were seen as being contrary to the principles of monastic theology. For example he says [Chenu, p. 48]: "Thus we see that without any weakening of the contempt for the world exercised at Cîteaux or of the monastic theology that supported it [...] the twelfth century featured an essentially religious discovery of the universe through a discovery of Nature [...]"

addiction out of their lives in order to keep it out of their minds, but seeing as how the object in their case was the world itself, there was also built into the tradition of monastic theology a sort of pessimism, i.e., the expectation of failure and the condemnation of man as intrinsically weak and sinful. Typically the addict will despise the object of addiction. But in the face of failure and submission, there develops also a loathing of oneself.

This sort of asceticism, according to which the body can perhaps indirectly be a negative factor but can have no positive significance in spiritual development, is traditionally called *contemptus mundi*. This term roughly applies to the monastic theology that flourished across the Christian world from the times of Augustine to the rise of scholasticism, remaining as a residual attitude when monastic theology began to wane.

Monastic theology, at least to a certain extent, had as one of its aims the ideal of living as much as possible in a quasi-angelic state of bodylessness.¹⁴⁷ *Contemptus mundi* is the attitude behind this goal. *Contemptus mundi* implied an attitude of disdain of everything 'worldly', of everything having to do with the limitations, compromises and weaknesses of physical existence. Within the framework of this attitude reality can be seen as being schematized according to a strict hierarchy of up and down, heaven and earth, soul and body.¹⁴⁸ The attitude of *contemptus mundi* supported the ideal of monastic theology that one ought to flee this world and get oneself as fast as possible to heaven.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ See, for example, Peter Damien, *Sermon IV*, (PL, vol. 144), 523 A: "[...] egregius confessor deposito terreni corporis pondere liber ascendit in coelum [...] recedendo Severus de mundo ad angelicam proventus est dignitatem".

¹⁴⁸ For a discussion of this see R. Bultot's "La 'dignité de l'homme' selon s. Pierre Damien," (*Studi Medievali*, series 3^a, XIII ii, 1972, pp. 941-966), p. 951: "l'âme venant d'en haut et le corps d'en bas, selon un schéma de type orphique et pythagoricien qui connut d'amples développements dans le platonisme et le gnosticisme, et fut une tentation permanente de beaucoup de Pères de l'Eglise. Il n'est pas rare qu'il perde un peu de vue le dogme de la résurrection finale et se montre davantage séduit par l'état intermédiaire d'incorporité des âmes: le corps terrestre est un fardeau, la mort en délivre l'âme et lui permet ainsi de quitter le monde pour être, dans les cieux, promue à la dignité angélique." Bultot is used in this section on Monasticism because he has focused specifically on the topic of *contemptus mundi*.

¹⁴⁹ This was, of course, not the only ideal of monastic life, nor was it held as strongly by all as by some. But for one example of an expression of this ideal see Bultot's "Les philosophes du

It is interesting to note that the resurrected body, as conceived of by monastic theologians, is transformed not so that it is made susceptible to an enjoyment of God but, rather, made fully neutral and invisible, offering absolutely no resistance to the will, as if it were not there at all. Bultot describes the monastic theological conception of the resurrected body thus:

Pour recouvrer sa dignité première et réaliser la destinée à laquelle il est appelé dans le Royaume des cieux, l'homme doit mépriser le monde. S'il désire "être, dans sa partie, paré des titres de la dignité angélique", "participer à la gloire de la dignité angélique", il doit "dans l'exil, renoncer aux dignités humaines, et renoncer à se rouler dans la fange de la volupté terrestre". A ce prix, il sera, après la résurrection, accueilli dans la Jérusalem céleste. Là, la nature humaine, dépouillée des passions et de la corruption, la chair réconciliée avec l'esprit, retrouvera toute sa pureté originelle [...]¹⁵⁰

Although a theoretical or conceptual definition of *contemptus mundi* is perhaps impossible to give, one might characterize the *attitude of contemptus mundi* by its fundamental aspect. This basic character of *contemptus mundi* which mediates between the hierarchical structure of reality and the attempt to flee the world here below is the decision to choose the higher over the lower. One desires a movement, in oneself, towards being like or more like what is higher. But, what is crucial in grasping the flavor of the *contemptus mundi* attitude is that the choice is exclusive, in that the choice of the higher implies a rejection of the lower:

Le principat d'une plus sublime excellence que l'homme originel détient sur les autres êtres vivants sur la terre, consiste dans le discernement des réalités charnelles et des réalités spirituelles, des choses terrestres et des

paganisme, docteurs et exemples de *contemptus mundi* pour la morale médiévale," (*Studia Gratiana*, XIX, 1976, pp. 101-122). Bultot quotes (p. 116) from Peter Abelard [*Theol. christ.*, II, 64]: "La prudence consiste à mépriser, par la contemplation du divin, ce monde et tout ce qui se trouve dans le monde, et à diriger toute l'activité pensante de l'esprit sur les seules réalités divines; quant à la tempérance, c'est abandonner, autant que le permet la nature, tout ce que requièrent les besoins du corps."

¹⁵⁰ Bultot, "La 'dignité de l'homme' ...," p. 950.

Because of the bipolar nature of the hierarchy of reality, split into pairs of opposites (high/low, light/heavy, spirit/matter, light/dark, etc.) the upward movement is seen as a function of the ongoing rejection of what is lower. According to this framework, the practitioner would think that by consistently despising what is lower that he/she was actually moving upwards. The stronger one's hatred for what is lower, the greater one's love for what is above; the stronger one's rejection, the faster or higher one climbs.

Thus, the antagonism or clash between body and soul (for example) is not, for *contemptus mundi*, a theoretical postulate having to do with the nature of either soul or body but, rather, lies in the individual's attitude towards one or other contrary aspect of reality.

Another fundamental aspect of the attitude of *contemptus mundi* is that in this life we are exiles and everything which is a worldly condition of this existence, like food, is alien to our true nature.¹⁵² This is what constitutes the real disgust that the practitioner of *contemptus mundi* would have for a love of something worldly. It is an illicit and unnatural love because it is a love which has as its object something which falls outside the *ordained* domain. Love for the world takes as its object something outside the *natural* class of objects that is supposed to be *proper* to the one loving. In fact, it would be in accordance with the attitude of *contemptus mundi* to define sin as love for this life or any of its aspects or objects.

Even further, however, there seems to have been a conflation of not loving the world and holding it in contempt, to the extent that sin need not involve a positive love of life, but simply a failure to hate it sufficiently:

¹⁵¹ Bultot, "La 'dignité de l'homme' selon s. Pierre Damien", p. 954.

¹⁵² Bultot, "La *Chartula* et l'enseignement du mépris du monde dans les écoles et les universités médiévales", *Studi medievali*, series 3^a, VIII, ii (1967), p. 288.

Qu est-ce que le vice, sinon le fruit d'un attachement excessif et désordonné au monde, un fléchissement ou un abandon du mépris du monde qui est le devoir du chrétien et la condition de la sainteté?¹⁵³

The metaphysical assumption behind the general attitude of *contemptus mundi* is that the things in the world are transitory and changing and thus somehow inherently *defective*. And, crucially, the fact that things change means that they are without value in themselves and if they have no proper being in themselves, they could not be valued in themselves due to the absence of an "in themselves" to be the subject valued.¹⁵⁴

Thus things are changing because they cannot remain what they are as they are not truly or really anything. In other, Platonic terms, they cannot remain the same because they are not self-identical. They cannot simply be because they have no real being.¹⁵⁵ If there is no real sense in which some tree (for example) is, then there can be no *good* (or perfection) involved in simply being that tree. Because, according to the attitude of *contemptus mundi*, this world is a world of this and that particular thing, there can be no *good in this world itself*.

It follows that, although the world has no real being, it does have the appearance of being. The appearance we are presented with, of this world and the things in it, is a symptom of sin which is, at the same time, an ongoing source of deception because the

¹⁵³ Bultot, "La doctrine du mépris du monde chez Bernard le Clunisien," (*Le moyen age*, 2-3-4, 1964), p. 362. In the same article at p. 357, Bultot quotes Bernard of Cluny (cf. *DCM*, II, 453-454: *Foemina nutibus, artibus, actibus, impia suadet. Cogere crimina, totaque foemina vivere gaudet.*) to illustrate that for Bernard, one of the major failings of women is that they love life.

¹⁵⁴ Bultot, "La doctrine du mépris du monde chez Bernard le Clunisien", p. 364. Bultot quotes from Bernard, *De octo vitiis*, 6-10: "*Omnia labuntur que terrae conspiciuntur. \ Que bona cernuntur, modo sunt, cras eripiuntur, \ Immo nec modo sunt, que stare nec ad breue possunt. \ Dans modo uel modicum florem caro fenea siccum, \ Ut loquar expresse, non est quod cernitur esse.*"

¹⁵⁵ In scholastic/Aristotelian language (which, of course, was not at all the language of monastic theology), one might express this *contemptus mundi* belief that the things of this world are not real beings in the following way: the things of this world, including man, have no form of their own, but exist only through some distant relation to a transcendent form (of each type of thing) in that a thing's perfection lies in its own individual form.

appearance leads us to believe the thing is real when it is not. This deception (being evil) must be avoided and can only be avoided by the mortification of the senses.¹⁵⁶ We are trapped in a bodily situation that makes us vulnerable to this deception and so it follows that the attack against the false nature of the world is directed upon the body which chains us to this source of deception. There is, on the part of the body, a positive force which actively draws the soul into the world. Hunger opens up to the soul a world of food; sexual desire opens up a world of bodies to it.¹⁵⁷

The things of this world have no true being and, so too, man himself is not a real being.¹⁵⁸ There can be no perfection, no good in being a man, as man is in this life. Man must flee this world and even himself. To the extent that the monastic life was animated by the attitude of *contemptus mundi* it was an attempt to do the impossible: to live in the world in a way which was itself a flight from the world.

¹⁵⁶ We must remember that for the school of *contemptus mundi*, as for Augustine, we cannot eliminate sin, since the diseased will is a symptom of our fallen state. At best, with the help of Grace, we can control the effects of that diseased will.

¹⁵⁷ This is why medieval culture (that more often felt the necessity of food than sex) held sexual lust in more contempt than gluttony — it represented the ultimate form of worldliness: the desire of a soul for a body.

¹⁵⁸ Bultot, "La doctrine du mépris du monde ...," p. 368.

SECTION I : CONCLUSION

We have formulated a definition of spiritual dualism and, in a sense, traced the history of spiritual dualism through the history of our tradition of spiritual development, showing how, to varying extents, formulations of anthropological dualism remained related to negative valuations of human materiality.

I think that this first section successfully shows that from the point of view of anthropology, one could be tempted to conclude that Weil was a spiritual dualist as well as an anthropological dualist. I maintain, however, that the point of view of anthropology imposes an artificial constraint, which can be applied to Weil's writings only with a certain amount of violence. From the point of view of spiritual development, as will be shown in the following chapters, she is not an anthropological dualist nor a spiritual dualist.

When one starts from the point of view of spiritual development, it becomes apparent that Weil's conception of man's nature is much more complex than that revealed by the anthropological analysis. Because man's metaphysical reality consists in spiritual goodness, one cannot really understand his nature from a purely philosophical analysis restricted to anthropology.

One must look at man's spiritual struggle for the good to get a more complete philosophical understanding of what man is. The true nature of man reveals itself only in reference to this struggle, equally in man's success or failure therein, because the investigation of man's nature must start with man in his actual, worldly, situation: "On ne

peut pas percevoir la présence de Dieu dans un homme, mais seulement le reflet de cette lumière dans la manière dont il conçoit la vie terrestre."¹⁵⁹

In other words, Weil did not approach the question of anthropology by first defining 'soul' and 'body' on their own and then attempt bringing these together in her analysis of creation (of man). Soul and body are defined in terms of the good, and how it can be achieved by man.

Weil formulated her conception of human nature, at least to some extent, from considerations concerning the task of spiritual perfection. This implies that, at least in the case of Weil, an analysis of man's nature from the point of view of spiritual perfection leads one to a more complete understanding of human anthropology.

In accordance with the definition of spiritual dualism stipulated above, my task, in the following section, will be to show that Weil did not have a 'traditional' notion of spiritual development. She did not conceive of man's ultimate good as exclusively concerning the soul or as residing in the soul's salvation; rather, she conceived of man's goodness as depending upon the body and the world in a way that goes against the very assumptions involved in the 'tool' analogy that is at the very root of spiritual dualism.

¹⁵⁹ CS, p. 95.

SECTION II

Weil's Theory of Spiritual Development

In the preceding section I tried to show that by approaching certain passages of Simone Weil's writings from an anthropological perspective she could be seen to be, what I called, a 'spiritual dualist'. A definition of spiritual dualism was then formulated as the movement of the soul towards its own perfection that is in spite of, away from and to some extent against the body. Historical examples were given to illustrate that there is a negative attitude towards matter at the basis of spiritual dualism. It was the definition of spiritual dualism that provided the conceptual structure through which these fundamental attitudes towards matter were discussed. We can now see, for example, that there is a fundamentally negative attitude towards matter and/or the body which is at the basis of the tool analogy, which is, in turn, basic to anthropological dualism.

In this second section I will be concerned with showing that Simone Weil is not, in fact, a spiritual dualist. Accordingly, we will define spiritual development as man's movement towards his ultimate good. Whether, for Weil, it is a movement of the soul alone (and thus really only the soul's ultimate good)¹⁶⁰ is really what is at issue in the

¹⁶⁰ As is the case, for example, in Plato: "Are you not ashamed that you give your attention to acquiring as much money as possible, and similarly with reputation and honor, and give no attention or thought to truth and understanding and the perfection of your soul? [...] For I spend all my time going about trying to persuade you, young and old, to make your first and chief

question of spiritual dualism and so the question will be left open until conclusions can be drawn. Chapters IV-VI of this second section will concentrate on what takes place according to Weil's theory of spiritual development and will outline the conditions which make that development possible.

We will begin the analysis of Weil's writings in Chapter IV with the question of what is, for Weil, man's ultimate good, since it is vis-à-vis this end that spiritual development takes place. We will be concerned with showing that, for Weil, man's ultimate good is not exclusively a concern of the soul (i.e., having to do with the soul's salvation). Also, we will try to show that, for Weil, the process of spiritual development does not assume a belief in God that would make man's relationship with the divine exclusive to the soul, leaving no way of being good in a purely physical sense. In Chapter V, we will show how Weil's theory of spiritual development requires the renunciation of the soul to necessity and the subsequent destruction of the soul through an analysis of the role of the will and desire in spiritual development. After discussing how the renunciation of the soul to necessity involves grace, we will introduce the different ways that Weil envisaged the soul's consent to necessity and how this consent to necessity is still able to form a context of moral responsibility. Chapter VI explains how the destruction of the soul is at the same time the introduction of spirit, which spirit replaces the soul.

Chapters VII-IX of this second section will deal with the process through which spiritual development takes place. These chapters will show that, for Weil, man's ultimate

concern not for your bodies nor for your possessions, but for the highest welfare of your souls [...]" Socrates' Defense (Apology), 29^e-30^b (p. 16).

good is achieved primarily through the body in a sense that implies, along with whatever else, that it is the body itself which is perfected. It will be the aim of these chapters to explain how exactly the body and soul interact to achieve man's end, and to describe how the body itself has a positive role to play in desiring the good. We will then investigate the anthropological implications of Weil's theory of spiritual development, showing that her conception of moral perfection implies an anthropological monism. Through this analysis we will be better able to understand what 'man' refers when it is said that spiritual development is man's movement towards his ultimate end.

Although Weil was initially an anthropological dualist, her anthropological doctrine changed as she developed her theory of spiritual development. Not only does her theory of spiritual development call for a change from being an anthropological dualist to being an anthropological monist but, further, her theory of spiritual development calls for a corresponding real transformation in the developing person: from actually being a duality of body and soul to actually being a simple unity of matter and spirit. So, in a sense, she was neither an anthropological dualist nor an anthropological monist because she held that men are initially composed of body and soul but, as they develop spiritually, they undergo an actual transformation from that initial duality into a unity of matter and spirit. But in an important sense Weil can be called an anthropological monist since she associated anthropological monism with man's perfected state.

CHAPTER IV : Man's Ultimate Good

In her writings on spiritual development, Weil did not just describe the perfect state or the different stages involved in attaining perfection. She also placed a great deal of emphasis on the difficulties of spiritual development. She believed that, above all, the greatest difficulties that one had to face were those stemming from within oneself. She felt that there were parts of the person that would resist the movement of other parts towards the good and even produce deceptions to distort and sabotage any direct movement towards the good.

Weil's conception of the process of spiritual development takes into account that it is a difficult and complex process, full of pitfalls, traps and deceptions. It, therefore, requires an indirect movement and her theory of spiritual development involves, to a large extent, a strategy for navigating through the perilous waters of self-deception.

As a strategy, her theory of spiritual development does not focus on formulating absolute truths for people to believe, because such direct progress is not possible. Her theory of spiritual development deals, rather, with whether it is useful for a certain individual at a certain stage of development to believe a given absolute truth. Weil holds that there are some truths that are harmful to know in the wrong stage of the process. There are truths that one should know in one part of oneself, and yet kept hidden from other parts of oneself. The strategy must also take into account the needs of different

people:

Il y a des vérités qu'il ne faut pas savoir, ou pas trop [...] Il y a des choses qui sont bonnes à penser pour tels, non pour tels [...] Plusieurs représentations ont ainsi une valeur de vérité, mais une valeur d'usage qui varie. En matière transcendante, il y a une architecture des représentations et notions. Certaines sont à mettre au premier plan, d'autres à loger dans la partie de l'âme muette, secrète, inconnue à la conscience. Certaines à loger dans l'imagination, d'autres dans l'intelligence tout à fait abstraite, d'autres dans l'une et l'autre, etc.¹⁶¹

Weil does not mean to put into doubt the objective truth of the claims in question.

For example, she does not mean to say that it should be part of the process of development to question (or determine) what man's ultimate end is. Weil observes, simply, that the affirmation or acceptance, by someone, of a certain conception of the ultimate end of man (even if it is, in itself, true) is not necessarily going to be helpful to the person on his or her way towards that end. For example, the affirmation or the denial of the claim that salvation is man's ultimate good should depend on whether that is something helpful for some specific individual to believe, depending on how he or she conceives it. As Weil puts it:

Il y a des absurdités qu'il est utile de supposer. Ex.: au cas où Dieu voudrait ma damnation... C'est absurde, la volonté de Dieu sur moi et mon salut sont identiques en Dieu. Mais utile parce que diriger mon désir vers la volonté de Dieu ou vers mon salut sont en moi deux choses très différentes.¹⁶²

This contrast between what is true absolutely and what is good to believe is characteristic of Weil's writings. Throughout her writings there are references to salvation

¹⁶¹ **CS**, p. 69.

¹⁶² **CS**, p. 69.

as well as to the claim that we should not desire salvation.¹⁶³ If it is true that for the purpose of spiritual development we should not desire salvation, then from that point of view, salvation is not man's ultimate good. Weil says that: "'Qui veut sauver son âme la perdra.' Salut imaginaire."¹⁶⁴

So, it is not simply that a belief in salvation would be harmful at a certain point in development because it would act as a compensation but, also, because it would not be true salvation that was believed in.¹⁶⁵ In an immature state of spirituality one represents the transcendent in an incorrect way, i.e., as not properly transcendent. One could not help but imagine salvation in a worldly way. In fact, the two are related, since the belief in salvation would constitute an illicit compensation only because it was conceived of in a worldly way. She says that we mustn't have any consolation — any consolation which can be represented to the mind.¹⁶⁶

There is also another consideration that is relevant to the question of the usefulness of believing in salvation. According to Weil, we are attached to things only

¹⁶³ See CS, pp. 177-178; CAH, II, p. 197; p. 138. Weil's point is that we should not desire salvation because in doing so we look for selfish fulfillment. Consequently, we do not have a true concept of salvation. If we had a true understanding of salvation we would not desire it in this way. Thus, given that if we desire salvation, in this way we have an incorrect conception of salvation it follows that we should not believe that conception, i.e., that it is not good to believe in salvation when salvation is conceived of as something that can properly be desired in a selfish way. There is no need to choose between not desiring it because it is bad to believe or not believing it because it is bad to desire.

¹⁶⁴ CAH, II, p. 276.

¹⁶⁵ Weil sometimes, but not always, speaks of a renunciation of rewards and also things to the extent of denying even 'heavenly' rewards and even the minimum of things (goods) that are necessary for one's spiritual well-being and progress: see, for example, CAH, I, p. 249; p. 261; II, p. 107; p. 134; p. 197; p. 276. But, see for example, CAH, II, p. 138: "Il n'aura, en échange, que le royaume des cieux".

¹⁶⁶ See CAH, II, p. 107.

because we do not truly know their reality. Paradoxically, if we knew that something was real, it would be impossible for us to be attached to it. So, if we covet our own salvation, it is because we do not truly think it is real. Also, since for the human mind reality and goodness are equivalent,¹⁶⁷ our attachment to our own salvation reveals an insufficiency in our understanding of exactly what would be the good of salvation:

Dès qu'on sait que quelque chose est réel, on ne peut plus y être attaché.
Ceux qui désirent leur salut ne croient pas vraiment à la réalité de la joie
en Dieu.¹⁶⁸

The strategy of spiritual development is thus basically one of a negative or indirect approach. This strategy is the same for the claim that God exists as it is for the claim that there awaits us after death a personal salvation. If one were to have a belief that God exists at an immature level of spiritual development, the belief would not really be a belief in God because of the way in which God is conceived. So, from that immature point of view, it would be more true to say that God does not exist. As Weil puts it: "[En un sens] l'imaginaire n'existe pas — Dieu n'existe pas."¹⁶⁹

For this conceptual analysis Weil is indebted to the tradition of negative theology that has its roots in Plotinus and the pseudo-Dionysius. Weil's use of negative theology is limited to the conceptual analysis which contrasts what is transcendent to what is knowable by the mind through concepts.¹⁷⁰ For instance, she says:

¹⁶⁷ See CAH, II, p. 337.

¹⁶⁸ CAH, II, p. 338.

¹⁶⁹ CAH, I, p. 274 (square brackets in text).

¹⁷⁰ But, like St Thomas, who also incorporated elements of negative theology in his philosophy, Weil does not adopt the method of ascent through an emptying of the mind of its conceptual content. She is interested in the world and not what is transcendent. See CAH, II, p. 50.

La foi. Croire que rien de ce que nous pouvons saisir n'est Dieu. Foi négative. Mais aussi, croire que ce que nous ne pouvons pas saisir est plus réel que ce que nous pouvons saisir. Que notre pouvoir de saisir n'est pas le critérium de la réalité, mais au contraire est trompeur. Croire enfin que l'insaisissable apparaît néanmoins, caché.¹⁷¹

Je suis tout à fait sûre qu'il n'y a pas de Dieu, en ce sens que je suis tout à fait sûre que rien de réel ne ressemble à ce que je peux concevoir quand je prononce ce nom, puisque je ne peux pas concevoir Dieu.¹⁷²

We initially find ourselves in the world, with our desires attached to the things of this world.¹⁷³ However, the things of this world, which belong to the domain of necessity, can be for us only means and never ends. For Weil,

[...] l'univers est vide de finalité. L'absence de finalité c'est le règne de la nécessité. Les choses ont des causes et non des fins.¹⁷⁴

We want the things of the world to be ends, but the problem is that, according to Weil, we desire something which exists only as it presents itself to desire. When we attain something which we desired as an end in itself, it is never what we desired.¹⁷⁵

The fact that things can only be desired by us as ends is not due to a lack of reality on the part of the thing, rather, we desire things as ends because we cannot grasp the reality (the good) that the thing has in itself. It has reality for us only as it relates to our 'I' through desire. In other words, we have no grasp of the good that belongs to the thing itself. The only good of the thing that we can conceive is its good as relates to our desire.

¹⁷¹ CAH, II, p. 122.

¹⁷² CAH, I, p. 258.

¹⁷³ See CS, p. 110; p. 285.

¹⁷⁴ AD, pp. 168-169. See also AD, p. 169: "Le malheur force à sentir avec toute l'âme l'absence de la finalité."; CAH, III, p. 121.

¹⁷⁵ See CAH, III, p. 87.

Weil conceives of 'worldly desire' in an unconventional way. For Weil, worldly desire consists in the desire for something as an end when it is really only able to be, for man, a means. For example, one would normally think of desiring 'X' in order to get 'Y' as a case of desiring 'X' as a means. But Weil looks at the intentional structure of desire rather than the logical relations between the terms. Even in the desiring of 'X' in order to get 'Y', 'X' is desired as something that one can possess or consume, i.e., as something related to an 'I' absolutely and, therefore, desired as an end.

When we desire a finite thing, as an end, we necessarily desire it as a transcendent goal, and in this context, we are condemned to be unsuccessful.¹⁷⁶ Weil uses the example of not being able to have a cake and eat it too. She finds all desire for things in this world similarly paradoxical. In the desiring we necessarily transform (in the imagination) the object of desire in such a way that when it is attained it is no longer what we desire, leaving desire necessarily frustrated. We desire it as having a reality only for us as relates to our desire but the thing can only have a reality for itself.

This paradoxical nature of desire is due as much to the type of thing desired as to the worldly way in which it is desired. If we desire the things of this world as a means only, rather than desiring them for possession or consumption, then our desire would not be frustrated. To truly know that something is real makes it impossible for us to be attached to it as an object desired because there is a consent to the thing's independent being in the recognition of a thing's reality. To realize that a thing has a reality of its own, a reality which is other than the way it exists for us as desired, implies not desiring the thing as an end for oneself to possess or

¹⁷⁶ In other words, as a goal for us it is removed from its own context of relatedness to the rest of its environment.

consume. Therefore, seeing something as real implies a recognition that the thing can only be, with respect to my desire, a means and not an end.

Weil is even against the type of relative finality which exists, for example, between laboring and eating. Weil objects even to this relative sense of taking eating (life) as the end of labor, because, for her, it introduces into a context of finitude the appearance of being able to raise oneself up a little, i.e., the appearance of transcending finitude. The difference between relative finality (such as that of labor as the means to one's sustenance as end) and the complete absence of finality is similar to the difference between a linear analysis which creates the illusion of accomplishment, efficacy, progress, autonomy and a circular analysis which brings home one's absolute finitude:

Le travail fait éprouver d'une manière harassante le phénomène de la finalité renvoyée comme une balle; travailler pour manger, manger pour travailler... Si l'on regarde l'un des deux comme fin, ou l'un et l'autre pris séparément, on est perdu.¹⁷⁷

Remaining, however, at the level of the world, we would go from means to means with no end for these things to be the means for. Ultimately one needs to posit something which is a transcendent end. But it cannot be desired in the same way that things of this world are desired or else we would make it into a worldly thing. The circular analysis of life insures that when a transcendent end is posited, it is properly transcendent:

L'objet de ma recherche n'est pas le surnaturel, mais ce monde. Le surnaturel est la lumière. On ne doit pas oser en faire un objet, ou bien on l'abaisse.¹⁷⁸

The transcendent 'something' that is posited is the good. The good is able to be a

¹⁷⁷ PG, p. 179.

¹⁷⁸ CAH, II, p. 50.

final end (truly transcendent) because we cannot desire it as an end, i.e., as an object that we possess or consume and, consequently, by definition it is only the good which in fact remains unchanged through the achieving of it. In other words, we cannot conceive of the good in a worldly way.

It is due to the fact that the things of the world are really only capable of being desired by man as means that the desire of them as ends relates the structure of desire to the self as an 'I' which takes the thing desired as something to consume or possess. The good is by nature an end and therefore the incapability of desiring it as such does not relate the structure of desire to an 'I'. The good cannot be desired as a possession, i.e., desired with reference to an 'I'. If we try to, what we conceive will not be the good.

It is, however, also the case that objects cannot really be desired as ends to be possessed and consumed and that, when we try to desire them in this way, it is never the object itself that we desire but something else. This does not, however, mean that things cannot be desired in a worldly way. It is because they are desired in a worldly way that they are represented falsely to oneself.

Both things and the good cannot be desired as ends, but for different reasons. In the case of things, it is because of the nature of the things themselves (as finite) that they cannot really be desired as ends. And in the case of the good, the good cannot be desired as an end because of the limitation on the part of the subject to understand the transcendent as purely transcendent, i.e., without reference to an 'I'.

The absolute good that Weil posits as a transcendent end, is for her, roughly

equivalent to God.¹⁷⁹ Basically, the identity stems from the unicity of desire: a desire for God can not be other than a desire for the good, and *vice versa*.¹⁸⁰ Weil does not, however, have a dogmatically rigid definition or preconception of God. The good is given different divine attributes to illustrate different **themes** that she finds useful or necessary in making sense of man's worldly and otherworldly experience. It is, accordingly, wholly irrelevant to the point of view of spiritual development whether or not the good (or God) really exists:

Quand Dieu serait une illusion du point de vue de l'existence, Il est l'unique réalité du point de vue du bien. [...] Je suis dans la vérité si j'arrache mon désir de toutes les choses qui ne sont pas des biens pour le diriger uniquement vers le bien, sans savoir s'il existe ou non. [...] C'est pour les faux biens que désir et possession sont différents; pour le vrai bien, il n'y a aucune différence. [...] Et je n'ai pas besoin de me représenter quelque chose sous ce mot. Au contraire, il faut que l'objet de mon désir soit seulement la réalité complètement ignorée de moi qui est derrière ce mot.¹⁸¹

If desire stems from a worldly motive, then desire for God or salvation will be inseparably mixed with a worldly conception of God and salvation. This is because desire is always linked with imagination.¹⁸² Imagination lends to desire an aspect of unlimitedness, of transcendent freedom from necessity.¹⁸³ However, this feeling of transcendent freedom is only an illusion because, in fact, desire "se dirige toujours vers ce

¹⁷⁹ See for example, CS, p. 277.

¹⁸⁰ Victor Goldschmidt, "La connaissance surnaturelle d'après Simone Weil", Revue de métaphysique et de morale 3 (1952), pp. 349-356.

¹⁸¹ CS, pp. 109-110. In general, detachment is, for Weil, a detachment from things in so far as they are considered ends, but not in so far as they are taken as means. The concept of detachment does not have, for Weil, the negative connotation of a physical or emotional distancing of ourselves from the things in question and, in fact, implies a more genuine relation to the world and the things in it.

¹⁸² See CAH, III, p. 192.

¹⁸³ See CAH, III, p. 70.

qui est nécessaire."¹⁸⁴

Our desires can never actually lift us up out of the realm of necessity because imagination is impotent with respect to reality. Our desires are limited by their source of energy. We are only men, and as such, we can only give to desire as much energy as we receive from necessity:

Le mouvement cesse par transformation de l'énergie mécanique en chaleur. De même le désir, et toute activité qui procède du désir, cesse par la fatigue. Le désir est ainsi contradictoire, illimité dans son objet, limité dans son principe.¹⁸⁵

Desire that is tied to imagination is always worldly, in that what we desire can never really coincide with what the thing is in itself. Desire mixed with imagination distorts what is desired, making it into an 'object'. It does this not by changing the thing but by giving the one who desires a sense of transcendence and it is this sense of being a free agent that transforms something into an object 'for us'. Thus, Weil thinks that the only way to desire the good would be to desire without an object, because then desire would be free of imagination. And where there is no operation of the imagination, i.e., nothing of the imaginary, that is where truth and the good are:

L'imagination est toujours liée au désir, c'est-à-dire à la valeur. Seul le désir sans objet est vide d'imagination. Le beau est nu, non voilé d'imagination. Il y a présence réelle de Dieu dans toute chose non voilée d'imagination.¹⁸⁶

Desire without an object constitutes a movement away from the way of the

¹⁸⁴ CAH, III, p. 121.

¹⁸⁵ CAH, I, pp. 226-227 (text in italics).

¹⁸⁶ CAH, III, p. 192.

intellect into the way of love.¹⁸⁷ According to Weil, one should keep on firmly repeating to oneself that God does not exist in order to experience the fact of loving him even though He does not exist:

Faire toute espèce de travail, d'effort, pour Dieu *et* en pensant qu'il n'existe pas.¹⁸⁸

Weil is here introducing a notion of a negative theology of the way of desire or love that is like the negative theology of the way of the intellect. Negative theology is typified in the Pseudo-Dionysius. The Aeropagite sought intellectual union with the divine through a method that neutralized the deceptive and obstructive operation of the intellect itself through a 'conceptual emptying' which left the intellect free to be filled with the immediate non-conceptual (i.e., transcendental or non-worldly) knowledge of God as intellect. The way of desire was set in contrast to the way of intellect by St Francis of Assisi and his most famous follower, St Bonaventure. The way of desire involved a union (or communion) in love with the divine, as love.

The way of desire was not initially conceived of as a negative way. Weil's version of the way of desire takes into account the possibly deceptive (illusory) nature of one's desire for God or, in general, for the good and introduces a negative theology of desire which attempts to neutralize the possible illusory aspects of desire so that it can be a true desire for God.

Thus, just as one ought to empty the mind of conceptual content in the negative

¹⁸⁷ Weil was essentially Cartesian in her conception of the intellect. The 'way of the intellect' here refers to the emphasis on trying to get an adequate conceptual knowledge of God and does not imply a rejection of the intellect.

¹⁸⁸ CAH, I, p. 275. See also, CAH, III, pp. 35-6.

way of the intellect, in Weil's method one ought to analogically empty one's desire of all objects sought as ends so that by desiring, as it were, in a vacuum, the divine rushes in like air into an empty chamber. In other words, when one desires with no object, desire is not false and, therefore, is able to be a true desire of the divine — a true desire to which the divine presumably responds.

The same sort of empty desire for the divine seems to be at the root of St John of the Cross' notion of the 'dark night of the soul'. When, through ascetic purification, desire for God loses the temporal qualities that one associates with the divine through the imagination, it seems to the person desiring that the object of desire is lost as well. St John advises that although the person experiences only emptiness, this emptiness is really a divine fullness and that one must persevere in desire even though the object seems absent.¹⁸⁹

The imagination also gives us the false sense of being above necessity because it provides us with consolation for evil suffered.¹⁹⁰ Suffering always brings us face to face with necessity, but imagination reestablishes the distance:

Seulement le passé et l'avenir entravent l'effet salutaire du malheur en fournissant un champ illimité pour des élévations imaginaires.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ See, for example, St John of the Cross, "The Ascent of Mount Carmel." In The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross, tr. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1979), II. ch.6.6.

¹⁹⁰ See CAH, I, pp. 271-272.

¹⁹¹ CAH, II, p. 159. Weil is not precluding the Sartrean sort of freedom that stems from man's power of self determination through the re-interpreting of the past. One could discover new truths through such a re-interpretation. What Weil is against is the distortion of history through the imagination. Also, Weil would have to qualify the sense of self determination involved. She would not accept an arbitrary sense of determination. For Weil, we do not come ready made, we are faced with the responsibility of self-determination, but what we ought to become is not arbitrary and is not up to us to decide.

Le présent, nous y sommes attachés. L'avenir, nous le fabriquons dans notre imagination. Seul le passé, quand nous ne le refabriquons pas, est réalité pure.¹⁹²

Weil says that the imagination lifts us out of this world of necessity. We have to renounce this illusion and become incarnate. We have to "[p]erdre l'illusion de la possession de temps. S'incarner. L'homme doit faire l'acte de s'incarner, car il est désincarné par l'imagination."¹⁹³

It is thus, for Weil, the height of folly to try to find God by rising above necessity. God is to be found only by 'going down'. As we have seen, the strategy of spiritual development advocates primarily an indirect movement:

Reculer devant l'objet qu'on poursuit. Seul ce qui est indirect est efficace. On ne fait rien si on n'a d'abord reculé. [...] Levier. Abaisser quand on veut élever. C'est de la même manière que "celui qui s'abaisse sera élevé".¹⁹⁴

'Going down', according to Weil, 'tears (arrache) the being from appearance'.¹⁹⁵ To accept that one is nothing but what one is at this time and place, a mortal being with finite energy etc., is a condition for spiritual development because it is a movement away from appearance towards truth. Weil sees Christ crucified as the ideal example of this: "C'est le corps crucifié qui est une balance juste, le corps réduit à son point dans le temps et l'espace."¹⁹⁶

'Going down' also brings us closer to the good because it is an imitation of God's

¹⁹² CAH, III, p. 38.

¹⁹³ CAH, II, p. 117.

¹⁹⁴ CAH, II, p. 43.

¹⁹⁵ CAH, II, p. 142: "Arrache l'être du paraître."

¹⁹⁶ CAH, II, p. 112.

creation. God became matter in creating the world.¹⁹⁷ This act of drawing back from being all of reality, to allow something other to be, is analogous to our drawing back from a false sense of unlimitedness that we receive from the imagination mixed with our desires to allow the world to be. When we consent to exist in the present, the world becomes beautiful.¹⁹⁸ It becomes real for us when we accept that it is other than us instead of below us:

Croix comme balance, comme levier. Descente condition de la montée. Le ciel descendant sur terre soulève la terre au ciel.¹⁹⁹

Nous ne pouvons quelque chose à cette opération que par technique ressemblant à la magie sympathique. Les sorciers australiens versent de l'eau à terre pour amener la pluie. De même nous pouvons descendre pour amener Dieu à descendre en nous. C'est là la vertu d'humilité. Les mouvements descendants sont seuls en notre pouvoir. Les mouvements ascendants sont imaginaires.²⁰⁰

In the realm of humility, it is only by accepting that we are limited to the world of necessity, that all else is imaginary, that we can believe in the reality of others. This belief in the reality of another is the criterion of love. To love, is to 'go down', to consent to be no more than one element in the world. Weil says that we only fully recognize the existence or reality of those people whom we love and that the "croyance à l'existence d'autres êtres humains comme tels est *amour*."²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷ See CAH, II, p. 75.

¹⁹⁸ CAH, II, p. 329; III, p. 192.

¹⁹⁹ CAH, III, p. 199. See also, CS, p. 33: "Rapport de la nécessité à l'homme, alors, non de maître à esclave, ou d'égaux, mais de tableau à regard. Dans ce regard naît la faculté surnaturelle de consentement. On ne consent pas à la force comme telle (car elle contraint) mais comme nécessité. L'intelligence pure est à l'intersection de la nature et du surnaturel." Necessity becomes a picture because we 'draw back' before the world instead of approaching it through desire etc.

²⁰⁰ CS, p. 264.

²⁰¹ CAH, II, p. 233. See also, CAH, II, p. 227.

Emmanuel Levinas adopts, to some extent, Weil's analysis of what is involved in the self's recognition of the other. Levinas argues against much of the contemporary attitudes towards 'self' and theories of ego development. Against the whole tradition originating with Descartes, Levinas argues that, despite the thoroughly intentional structure of consciousness, self-consciousness discovers itself as an original and irreducible relation to some 'other' that it can neither absorb nor posit by its own, *a priori* capacities. In other words, the origin of the self is not to be found in a transcendental 'I', it is to be found, rather, in the absoluteness of a relation to the other.²⁰²

Moreover, for Levinas, the fundamental relation which makes possible the recognition of the other in its irreducible otherness depends upon the unique intentional structure of Desire. Levinas uses the term 'Desire' in contrast to the normal sense of desire that is for an object as an end. He seems to mean by it what Weil meant by desiring something as a means, i.e., the desire is not satisfied as a self-fulfillment. Levinas writes of desire:

The idea of the infinite is a thought which at every moment *thinks more than it thinks*. A thought that thinks more than it thinks is desire. Desire 'measures' the infinity of the infinite. The term we have chosen to mark the propulsion, the inflation, of this going beyond is opposed to the affectivity of love and the indigence of need. Outside of the hunger one satisfies, the thirst one quenches, and the senses one allays exists the Other, absolutely other, desired beyond these satisfactions, when the body knows no gesture to slake the Desire, where it is not possible to invent any new caress. Desire is unquenchable, not because it answers to an infinite hunger, but because it does not call for food. This Desire without satisfaction hence takes cognizance of the alterity of the Other. [...] The desires one can satisfy resemble this Desire only intermittently, in the deceptions of

²⁰² Adriaan Peperzak, An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1992), p. 16.

satisfaction or in the increases of emptiness which mark their voluptuousness. They wrongly pass for the essence of desire. The true Desire is that which the Desired does not satisfy, but hollows out. It is goodness. It does not refer to a lost fatherland or plenitude; it is not homesickness, is not nostalgia. It is the lack in a being which is completely, and lacks nothing.²⁰³

At the basis, then, of Levinas' notion of desire is that it involves a conception of 'the other' as a thing in itself and not as a thing which exists for the self. Desire for another is not a desire to possess or consume the other, it is a desire for the good of the other, it is a respect for the other as other which is not a movement towards the other which decreases the distance. The moral exigency that is implied in the relationship to the other keeps the other 'out there' as an autonomous being to which I have an absolute responsibility.

Weil's analysis of the existence of the world is the same as her analysis of the existence of other people. To go down, to accept that one is no more than one really is, is to believe in the reality of the world. It is God's love that caused the reality of the creation. Yet for God, the reality of creation means a suffering, an acceptance of otherness. In the same way, we give reality to the world through love but, in another sense, it is thereby revealed to us.

So, at the same time, in a contradictory way, for us, the world is nothing (an illusion) insofar as we know that we are infinitely far from God, and real, insofar as we know God is infinitely far, since it is only by this distance that creation (as a reality other

²⁰³ E. Levinas, "Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinite", (in A. Peperzak, *To the Other*, pp. 88-119), p. 113-114; Cf. p. 119 and also E. Levinas, *Totalité et infini*, (Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965), pp. 3-5. The similarity of Levinas' notion of Desire to Weil's notion of desiring something as a means extends even to the seeming impossibility of applying either notion to things.

than God) is possible. This same distance is present when we love some other person or the world. They become real to us because we accept them as other. But this acceptance of the other's reality, means that we become less ourselves in the sense of being the axis of meaning for all of reality in the way that the transcendental 'I' is conceived of being. We allow for the reality of the other by contracting our own sense of reality. As Weil puts it: "Désirer la vie d'un être humain, c'est désirer à une limite à soi-même."²⁰⁴

Thus we move closer to God the more we become nothing through loving the world and the things in it. We start with a knowledge of our misery at not being all, of not being like God in his allness, but the more we love and the less we become, the more real is the world and the closer we come to God.²⁰⁵ For example, Weil interprets the incarnation of Christ as implying that God is now to be found in the world instead of by going out of the world to some heavenly 'beyond'. But, crucially, this seems true to Weil because it implies more difficulty, more suffering, which for her, indicates an absence of self-deception:

L'incarnation ne rapproche pas Dieu de nous. Elle augmente la distance. Il a mis la croix entre lui et nous. La croix est plus difficile à franchir que la distance du ciel à la terre. Elle est cette distance.²⁰⁶

It is absolutely wrong, from the point of view of spiritual development as Weil

²⁰⁴ CAH, I, p. 161.

²⁰⁵ The wrong way to try to become like God is through imitating his allness, aspiring to be like God in his power. CAH, II, pp. 220-221: "Se représenter Dieu tout-puissant, c'est se représenter soi-même dans l'état de fausse divinité. L'homme ne peut être un avec Dieu qu'en s'unissant à Dieu *dépouillé de sa divinité* (VIDÉ de sa divinité)."

²⁰⁶ CAH, II, p. 242. Thus, the suffering involved in reaching heaven by going through the world (the cross), serves to insure that one has a properly transcendent notion of heaven, i.e., it is not the imaginary heaven that is reached by fleeing the world.

conceives it, to think of the belief in the nothingness of the world as a means or a requirement to the attainment of spirituality. Weil refers to some 'almost' saints as having knowledge of their otherness from God, but true sainthood is the love of the world (despite and because of its nothingness).²⁰⁷ One must love the world before even thinking of renouncing it, and as we have seen, to love and to renounce are one and the same movement. To renounce the world out of knowledge of its nothingness is to try to raise oneself by pushing away what is below one. To renounce the world because of its nothingness is to believe that one is something above the world. The same is true for oneself. The dualistic conception of spiritual development which involves a renunciation of worldly attachments and one's 'lower' nature is characteristic of a very low level of spiritual development.

To love the world, and yet to renounce it, is to 'go down', to love the world and to renounce oneself (consent to be less) out of love for the world. Loving is the gateway to reality because it brings one down to the world and across to others²⁰⁸ and also because it is a 'going down', which means that the aspects of desire that are tied to what is imaginary are negated. What is imaginary in a love relationship is the distortion of the essential otherness of the loved one through imagining the other different than he or she really is. The deeper the distortion, the less distance remains between the people. But at a certain point no distance remains and, as a consequence, no love either. For, love requires respect and respect requires otherness. Weil writes:

Rapport, négation de l'absolu. Le désir jette la pensée dans l'absolu comme

²⁰⁷ See CAH, II, p. 244.

²⁰⁸ See CAH, II, p. 243.

dans l'illimité. Le désir est mauvais et mensonger; mais pourtant sans le désir on ne rechercherait pas le véritable absolu, le véritable illimité. Il faut être passé par là.²⁰⁹

Descendre en soi-même, où réside le désir qui n'est pas imaginaire. Faim; on imagine des nourritures; mais la faim elle-même est réelle; se saisir de la faim.²¹⁰

The 'going down' which Weil speaks of, has the effect that we reach a point where desire is not mixed with imagination, where desire is true, in the sense of revealing a real need, be it physical or spiritual. Even more spiritual desires, like love for another person or for God, can be brought down to the level of a real need:

Quand la passion de l'amour va jusqu'à l'énergie végétative, alors on a des cas tels que R., Phèdre, Arnolphe [...] Hippolyte est vraiment plus nécessaire à la vie de Phèdre, au sens le plus littéral, que la nourriture. Pour que l'amour de Dieu pénètre aussi bas [...] il faut que la nature ait souffert la dernière violence. Job. Croix.²¹¹

What is also important to notice, here, is that at the level where the good is a real need, where imaginary good will not satisfy our need, there is no place for a belief in the existence of the good. Weil says that: "Tant qu'on en a pas mangé, il n'est pas nécessaire ni même très utile de croire au pain."²¹² And after one has 'eaten', one does not believe, one knows.

²⁰⁹ CAH, I, p. 226. See also, CAH, II, p. 204: "L'amour a besoin de réalité. Aimer à travers une apparence corporelle un être imaginaire, quoi de plus atroce, le jour où l'on s'en aperçoit? Bien plus atroce que la mort, car la mort n'empêche pas l'aimé d'avoir été. C'est la punition du crime d'avoir nourri l'amour avec de l'imagination. *Essayer d'aimer sans imaginer*. Aimer l'apparence nue et sans interprétation. Ce qu'on aime alors est vraiment Dieu."

²¹⁰ CAH, I, p. 137.

²¹¹ CAH, II, p. 233. See also, AD, p. 209: "Le danger n'est pas que l'âme doute s'il y a ou non du pain, mais qu'elle se persuade par un mensonge qu'elle n'a pas faim."; CS, pp. 85-86: "On ne désirera pas moins lui obéir plus que toute autre chose, avec un désir plus fort que la faim, la soif, la flamme charnelle ou le besoin d'un répit au milieu d'une torture physique."

²¹² PSO, p. 45.

In this chapter we have seen how, for Weil, the good is able to be desired as an end but only because it is an empty desire. We have also seen how Weil's conception of the desire for things as means involves an insight into the reality and goodness intrinsic to things. This insight corresponds to a movement of diminishment of the 'I'. We shall see in the next chapter how Weil's analysis of will involves a further diminishment of the 'I'.

CHAPTER V : Will, Grace and Consent to Necessity

In this chapter we will see how Weil thought the will incapable of providing an approach to the good. Weil felt it to be her task to find a source for moral actions that did not rest on the will and internal freedom of the soul from mechanical necessity. Weil's answer involves a consent to the divine will that constitutes a destruction of the soul and allows God to work through the individual as a transparent medium.

Will and Grace

The aspect of indirect strategy in spiritual development also determines the role that the will can play in this development. The will operates only in a direct way. To will the good is an effort to rise, it is a direction of effort towards what is higher than oneself. It is this limitation of the will to a direct effort that makes it always an attempt to rise. But, because what is required for spiritual development is not a direct movement upward but, rather, an indirect movement upward *via* a downward movement, the will can only have a very limited role in spiritual development. Weil says that whatever one can acquire or achieve through an effort of the will, can have no intrinsic spiritual value.²¹³ Spiritual progress can never involve a direct movement of the will because the energy that feeds the will is finite. But, as in mechanics, a small amount of energy can be much more

²¹³ See CS, p. 93; p. 94.

effective if used indirectly:

Pierre sur un chemin où on a hâte de passer [...] on se précipite dessus et on pousse. On épuise sa force pour en donner à la fiction que la pierre n'est pas là. Ou bien on contemple la pierre, soi, son désir de passer; la pierre est là, mais elle n'est pas tout. Ce moment d'arrêt permet l'action indirecte et le levier. Celui qui pousse, souvent réussit; s'il ne réussit pas, une fois épuisé, la pierre lui semble un absolu, impossible à écarter. Celui qui manie le levier, même s'il ne réussit pas, la pierre n'est pas pour lui un absolu; il pense qu'il aurait réussi si...²¹⁴

There is no way to employ the will indirectly because every effort of the will is an effort to rise. In every act of will the soul affirms itself as an 'I'.²¹⁵ Weil says that humility, which is the condition of spiritual development, "[...] consiste à savoir qu'en ce qu'on nomme 'je', il n'y a aucune source d'énergie qui permette de s'élever."²¹⁶

It is important to note that there is no traditional theory of grace being implied here. The argument is not intended to show that there must be an external source of energy, superior in quality, that allows the self to rise. This would follow only if it were assumed that the self in fact did rise. This is not the case. The argument is a metaphysical one. The claim is that any energy that the self can make use of is necessarily finite in quality and not quantity. To rise would require a supernatural energy, rather than an infinite amount of natural energy, but the 'I' deals only in finitude and cannot receive supernatural energy. This does not mean, however, that the supernatural energy cannot be

²¹⁴ CAH, II, p. 22.

²¹⁵ See CAH, II, p. 91: "On dit 'je' quand on fait effort. C'est naturel [...]" This association of the will with one's sense of self perhaps stems from Maine de Biran. See for example, Maine de Biran, François-Pierre, Oeuvres, II, (1954). p. 178: "The fact of a power of action and of will, proper to the thinking being, is certainly as evident to him as the very fact of his own existence; the one does not differ from the other."

²¹⁶ CAH, II, p. 59. See also CS, p. 285: "Les efforts de volonté sont illusoires. Ma propre âme ne me croit pas."

used, but only that it cannot be used by the soul. Weil's theory of grace involves supernatural energy (love) that destroys the soul rather than lifts it up.

In Chapter II, I described how, for Weil, our very creation was inseparable from an original sin of wanting to be other than God.²¹⁷ This desire to be other than God is tantamount to the possession of a will.²¹⁸ Weil describes original sin as the theft of free will. However, the evil is not in the theft but, rather, in the will itself. Therefore, the 'way down' that characterizes the strategy of spiritual development is through a renunciation of will as the power of free choice between good and evil.²¹⁹ This renunciation is an acceptance that we cannot will the good.²²⁰ It is not a question of it not being in our power to will the good but, rather, the realization that any act of will reinforces one's sense of being an 'I' and, thus, is a movement away from the good. The problem is not in the amount of power but in power itself:

L'humanité avait volé le libre arbitre, le choix du bien et du mal. Le Christ l'a rendu en apprenant l'obéissance. La naissance est une participation au vol d'Adam. La mort est une participation à la restitution du Christ.²²¹

On ne peut pas sortir de soi par la volonté. Plus on veut, plus on est en soi. On ne peut que désirer, supplier.²²²

²¹⁷ See notes 63 and 64 above. Recall, the qualification that was made in the previous chapter, that Weil is speaking mythically about the origin of our moral situation.

²¹⁸ See CAH, II, p. 196; p. 214.

²¹⁹ Of course the renunciation cannot itself be a straightforwardly willed operation. To some extent, however, the movement involves the will under the strict rule of the intellect's desire for the good which overwhelms the soul and the will, as we shall see.

²²⁰ On the one hand original sin, according to Weil, is a desire to be other than God, but on the other hand it is a desire to be like God. We wanted to be like God by our own power (of knowing good and evil and willing the good) but as a consequence, became other than God in asserting our independence.

²²¹ CS, p. 169.

²²² CS, p. 224.

The impossibility of willing the good requires that another source of moral action be found. Weil finds this other source in God. In order for God to be man's source of moral goodness, we must develop a way of substituting God's will for our own. Weil concludes that a substitution is possible through a profound consent to God's will. We must transform our understanding of the situation we are in from that of a free agent who needs to choose the good to that of a passive object through which the good is accomplished. As Weil puts it:

Agir non pour un objet, mais par une nécessité. Je ne peux pas faire autrement. Ce n'est pas action, mais une sorte de passivité. Action non-agissante.²²³

On ne peut pas dire de l'esclave qui va porter secours qu'il fait cela pour son maître. Il ne fait rien. Quand même pour aller jusqu'au malheureux il marcherait sur des clous, pieds nus; alors il souffre; mais il ne fait rien. Car il est un esclave. [...] Pour être seulement un esclave, il faut secourir le prochain seulement quand on y est ou forcé par la vue claire d'une nécessité, c'est-à-dire d'une obligation tout à fait stricte, ou irrésistiblement contraint par une impulsion transcendante. Il y a aussi le cas où naît dans l'âme une inclination naturelle à secourir; alors il faut examiner de très près si aucun inconvénient grave n'est à prévoir comme conséquence, et en ce cas s'y abandonner. Hors des trois cas il ne faut rien faire.²²⁴

Weil holds that the will and the sense of being an 'I' actually obstruct God's will:

Toutes les choses que je vois, entends, respire, touche, mange, tous les

²²³ CAH, I, p. 254.

²²⁴ CAH, II, p. 328. The 'clear perception of a necessity' sounds Cartesian and indeed is induced through an intense intellectual attention on the good with reference to a specific situation. It is perhaps best described as an intellectual grasp or intuition (intellectual) into the good. But the perception of a necessity, however intellectual, is so intense as to affect one equally in all of one's capacities, and insofar as it affects one in his or her physicality, to that extent it involves an automatic action towards the realization of the insight into the good. Without going into it here, we can nevertheless catch a glimpse of how Weil's moral theory involves a rejection of anthropological dualism.

êtres que je rencontre, je prive tout cela du contact avec Dieu et je prive Dieu du contact avec tout cela dans la mesure où quelque chose en moi dit je.²²⁵

Tout ce que *je* fais est mauvais, sans exception, y compris le bien, parce que *je* est mauvais. Plus je disparaissais, plus Dieu est présent dans ce monde-ci.²²⁶

But it is not just that God will work through us but that, in fact, as passive desirers of the good, it is only through us that God can come into contact with the world. When God acts through us, he is not acting through us towards our own ends but, rather, acts on the world:

L'unique intermédiaire par lequel le bien puisse descendre de chez elle au milieu des hommes, ce sont ceux qui parmi les hommes ont leur attention et leur amour tournés vers elle.²²⁷

Le seul rapport de Dieu avec le monde consiste dans la possibilité que le surnaturel existe dans le monde, dans une âme humaine.²²⁸

It is not the case that this presence of God in the human soul is possessed by an 'I'.²²⁹ It takes the place of the 'I'. Nor is it a presence of the divine in the soul, in the sense that the relationship is one between the soul and God.²³⁰ Rather, through the elimination of the soul, God transcendent is brought into relationship with God that is

²²⁵ CAH, II, p. 357.

²²⁶ CAH, II, p. 331.

²²⁷ ELL, pp. 74-75.

²²⁸ CAH, II, p. 226.

²²⁹ See CAH, III, p. 33: "Le moi, ce n'est que l'ombre projetée par le péché et l'erreur qui arrêtent la lumière de Dieu et que je prends pour un être. Même si on pouvait être comme Dieu, il vaudrait mieux être de la boue qui obéit à Dieu." See also, II, p. 53: "'Je suis libre' est comme une contradiction, car ce qui n'est pas libre en moi dit 'je'."

²³⁰ See CAH, II, pp. 51-52: "Rapport entre l'homme et Dieu [...] ce n'est pas la personne qui est en cause, mais autre chose. Et cet autre chose est tourné vers autre chose qu'une personne, nécessairement."

creation:

Dieu crée un être fini, qui dit je, qui ne peut pas aimer Dieu. Par l'effet de la grâce peu à peu le je disparaît et Dieu s'aime à travers la créature qui devient vide, qui devient rien. Quand elle a disparu... il continue à en créer et à les aider à se dé-créer.²³¹

Cet univers où nous vivons, dont nous sommes une parcelle, est cette distance mise par l'Amour divin entre Dieu et Dieu.²³²

We can see here that, for Weil, moral development involves the movement of the purely natural soul towards its own destruction as an 'I'.²³³ This is, understandably, an unnatural movement and, thus, it is impossible for the soul to actually do this. As we shall see in Chapter VIII, the movement is accomplished through the body, but the soul consents to the destruction out of a supernatural love for the good. Weil concludes that it must be with help from the divine that the soul is able to consent to its own destruction. For Weil, grace has only to do with this initial consent of the soul towards its own destruction for the sake of good.

As consent, grace is, a 'transforming of the feeling of effort into a passive feeling of suffering'.²³⁴ St Peter's mistake (in saying to Christ: 'I will not deny Thee'), was to suppose the source of faithfulness to be in himself and not in grace.²³⁵ What St Peter

²³¹ CAH, II, p. 289. See also, II, p. 331. Weil divides up the trinity according to the structure of the universe: God the Father (power) empties himself into creation, God the Spirit (powerless love) remains transcendent, and God the Son mediates between the two.

²³² AD, p. 110.

²³³ It is important to make clear that the destruction of the natural soul is absolute in the metaphysical sense of the word.

²³⁴ See CAH, III, p. 247: "Ce qui est certain, c'est que je dois m'exercer à transformer le sentiment d'effort en sentiment passif de souffrance."

²³⁵ See CAH, II, p. 10. See also, CS, p. 114. This is perhaps seems similar to the sort of objection that Augustine will make towards Pelagius, but it differs to the extent that Augustine was

failed to do was to become a passive medium through which God could act.

For Weil, God 'in his power' is outside the realm of necessity and cannot enter into necessity to help us will, because such an efficacious will would be efficacious with respect to the laws of necessity.²³⁶ Such an efficacious augmentation of the energy that the will draws from necessity would still be directed upwards and would be essentially an effort which reaffirms the 'I'. For Weil, we can only find God 'in his powerlessness', i.e. in necessity.

To renounce one's personal will means letting mechanical necessity act within oneself.²³⁷ It means consenting to God's will. When one makes the movement down, towards necessity, one ceases to see creation as a blind mechanism of necessity. Creation becomes revealed as being pure obedience to God. Weil says that:

[...] il ne suffit pas de connaître cette possibilité, il faut l'aimer. Il faut aimer tendrement la dureté de cette nécessité qui est comme une médaille à double face, la face tournée vers nous étant domination, la face tournée vers Dieu étant obéissance.²³⁸

In so far as we are above the order of necessity we are far from the good, i.e. from

referring to the power of will needed to persevere and accomplish one's decided course of action, whereas Weil is referring to the decision made by the soul to become a passive medium.

²³⁶ See AD, pp. 189-90.

²³⁷ See CAH, II, p. 180. Normally spiritual development is conceived of as involving three levels: physical necessity, free will and obedience. Moreover, obedience is the goal of spiritual development. Weil, however, denies that free will is a requirement for obedience. As she conceives it, free will stands between necessity and obedience. In other words, it is only our attachment to the sense of having free will that keeps us from seeing necessity as obedience. One could obey in a purely external sense or with at least a formal conformity of internal with external compliance and finally the external compliance could result automatically from an absolute internal obedience. Correspondingly one could obey out of an abstract duty with humility or as a simple instrument where one's deepest desire cleaves to the will of the other. This last sense of obedience, the one Weil holds, is incompatible with free will.

²³⁸ PSO, p. 111.

God's will. That is why God cannot help us to rise up above necessity by augmenting our personal will. Creation only appears to us as necessity (i.e., as distinct from God and opposed to the good) when we ourselves are distant and opposed, separated through a sense of autonomy. Our sense of autonomy is, at one and the same time, what gives us the sense of being aloft from necessity and constitutes our existence separate from God. Unlike animals, we are essentially thinking beings and thus could not have been created with a natural quality of obedience.

When God does act through a person, as a transparent medium, one is not thereby brought to a desire of the good. One must desire the good in order for God to act through one since, as we have seen, God's ability to work through one depends upon one's consent, and consent is a function of one's desire for the good. The initial desire in man for the good comes from himself. According to Weil, "C'est en désirant Dieu qu'on devient capable d'attention."²³⁹ Moreover, attention, as empty desire and supplication, is the presence of God.²⁴⁰ There cannot be a true object of desire until God actually comes down to us:

Il veut donner son pain à quiconque en demande, mais seulement à qui le demande, et seulement son pain.²⁴¹

Because to desire the good is to possess it,²⁴² the achievement admits of degrees corresponding to degrees of desire:

²³⁹ CAH, III, p. 145.

²⁴⁰ See CAH, III, p. 158.

²⁴¹ CS, p. 68.

²⁴² See CS, p. 109: "Quand une fois tout mon désir est dirigé vers le bien, quel autre bien ai-je à attendre? Je possède alors tout le bien."

Ceux qui sont incapables d'une telle attention ne pensent pas à Dieu, même s'ils appellent Dieu ce à quoi ils pensent. Mais s'ils se rendent compte qu'ils ne pensent pas à Dieu et désirent vraiment y penser, la grâce les aide à faire de plus en plus attention, et ce à quoi ils pensent est de plus en plus proche de Dieu.²⁴³

So, although Weil does talk about grace, it is nevertheless not the source of our desire for the good. Grace is the presence of God in the soul in response to our desire and supplication. Grace has only to do with the initial consent of the soul towards its own destruction for the sake of good. God is present to the extent that we desire him to be.²⁴⁴ If only a small part of the soul desires and supplicates, then only a seed of the divine will be present. But, even such a small presence acts as a catalyst, making one feel the need even more. It is in this way that grace, as a divine consent, helps us to increasingly concentrate our attention:

Dieu [...] essaie de lui faire manger un grain de grenade. Si elle se laisse arracher, ne fût-ce qu'un instant, un consentement pur et entier, alors Dieu en fait la conquête. Et quand elle est enfin devenue une chose entièrement à lui, alors il l'abandonne. Il la laisse complètement seule. Et elle doit à son tour, mais à tâtons, traverser l'infinie épaisseur du temps et de l'espace pour aller à ce qu'elle aime.²⁴⁵

Grace is the supernatural love for the good that makes the soul able to consent to its own destruction. Grace is not the source of our desire for the good. The presence of Grace is a response to the soul's desire for the good. Initially the soul desires on its own but is subsequently aided by God in desiring the good.

²⁴³ **CS**, p. 145.

²⁴⁴ See **CAH**, II, p. 202. And, in fact, this presence is nothing but our desire, since to desire is to possess.

²⁴⁵ **CAH**, III, p. 45. The use of the pomegranate seed analogy is taken from the Greek myth of Proserpina and Demeter.

The divine presence, as supernatural love, refers to God-in-his- powerlessness or God the Spirit (love). The aim of the consent to necessity, the 'going down', is to gain access to the good inherent in the world through obedience to necessity. The divine presence, as necessity, refers to God-in-his-power or God the Father (power). Thus the divine presence, as supernatural love, does not constitute some individual action of God that is within the realm of necessity but which is at the same time somehow exempt from the laws of necessity. Grace, as supernatural love, is not some miraculous suspension of the laws that govern necessity. This, after all, is the whole point of Weil's theory, i.e., to explain how God-in-his-powerlessness, who is outside of the realm of necessity, can intersect with God-in-his-power, who is limited to that realm. Weil therefore introduces the notion of a natural mechanism of Grace which operates with the same universality and objectivity as do the laws of necessity. The mechanism is not a part of the realm of necessity, but its operation can be effective in that realm without requiring an interruption of the laws that govern necessity. Weil writes:

Nous devons être indifférents au bien et au mal, mais en étant indifférents, c'est-à-dire en projetant également sur l'un et l'autre la lumière de l'attention, le bien l'emporte par un phénomène automatique. C'est là la grâce essentielle. Mais c'est là la définition, le critérium du bien.²⁴⁶

As we can see, the intellect plays a central role in the desire for the good. As we

²⁴⁶ CAH, II, pp. 248-249. Like grace, divine inspiration operates through a sort of natural mechanism. See also PG, p. 11: "Tous les mouvements naturels de l'âme sont régis par des lois analogues à celles de la pesanteur matérielle. La grâce seule fait exception." The natural mechanism of grace presupposes that one dedicates one's intellect towards the good. Of course there is no certainty that someone will dedicate their intellect to the good. In this way Weil's conception of spiritual development is more classical than Christian, or more philosophical than theological. There is no presupposed leap of faith, only an intellectual commitment to the truth.

mentioned earlier, Weil's rejection of conceptual knowledge as a viable means of spiritual development does not involve a rejection of the intellect itself. She saw the intellect as a bridge between the natural and the supernatural.²⁴⁷ She says, for example: "Si on tourne l'intelligence vers le bien, il est impossible que peu à peu toute l'âme n'y soit pas attirée malgré elle."²⁴⁸ It is love that enables one to turn the intellect towards the good.²⁴⁹ Weil even goes so far as to say that attention and love are the same thing²⁵⁰ and that attention constitutes consent.²⁵¹ The intellect operates according to the mechanism of grace (love) so that it is automatically drawn towards the good if left unhindered:

Tentation du bien. On ne peut éviter le bien qu'en en détournant son attention. Si on y porte assez d'attention et assez longtemps, on a beau se défendre; on est pris.²⁵²

Three forms of Consent

For Weil, grace is the divine assistance needed for the soul to consent to God's will.²⁵³ We consent to this substitution of God's will in place of our own because we know that we cannot accomplish the good through ours and, yet, we have a love for the good. Although any love constitutes an implicit consent to the desires of the loved one, consent to the divine will must be unconditional and it is only when the love we have for the good is strong enough, being augmented through divine love (grace), that it implies an

²⁴⁷ See CS, p. 33.

²⁴⁸ CAH, II, p. 200.

²⁴⁹ See CAH, II, p. 246.

²⁵⁰ See CAH, II, p. 261.

²⁵¹ See CAH, III, pp. 158-159.

²⁵² CAH, II, p. 206.

²⁵³ Consent to God's will implies the soul's destruction.

unconditional consent.

Weil outlines three domains in which our submission to God's will takes place.

The first realm is that of things and events which are not dependent on us at all:

Aimer tout cela, dans l'ensemble et le détail, absolument. Y sentir (y lire) la présence de ce qu'on aime. L'amour devient transcendant quand on lit l'objet aimé à travers les choses horribles (horribles pour toute l'âme).²⁵⁴

This first form of submission to the will of God involves only the intellect. Weil's notion of 'reading' is similar to the notion of interpretation, but differs slightly in having a connotation of an inner transformation which enables us to see what could not have been seen before. Reading is primarily an intellectual operation, but involves one's entire being because it is a profound insight into reality similar to the sense in which Plato spoke of real knowledge which makes it impossible for one's actions not to conform, i.e., that if one really knew the good then they could not but do it.²⁵⁵ Weil's sense of reading here implies a conformity not primarily of actions but rather of attitude and emotion.

The second realm of consent is that of things which are wholly dependent on our will. Here, one must fix on what is one's duty. "Pour les choses hors de notre pouvoir, 'que votre volonté soit faite et non la mienne' est clair. Mais pour les choses en notre pouvoir? Ne pas les regarder comme telles. Lire l'obligation comme une nécessité."²⁵⁶

One must do, without exception, what one reads as being one's duty in order to avoid the

²⁵⁴ CAH, II, p. 181. Also reading does not have the sense of relativity that interpretation seems to have.

²⁵⁵ It is interesting to note the latin for 'reading' is *legere*, and the latin for intellect means *intus-legere* which is literally 'insight-reading'.

²⁵⁶ CAH, I, p. 152.

sense of having a will of one's own.²⁵⁷ If no clear sense of duty is possible, we must choose arbitrary rules. Even in this case, the arbitrary rules must be taken as absolute, since the aim is, in effect, to replace the will with rules.²⁵⁸

This second form of consent, although involving the will, makes the operation of will subservient to the intellectual operation of reading one's duty as a necessity. The will, as the power of choice between good and evil, is read as an operation of intellect. Any particular movement of will (presumably a choice of some good) is read as being determined in the first place by an intellectual insight into reality that imposes a binding force on the will's choice. Here again we have the Platonic doctrine of real insight into reality implying a profound effect on other aspects of one's being, except that under the second form of consent the knowledge of what is good (apprehension of one's duty) implies a corresponding action rather than attitude as under the first form of consent.

The third realm in which submission to God's will takes place is that in which things, while not absolutely independent of ourselves, are not really dependent on the will either. This is the realm of, for example, ascetic practices and the partaking of religious sacraments. It was a serious problem for Weil to find a source of guidance in such matters which was external to the will. She thought that she found such a source in the idea of

²⁵⁷ Weil seems, here, to be borrowing from Kant. In his Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, tr. H.J. Paton, (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964), pp. 8-14 (of the second edition of the original), Kant distinguishes between actions done 'in conformity' with duty and those done 'from the motive' of duty. He argues that only the latter are truly moral, being free of self-interest. However, the fact that there is no will entirely free from self interest leads Kant to claim the immortality of the soul as a postulate of practical reason, making the development of a good will an infinite task. In Weil's thought, however, the fact that there is no will free from being a vehicle of the 'I' leads her to say that duty implies the renunciation of all will.

²⁵⁸ See CAH, II, p. 187. See also, Descartes' Discourse on Method, tr. Arthur Wollaston, (Baltimore: Penguin, 1960), part 3.

God responding to our desire for the good with a determination towards a certain action:

Quand on pense à Dieu avec attention et amour, il récompense en exerçant sur l'âme une contrainte exactement proportionnelle à l'attention et à l'amour. [...] Il ne faut accomplir que ce à quoi on est irrésistiblement poussé par cette contrainte.²⁵⁹

This last domain of consent to divine will is supremely important for Weil. For example, in Weil's personal dilemma over whether or not to be baptized as a Catholic (which she acknowledges as a spiritual good of the highest order) she finally concludes that, because she has had no clear feeling (reading) of what would be God's will, i.e., that it would be good for her given her situation vis-à-vis spiritual development, she stopped thinking about it and left it to God to think about.²⁶⁰ It is not for her to think about herself. She, therefore, did not take baptism because she did not feel a compulsion to:

Si j'avais mon salut éternel posé devant moi sur cette table, et si je n'avais qu'à tendre la main pour l'obtenir, je ne tendrais pas la main aussi longtemps que je ne penserais pas en avoir reçu l'ordre. Du moins, j'aime à le croire. [...] Car je ne désire pas autre chose que l'obéissance elle-même dans sa totalité, c'est-à-dire jusqu'à la croix.²⁶¹

This might seem to be saying that one ought not to act until one has evidence that this is what God wills, like a vision or some unmistakable 'sign'. Such a position would rightly be criticized as egoistic in the sense that one desires to be considered important

²⁵⁹ CAH, II, p. 182. Weil's notion of the inspiratory presence of God in the soul can apply as much to a constraint against doing something, even what seems good, as to being constrained to do something. But when she says that 'we must only carry out...' the 'must' refers to not doing what we are not compelled to do. She is not saying that we should (must) do what we are compelled to do. Rather, she is referring to the fact that, through our own will, we could do even more than what we are compelled to and here she is saying that we should not do more. We must only do what we are compelled to.

²⁶⁰ See AD, p. 22.

²⁶¹ AD, p. 29.

enough to receive personalized service from God. Also such a position is criticizable in that it would imply a certain amount of self-importance to demand evidence out of a need to be right, instead of doing as best one can and having to settle for the hope that it is pleasing to God. There would be no humility in knowing that one is acting right. But this is not Weil's position. She is not demanding evidence in an intellectual sense, but rather a constraint that negates the personal will and the self.

This third form of consent to God's will requires a conformity of one's actions and attitudes to an insight into duty even when there is no naturally occurring movement of will. Unlike the second form of obedience, here one needs to cleave to a course of action, as a necessity, without the will having also chosen that action. In the third form of consent, even the internal consent of the 'I' is imposed. Thus the third form of consent implies a much stricter sense of obedience.

Martin Andric argues very convincingly that Weil's three domains of submission to the divine will go beyond "Epictetus' distinction between things in our power and things not in our power, where freedom lies in doing what right and good thing we can, and accepting what must be as heaven's gift to us for our good."²⁶² It seems that Weil was directly influenced in this respect by Jean-Pierre de Caussade (1675-1751), who is known for his book Abandonment to Divine Providence. For example, Weil significantly goes beyond Epictetus' formulation where she, like Caussade, says that without being

²⁶² "Simone Weil's Caussadism," Mystic's Quarterly 13 (June, 1987), p. 74. Also, Epictetus, Moral Discourses, tr. E. Carter, Everyman's Library no.404, (New York: Dutton, 1910), 1,1.

compelled we should not act even in the direction of what seems to us to be a good.²⁶³

Since what is at issue is the deliverance from the self and its will there is no place for seeking after the good since this is an act of the will.

Weil's idea of a divine inspirational guidance in one's moral actions that constitutes, in effect, a necessity, is essentially the same theory expressed by Plato in his

Apology:

I am subject to a divine or supernatural experience [...] It began in my early childhood — a sort of voice which comes to me, and when it comes it always dissuades me from what I am proposing to do, and never urges me on.²⁶⁴

In the past the prophetic voice to which I have become accustomed has been my constant companion, opposing me in quite trivial things if I was going to take the wrong course. [...] yet neither when I left home this morning, nor when I was taking my place here in court, nor at any point in any part of my speech did the divine sign oppose me. In other discussions it has often checked me in middle of a sentence [...]²⁶⁵

Although in these Socratic passages there is no explicit indication that it is actually the divine that acts, I think that this is due to a negative restriction, i.e., the divine exerts only a negative influence. But even restricted to its negative aspect, the feeling has that quality of necessity, i.e., that one could not disobey. Moreover, implicit in the necessity of the compulsion is the sense of being displaced or taken over by the divine will.

²⁶³ Jean-Pierre de Caussade, Self-Abandonment to Divine Providence, tr. by John Beever, (Image Books, 1975), p. 32: If God wants us to do more than our duty, then we "will recognize it because [we] will be attracted by it and [...] feel inspired to do it". See also, ibid., p. 80.

²⁶⁴ Plato, "Apology," 31^d.

²⁶⁵ Plato, "Apology," 40^{a-c}.

It is difficult to see how necessity can be a moral category. Traditionally it has been universally accepted that what is done by duty must be done freely. Actions done of necessity have not only been seen as being devoid of merit but also devoid of responsibility. In other words, they simply fall outside the sphere of morality. Nevertheless Weil held that man: "n'a aucune puissance, et pourtant il a une responsabilité."²⁶⁶

In order to better understand Weil's seemingly impossible doctrine it will be helpful to give a little of the philosophical background against which she was writing. At the turn of the century the philosophical world was divided between idealism and materialism (positivism).²⁶⁷ There were, however, a few thinkers, like James Pratt who tried to find a solution to this conflict that would appease both sides.²⁶⁸ Anthropological dualism became the 'enlightened' alternative to the only other options (materialism and idealism).

Anthropological dualism was supposed to appease the materialists by conceding that the body and the world of bodies were undeniable facts of experience, so that the body is part of a larger system of mechanical forces outside of one's control. At the same time, however, interactionist dualism granted to idealism a fundamental freedom of the person, which was thought to be the condition of any morality and yet denied by

²⁶⁶ *CAH*, I, p. 223 (texte in italics). As this quotation from Weil implies, she seems to collapse the three forms of consent when discussing how necessity works within a person. Thus when speaking generally about the way necessity works within the person who consents, we should keep in mind that particular cases of necessity working within one that fall within the second sphere of consent will also involve a movement of will.

²⁶⁷ Although perhaps held by some, Aristotelian or Thomistic conceptions of man did not figure significantly in the philosophical landscape.

²⁶⁸ See James Bissett Pratt, *Matter and Spirit*, (New York: Macmillan Company, 1926).

materialism. The interactionists did this through a concept of soul as an independent (immaterial) substance which is the seat of the self. Freedom of the soul consists in an independence of the soul from mechanical necessity.

Weil criticized this need for liberty and concluded that it was indicative of the mistaken assumption that moral action was somehow necessary. The idea that liberty is a necessity, because moral actions are necessary, seemed rather bourgeois to Weil since most of the people lived, as wage laborers, completely within the sphere of mechanical necessity and had no opportunity for free actions or even thoughts and, thus, according to this condition of morality, had no opportunity to be moral. This conclusion was unacceptable to Weil. She realized that physical necessity can be overwhelming enough to penetrate even the soul. In order to make morality more than a luxury for the few, Weil tried to find a basis for morality that did not require liberty of soul (will).

James Pratt's Matter and Spirit outlines a theory of "a dualism of process" that Weil also held. Although Weil's version is different, it will be useful to see what the theory looked like before Weil got hold of it. Pratt gives this succinct explanation:

What I mean by a Dualism of Process is now, I trust, plain enough. Whether reality is made up of one kind of stuff or whether there are two or more kinds of being within it, there are at any rate two kinds of laws, two kinds of processes to be found in the activities of the real beings of the world. Throughout the vast spaces of the physical universe where matter and energy come into immediate relation with conscious persons, the laws of physics and chemistry have absolute sway. [...] However it may be with the other planets and with the infinite starry host [...] there are beings who are not altogether subject to the laws of matter and motion. The beings we know as persons have their own ways of acting [...] — ways of acting which are not reducible to physical laws.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁹ Pratt, pp. 184-185.

Thus, according to this theory, most of the activities of the human body will be determined along the lines of physical necessity. Yet, some acts of the human body are determined by the processes of a rational and purposive will. Although even willed activity will have to be in accordance with the laws governing the physical realm, the cause of willed activity will not be found at the level of physical causation.

This sort of dualism of process is entirely symptomatic of anthropological and spiritual dualism. It reduces the body, as material, to something completely insignificant to a person's moral life. As Pratt himself puts it:

Fortunately one of these terms, namely matter, need cause us little concern. Whether we interpret it realistically or idealistically will have little bearing on the more pragmatic questions of life and religion [...] The interpretation of the other term of the interaction relation, namely "mind", is very much more crucial in its bearings upon life's values.²⁷⁰

Not only does this dualism of process make the body insignificant to man's moral life, it also illustrates how the principle of the autonomy of the self is the cornerstone of anthropological dualism. In other words, if one claims that the self is autonomous, then it seems as though one is committed to some form of a dualism of process, which in turn, seems to commit one not only to anthropological dualism but, also, to spiritual dualism.

Pratt describes how the tradition of moral theory has always been not only anthropologically dualistic but also spiritually dualistic²⁷¹ and has always depended on the principle of the autonomy of the self:

²⁷⁰ Pratt, p. 168.

²⁷¹ Pratt, pp. 222-23.

What we mean by moral action is impossible without responsibility; and responsibility in turn is impossible without some form of spiritual freedom and spiritual efficiency. And neither spiritual efficiency nor spiritual freedom is possible for any philosophy which denies the existence of free and efficient spirits whose actions are not to be predicted by the laws of the external cosmos. The free and efficient self which is presupposed in any genuinely moral world is provided only in some form of pluralistic philosophy such as our proposed Dualism.²⁷²

Kant's philosophy is an obvious candidate for criticism on these grounds. He says very clearly that in order to be ethical (i.e., to have a duty) the self must be autonomous from the laws that determine physical causation. Kant holds a theory of a dualism of process, and like Weil, he extends the realm of necessity to include the activities of the soul. Both Weil and Kant saw that moral action must come from beyond the self. But for Kant, on the one hand, this is because the self is not entirely free from considerations having to do with the person's physical or worldly situation and, therefore, the self is, in its attachment to worldly concerns, not free in its deliberation from the laws that determine physical phenomena. Thus Kant's insistence on freedom ultimately rests on a negative valuation of physical (phenomenal) existence involving the implicit assumption that the world of physical phenomena does not provide an adequate basis for morality.

Weil's observation that moral action must come from beyond the self is, on the other hand, part of her critique of the self. Weil's claim that morality must come from beyond the self rests precisely on the fact that the self is or wants to be free from the realm of material necessity. Thus, Weil adopts a dualism of process, claiming that there

²⁷² Pratt, p. 198. It should be noted that Pratt had no conception of any other anthropological possibilities except materialism, idealism or dualism. A view such as Aquinas' (hylomorphism) seems totally unknown to Pratt. The same could be said of Weil, except that she develops a genuinely non-dualistic anthropology. Weil did, however, continue to see the 'autonomous self' as a problem even in a non-dualistic anthropology.

are different mechanisms of necessity: natural and supernatural. But, Weil avoids the anthropologically dualistic and spiritually dualistic implications of a dualism of process such as Pratt's by locating both the soul and the body within the domain of natural necessity.

Weil's solution to the problem of how necessary actions can be moral actions lies in the form that compelled activity takes, i.e., it is action in the sense of involving bodily movement and physical consequences and even, under certain forms, action in the sense of being willed. A compelled action is moral insofar as it is good. An action or attitude can still be good while being ultimately determined by something other than one's will.

However, Martin Andric points out that there is a seeming inconsistency in Weil's claim. How can we recognize something to be **our** duty when we act only in ways that we feel bound to, by a necessity external to us, and when it is really God that performs those actions through us?²⁷³ There are, in fact, two questions being posed. One refers to how we can recognize something as a duty within a context of moral determinism (being compelled). This question is answered simply in Weil's claim that although man has no power to do good he still has a responsibility.²⁷⁴ One could easily imagine a situation where someone was helpless to act yet nevertheless recognized what ought to be done.²⁷⁵

²⁷³ Andric, Simone Weil's Caussadism, p. 74. Weil says that we should only act where it is recognizably our duty to do so. See earlier section devoted to the three forms of consent.

²⁷⁴ This is very similar to Augustine's position against Pelagius. However, it must be remembered that, unlike Augustine, Weil did not think that we must therefore get the power from God. Weil's position is, rather, that progress is simply not achieved through power.

²⁷⁵ This is, of course, very controversial. Kant felt strongly that the idea of duty made no sense without freedom. However, he fudges the issue by granting, as a solution, a sort of inner freedom of a transcendental 'I'. What would Kant have said about an absence of external liberty? Weil, considering the profound affliction in which most people live, denies the necessity of the freedom of the 'I', making its autonomy contingent along with the obvious contingency of

The second question refers to how we can recognize something to be our duty when it is God who acts. Martin Andric answers this question by pointing out that, although it is God that acts, it is we who consent to the action by desiring the good. This answer shows how consent to God's will forms the cornerstone of Weil's conception of moral development:

[It] is in our power to let God help our neighbor through us; and that our love of him in the necessity of the world is his love of himself in it, acquired by us in so far as we unite ourselves to it, or let it pass through us, or become nothing but an empty channel for it to pass through.²⁷⁶

Weil holds that moral actions are desired by God but that God is powerless to do them. God needs man as an instrument in order to perform moral actions. God, however, prefers to have man's consent to being used as an instrument and He can only beg this consent from us:

Un bien que je peux faire et que je ne fais pas, c'est un bien que Dieu veut faire et ne peut pas faire par ma faute, car il ne veut pas le faire autrement que par moi.²⁷⁷

This is an example of how Weil conceived of the body acting in God's service in

physical freedom. She concludes that just as a lack of external liberty does not keep one from recognizing what they would do if they could act, so too, a lack of internal liberty does not keep one from recognizing the good. The type of internal lack of liberty intended here is that of a lack in the ability of free will as the ability to make an equal choice between different options. One could use the example of addiction. The addict might know that some addiction related activity is wrong (stealing, drinking...) but, presumably, being an addict means precisely that they do not have the capacity to even will to stop.

²⁷⁶ Andric, *Simone Weil's Caussadism*, p. 88. See, for example, *CAH*, II, p. 248: "Il y a identité entre: Dieu veut cela, et : cela est. A cette identité répond en nous celle entre l'amour surnaturel et la croyance. L'amour surnaturel, qui est obéissance, est ce qui répond en nous à la volonté en Dieu."

²⁷⁷ *CAH*, II, p. 201 (text in square brackets).

works of charity. It is here that Weil is at her most profound:

Ce malheureux gît sur la route, à moitié mort de faim. Dieu en a miséricorde, mais ne peut pas lui envoyer du pain. Mais moi qui suis là, heureusement je ne suis pas Dieu; je peux lui donner un morceau de pain. C'est mon unique supériorité sur Dieu. [...] Dieu peut implorer du pain pour les malheureux, mais non pas leur en donner.²⁷⁸

It is only because attention and desire constitute our consent to God's will that God is able to act through us as an inspirational presence. On the one hand, attention seeks to know what we must do or feel. On the other hand, to desire the good is to become nothing, which allows the good to work through us. Thus the intellectual grasp of the good constitutes an actual necessity because of the absence of an 'I'.

In this chapter we have seen how Weil is able to claim that we have a moral responsibility while being, at the same time, powerless to act. We are powerless to move directly towards the good through actions in the same way that we are powerless to desire the good directly as described in Chapter IV. The empty desire is a consent to God's will but at the same time the empty desire is a slow death for the soul.

In the following chapter we shall discuss the death of the soul and what, according to Weil, occurs when it is destroyed.

²⁷⁸ CS, p. 281. The action of God through man in such actions as charity is the only sort of miracle that Weil accepts.

CHAPTER VI : The Introduction of Spirit

In the last chapter we discussed how, in order to become a transparent medium through which God can act, a person must renounce their willfulness by turning his or her desire and attention towards the good. We saw that this redirection of desire and attention had as a consequence the destruction of the soul. We must now discuss the situation that results from that destruction. The destruction of the soul is at the same time the generation of what Weil calls 'spirit'.²⁷⁹

When we renounce our will and our sense of being an 'I', the desire and attention for the good is met with a divine emptiness that comes to dwell in us and which is, really, a supernatural plenitude.²⁸⁰ In other words, when we renounce our sense of being an 'I', the desire for the good is all of a sudden empty because it was previously filled with 'I' affirming goods. For example, we are used to asking in a particular situation: 'what is the

²⁷⁹ Weil's notion of spirit is related to that of soul, but one can best understand what she means by spirit by understanding how spirit is different from soul. Spirit is defined as the desire for the good and also as an internal force which draws the person towards the good. It is a particular orientation that involves the person's whole being. It is not nous and it is not mens, it is not the highest power of the soul. It is the quality of life that embraces the totality of life. See pp. 102-103 (Spirit is defined as one's love of Good which is, in terms of spiritual development, the equivalent to one's consent to God's will.); p. 104 (Spirit is said to be like the Hebrew notion of *Ruah*, i.e., the dimension of man's entire life when he fully embraces the ongoing invitation to enter the divine. Spirit is also defined as equivalent to a movement of desire in the person for the good.); p. 104, note 293 (again that spirit is an orientation towards the good and not a substantially concrete entity.); pp. 173 ff. (in the sections entitled 'Weil's use of Manichaeic Imagery' and 'The New Man: A Unity of Matter and Spirit' I describe the place that spirit has in the constitution of the person.)

²⁸⁰ See CAH, III, p. 163.

greatest good that I can do or that can happen to me?' If there were no question of the 'I' doing anything or enjoying anything, the desire for the good would have no reference to the 'I'. When desire for the good does refer to an 'I' the only content present in the desire for the good comes from the 'I'. If the desire for the good had no reference to the 'I' it would seem empty to the 'I'.

It is in this state of emptiness that we can begin to truly desire the good. In order to desire the good, we must be able to desire without putting false or illusory conceptions in the place of the true good (which we cannot conceive). A desire which has no object feels like total emptiness, like being abandoned by God. But, the feeling of emptiness only really corresponds to an absence of illusion. Unknown to us, the desire is actually for the good itself. Thus, it is in 'going down' that we find the true object of our desire: "[...] tôt ou tard, il descend sur lui du bien qui à travers lui rayonne autour de lui."²⁸¹

This good that descends upon us passes through us (as a passive medium) and descends upon the world in the form of good actions and attitudes. At the same time, however, the good that descends upon man constitutes the spirit in him which replaces the soul:

La partie éternelle digère la partie mortelle de l'âme et la transforme.²⁸²

L'Esprit est sans rapport avec le monde. Mais il est le moi de l'homme parfait. Il est le moi dé-créé.²⁸³

²⁸¹ ELL, p. 75. See also, AD, pp. 221-222: "Il est une énergie transcendante, dont la source est au ciel, qui coule en nous dès que nous le désirons. C'est vraiment une énergie; elle exécute des actions par l'intermédiaire de notre âme et de notre corps."; CAH, II, p. 330: "La présence d'inspiration influe sur toutes les parties de l'être, âme et corps, conformément à la nature et aux lois propres de chacune; mais influe et ne descend pas."

²⁸² CS, p. 252.

²⁸³ CAH, II, p. 189.

Ce que je nommais je, moi, est détruit, liquéfié; à la place de cela, il y a un être nouveau, grandi à partir de la semence tombée de Dieu dans l'âme.²⁸⁴

When it is said that good is produced in the soul, what is meant is that the soul is proportionally reduced to the same degree of increase of good. Attention produces good in the soul by transforming the soul into spirit. The spirit is, however, not a 'thing' like the body or the soul, i.e., it is not something of which the good is predicated but, rather, it is, itself, the good of the person.²⁸⁵ What Weil calls the spirit that grows (on the biblical analogy of a mustard seed of faith) is really the good that is in the person.

It is not the case that Weil holds that there are, initially in man, two souls or soul and spirit. The soul is split in two by supernatural love and the consent it engenders. The soul is split between that part which is capable of this love and the part that is not. The part which is capable of that love is at first 'an infinitesimally small part', that corresponds

²⁸⁴ CS, p. 253.

²⁸⁵ Weil nevertheless refers to the spirit in its traditional sense, as the 'higher' part of the soul. It is clear, however, that this is not what she means. She does, however, sometimes refer to the spirit as a thing, saying, for example: it grows as something distinct from soul. Weil's sense of spirit is analogous to Plato's conception of matter: evil cannot be predicated of matter, rather, matter is the evil of a thing. The significance of Weil's contention that the soul is a natural entity can be seen clearly when we consider the fact that the soul by nature revolts against anything supernatural, and yet consents to die out of love - a consent that is unnatural. It seems that Weil was influenced by Lavelle in this respect. See, for example, Davy, M, Introduction au message de Simone Weil, (Paris: Plon, 1954), p. 249: "Toute communication dans l'ordre spirituel exige que l'âme qui en est la bénéficiaire soit déjà purifiée. Sinon, comment reconnaître et accueillir? Parler à une âme charnelle d'une présence spirituelle, c'est - écrit Louis Lavelle - demander qu'elle en rie, qu'elle la profane ou la souille." In the context of Lavelle's influence on Weil's emphasis on 'spirit' see, for example, Lavelle, La Conscience de soi, (Paris, 1933), p. 294, where Lavelle explains that 'matter imposes itself on the spirit through a sort of violence, but the spirit, in penetrating matter, illuminates it, making it a voluntary servant'. He goes on to say that 'we are born flesh and we become spirit'. Although it should also be noted that Weil was already dead by the time this work was published. And the same thing can be said for many other works by Lavelle and Le Senne which cannot therefore be seen as having been directly influential on Weil.

to the small seed of supernatural love that God secretly plants in the soul.²⁸⁶ The spirit is the 'infinitely small seed'²⁸⁷ of consent to God's will that the rest of the soul is unconscious of:

[P]endant que presque toute l'âme dit oui, un point de l'âme s'épuise à crier en suppliant: non, non, non! En criant ce point s'élargit, devient une tache qui un jour envahit toute l'âme.²⁸⁸

There is a tension in what Weil says on this point. She wants to say several things that do not really seem to fit together. The problems have to do, in part, with the 'fact' that soul is a natural entity, but spirit is entirely supernatural. Weil wants to hold that the spirit develops out of the soul rather than holding either that the spirit is initially present or that it is given outright by God at a certain point. But, on the other hand, there has to be some radical difference between the spirit and the soul, so that the spirit is not just a soul that is accidentally different. For instance, the existence and the development of the spirit actually depends upon the destruction of the soul. So, as a solution, Weil holds that the spirit develops out of the soul in the process of spiritual development, but that there is this mysterious introduction of a divine seed. Thus the spirit grows out of the soul in the way

²⁸⁶ See CS, p. 176.

²⁸⁷ See CS, p. 228.

²⁸⁸ CS, p. 168. See also, CS, p. 253: "Notre âme doit être uniquement un lieu d'accueil et de la nourriture pour ce germe divin. Nous ne devons pas donner à manger à notre âme. Nous devons donner notre âme à manger à ce germe. Après quoi il mange lui-même, directement, tout ce qu'auparavant notre âme mangeait. Notre âme est un oeuf où ce germe divin devient oiseau. L'embryon d'oiseau se nourrit de l'oeuf; devenu oiseau, il brise la coquille, sort, et picore des grains. Notre âme est séparée de toute réalité par une pellicule d'égoïsme, de subjectivité, d'illusion; le germe du Christ déposé par Dieu dans notre âme se nourrit d'elle; quand il est assez développé, il brise l'âme, la fait éclater, et entre en contact avec la réalité."

a seed would grow out of soil, rather than as a fruit would grow out of a tree.²⁸⁹

The supernatural part of soul, or spirit, exists only to the extent that the natural part of soul ceases to exist. The spirit is not just part of the soul that is 'higher': it is a completely different 'sort' of thing.²⁹⁰ The spirit differs in nature as much from the soul as does the soul from the body.

Weil's conception of spirit has much in common with the Hebrew notion of *ruah*. As Tresmontant says, spirit is for the Hebrews the "dimension surnaturelle qui est propre à la révélation biblique. *Le pneuma* biblique, c'est, en l'homme, une partie surnaturelle, une participation à un ordre surnaturel."²⁹¹ Tresmontant also describes the Hebrew notion of spirit as an ongoing invitation in man, and tantamount to a transformation that allows man (who is created) to participate in the life of his creator who is not himself created. The essence of man is to be in transition and to be radically out of balance with respect to a purely natural state.²⁹² Spirit, for Weil, is itself desire for the good.²⁹³

²⁸⁹ This supports the view expressed earlier that the destruction of the soul is not a destruction limited to the soul as an 'I' but is, rather, an actual destruction of the soul in an absolute sense. ²⁹⁰ As, for example, is the case in the thought of Plotinus, who held that the descent of the soul refers to the part of the soul that operates the body while there remains the greater part of the soul that remains 'detached' from the body. See Audrey N. M. Rich, Body and Soul in the Philosophy of Plotinus, p. 2.

²⁹¹ Tresmontant, La pensée Hébraïque, p. 110.

²⁹² See Tresmontant, La pensée Hébraïque, p. 110. What is also interesting to note is that there is perhaps more than a coincidental relation between this notion of spirit (which Weil shares with the Hebrew tradition) and an anthropologically non-dualistic conception of man. For the Hebrews, if one could speak of removing the soul from man, there would not remain a body, there would remain nothing except maybe the dust of the earth. See also, p. 98. "Il est aussi vrai de dire: nous sommes des corps, que de dire: nous sommes des âmes." Note, however, that in Weil, the spirit emerges only after a certain point in the spiritual development and, therefore, the anthropological monism need not be an initial, natural state of man. For Weil, anthropological monism results from (monistic) spiritual development.

²⁹³ See, for example, AD, p. 120: "Il faut seulement savoir que l'amour est une orientation et non pas un état d'âme." This suggests that the spirit is, likewise, an orientation towards the good and not an ontological entity in the way in which the soul is said to be.

There are striking similarities between Tresmontant's description of Christian virtues founded on the biblical tradition and Weil's understanding of Christian virtue. He says that Christian virtues are spiritual and not psychological, i.e., that they are of the spiritual order and not that of the psyche. Faith according to Tresmontant is, for example, is a supernatural knowledge.²⁹⁴

Weil calls the new relation between the spirit and the body a new birth or new creation.²⁹⁵ Spirit substitutes itself for the old soul. The natural soul, 'must be destroyed so as to leave the vegetative part [the body] directly exposed to the fiery spirit which comes from beyond the heavens'.²⁹⁶ This new man that is a relation between the body and the spirit is said to be an incarnation but not a new incarnation. For, the soul was not really incarnate. Our existence is no longer a theft. We consent to exist out of obedience

²⁹⁴ See Tresmontant, La pensée Hébraïque, p. 116. Tresmontant's description unfortunately retains some prejudices, shared with Levinas, characteristic of anthropological dualism. For example, he says that charity is not an affective love, desire or passion, it is not a sentiment it is of a higher order. He, thus, contrasts the life of the spirit with human existence instead of seeing the spiritual life as the natural life transformed. It is this spiritually dualistic attitude that would eliminate all that is human from man's perfection. Weil wants to find a way of seeing how one can be Christianly virtuous while still being a man, i.e., material and terrestrial.

²⁹⁵ See CS, p. 59: "Pour devenir enfant de Dieu, il faut mourir et renaître. Etre engendré par la semence de Dieu. Une semence incorruptible est semée dans le corps." (**note that the seed that is sown in the body is the spirit**). See also, CS, p. 161: "Nous avons en nous la vie éternelle. Il y a eu une transformation réelle, donc aussi corporelle. Cette transformation est la nouvelle naissance."

²⁹⁶ See CS, p. 260. This theory of the mind or spirit coming from without is, of course, not an innovation of Weil's. It is similar to the theory of the origin of intellect found in Aristotle's De Anima, 408^b15-19: "The case of the mind is different; it seems to be an independent substance implanted within the soul and to be incapable of being destroyed." [The Basic Works of Aristotle, ed. by R. McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), p. 548] and De Generatione Animalium, II, 3, 736^b27-28 where Aristotle reports the theory according to which the intellect is implanted in the soul from without. Also, in the Gospels there is the claim that "spirit" descends upon the faithful giving them special powers.

and not out of our own desire to exist, i.e., we become a passive media of the good.²⁹⁷

Because this new creation can be described (as we have already done) through an analysis of what it means to 'go down' (to love as a sort of renunciation), we can see that it is out of love for creation and creatures in general that one who is created anew consents to exist. This new way of existence mirrors the way that God creates, which is as a sacrifice and an acceptance of a limitation or limit out of love.²⁹⁸

The entrance of the supernatural into the world is only possible through the intermediary of a soul that has turned away from itself and directed its attention towards the good. For Weil, directing one's attention towards the good is to direct it away from this world to the reality that lies beyond.²⁹⁹ But, at the same time, because the sense of being an 'I' diminishes the more incarnate one becomes, attention towards the good orients the person towards the world. It is only with reference to something in the world that one recognizes some good, because, crucially, it is only in relation to something in the world that man can be good. Weil writes: "Il est clair que nous ne pouvons voir de nos yeux et ne pouvons imiter que Dieu impuissant et non pas Dieu puissant."³⁰⁰ Or, for

²⁹⁷ It seems as though Weil is referring here to the second sphere of obedience to God's will that is characterized by the Kantian sense of moral duty. However, I think, it is rather a reference to the first sphere of obedience to God's will as concerns those things outside our power to affect. She is referring to existence as a part of the world and as an object which serves as a passive medium through which God acts. Our existence becomes a fact outside of our control that we submit to — it is as much willed by us as caused by us.

²⁹⁸ See CS, p. 182: "Après cela il y a nouvelle création, que l'âme accepte non pas pour exister, car elle aspire à ne pas exister, mais uniquement pour l'amour des créatures, comme Dieu accepte de créer."

²⁹⁹ See ELL, p. 75.

³⁰⁰ CAH, III, p. 179. Imitating God in his powerlessness as opposed to his powerfulness implies that it is only with reference to things in the world that we can be good because imitating God's powerlessness means not wanting to be good in a way that takes one out of the realm of material necessity. For example, taking a passive stance of radical pacifism, as opposed to taking part in

example, Weil says that grace does not lift one out of the world but, rather, it is only grace that can make one 'go down' in the right way, i.e. out of love for the world:

Descendre d'un mouvement où la pesanteur n'a aucune part... La pesanteur fait descendre, l'aile fait monter: quelle aile à la deuxième puissance peut faire descendre sans pesanteur?³⁰¹

La grâce, c'est la loi du mouvement descendant.³⁰²

So, although there is a love that flows into us from 'heaven' and which forms the spirit in us, the actions performed through this energy have only to do with the relation between God-in-his-power (Father) and God-in-his-powerlessness (Spirit). This communication of God with Himself, through us, is in no way related to any sort of personal salvation. It is always the case that we only take some reality away from the creation which is, in itself, always obedient to God. It is only the 'I' that misrepresents creation's blind obedience as being mechanical necessity, cut off from the divine.³⁰³ Weil

social struggles (where the justification is relative to the temporal, i.e., contingent, social, political situation), could be an attempt to be good with reference to absolute values that cannot bring God transcendent into relation with the God-in-his-powerlessness since the absolute value is not related to a temporal situation.

³⁰¹ PG, p. 13. See also, AD, p. 209: "Mais ces amours sont devenus un mouvement descendant comme celui même de Dieu, un rayon confondu dans la lumière de Dieu."; AD, p. 79: "Tout ce qui existe est également soutenu dans l'existence par l'amour créateur de Dieu. Les amis de Dieu doivent l'aimer au point de confondre leur amour avec le sien à l'égard des choses d'ici-bas."; CAH, III, p. 263: "L'amour pour des créatures; non pas amour en Dieu, mais amour qui a passé par Dieu comme par le feu. Amour qui se détache complètement des créatures pour monter à Dieu, et en redescend associé à l'amour créateur de Dieu."

³⁰² PG, p. 13. Notice, also, the characterization of grace as a law.

³⁰³ See CAH, II, p. 91. Although seeing the movement of the world as obedience rather than mechanical necessity is admittedly a theological perspective, Weil would not want to thereby eliminate the natural sciences. She felt, rather, that science should be a discipline falling within the theological perspective. See also, PG, p. 134: "Galilée. Ayant à son principe le mouvement droit illimité, et non plus le mouvement circulaire, la science moderne ne pouvait plus être un pont vers Dieu."; PG, pp. 133-134: "La science, aujourd'hui, cherchera une source d'inspiration au dessus d'elle ou périra. La science ne présente que trois intérêts: 1. les applications techniques; 2. jeu d'échecs; 3. chemin vers Dieu. (Le jeu d'échecs est agrémenté de concours, prix et

held that the determinism of necessity is really obedience:

Joie d'être certain qu'en tout cas, inconditionnellement, même malgré soi, on obéira à Dieu, puisque tout lui obéit. Si notre âme ne consent pas à Lui obéir, notre chair y consentira; et notre obéissance sera alors conformité aux lois de la mécanique. Celui qui consent à obéir à Dieu, l'esprit en lui obéit, c'est-à-dire est soumis aux lois des phénomènes spirituels; le reste de l'être, par un mécanisme que nous ignorons, s'adapte à l'esprit autant qu'il faut pour que ces lois jouent. Celui qui ne consent pas à obéir à Dieu, en lui il n'y a pas d'esprit. L'âme charnelle et la chair qui sont tout son être obéissent, c'est-à-dire sont soumis aux lois mécaniques.³⁰⁴

Je ne suis qu'un intermédiaire, mais un intermédiaire indispensable. Et si je me dérobe? Je fais alors partie de la matière du monde, par la pesanteur.³⁰⁵

Even if I do not want to submit myself to necessity, I am still subject to necessity.

Weil felt not so much that the movements of the soul are somehow determined by necessity but that the movements of the soul are subject to chance. The physical necessity that determines the movements of matter can also, in effect, determine the movements of the soul by imposing external constraints upon it as, for example, in the case of overwhelming physical suffering where the physical conditions of one's existence, in the form of space and time, become so intense that they affect even those

médailles.); Gabriella, Fiori, Simone Weil, tr. by J. Berrigan, (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1989), cites Weil on p. 295: "The scientist has as an end the union of his spirit with the mysterious wisdom eternally written in the universe."

³⁰⁴ CS, p. 225. See also, CAH, II, p. 188: "Il y a deux manières d'obéir à Dieu, comme matière et comme esprit. Faire le mal, c'est obéir à Dieu comme matière. Il ne peut rien y avoir en nous qui n'obéisse à Dieu. Par suite, si nous lui obéissons comme matière, l'esprit est absent, Dieu en nous est mort."

³⁰⁵ CAH, II, p. 100. 'Gravity' refers the workings of natural necessity on the soul. The language here is perhaps deceptive. Although Weil speaks of choosing between renouncing and not renouncing, she is not implying that we are free at some level to choose between alternatives. The refusal to play the role of an intermediary refers only to the absence of a desire for the good. We can refuse to desire the good. Although the desire for the good is, in a sense, natural. See also, OL, p. 209. It does not contradict Weil's emphasis on necessity of the world to hold at the same time that the world is not really opposed to the good. It is only from the perspective of the 'I' that the world is the domain of blind mechanical necessity.

operations of soul usually thought to be most removed from physicality:

Elle ne le connaît que par contrainte. Il est impossible de croire sans y être contrainte par l'expérience que tout ce qu'on a dans l'âme, toutes les pensées, tous les sentiments, toutes les attitudes à l'égard des idées, des hommes et de l'univers, et surtout l'attitude la plus intime de l'être envers lui-même, tout cela est entièrement à la merci des circonstances.³⁰⁶

The 'way up' is found in the silence of empty desire, sooner or later 'God comes and takes us up'. The role of intermediary that we can play through which God–creation can be reunited with God–transcendent has no relation to the issue of our salvation. In order to be a completely passive medium through which God can regain his wholeness, Weil says that:

Il faut accepter absolument la possibilité que tout ce qui est naturel en soi-même soit détruit. Mais il faut à la fois accepter et repousser la possibilité que la partie surnaturelle de l'âme disparaisse [...] conformément à la volonté de Dieu.³⁰⁷

From the point of view of spiritual development, the 'going down' to the level of necessity actually implies a denial of our desire for salvation. To 'go down' is to find the place where we can obey God, where we can desire what is good, in a way that requires the elimination of will. Recall Weil's distinction between desiring the good and willing one's own salvation. The contrast does not simply depend on one's salvation being good. Salvation is always conceived as being above. One does not go down to salvation because salvation can only be for us an object of imagination, of our will. But, to go down is to renounce one's will:

³⁰⁶ PSO, p. 113.

³⁰⁷ AD, p. 227.

Désirer son salut est mauvais, non parce que c'est égoïste (il n'est pas au pouvoir de l'homme d'être égoïste), mais parce que c'est orienter l'âme vers une simple possibilité particulière et contingente, au lieu de la plénitude de l'être, au lieu du bien qui est inconditionnellement.³⁰⁸

If, by desiring the good I possess the good, what could my salvation add to this?³⁰⁹

What good could there be in my salvation apart from God's will? The only possible answer would be: 'my good'. But, my good would not really be good if it was a good separable from the good.

If, finally, there is no part of oneself that does not desire the good, then we are a pure, transparent medium through which God can act. This is pure obedience and it is obedience out of consent rather than the natural obedience of unintelligent life. And, at the same time, this is man's ultimate good, his salvation, because to desire the good completely is to possess it completely, to the extent that is proper to our nature. But it is not 'my' salvation nor the salvation of my soul. Weil seems to have held a Neo-Platonic conception of the dissolution of the soul's existence into the reality of God. She writes:

Saint Jean ne dit pas: nous serons heureux, car nous verrons Dieu; mais: nous serons semblables à Dieu, car nous Le verrons tel qu'il est. Nous serons du bien pur. Nous n'existerons plus. Mais dans ce néant qui est à la limite du bien nous serons plus réels qu'à aucun moment de notre vie terrestre. Au lieu que le néant qui est à la limite du mal est sans réalité.

³⁰⁸ CAH, II, p. 212.

³⁰⁹ In a sense, this opposition between desiring the good and desiring one's own salvation is parallel to the Kantian opposition between doing something for the sake of duty and doing something for self interest. However, unlike Weil, Kant does not say that one should act according to the law in order to circumvent one's other motives. The problem for Kant is entirely epistemological. For Kant, what is important is that if one could know that one's only motive was the law then one could know that he or she acted morally. Unlike Weil, Kant never thought of the presence of the other motives as actually detracting from the morality of the act but only the discernibility of its moral character. Weil, however, is speaking of a conflict of desire. Although one's salvation may be implied by a desire for the good, to desire one's salvation in fact detracts from one's desire for the good.

In this chapter we have shown that, according to Weil, spiritual development consists in the destruction of the soul and its replacement with spirit. We have seen that, according to Weil's theory of spiritual development, spiritual dualism is indicative of an inferior state of spiritual development. Her theory does not involve a conception of man's ultimate good as the salvation of the soul, nor does it involve belief in God where only the soul would have a relationship with the divine. These issues are relevant to showing that, for Weil, the soul and the body do not have independent vocations or affinities.

We have not tried to deal explicitly with Weil's theory of the body. This will be the topic of the following chapter where we will explain the process through which spiritual development takes place.

³¹⁰ CS, p. 280. Undeniably Weil has a tendency to speak in this Neo-Platonic way, contrasting true being (real) with existence, but the Neo-Platonic sense of this contrast is uncharacteristic of her theory of spiritual development. It would be more consistent with her theory to interpret the contrast between existence and being, as a contrast between physical existence that is 'earthly' and one in which one fully realizes man's true being (which is, according to Weil, only possible in this life) rather than as a contrast between physical existence and immaterial being *per se*. 'Earthly life' seems to have meant, for Weil, existence centered around the consciousness of an 'I'. In other words, one could express Weil's conception of the difference between reality and existence by associating reality with obedience and existence with a life lived in opposition to the world thought of as mechanical necessity.

CHAPTER VII : The Role of the Body in Man's Desire for the Good

In chapters IV and V we described in an abstract way what Weil conceived to be the proper strategy involved in the elimination of soul and the introduction of spirit. The transcendent character of the end sought determined, in a general way, what role will and desire, as movements of the soul, could play in the development of spirit. In this chapter we will attempt to describe Weil's explanation of exactly how spiritual development is achieved in the concrete in order to show to what extent it is through the body and the finitude of man's material existence that this development takes place.

Being desired in the concrete means being desired throughout the course of one's human, day to day, physical existence. It means desiring the good in time and space. In order for the good to truly be desired by man, it must be desired in the body, because only physical desire is desire in space and time. The body anchors man to a specific spot in time and space. It is the body that makes man a temporal and spatial being.

Weil saw material existence (and its physical necessity) as antithetical to the imagination (and the will). This meant for her that it was a source of truth.³¹¹ She felt that the contact between material existence and the body is the only contact that man has with

³¹¹ See, for example, Jacques Cabaud, Simone Weil: A Fellowship in Love, New York: Channel Press, 1964), pp. 172-173, where he describes Weil's poem about the sea. "As if responding to the call of justice, the sea weighs in its invisible scales both its own waters and all things that float. The sea mirrors the sky as truth itself [...]" The sea is obedient to the laws of necessity (p. 173): "The all-encompassing sea brings to man the realization of law permeating creation and of God's love permeating law [...]"

reality (taken as the objective or true state of affairs as opposed to a situation that has been distorted by imagination). Thus, the contact between material necessity and the body puts the emphasis on the body as man's most proper way of desiring and achieving of the good. Man's physicality becomes the most properly human aspect of man, being that aspect through which man's end is most significantly achieved. Man's physical aspect is thereby situated at the very heart of the definition of man.

The process by which the soul is won over to an unconditional desire for the good is only half the story. The 'being won over' must be seen in relation to one's entire nature and existence. The quotations below refer to the rest of the process as a journey which man must make. The image of a journey refers to the process through which the desire for the good penetrates one's whole nature and temporal life.

Desiring the good is not something that can be achieved once and for all in a way that is unrelated to one's physical, temporal existence. To desire the good in one's whole being, in one's body, is much more difficult, yet it is precisely this that is required:

Une douleur physique allant jusqu'à l'extrême limite, sans mélange de consolation parce qu'elle s'accompagne d'une complète détresse morale, c'est la totalité du temps et de l'espace entrant dans quelques moments et dans l'infime étendue d'un corps et déchirant l'âme. C'est ainsi et non autrement que l'âme refait en sens inverse le voyage qu'a fait Dieu vers elle.³¹²

When the soul is won over to this consent and the desire is not automatically answered, the soul feels abandoned. The desire for the good is not answered because it is only the desire of the soul. Crossing the infinite 'thickness' (épaisseur) of space and time

³¹² CAH, III, p. 45.

means coming to desire in one's physical existence. Only through desiring in the body can man find the object desired because only physical desire constitutes a 'going down' and, for Weil, God can only be found through the cross and the cross is found by going down:

Et quand elle est enfin devenue une chose entièrement à lui, alors il l'abandonne. Il la laisse complètement seule. Et elle doit à son tour, mais à tâtons, traverser l'infinie épaisseur du temps et de l'espace pour aller à ce qu'elle aime.³¹³

If it is true that to desire the good is to possess the good, it follows that one must continue to desire in order to continue to possess. As soon as a person thinks that he or she possesses the good and consequently stops desiring it, then it is not the good the person desired, since the good can never be a possession. Moreover, it is only by desiring in one's body that we have access to the real (non-illusory) temporality which is required in order to desire, i.e., to continue to desire.

Desire in itself, even if it is unconditional, is somewhat unreal according to Weil. It is, in one sense, an easy thing to desire the good fully for one instant. However, it is much more difficult to do so across the endless span of instants that make up human existence. This is, she says, the difference between a martyr and a saint. It is more difficult to persevere in desire throughout one's entire human existence because it involves desiring within one's physical existence as well. At a certain point, one invariably runs up against physical necessity — one gets hungry or tired:

Il y a deux lignes dans l'Iliade qui expriment avec une force inégalable la misérable limitation de l'amour humain. L'une "eux à terre gisaient, aux vautours beaucoup plus chers qu'à leurs épouses". L'autre: "Mais elle a

³¹³ CAH, III, p. 45.

songé à manger, quand elle fut fatiguée des larmes."³¹⁴

One must realize that the soul's desire for the good does not lift either the soul alone or oneself as a whole out of the realm of necessity. Desire for the good must, therefore, penetrate even into the realm of necessity.

The soul is, to some extent, naturally disincarnated. This natural level of disincarnation was analyzed in Chapter II as the soul's natural ability to span time without being subject to it.³¹⁵ Moreover, the soul's superiority over the body seemed to lie precisely in that ability:

L'unique arme de la volonté, c'est, en tant qu'elle est une pensée, de pouvoir embrasser les divers instants du temps, au lieu que le corps est limité au présent.³¹⁶

However, according to the strategy of Weil's theory of spiritual development, the soul's superiority is brought into question. The will can embrace the different moments of time but only by making time imaginary. In order to actually will (or desire), it must will in time. The task is to find a way of desiring the good within the realm of necessity which involves not simply finding a way for the soul to express its desire physically but, also, finding a way to actually desire the good physically. To desire in a way that is an expression of our consent to necessity is to desire physically, because necessity is essentially the finitude of space and time and it is our physicality that limits us to space and time.

³¹⁴ CS, p. 292.

³¹⁵ See for example, above Chapter II, p. 23.

³¹⁶ CAH, I, p. 21. See also, CAH, I, p. 103.

Weil claims that because Christianity has never developed a notion of physical good which applies to the body, its spirituality has never been fully compatible with worldly existence:

Jamais l'inspiration chrétienne n'a su se donner une relation avec les choses d'ici-bas. Tout se passe comme si l'Incarnation était un couronnement, un achèvement, et non un commencement.³¹⁷

Christian spirituality is, for Weil, characteristically a movement of extraction from the world of things. She says that the incarnation of Christ is only conceivable as a termination, rather than a beginning, because the presence of the divine in the world is always seen as a contradiction or an impossibility, i.e., something that takes place against nature. Weil's conception of spiritual perfection is primarily concerned with showing how human life in this world only truly begins, and is only really possible, once the person makes an act of self-incarnation, that is, once the person starts to live in the world in a way that brings the person's desire for the good into relation with their physical life. In fact, one can interpret Weil's whole philosophical enterprise as an attempt to explain what this means and how it is possible.

Weil conceives the body in such a way that there is in every human life the inherent possibility of bringing a desire for the good into relation with one's physical existence. Because the body cannot produce in itself movements akin to that of imagination or will, it is limited, in its sensibilities, to the present. In other words, the sensibility of the body is not mediated by the imagination and can only span time as it is

³¹⁷ CS, p. 226.

actual, i.e., as experience and not as it is imaginary, i.e., as past and future.³¹⁸ Because the body is limited in this way, it is the only possible measure of reality for the soul. The soul needs a measure because it is inherently susceptible to self-deception:

Distinction entre ceux qui restent dans la caverne, ferment les yeux et imaginent le voyage, et ceux qui le font. Réel et imaginaire aussi dans le spirituel, et là aussi la *nécessité* fait la différence. Non la souffrance simplement. Il y a des souffrances imaginaires. Des efforts aussi. Quant au sentiment intérieur, rien de plus trompeur.³¹⁹

For Weil, the fact that the gospels contain a way of life and not a theology indicates that we can only see the spiritual as it appears in the material world. Weil illustrates her conception of the religious way of life by comparing a particular theological conception of life to an electric flashlight. She says we should not test the flashlight's strength by looking straight into the bulb but, rather, by seeing how much of the dark it illuminates. So, the value of a particular way of life will be revealed and can be judged by the amount of good that it yields in the world.³²⁰ It is only with reference to worldly things that the good can be known and so it is only with reference to worldly things that a particular conception of the good can be judged.

Weil concludes that earthly things are the actual criteria of spiritual things not just in the sense that it is through earthly things that the spiritual things are known or tested but, also, in the sense that it is through earthly things that the spiritual things are made real. She says that, although only spiritual things have an intrinsic value, it is nevertheless

³¹⁸ Although, classically, imagination has always been considered a bodily faculty located with other sensitive faculties in a physical organ, Weil was influenced here by Descartes for whom imagination is part of the intellect.

³¹⁹ CAH, II, p. 274.

³²⁰ See CS, pp. 98-99.

the case that only physical things have verifiable states. This is the meaning that Weil gives to God's act of creation. She would argue that God knew that the good had being on its own but that He also realized that existence added a reality to being and, hence, that in order for the good to be fully real it had to exist materially.³²¹ Being is empty without existence. Material manifestation of the good gives a reality to the good that it does not have on its own. God knows the good in and of itself, but man can only know the good as it exists, i.e., as it relates to things.

There are two things at issue here: the criterion by which we can know and judge the good and, second, the condition of reality of the good. With respect to our desire for the good there are two corresponding issues. The first is that of a criterion whereby we can test the reality of our desire. We can only be certain of the reality of those desires for the absolute good which are expressed in the physical world. It is by the manifestation of the desire in the world that we are able to tell to what extent the desire is actually a desire for the absolute good. The following quotations show, first, how the physical world reveals the existence of a person's desire for the good and, second, how the physical world of 'things' is a test of the quality of a person's desire for the absolute good, i.e., that it is properly transcendent:

Ce n'est pas par la manière dont un homme parle de Dieu, mais par la manière dont il parle des choses terrestres, qu'on peut le mieux discerner si son âme a séjourné dans le feu de l'amour de Dieu. [...] Quand dans la manière d'agir à l'égard des choses et des hommes, ou simplement dans la manière de les regarder, il apparaît des vertus surnaturelles, on sait que

³²¹ Weil held, in a Neo-Platonic way, that existence was synonymous with matter. Unlike the Neo-Platonists, however, Weil's view stems from the assumption that matter adds reality rather than takes it away.

l'âme n'est plus vierge, qu'elle a couché avec Dieu [...] ³²²

De même si un homme donne d'une certaine manière un morceau de pain à un malheureux, ou parle d'une certaine manière d'une armée vaincue, je sais que sa pensée est sortie du monde, et s'est assise, avec le Christ, à côté du Père qui est dans les Cieux. ³²³

The second issue that is relevant to the way that the desire for the good relates to human physical existence concerns Weil's claim that the world actually gives reality to one's desire. It is not simply a question of being able to verify the presence and the quality of some desire in the soul or spirit but, also, and much more importantly, it is only through a desire's expression in the world, through the body, that the desire becomes real:

La nature humaine est ainsi agencée qu'un désir de l'âme, tant qu'il n'a pas passé à travers la chair au moyen d'actions, de mouvements, d'attitudes qui lui correspondent naturellement, n'a pas de réalité dans l'âme. Il n'y est que comme un fantôme. Il n'agit pas sur elle. ³²⁴

The claim that a desire does not have a proper reality as it exists exclusively within the soul, applies equally to good and bad desires. Weil advances that in the search of perfection, when faced with desires or aversions that are incompatible with one's desire for the good, we should not attack them and try to eradicate them because this would be an effort of the will. ³²⁵ Rather, one should see these things, which one considers to be bad, as coming from necessity and, thus, one should bear them passively (i.e., suffer

³²² CS, pp. 96-97.

³²³ CS, p. 99.

³²⁴ PSO, p. 135.

³²⁵ See CS, p. 285: "Quoique je sache que les choses d'ici-bas ne méritent pas mon désir, pourtant j'y trouve mon désir attaché, et je n'ai pas d'énergie pour l'en arracher. Les efforts de volonté sont illusoires. Ma propre âme ne me croit pas."

them) in a way that does not attach any meaning to them.³²⁶ Just as one does not try to convince oneself that the wall in front of one is not really fluorescent orange (some painfully disagreeable color) but, rather, tries to ignore it, so likewise we should not try to pretend to ourselves that we do not have such and such a desire, but simply accept it as irrelevant. As long as the desire is not acted upon, it has no reality and will eventually disappear:

Quand il y a lutte entre la volonté attachée à une obligation et un désir mauvais, il y a usure de l'énergie fixée au bien. Il faut subir la morsure du désir passivement, comme une souffrance, une souffrance où on éprouve sa misère; et maintenir l'attention tournée vers le bien.³²⁷

This strategy is similar to that of the Desert Fathers. Weil even quotes from the Verba Seniorum: "Pledge your body to the walls of the cell, and let your thoughts stray where they will".³²⁸ This saying implies that only our actions and not our thoughts pledge us.³²⁹ Her theory, also, implies that thought depends on action: if one does not act on (or

³²⁶ See CAH, III, p. 39 (text italicized): "Il ne faut pas essayer de changer en soi ou d'effacer désirs et aversions, plaisirs et douleurs. Il faut les subir passivement comme les sensations de couleur et sans leur accorder plus de crédit."

³²⁷ CAH, II, p. 169.

³²⁸ CS, p. 300. Weil quotes the Desert Fathers at length. See, for instance, CS, pp. 299-301 (cf. Migne, Patrologia Latina, Vol.73, B.5).

³²⁹ However, this conception of the unreality of thought alone is contradicted in an earlier entry where she holds the opposite view, that thought alone pledges us: CAH, I, pp. 237-238: "On croit que la pensée n'engage pas, mais elle engage seule, et la licence de penser enferme toute licence." Although this quotation is from an early section of the journals, it would be extremely problematic to argue that it was an early opinion that was changed later on. I think that it would be closer to the truth to say that Weil perhaps saw some value in this statement and was not terribly concerned that it contradicted what she says elsewhere. But overall, I feel confident that in the course of this study it will become clear that Weil overwhelmingly saw more value in the opposite position. In fact, the seemingly contradictory positions are perhaps compatible in the sense that although a thought or desire has no reality in the soul until it is acted upon, it is nevertheless true that, in terms of strategy, not acting on a desire will only be an effective elimination of that desire if one's attention is at the same time turned towards the good.

will) a desire, then the soul will slowly stop thinking it.³³⁰

Because the will is able to span time, whereas the body is limited to the present, the will is able to decide in advance and take measures that will make it physically impossible to do something at a later point in time. As Weil puts it:

En définitive, il s'agit donc simplement de refuser aux passions le concours de la pensée. Non pas "prendre des résolutions", mais se lier les mains d'avance.³³¹

This passage implies the same distinction, with respect to reality, between what one does and what one desires. However, there is, here, a slight difference in conception: it is will that chooses to act on some desire and, so, what is significant is not that the desire would receive a further element of reality from being acted on but, rather, from being consented to by the will. Still, if one puts oneself, beforehand, into a situation where at a later stage it is physically impossible to act out a certain willing, then one will also be unable to actually will that action. As Weil says: "[...] remarquer que Hegel, en traitant de l'habitude, a oublié de noter qu'il n'y a pas d'habitude sans instrument."³³²

Now let us turn to the positive aspect of Weil's claim that a desire has no reality until it is acted on. As we have seen, Weil came to think that it was the actual passing through the body that gives to thought its reality. This, she says, is due to a particular arrangement of human nature whereby the thought has no reality in the soul itself, but

³³⁰ See CS, p. 189: "Que mon corps soit un instrument de supplice et de mort pour tout ce qui est médiocre dans mon âme. Il faut quelquefois faire violence à sa pensée, quelquefois clouer le corps et laisser la pensée s'épuiser." If one stops oneself from acting out one's thoughts then they will eventually go away (one will stop thinking or willing the thing).

³³¹ CAH, I, p. 21.

³³² CAH, I, p. 63.

only when it passes through the body. Is it not, then, also the case that if we act on a good thought, we are made 'really' better?

Weil seems to say that although the will can make us really worse, if we act on an evil thought, acting on a good thought is unable to produce the equivalent effect:

Sur cet agencement est fondée la possibilité d'un certain contrôle de soi au moyen de la volonté, par la liaison naturelle entre la volonté et les muscles. Mais si l'exercice de la volonté peut, dans une mesure d'ailleurs limitée, empêcher l'âme de tomber dans le mal, il ne peut pas par lui-même augmenter dans l'âme la proportion du bien à l'égard du mal. [...] Le bien que nous n'avons pas en nous, nous ne pouvons pas, quelque effort de volonté que nous fassions, nous le procurer. Nous ne pouvons que le recevoir.³³³

Although Weil seems, here, to be answering the question of whether it not the case that if we act on a good thought we are made 'really' better by saying that the principle applies only to bad thoughts, her answer is actually 'yes', but only because of her distinction between will and desire.³³⁴ The will is a terrestrial source of effort and can, thus, only stop evil actions. Desire, however, can come in the form of divine love. As we saw in Chapter V, with respect to the good, it is attention focused on the absolute good that replaces the will in causing good actions. Good actions proceed not from will but from attention because attention makes the soul a passive medium through which the good comes into the world. Because the soul (the 'I') disappears through the appearance of the divine inspiratory presence, the only reality that the good can have is for the body and not for the soul:

³³³ PSO, p. 135.

³³⁴ This is very similar to Augustine's position against Pelagius according to which we can do evil but we cannot do good without grace.

Seul le désir dirigé directement sur le bien pur, parfait, total, absolu, peut mettre dans l'âme un peu plus de bien qu'il n'y en avait avant. Quand une âme se trouve dans cet état de désir, son progrès est proportionnel à l'intensité du désir et au temps. Mais seuls les désirs réels agissent. Le désir de bien absolu, lui aussi, est efficace pour autant et seulement pour autant qu'il est réel.³³⁵

As was shown in the last chapter, when it is said that good is produced in the soul, what is meant is that the soul is proportionally reduced to the degree that the good increases. Attention produces good in the soul by transforming the soul into spirit. The good that is in the soul is really what Weil calls the spirit that grows (on the biblical analogy of a mustard seed of faith) as a separate thing from the soul itself.

Normally, or naturally, the imagination and will serve to keep the soul separated from necessity by constituting an 'I' that is autonomous. When the soul is exposed to the necessity of matter, it suffers because it is thereby diminished in the same way that the very presence of reality destroys illusion. Every contact of the soul with the world that is against its will is felt as suffering, because such contact diminishes the soul's illusory sense of autonomy which is tantamount to the very existence of the soul.³³⁶ Although this

³³⁵ PSO, p. 136.

³³⁶ Man seems to have acquired an amazing degree of control over nature in the sense of having turned nature into an object for his will to dominate. Weil characterizes this sense of control as a sense of freedom from nature. See CAH, I, p. 27: "L'homme est dans une grande mesure libéré de la contrainte de la nature elle-même. Quelle mesure? A évaluer par la proportion des travaux non directement destinés à assouvir des besoins. On est d'autant plus libre à l'égard de la nature qu'il y a plus de distance entre l'acte et l'assouvissement." See also, CAH, I, pp. 28-29. This distance that man might call freedom, Weil, however, calls illusion. It is an illusory sort of freedom because control depends upon a manipulation of natural laws but not an actual movement away from nature. Real freedom can exist only for an individual who actually works on nature. Work consists in the transfer of thought into action and the material situation that one is in, i.e., the activity of a man wherein he actually confronts the conditions of his existence. The ideal of freedom is misguided because control of nature depends on a direct interaction between an individual and nature. Modern man has tried to develop technology, as a mediation between man and nature so that man would not have to directly confront nature. But because the individual has

description of the decline of soul, due to its incarnation, is also found in Plotinus' work, for Weil it is a positive rather than a negative situation.

The condition of spiritual development that we called 'going down' involves this element of suffering (that causes a destruction of the soul's illusory sense of autonomy) which we did not fully explain in the preceding chapters. The suffering is tantamount to the destructive effect of 'going down' to the level of necessity. There is a contradiction in the soul's consent to this suffering. At one and the same time the soul suffers in a way that actually destroys it, i.e., in a way that it cannot will or desire, and yet it affirms the goodness of the world that makes it suffer. This consent is called supernatural love and it is really the spirit that consents because the soul is unable to. This contradiction, moreover, splits the soul in two:

Cette division en deux de l'âme est une seconde douleur, une douleur spirituelle plus aiguë que la douleur physique qui en est l'occasion.³³⁷

It is the body which causes the suffering that splits the soul. The body acts like the intellect in the sense that if the intellect is left unhindered by the soul it will act towards the good. Like the intellect, the body is a bridge between soul and spirit. Just as the intellect is inspired by the love of the good in its attention so, too, the body is inspired by the love of good in its action. When a desire for the good becomes an action or attitude,

no control over technology instead of technology being an intermediary between man and nature, man has become an intermediary between technology and nature. See Weil's, 'Expérience de la vie d'usine, (Marseille, 1941-1942),' in La condition ouvrière, collection Espoir (France: Gallimard, 1951), p. 244: "qu'on y est un étranger admis comme simple intermédiaire entre les machines et les pièces usinées, ce fait vient atteindre le corps et l'âme; sous cette atteinte, la chair et la pensée se rétractent."

³³⁷ CS, pp. 176-177. Notice also the clear affirmation that it is the physical suffering that brings about the splitting of the soul.

the action serves to destroy the soul because the action does not come from the will.

Acting on a good desire brings the spirit into being and thus brings the body into relation with the spirit. The body is then directly in relationship with the divine:

Une partie de l'âme veut remplir une obligation, comme rendre un dépôt; une autre ne veut pas. Elles luttent. Le corps est la balance. Le corps est l'unique balance capable de faire de l'âme le contrepoids de l'âme. En un sens, il est juge entre l'âme et l'âme, comme la balance entre le poids et le poids. Comme la Croix est une balance entre le ciel et la terre, ainsi le corps entre l'âme et l'âme. C'est là l'éminente dignité du corps. C'est le corps qui mange, mais c'est aussi le corps qui jeûne. C'est la chair qui dort, mais c'est aussi la chair qui veille. Les obligations sont des actes, et le corps est la balance convenable pour les conflits de l'âme qui les concerne. Mais il y a un conflit plus profond, le conflit autour de la régénération de l'âme. Une partie de l'âme désire recevoir la lumière qui régénère, une partie ne le désire pas. La régénération spirituelle n'est pas une action, ce n'est pas un enchaînement de mouvements, ce n'est rien sur quoi la volonté ait prise. Et pourtant le corps est l'unique balance entre l'âme et l'âme. C'est pourquoi le conflit restera indécis, le choix ne sera pas accompli, s'il n'y a pas quelque action corporelle qui soit unie à la régénération de l'âme par une convention, comme le mouvement du corps allant porter l'or du dépôt à son propriétaire est lié à l'honnêteté par la nature. Mais le lien conventionnel doit être plus solide que le lien naturel. La convention doit être une convention avec Dieu, entre Dieu et l'homme. C'est cela qu'on appelle un sacrement.³³⁸

Weil's conception of the body as the arbiter between the soul and the soul³³⁹ is

³³⁸ CS, p. 256.

³³⁹ Weil is talking here about the soul and the spirit. She does not use consistent terminology. In speaking of this soul/spirit relationship she sometimes uses the terms 'soul' and 'spirit', sometimes 'natural soul' and 'supernatural soul' and sometimes simply 'soul' and 'soul'. What makes things worse is that Weil uses the word 'partie' to describe these various terms. To a certain extent, I think that she is simply trying to keep a certain aspect of her thought at a very simple level. She never engages in discussion about the metaphysical nature of soul or spirit. She does not really tell us how the natural soul differs metaphysically from the natural one. The terms 'supernatural' and 'natural' do not refer to the nature of the 'parts' in themselves but rather to the respective moral modes of existence. One 'part' loves itself and exists as a function of psychological mechanisms and the other 'part' exists as a love of what is good. I have argued throughout that 'spirit' (or the supernatural part) is not a 'thing' (i.e., not something in the order of being) but, rather, the mode of existence of the person who loves the good more than himself or herself.

based on her analysis of the body as the point of contact which pins the soul to this moment and this spot. The body can only do one thing at any given moment, and this is what gives rise to the soul's internal struggle. The body cannot both return the money and keep it, and so the soul also cannot both give it back and keep it. It is, thus, the natural constraints on the body that allows it to bring about the split in the soul.

Although Weil says that the soul can only use the body against the soul if the soul is already split, she is referring to the purposeful destruction of the natural soul (i.e., the 'I') by the spirit.³⁴⁰ It seems to follow, from the fact that it is the body which limits the soul to only one act at a time, that the body actually causes the split in the soul. This splitting of the soul, into natural and supernatural parts, could never arise without the presence of the body.

It is, thus, only through some external form of activity that real change is brought about in the soul. Weil stresses, however, that although arbitrary in itself, the form of activity that represents the spiritual desire for the good must be sincerely thought of as being efficacious in the sense that through the activity the desire is satisfied. For example, in the case of moral obligation, one must believe a certain action to be a full expression of one's duty in order for the corresponding activity to be a source of real change in the soul.

We have just seen how Weil uses the example of a deposit that a person owes as an example of how, in the sphere of moral obligations, the "corps est l'intermédiaire indispensable à travers lequel l'âme exerce sur l'âme une action réelle."³⁴¹ The soul wants

³⁴⁰ See CS, p. 189.

³⁴¹ CS, p. 254.

to keep the money, but finds that the money has nevertheless been given back by the body. The activity of the body in this case seems to come from a source external to the soul. Desire for the good does, however, grow in the soul (as spirit) but remains hidden.³⁴² The situation that Weil describes is much the same as that which is commonly experienced: when we do something good we frequently feel that we should have instead taken advantage of the situation, and when we do something wrong we feel remorse. There are, in other words, different levels of desire for the good in each individual. Thus, Weil's idea of the body acting independently of the soul corresponds to the second sphere of obedience to God's will, described in the Chapter V.³⁴³

Regardless of what the soul desires, the soul nevertheless feels the body being moved or driven by a necessity that does not seem to spring from the soul itself. Through attention focused upon the good (and the feeling of necessity that results), Weil says: "Je peux pousser mon corps dans le bien plus loin que ne se trouve l'âme; il entraîne alors l'âme."³⁴⁴

³⁴² There seems to be a certain ambiguity in Weil's writings. She speaks of the natural soul (or part of it) desiring the good and she speaks of the desire for the good that grows in the soul as 'spirit'. It is not clear whether or not when she talks of the natural soul desiring the good that this is always meant to refer to the growth of the spirit or whether there are two different processes: the natural soul's desire for the good and the spirit as a desire for the good that is distinct from the soul. She does say that the soul, in its natural capacity, must desire the good before God can plant the seed that grows into spirit. But apart from this initial movement I take all other references to a desire for the good in the natural soul to refer to the spirit as desire for the good because there does not seem to be any other way of making sense of the radical split between soul and spirit. Part of the problem might be linguistic. She wants to do away with the soul and talk about spirit as pure subjectless desire for the good (since the spirit is not a 'thing' in the sense that the soul is). But she still needs to refer to some subject that desires.

³⁴³ Chapter V, p. 88.

³⁴⁴ CS, p. 254. Weil is not referring here to the 'I'. She is careful to distinguish between what she calls the 'I' and the use of the personal pronoun as it is normally used to refer to an individual. The 'I' is the soul's sense of being a self that is constituted out of making all that the soul comes into contact with dependent for its reality upon the soul. In other words, the 'I' is the soul's sense

Weil is not saying that the soul moves the body but, rather, that there is a certain external necessity of action which responds to the attention the soul (i.e., spirit) directs at the good. So, it is only indirectly that the soul moves the body further than the soul could have moved itself through the divine response to a certain desire for the good possessed by the soul. According to Weil, any other way of conceiving moral activity would be illusory because seeing all dutiful acts as coming directly from the soul's desire would restrict the analysis of moral good to the sphere of the will.

Physical activity is, then, for Weil, the way in which man finds his good and thus, crucially, man has access to goodness only through his body. The body puts the soul into a relationship with the good by making the soul choose between its conflicting desires. The choice in the direction of the good, however, results in the splitting of the soul into the natural part and a supernatural part. The parts are mutually exclusive and battle for survival. It is the body that is the battleground — it is where the battle is won or lost. It is, ultimately, simple actions in one's behavior towards someone in need, someone defeated, which constitute the victory of the good. The victory of the supernatural part of the soul is not simply revealed through such actions, it consists in such actions, such that the victory of the spirit implies a union of spirit and body that is metaphysical and not just operational, as was the unity between the body and the natural soul.

of being the center of meaning of the universe. The 'I' is what makes reality of everything take the form of the reality the thing has for me.

CHAPTER VIII : The Intrinsic Goodness of the World

In order for us to claim that Weil did not conceive of spiritual life in opposition to, or at least incompatible with, one's physical existence, we will have to show that Weil held that physical things can be intrinsically good and not just conventionally symbolic of a spiritual good. A presence of the good in the world as a conventional symbol is not really an actual presence of the good in the world. If this were all that Weil was saying it would not be very interesting, since it hardly commits her to a position which holds an intrinsic value to the world and one's physical existence. The body must be able to have its own good to act upon or express physically, rather than simply expressing spiritual good. Weil acknowledges this and does, in fact, claim more than that the good can exist in the world only in a symbolic form as an expression or a sign of a human convention:

Un symbole n'opère pas de transformation, ne fait pas franchir de limite, de porte. Un symbole est dans l'âme, et il faut quelque chose hors de l'âme pour la tirer.³⁴⁵

There are three ways in which Weil conceives of a physical presence of the good: as sacraments, morally good actions and beauty:

L'amour implicite de Dieu ne peut avoir que trois objets immédiats, les trois seuls objets d'ici-bas où Dieu soit réellement, quoique secrètement présent. Ces objets sont les cérémonies religieuses, la beauté du monde, et

³⁴⁵ CAH, II, p. 282.

le prochain.³⁴⁶

Physical Presence of the Good: Religious Sacraments

The sacraments are an example of a convention ratified by God which make the symbolic presence of God a material reality. Weil argues that an agreement between men can only have as its subject worldly things, whereas for an agreement concerning absolute good, the agreement must be with God himself.³⁴⁷ Only things which have been ratified by God can serve as symbols of the absolute good. This means that the material object that is a divinely established symbol actually comes to be divine or good:

Dans les conventions établies entre hommes, la signification d'une chose a moins de réalité que la matière qui la compose. Dans une convention établie par Dieu, c'est le contraire. Mais la signification divine l'emporte infiniment plus en degré de réalité sur la matière que ne fait la matière sur la signification humaine.³⁴⁸

Human symbolic meanings never go down into the materiality of the object and thus remain contingent. For example, if we try to attach the monetary value of five dollars onto a piece of paper, the five dollar value cannot be thoroughly imposed upon the paper but must always be maintained by cultural convention. At best, the paper comes to represent the five dollar value. The paper can never itself be that value. In other words, it

³⁴⁶ AD, pp. 122-23. See also, PSO, p. 16: "Il n'y a pas de pur ici-bas que les objets et les textes sacrés, la beauté de la nature si on la regarde pour elle-même est non pas pour y loger ses rêveries, et, à un degré moindre, les êtres humains en qui Dieu habite et les oeuvres d'art issues d'une inspiration divine."

³⁴⁷ See PSO, p. 137.

³⁴⁸ PSO, p. 137. See also, CS, p. 255: "Cette forme est une convention de l'homme avec l'homme, mais faite pour le bien, et par suite ratifiée par Dieu. Pour que cette forme soit l'objet d'une certitude, on doit penser qu'elle a été établie par un homme inspiré de Dieu, ou, préférablement, par Dieu lui-même incarné ici-bas."

is not the value that is imperfect but, rather, only the valuation.

According to Weil, this is not the case for agreements ratified by God. The meaning goes right down into the matter of the thing.³⁴⁹ The Eucharist is more Christ's flesh than bread. In fact, the reality that is given to the object in a divine signification goes even so far beyond its materiality that the bread, as Christ's flesh, becomes a sensible appearance of the reality it signifies.³⁵⁰ So, for Weil, the absolute good, in the form of the Eucharist, is actually present as a material reality in the bread and wine, but the fullness of the good is not exhausted in that presence.

Physical Presence of the Good: Moral Actions

Weil takes her analysis of the way that the good is present in the relationships between people from the Gospels. She made no distinction between what would be called 'Christian virtues' and moral virtue in general. Christ's presence (which, for Weil, is equivalent to the presence of moral goodness) in the world is, to some extent, a function of the way that people interact. But, instead of emphasizing Christ's presence in the one who receives charity, as is traditionally done, she claims that Christ enters into the recipient only by passing through the benefactor, thus being first present therein.³⁵¹

³⁴⁹ It is not that the convention causes the meaning to enter the matter but, rather, that we only call it a divine convention if we conceive of the divine as being already present in the matter of the object.

³⁵⁰ See PSO, p. 137.

³⁵¹ See AD, p. 124: "Dans le texte de l'Évangile, il est question seulement de la présence du Christ dans le malheureux. Pourtant il semble que la dignité spirituelle de celui qui reçoit ne soit pas du tout en cause. Il faut alors admettre que c'est le bienfaiteur lui-même, comme porteur du Christ, qui fait entrer le Christ dans le malheureux affamé avec le pain qu'il lui donne. L'autre peut consentir ou non à cette présence, exactement comme celui qui communie. Si le don est bien

According to Weil, it is a law of our psychological nature, that every soul expands (and, in another sense, expands) its power to the full extent possible for it.³⁵² Charity, however, consists precisely in the refusal to do so. For Weil, charity consists in treating an unequal as an equal or, in other words, treating someone who is without rights as if the person had rights. Weil uses the image of invisibility to characterize the condition of the one afflicted which charity must be able to overcome. She uses the Spanish proverb that 'to become invisible all a man has to do is lose all his money'. Charity, for Weil, is the ability to see the one who is made invisible by affliction. The ability to see past the anonymity and invisibility of the afflicted one involves a pulling back of one's own power over the other. The afflicted one offers no resistance to our power, but charity is a love for the other which acts as a wall restricting one's natural need to expand or extend one's own power to the full extent possible. The refusal, out of love, to exercise all one's power constitutes a destructive limitation on the soul. Thus, not only is it through a physical action that Christ is present in the benefactor as in the sufferer but, further, this action actually causes the growth of the spirit even though, at the same time, charity originates in the spirit's act of attention which allows God to act through the person's body.

It is important to notice that attention allows God to work directly through the body rather than through the spirit. This is because the initial desire or attention of the spirit is unreal until it passes through the body. Thus, if God worked through the spirit, so that the divine is present primarily in (or as) the spirit, then the physical activity and the

donné et bien reçu, le passage d'un morceau de pain d'un homme à un autre est quelque chose comme une vraie communion."

³⁵² See AD, pp. 125-131. See also, CAH, II, p. 116.

presence of the good in the world would be both unnecessary. The spirit's desire would be made more real directly by God. It is, rather, through the action and, thus, through the body, that the good first (or primarily) enters the person, giving rise to the spirit by making the desire real.

Therein lies, as we have seen, the superiority of man over God: God needs our body to act in the world. This means that not only are the spirit's desires made more real through passing through the body but, also, God's desires (these which have to do with man). For example, the divinely ratified convention of the Eucharist is the actual presence of God in the bread and wine. But it is not a convention established between God and God, but rather between God and man, and man can only truly partake in the agreement (consent) through his actions, i.e., physically. Thus, without the body, even God could not truly be present in the world except, as we shall see, in the realm of nature. In the process of God acting through one's body, the body is united directly to the divine and becomes sanctified as does the bread when it becomes Christ's flesh in the Eucharist. In fact, the way Weil describes it, one could even say that the person's body, through which the good comes into the world, becomes Christ's body.³⁵³

Physical Presence of the Good: Beauty of the World

The absolute good is, according to Weil, also present in the beauty of the world:

Le Bien est hors de ce monde. Grâce à la sagesse de Dieu qui a mis sur ce

³⁵³ Weil conceives of friendship and love relationships as analogous to that of charity. See, for example, AD, p. 51: "Car rien parmi les choses humaines n'est aussi puissant, pour maintenir le regard appliqué toujours plus intensément sur Dieu, que l'amitié pour les amis de Dieu." See also, AD, pp. 202-03.

monde la marque du bien sous forme de beauté, on peut aimer le Bien à travers les choses d'ici-bas.³⁵⁴

Beauty is different from the other ways in which the good is present in the world because it alone is not a divinely established convention between man and God but, rather, is established through a convention between God and material creation. Beauty does not enter into the world through our bodies (except in the case of art) but through the matter of the universe as a whole. According to Weil, the whole of material creation can be seen as God's body.³⁵⁵ In fact, since the whole of material creation is God as creator, nature does not become beautiful or become a sacramental presence of the good but, rather, is such of its very being.

When the soul sees beauty, it cannot but think that it is the mark of the divine in nature and this leads us to say that nature is marked by the divine through some sort of agreement (speaking mythically) between matter and God. From the soul's point of view nature could not 'naturally' possess divinity (or beauty) because nature is, from this point of view, contrasted with the good. Thus, this contrast between it being impossible for nature to be 'naturally' beautiful and being beautiful through some sort of divine convention is to a large extent determined by our perspective. But from the point of view of spirit all of matter is seen as being infused with the divine and creation itself is seen as an 'agreement' in the sense of being a sacrifice of power (transcendence) out of love. God, as nature (God-in-his-powerlessness), and God as outside of nature (God-in-his-power),

³⁵⁴ CS, p. 89.

³⁵⁵ See CAH, II, pp. 276-277: "Si on est amoureux de Dieu, on le pense nécessairement entre autres choses comme l'âme du Monde; car l'amour a toujours un rapport au corps et Dieu n'a pas d'autre corps qui soit offert à nos sens sinon l'univers lui-même."

represent two conflicting perspectives that correspond respectively to spirit and soul.

The beauty of the world, experienced as pure joy, is necessarily experienced physically. Beauty is actually a physical sensation of the fact that the necessity of material creation is really obedience to the good. Weil speaks of beauty as a sort of union between the body and supernatural love:

Beauté, joie pure: complicité du corps et de la partie naturelle de l'âme à la faculté de consentement surnaturel. Indispensable, même à ceux qui ont pour vocation la Croix. Sentiment du beau, sentiment sensible à la partie charnelle de l'âme et même au corps que cette nécessité qui est contrainte est aussi obéissance à Dieu.³⁵⁶

The beauty of the world lies in its reality, involving even the bodily sensation of this reality. Because joy is the feeling of reality, pure joy is always joy in what is beautiful.³⁵⁷ Unfortunately, it is for us, Weil thought, a simple fact that it is only through suffering that we have access to reality, and so the bodily sensation of the beauty of the world is not the same thing as pleasure. But, at the same time, the suffering that is required is not necessarily bodily pain and, so, just because the experience requires suffering does not mean that the bodily feeling of the beauty of the world is necessarily painful or even unpleasant:

Cette amertume [de la souffrance] n'empêche pas l'amour de Dieu, car elle n'empêche pas de sentir la beauté, elle est une condition pour la sentir. C'est par l'amertume que l'*Illiade* est belle.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁶ CS, p. 35.

³⁵⁷ See CAH, II, p. 329.

³⁵⁸ CAH, II, p. 180 (square brackets are mine). See also, CS, p. 16: "La vulnérabilité des choses précieuses est belle parce qu'elle est une marque d'existence. Fleurs des arbres fruitiers. Ainsi la vulnérabilité de l'âme au froid, à la faim..."; CAH, II, p. 338; AD, p. 112: "La mer n'est pas moins belle à nos yeux parce que nous savons que parfois des bateaux sombrent. Elle en est plus belle au contraire. Si elle modifiait le mouvement de ses vagues pour épargner un bateau, elle serait un

Since Weil also says that reality "est pour la pensée humaine la même chose que le bien," it is primarily in the beauty of the world that we have physical access to the good.³⁵⁹ It is the beauty of the world (including humans) which is the direct link between the world and the supernatural which Weil sought for:

Cependant le mystère reste le même. [...] Il y a quelque chose dans le monde avec quoi le surnaturel a un rapport, un lien spécial. Quoi?³⁶⁰

The good that is produced in matter is felt as joy by the spirit. Weil says that sometimes in the midst of terrible affliction one feels a joy that is as irreducible as the suffering.³⁶¹ It is only through the beauty revealed in affliction that we can feel joy.³⁶² Suffering is caused by the divine entering into the body, joy by the divine entering into the soul.³⁶³

Weil uses the story of the prodigal son to illustrate the way that man comes to be able to see the good in things.³⁶⁴ As the paradigm of all human beings, the prodigal son is more dear to his father than the son who stays obedient because the obedient son is not representative of man but, rather, is obedient in the way that unintelligent life is obedient, i.e., out of necessity. The prodigal son initially wills to be other than the father, as we (in

être doué de discernement et de choix, et non pas ce fluide parfaitement obéissant à toutes les pressions extérieures."

³⁵⁹ CAH, II, p. 337.

³⁶⁰ CAH, I, p. 224.

³⁶¹ See CAH, III, p. 94: "On sent dans la joie qu'on ne pourrait si elle croissait la supporter longtemps sans éclater. La joie est chose de Dieu, parfaite et pure, elle fait crever une âme finie comme une bulle de savon." See also, CAH, II, p. 338; CS, p. 89.

³⁶² See CAH, III, p. 260.

³⁶³ See AD, p. 116.

³⁶⁴ See CS, pp. 167-168; p. 180; p. 328.

our creation) willed to be other than God. He is consumed by a desire which he mistakenly thinks is a desire for things. He comes to realize, however, that the good he desires is not the things, but the good itself that the things have a share in. Weil speaks very gracefully of the prodigal son:

C'est la beauté du monde qui force l'homme épuisé, l'homme qui a dépensé tout son patrimoine, toute son énergie, à se souvenir que les esclaves de son père ont plus de part au bien que lui qui est le fils. La part des choses au bien, le salaire des esclaves du Père, c'est la beauté. On désire être simplement une partie du monde, comme une pierre, plutôt qu'être soi. Alors le Père tue le veau gras. Ce sont des objets, les choses inertes qui sauvent à l'instant décisif. De même que le corps est un puissant instrument de salut.³⁶⁵

The good in things is present in them, but cannot be possessed by the son when he possesses the things. Weil finds the odyssey of the prodigal son a good allegory of any human searching for what he/she really desires: the good itself. We must move from seeing the possession of things as a good to seeing the good in things, but we must start with the desire for things in order that the love for the good grows in us. Then, "peut-être elle se souvient qu'il y a un autre bien auquel les choses inanimées elles-mêmes ont une part abondante."³⁶⁶

It is only through love that we can come into relation with the good that is in the world. This is because it is only love that allows us to see the reality of the world, since love is a stepping back from the world in the sense of an allowing it to be as other than the self or other than the self desires it to be. The stepping back of the soul is an allowing

³⁶⁵ CS, p. 188.

³⁶⁶ CS, p. 180.

of the world to be directly present to the body. Just as the reality of the world is revealed to us when we do not distort it into an object of desire so, too, the body becomes a criterion of reality when the soul is limited through an acceptance of the inherent limitations of the body.

The Body as Lever

When the soul consents to exist in the way that the body does, i.e., as limited to the present space and time that it occupies at the moment, and to simply be only what one is at that time and place, instead of augmenting oneself over time through the imagination, then the body is not just the bridge to reality of the world, but also the source of reality for the spirit.³⁶⁷ Then it is that the body actually brings about the transformation of the soul into spirit.

For example, in a situation of extreme suffering, or what Weil calls affliction,³⁶⁸ the soul is forced to accept this limit because affliction affects the soul directly and cripples the ability of the imagination to compensate:

Le malheur glace l'âme en la réduisant au présent malgré elle.³⁶⁹

La misère humaine serait intolérable si elle n'était diluée dans le temps.

³⁶⁷ See CAH, I, p. 188: "Le temps à proprement parler n'existe pas (sinon le présent, comme limite), et pourtant c'est à cela que nous sommes soumis. Telle est notre condition. *Nous sommes soumis à ce qui n'existe pas.* [...] Le temps, irréel, voile toute chose et nous-mêmes d'irréalité." Weil did not seem to be able to conceive of the obvious possibility of a 'realistic' consideration of the future and the past which was not tainted by the distortions of imagination. But there is no reason that such a consideration could not be introduced into her philosophy.

³⁶⁸ See AD, p. 98: "Dans le domaine de la souffrance, le malheur est une chose à part, spécifique, irréductible. Il est toute autre chose que la simple souffrance. Il s'empare de l'âme et la marque, jusqu'au fond, d'une marque qui n'appartient qu'à lui, la marque de l'esclavage."

³⁶⁹ CS, p. 48.

Empêcher qu'elle se dilue *pour* qu'elle soit intolérable.³⁷⁰

Weil also uses the example of being threatened with a sword to show how affliction freezes the soul by reducing it to the present moment in time and the specific point in space. When the tip of a sword is pressed up to someone, the whole person, even what is infinite in him/her is necessarily reduced to the point of metal at the tip of the sword. The entire person is involuntarily concentrated into that small point in space and time:

L'infini qui est dans l'homme est à la merci d'un petit morceau de fer; telle est la condition humaine; l'espace et le temps en sont cause. Impossible de manier ce morceau de fer sans réduire brusquement l'infini qui est dans l'homme à un point à la pointe, un point à la poignée, au prix d'une douleur déchirante. [...] L'être tout entier est atteint un moment; il n'y reste aucune place pour Dieu. [...] Il faut arriver jusque là pour qu'il y ait incarnation. L'être tout entier devient privation de Dieu [...] ³⁷¹

It is only when suffering becomes impossible that the spirit is born, because this impossibility of the suffering is tantamount to the impossibility of the good being incarnate in matter.³⁷² The impossibility of affliction was very important for Weil because

³⁷⁰ CAH, II, p. 170. See also, CAH, II, p. 225: "La révolte est détourner les yeux [...] Quand on souffre dans sa chair, on ne peut pas détourner sa pensée de ce qu'on souffre, et on aspire à le faire, on tire sur la chaîne. Job."; CAH, II, p. 354: "Le temps est la croix. La douleur physique est la contrainte du temps sensible à l'âme."; CAH, I, p. 20: "Quel raffinement: contraindre la pensée à goûter perpétuellement l'esclavage du corps! Il faut, pour le supporter, mutiler son âme. Sans quoi on se sent se livrer tous les jours tout vivant pour être broyé."

³⁷¹ CAH, I, p. 135.

³⁷² Weil calls impossible suffering 'affliction'. See CAH, I, p. 279: "'Souffrir autant moralement, ce n'est pas possible.' Sentiment caractéristique de la souffrance (au moment qu'on éprouve; disparaît dans le souvenir). C'est impossible, et on ne peut l'éviter." See also, CAH, II, p. 18: "Ce sentiment d'impossibilité, c'est le sentiment du vide. Accompagne toute vraie souffrance, et perce dès que l'imagination combleuse s'arrête un instant. D'où aussi sentiment d'irréalité dans le malheur. Ce n'est pas vrai, parce que ce n'est pas possible. Ce n'est pas possible, parce qu'il ne m'est pas possible de le supporter. Mais qu'est-ce que supporter? Support. C'est être en équilibre."; CAH, III, p. 29: "Le caractère irréductible de la souffrance, qui fait qu'on ne peut pas ne pas en avoir horreur au moment qu'on la subit, a pour destination d'arrêter la volonté, comme

it indicated the irreducible nature of affliction, revealing its true identity: that of reality itself.³⁷³ The irreducibility of affliction lies in its impenetrability to the imagination and intelligence:

Faire de la souffrance une offrande est une consolation, et par suite un voile jeté sur la réalité de la souffrance. Mais de même aussi regarder la souffrance comme un châtiment. La souffrance n'a pas de signification. C'est l'essence même de sa réalité. Il faut l'aimer dans sa réalité, qui est absence de signification. Autrement on n'aime pas Dieu.³⁷⁴

The more something is good (absolute), the more suffering would be involved in its being incarnate.³⁷⁵ This is, for Weil, the proof of the truth of the doctrine of Christ. She interprets the crucifixion (absolute suffering) as the final stage in the process of Christ's incarnation, because only on the cross was Christ finally completely cut off from God.³⁷⁶ She sees in the image of the cross the absolute good completely reduced to one

l'absurdité arrête l'intelligence [...]"; CAH, II, p. 261: "La vie humaine est *impossible*. Mais le malheur seul le fait sentir. Quand on comprend ce qu'est le malheur, on l'aime, mais on comprend que c'est à Dieu à l'infliger par ses instruments propres. A savoir la matière [...]"

³⁷³ See CAH, II, p. 257: "Dans le beau — par exemple la mer, le ciel — il y a de l'*irréductible*. Comme dans la douleur physique. Le même irréductible. Impénétrable à l'intelligence. Existence d'autre chose que moi. Parenté du beau et de la douleur."

³⁷⁴ CAH, III, p. 112. See also CAH, II, p. 193: "Je ne dois pas aimer ma souffrance parce qu'elle m'est utile, mais parce qu'elle *est*."; CAH, III, p. 48: "Nous devons aimer le mal en tant que mal. Cette opération ne peut être pure que lorsque le mal est une douleur physique [...]"; CS, p. 26: "Ne pas parler aux malheureux du royaume de Dieu, car cela leur est trop étranger, mais seulement de la Croix. Dieu a souffert. Donc la souffrance est une chose divine. En elle-même. Non par les compensations, consolations, récompenses. Mais la souffrance qui fait horreur, qu'on subit malgré soi, qu'on voudrait fuir, dont on supplie de ne pas être frappé."

³⁷⁵ See CAH, II, p. 369: "L'union des contradictoires est écartèlement. L'union des contradictoires est par elle-même passion, elle est impossible sans une extrême souffrance."

³⁷⁶ The theme of the real abandonment of divinity by the incarnate Christ and his embrace of the human condition is found in "Phillipians" [New Jerusalem Bible, (New York: Double Day, 1966), New Testament, pp. 339-340], 2, vv 1-10: "His state was divine, / yet he did not cling / to his equality with God / but emptied himself / to assume the condition of a slave, / and become as men are; / he was humbler yet, / even to accepting death, / death on the cross." This was also an important theme for the medieval ascetic women we shall look at in Chapter XII.

single point in time and space. As such, the crucifixion represents the absolute good completely present in matter. It was the suffering of Christ that brought him closer and closer to the world in which we live:

Le rapprochement de Dieu et de l'homme est défendu par la nature même de la création, par l'abîme entre l'être et le paraître. Upanishads: les dieux ne le veulent pas. C'est défaire de la création, et elle se défait dans la souffrance.³⁷⁷

Although the incarnation seems to bring Christ closer to man with respect to our situation as material beings, his incarnation actually makes Christ further from man with respect to the difficulty of imitating his goodness. His presence in the material realm makes him harder to follow because, to find Christ in the world, we have to become incarnate like he did. To become incarnate means, however, the death of the soul, because it involves a similar affliction as Christ's.³⁷⁸ We must desire God in our very aspect of materiality because it is only through our materiality that we have access to the good:

L'incarnation ne rapproche pas Dieu de nous. Elle augmente la distance. Il a mis la croix entre lui et nous. La croix est plus difficile à franchir que la distance du ciel à la terre. Elle est cette distance.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁷ CAH, II, p. 143.

³⁷⁸ See CAH, II, p. 202 (text in brackets): "Il n'a pas réservé la croix au Christ." See also, CS, p. 36 (texte in brackets): "On ne comprend vraiment l'univers et la destinée des hommes, notamment l'effet du malheur sur l'âme des innocents, qu'en concevant qu'ils ont été créés, l'un comme la Croix, les autres comme les frères du Christ crucifié."

³⁷⁹ CAH, II, p. 242. It is perhaps interesting to notice here that Weil does not conceive of the world as material and heaven as immaterial or spiritual, since the bridge between such radically different types of thing would have to be some third intermediate type of thing. But as Weil says here, the cross is the bridge, meaning the material realm. Thus, we can see that in this context Weil does not equate the material realm with the world. Rather, the world was for her the realm of illusory being, which in fact is put in contrast to the material realm.

Weil says that there is a necessary bond between the good and suffering.³⁸⁰ In fact, Weil says that the world itself was designed as a sort of trap, that challenges man to move closer to reality by subjecting him to physical suffering.³⁸¹ It is because matter (body) is not irrelevant to the good of man that it can either be good or evil. And, in general, the world as a whole can either be good or evil. As we saw above, in order for God to create he had to pull back from his 'allness'. This pulling back of God is a pulling back of the good, but of course only from the point of view of the soul. For Weil, like Plato, an absence of good does not leave nothingness: it leaves necessity.³⁸² And, for the natural soul, necessity is equivalent to evil since, for the natural soul, necessity is only possible in the absence of good. In other words, for the natural soul, there is an antinomy between necessity and the good. There is no mediation possible between them. According to Weil, this impossibility of overcoming the antinomy between necessity and the good is indicative of the limitation of the natural soul and, at the same time, characterizes the point at which Christian thought takes up where Greek thought reached its limit.

What Levinas says about the irreconcilable difference between Judaism and Christianity can also serve as an apt description of the situation between the Greek and

³⁸⁰ See CAH, II, p. 132.

³⁸¹ See CS, p. 308: "Cet univers est une machine à fabriquer le salut de ceux qui y consentent." See also, CS, p. 322: "Cet univers est un piège à capturer les âmes pour les livrer avec leur consentement à Dieu."; CAH, III, p. 259: "L'ordre du monde est fait pour nous, pour nous faire accepter la souffrance, et il s'étend à ce que nous ne connaissons pas, car il n'a d'usage pour nous qu'autant qu'il est hors de nous, indifférent à nous. Job."; CAH, III, p. 192; CAH, II, p. 213.

³⁸² See Theaetetus, 176^{a-b}; Republic, VI, 493^c; Symposium, 197^b; Cratylus, 420^d; Timaeus, 75^{a-b}; 47^e-48^a. Simone Pétrement (p. 37) argues that Plato is contrasting the good to necessity but that necessity is not chance, and is rather arbitrariness, like the way that Zeus distributes good and evil in the Iliad (XXIV, 527-532; IV, 84). Plato was opposed to this conception of God. Necessity, for Plato, meant not the absence of cause, but mechanical or blind causality, the arbitrary causality of matter devoid of purpose (See Pétrement, p. 40).

Christian views very well — the Christian conception of spirit involves the notion of loving necessity and evil in a way that breaks through the Greek (i.e., natural) irreconcilability of necessity and the good:

La bonté divine consiste-t-elle à traiter l'homme avec une infinie pitié dans cette compassion surnaturelle qui émeut Simone Weil, ou à l'admettre dans Sa Société, à le traiter avec respect? Aimer son prochain, cela peut vouloir dire entrevoir déjà sa misère et sa pourriture, mais cela peut vouloir dire voir son visage, sa maîtrise par rapport à nous, sa dignité de l'associé de Dieu ayant des droits sur nous. L'amour surnaturel de Dieu dans le christianisme de Simone Weil, s'il va au-delà de la compassion pour le malheur de la créature — ne peut signifier que l'amour du mal lui-même. Dieu a aimé le mal, c'est peut-être là — nous le disons avec infiniment de respect — la plus frissonnante vision de ce christianisme et toute la métaphysique de la Passion. Mais à notre respect se mêle beaucoup d'effroi. Notre voie est ailleurs.³⁸³

Weil finds that Gnostic dualism³⁸⁴ is best able to represent the state of the universe as it is for the natural soul with respect to the dichotomy between necessity and the good:

La puissance de Dieu ici-bas, comparée à celle du Prince de ce monde, est un infiniment petit. Dieu a abandonné Dieu.³⁸⁵

³⁸³Emmanuel Lévinas, "Simone Weil contre la Bible," in Difficile liberté: essais sur le judaïsme, 2nd ed. (Paris: Albin Michel, 1963 & 1976), p. 186.

³⁸⁴By Gnostic dualism Weil seems to have meant simply the absolute dichotomy and antagonism between matter and the good.

³⁸⁵CS, p. 68. See also, CAH, II, p. 173: "Le mal et l'innocence de Dieu. Il faut placer Dieu à une distance infinie pour le concevoir innocent du mal; réciproquement, le mal indique qu'il faut placer Dieu à une distance infinie."; CS, p. 46: "Tout le reste de sa puissance, Il l'a abandonné au Prince de ce monde et à la matière inerte."; CS, p. 222: "La création est un piège où le diable prend Dieu."; CAH, I, p. 172: "La même nécessité qui fait qu'il y a le mal, sans qu'on puisse en faire grief à Dieu, met aussi le mal dans toutes les actions de l'homme le plus juste."; CAH, III, p. 28: "Dieu seul est bien pur. La création étant Dieu et autre que Dieu est essentiellement bien et mal."; CS, p. 268: "[...] suivi d'une séparation violente qui livre les cieux à la domination exclusive de Dieu, mais la terre au diable."; CS, p. 271.

However, Gnostic dualism also represents, if not the actual overcoming of this dualism by the spirit, at least the best conceptual starting point from which this overcoming is possible. In an important sense, Gnostic dualism is, in Weil's philosophy, representative of man's actual situation with respect to spiritual development. It was Weil's own understanding of what I call 'spiritual dualism'. For Weil, Gnostic dualism characterized the traditional theories of spiritual development that held to a strategy of moving towards spirit directly by a rejection of matter and necessity.

Weil also thought, however, that the Gnostic perspective opens the possibility for a remedy of the spiritually dualistic attitude that must be surpassed in order to make real spiritual progress. Gnostic dualism opens the possibility insofar as it implies that matter is crucially relevant to one's spiritual development in its affirmation that matter and the body affect the soul. This affirmation puts the natural autonomy of the soul into question (in an existential sense) and, hence, suggests that a spiritually dualistic attitude towards the body is questionable.

The Body's Perfection

It is, thus, within the conceptual framework of Gnostic dualism, but radically against the valuations of that dualism, that Weil's theory of spiritual development affirms that the body must be united directly to the divine. Because the body must be so united, it must be made perfect in an analogous way as the soul is said, in traditional Christian theology, to have to be perfected in order for it to be united to the divine.

The perfection of the body implies, for Weil, that the body be reduced to a pure

(inert) state of materiality:

Pour qu'un homme soit réellement habité par le Christ comme l'hostie après la consécration, il faut qu'au préalable sa chair et son sang soient devenus matière inerte, et de plus comestible pour ses semblables. Alors cette matière peut devenir par une consécration secrète chair et sang du Christ. Cette seconde transmutation est l'affaire de Dieu seul, mais la première est en partie notre affaire. Il suffit de regarder ma chair et mon sang comme de la matière inerte, insensible, et comestible pour autrui.³⁸⁶

This is achieved through the elimination of the distorting veil of unreality cast over the body by the natural soul. Being stricken by affliction in such a way that there remains no place in the person for God, means that all the ways in which the soul can represent God to itself (i.e., through the imagination) become impossible. In effect, this means that the entire person is reduced to a purely natural state where the soul ceases to entertain the illusion of being powerful, i.e., as related to God conceived of as having power over nature. For the soul, this means not being able to represent oneself to oneself as autonomous from (or outside of) nature. But for Weil, because the soul is essentially nothing but this sense of being an autonomous self, the destruction of this 'illusion' of autonomy is, in effect, tantamount to the elimination of the soul. And because the soul's conception of the body is tainted by its own perspective the affliction also puts an end to the soul's conception of the body. There is an inherent reality to matter that remains and it is this matter that constitutes the 'undistorted' body that the spirit is related to. Thus, it is actually through the elimination of the natural soul that the body is, in this sense, perfected or purified:

³⁸⁶ CS, p. 41. Recall also, CAH, I, p. 135: "L'être tout entier est atteint un moment; il n'y reste aucune place pour Dieu [...] Il faut arriver jusque là pour qu'il y ait incarnation. L'être tout entier devient privation de Dieu."

L'homme fait de chair, comment ne souffrirait-il pas quand il s'unit à la nature divine? Dieu souffre en lui d'être fini.³⁸⁷

En notre être Dieu est déchiré. Nous sommes la crucifixion de Dieu. Mon existence crucifie Dieu. Comme nous aimons une douleur intolérable parce que Dieu nous l'envoie, c'est de cet amour, transposé de l'autre côté du ciel, que Dieu nous aime. L'amour de Dieu pour nous est passion. Comment le bien pourrait-il aimer le mal sans souffrir? Et le mal souffre aussi en aimant le bien. L'amour mutuel de Dieu et de l'homme est souffrance. [...] Si dans la communion la douleur de Dieu est joie pour nous, ne faut-il pas penser que notre douleur, quand elle est pleinement consentie, est joie en Dieu?³⁸⁸

The good of matter is to embody the divine and, thus, the highest good of matter is to embody the divine as sacrament. It is no coincidence that Weil held suffering to be related to joy as hunger is to eating.³⁸⁹ Man's attitude towards food was for Weil, one of the best ways that man has of being good. As Leslie Fielder says of Weil:

The whole pattern of her life was dominated by the concepts of eating and not eating — her virtue seems naturally to have found its expression in attitudes towards food.³⁹⁰

Although Weil was quite ascetic in her own life, there is no sense in her life or thought of a contempt for the material world and human physical existence. This is attested to by her commitment to social and political issues involving the improvement of the living conditions of workers and the poor. In fact, as her life illustrates, there is a fundamental opposition between Christian charity and a contempt for human existence. For example, although the presence of the good in the body that is felt as joy can also be,

³⁸⁷ CAH, II, p. 132.

³⁸⁸ CAH, III, pp. 203-204.

³⁸⁹ See CAH, II, p. 230: "Et si on conçoit la plénitude de la joie, la souffrance est encore un rapport à la joie comme la faim à la nourriture."

³⁹⁰ See Leslie Fielder's introduction to Waiting for God, p. 34.

at the same time, caused by suffering, Weil also accepts that there is a joy felt by the body that is due to the presence of the good that is not produced by suffering. As this passage shows, as great as was her emphasis on physical suffering, Weil also had place (admittedly not as great) in her thought for physical joy:

Pour l'homme vivant en ce monde, ici-bas, la matière sensible — matière inerte et chair — est le filtre, le crible, le critère universel du réel dans la pensée; le domaine de la pensée tout entier, sans que rien soit excepté. La matière est notre juge infaillible. De cette alliance entre la matière et les sentiments réels vient l'importance des repas dans les occasions solennelles, dans les fêtes, dans les réunions de famille ou d'amitié — même deux amis — etc. (aussi friandises, boissons...) Et celle des nourritures spéciales: dinde et marrons glacés de Noël — navettes de la Chandeleur à Marseille - oeufs de Pâques — et mille coutumes locales et régionales de folklore (presque disparues). La joie et la signification spirituelle de la fête est dans la friandise spéciale à la fête.³⁹¹

The presence of the absolute good in matter has the effect of, what Weil calls, an expiation of matter. The theme of the sanctification of matter plays an important role in Weil's thought. Through suffering, the material realm is sanctified. Matter becomes, in itself, a manifestation of the good. She holds that through the crucifixion "Dieu a expié la création, et nous qui y sommes associés l'expions aussi."³⁹² In one sense, matter is already good in itself because God is really present in it as the cause of its being:

Car autant qu'il est créateur il est présent partout, en toute chose qui existe, dès lors qu'elle existe.³⁹³

But the presence of God in all things refers only to God as creator. God as spirit

³⁹¹ CS, pp. 336-337.

³⁹² CAH, I, p. 203. See also, CAH, II, p. 239: "Le végétatif et le social sont les deux domaines où le bien n'entre pas. Le Christ a racheté le végétatif, non le social. Il n'a pas prié pour le monde."

³⁹³ CAH, II, p. 306.

remains apart. What this means is that the good is made present for man through the three loves: that of religious practices, of nature, of one's fellow human beings and friends. For example, the sacraments serve to bring the fullness of our attention to the presence of God in the world by focusing it on the particular piece of bread.³⁹⁴ Ideally, we would experience the presence of God in everything if we had a full capacity to focus our attention on the good in every aspect of our lives:

Présence de Dieu doit s'entendre de deux sens. Car autant qu'il est créateur il est présent partout [...] La présence pour laquelle Dieu a besoin de la coopération de la créature, c'est la présence de Dieu non pas pour autant qu'il est Créateur, mais pour autant qu'il est l'Esprit. La première présence est la présence de création. La seconde la présence de dé-création.³⁹⁵

Thus, any material object can be an expression of charity, beauty or worship when it serves to focus one's attention on the presence of the good in one's life. And, as we saw above, Weil felt that food serves best to draw our attention to the good that is all around us. It becomes, quite literally, our spiritual food.

Spiritual Food

Normally, in traditional theology, the idea of spiritual food is used metaphorically to refer to scripture that is read or 'eaten' and becomes food for the 'spirit' conceived of as

³⁹⁴ See CAH, II, p. 277: "La consécration de l'hostie ne fait pas que Dieu s'y trouve, car il se trouve toujours tout entier et pleinement dans chaque parcelle de matière dans toute la mesure où la matière est capable de le recevoir. Mais — même si nous savons cela abstraitement — nous ne le savons pas avec toute l'âme, nous n'avons pas contact avec Dieu à travers chaque parcelle de matière. La consécration, par la grâce qui y est attachée, pour l'âme capable de recevoir cette grâce, rend cette parcelle de matière, à cet instant du temps, transparente, de telle manière que l'on y trouve un véritable contact avec Dieu; de même qu'on a un véritable contact avec un homme en touchant son vêtement."

³⁹⁵ CAH, II, p. 306.

the highest part of the soul. But Weil holds that real food can be, in a literal sense, spiritual food when it is the actual point in space and time in which the reunion between God the creator and God the spirit is achieved:

Les sacrements ont rapport à la nature du temps. L'éternité entre dans le temps par l'intermédiaire des instants. On ne peut circonscrire un instant que par des circonstances matérielles. Quand ces circonstances remontent à l'union de l'éternité et du temps, à l'incarnation, quoi de plus sacré?³⁹⁶

It is not simply that any sacrament is food for the spirit when it serves to focus one's attention on the good but, even further, that any food can be 'spiritual food' when the food nourishes the body which is put into the direct service of the good (God as Spirit). When God works through one, in the sense of God taking the place of one's soul, then one's actions done in this state actually make the spirit in oneself grow:

Comme chaque minute d'attention même imparfaite vers le haut fait un peu monter, de même chaque acte accompli avec la même attention. Rien de bien n'est jamais perdu. On ne retombe qu'autant qu'on croit s'être élevé plus qu'on ne l'a fait réellement.³⁹⁷

Just as the body passes directly into God's service so, too, does the food that would normally nourish the body directly nourish the spirit.³⁹⁸ However, it is only in cases where the action puts the body at risk that the person really pledges him/herself to the good.

If we take the example of T.E. Lawrence, who goes back into the desert to look for the missing Arab soldier, we can see that the action, in a sense, gives what

³⁹⁶ CAH, II, pp. 172-173.

³⁹⁷ CAH, II, p. 249.

³⁹⁸ See CS, pp. 319-320; CAH, II, p. 320.

nourishment the body needs to survive (since he had only enough water to make it through the journey only if he kept going, without turning back) to the spirit³⁹⁹ since the action makes the spirit grow but robs the body of its vital needs:

Mais où trouver le courage de priver la chair et le sang de la dernière goutte d'eau pour la donner à la tige divine? Il n'est possible d'agir ainsi que par contrainte.⁴⁰⁰

There is a certain tension in Weil's thought between, on the one hand, needing extra food for the body's well-being and the spirit's growth and, on the other hand, voluntarily not allowing oneself this extra food. Of course, one would normally allow oneself this extra food. For example, Weil says:

Il faut donc, dans toute la mesure où c'est possible sans violer d'obligations, se mettre sous l'influence de stimulants terrestres, dans l'intention de donner à manger l'énergie qu'on en reçoit à la graine divine logée au secret du coeur.⁴⁰¹

In fact, Weil even says that, unless one is sure that one has the necessary supplementary energy, one should not try to perform the action because, if one fails due to an insufficiency of energy, there results a degrading effect.⁴⁰² However, in another sense, as long as there is enough energy to feed both the body and the spirit, the person never comes to really pledge him/herself to the good because, as long as the body is not at risk,

³⁹⁹ Weil makes the distinction between supplementary energy and vital (or vegetative) energy. Supplementary energy is extra energy that the body does not actually need to stay alive, and can normally be used for activities that go beyond those required for bare survival. Vital energy, on the other hand, is that energy which is actually required for the body's basic functions, without which it would cease operating.

⁴⁰⁰ CS, p. 321. We must remember that the spirit is not a 'thing' or entity like the soul or the body is. It is the goodness of the person, i.e., the person's orientation towards the good.

⁴⁰¹ CS, p. 320.

⁴⁰² See CAH, I, p. 251; pp. 253-254; CAH, II, p. 18; p. 55.

it makes no commitment; and for one's commitment to be real, it must be physical as well as spiritual. Until the extra energy is used up and the energy that is vital to the body is needed in the performance of good actions, there is no real (i.e., physical) aspect to one's unconditional commitment to the good.

In the case of T.E. Lawrence, we can imagine him having, for most of the journey back to find the fallen soldier, enough supplementary strength to make it back. But then, at a certain point, the point of no return, that energy is used up and his perseverance implies a conflict between survival and doing the good. If he is to persevere, the required energy must come from somewhere else besides the supplementary energy, it must come from his vital energy:

L'énergie supplémentaire alors précipite le corps dans la mort. L'énergie végétative n'est pas intéressée. Dès qu'elle est intéressée apparaît (sauf grâce surnaturelle) le plus froid égoïsme. C'est même le seul cas où l'homme soit égoïste.⁴⁰³

Quand les circonstances mettent l'énergie végétative à nu et commencent à la consommer, il faut que cette énergie même s'arrache aux fonctions biologiques qu'elle alimente et se consacre à Dieu. C'est la mort spirituelle, qui est aussi une opération corporelle. L'homme se donne à manger aux créatures de Dieu.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰³ CAH, II, p. 220. See also, CAH, II, p. 126: "C'est là que commence l'extrême malheur, quand tous les attachements sont remplacés par celui de survivre. L'attachement apparaît là à nu. Sans [autre] objet que soi-même. Enfer."; CS, p. 180: "A ce moment où l'énergie volontaire est épuisée, où l'énergie végétative est à nu, l'âme choisit entre l'enfer ou le paradis. Et elle ne sait pas qu'elle choisit. [...] Ceux qui meurent sans avoir jamais épuisé l'énergie volontaire meurent sans avoir fait ce choix — quelle que soit au reste la vie qu'ils ont menée, vertueuse ou criminelle. Quel est leur sort une fois morts, c'est un mystère."

⁴⁰⁴ CS, pp. 181-182. This is the rationale ultimately behind Weil's statement that we should detach all our desires for worldly things from those things and direct it exclusively to the good which we used in the second chapter to show that Weil could be seen as a spiritual dualist. See also CAH, II, p. 175: "Dans la privation d'énergie supplémentaire, il y a une espèce d'innocence. Innocence du malheur. Souffrance expiatoire. L'arrachement et l'orientation vers le haut de l'énergie végétative elle-même est souffrance rédemptrice. Rachète la création en la défaisant.";

It is only when one's vital energy is needed and the body actually pledges itself to the good that the supernatural aspect of food is revealed.⁴⁰⁵ Weil herself says that:

Pour travailler en nous, Dieu a besoin que nous lui offrions notre énergie vitale, que nous la mettions à sa disposition.⁴⁰⁶

For someone who has pledged him/herself in this way, any food will be a sacrament or, in other words, any food will be a point in space and time where the divine union between God and God is achieved.⁴⁰⁷

For Weil, not only can food be good but, also, the good can be food. When the body itself is pledged to the good, it becomes good right down to its very materiality, and just as the body's matter is good so, too, the body is fed in its physicality by the good in food:

Dieu résidant dans la nourriture. Agneau, pain. Dans la matière fabriquée par du travail humain, pain, vin. Cela devrait être le centre de la vie paysanne. Par son travail le paysan, s'il a cette intention, donne un peu de sa chair pour qu'elle devienne la chair du Christ. [...] Si le travail de labourer me fait maigrir, ma chair devient réellement du blé. Si ce blé sert à l'hostie, elle devient chair du Christ. Quiconque laboure avec cette intention doit devenir un saint.⁴⁰⁸

CAH, II, p. 58; CS, p. 86. This seems to describe the situation of the person in a concentration camp. Is moral behavior, or love, possible when one has not even enough energy to stay alive? Weil answers yes, but it requires a metaphysical transformation involving the birth of a supernatural self, and in fact it is only in this condition that being moral and loving the world and others is genuine.

⁴⁰⁵ See CAH, I, p. 278: "Alors la source d'énergie ne peut être que le pain surnaturel."

⁴⁰⁶ CS, p. 144.

⁴⁰⁷ See CS, p. 267: "[...] tout morceau de matière peut par convention enfermer la présence de Dieu. On peut ainsi par convention prononcer, entendre, voir, toucher, manger Dieu. De cette manière, seulement le conflit entre la partie de l'âme qui désire la présence de Dieu et la partie qui en a horreur peut être arbitré par la balance du corps."

⁴⁰⁸ CS, pp. 41-42.

Physical hunger and suffering in general also serve to feed the spirit, though indirectly, by causing the soul to suffer, which in turn feeds the spirit. Although it perhaps seems strange at first glance, it is not inconsistent for Weil to equate 'looking and not eating' (which is how she describes the hunger of the soul) with the enjoyment of ceremonial foods, since these foods serve to draw one's attention to the good in the world:

Seuls peuvent être sauvés ceux que quelque chose contraint à s'arrêter quand ils voudraient s'approcher de ce qu'ils aiment. Ceux en qui le sentiment du beau a mis la contemplation. [...] Seuls ont quelque espoir de salut ceux à qui il arrive quelquefois de rester quelque temps à regarder au lieu de manger.⁴⁰⁹

The two ways in which the spirit is fed, through actual food and through suffering, are complementary. Weil compares the food received from God, through actual food,⁴¹⁰ to the water that feeds a plant and the food received, through grace, from the hunger of the soul and suffering in general, is compared to the light that feeds a plant:

Il ne faut pas oublier qu'une plante vit de lumière et d'eau, non de lumière seule. Ce serait donc une erreur de compter sur la grâce seule. Il faut aussi de l'énergie terrestre.⁴¹¹

So, the food that is used ceremonially, that becomes a sacrament, is physical food that feeds the spirit because it serves to focus one's attention on the good. And, to a large degree, it is through actions and attitudes that attention is focused on the good, since the

⁴⁰⁹ CS, pp. 251-252. See also, CS, p. 252: "La partie éternelle de l'âme se nourrit de faim. Quand on ne mange pas, l'organisme digère sa propre chair et la transforme en énergie. L'âme aussi. L'âme qui ne mange pas se digère elle-même. La partie éternelle digère la partie mortelle de l'âme et la transforme. [...] Faire mourir de faim la partie périssable de l'âme, le corps étant encore vivant. Ainsi un corps de chair passe directement au service de Dieu."

⁴¹⁰ See CS, p. 251: "Mais la substance de Dieu, au moins au début, ne nourrit qu'un point de l'âme placé tellement au centre que nous ignorons qu'il existe."

⁴¹¹ CS, p. 321.

only good that man can focus on is that good that exists in the world.⁴¹²

Weil says that we must become "rien jusqu'au niveau végétatif. C'est alors que Dieu devient du pain."⁴¹³ When the spirit becomes directly related to the body the desire for absolute good becomes manifest as a physical desire. In this state the need for the good is felt in the body as hunger, because at this level, bread or any other food becomes a sacrament, essentially containing the good, which when consumed transforms the body into something which is also essentially (i.e., in its very aspect of materiality) good. Through labor (work in exchange for food) one's body that is used up in the labor becomes food, and when used for good actions (given in charity or used for the Eucharist), the food becomes Christ's flesh. When the food is then eaten again, it becomes a person's flesh again, except that it has now been transformed into something divine. The body has 'passed directly into God's service'.

In this chapter we have seen how the body's role in desiring the good depends upon the existence of the good in the world. The movement from soul to spirit is only possible through the body and the body is only able to provide this service insofar as it acts towards a good that exists materially. We have also seen that the body does not just provide a service and then become insignificant once that service is accomplished. Through its service, the body is implicated in the good in such a way that the growth of spirit results as much from the development of good in the body as from the destruction of the soul. This is because the spirit is not a substance or a 'thing' which is itself good.

⁴¹² See AD, pp. 184-85.

⁴¹³ CAH, II, p. 234.

The presence of spirit is the good of the body. Spirit is an orientation of the person towards the good.

As we will see in the next chapter the body's goodness involves a relationship between body and spirit that is very different from that which existed between body and soul.

CHAPTER IX : Action and the Relation Between Body and Spirit

In an attempt to illustrate how Weil could be mistaken to be a spiritual dualist, it was suggested, in Chapter II, that Weil accepted the analysis of the body as a tool for the soul, a thesis which, in the third chapter, we identified as the underlying principle of spiritual dualism. It therefore seemed as though she also accepted the dualistic conception of spiritual development.

This, however, is not the case. In Chapters IV-VIII we tried to show that Weil's theory of spiritual development does not involve a conception of man's good that has only to do with the soul and that the soul is not only replaced by spirit, but that there is a good which belongs properly to man's physical aspects. It would, therefore, be a simple thing to conclude that, according to Weil, the body is neither related to the soul as a tool (since, ideally, the soul is destroyed in the process of spiritual development), nor to the spirit in that way (since the spirit has no faculty of will).

This would not, however, be an adequate conclusion because the relation between the body and the spirit has not been clarified. In this chapter, we will clarify this relation by focusing on the anthropological implications of Weil's theory of spiritual development.

The Worker and his Tools

Certain clues to the relation between the body and the spirit have been given. For example, Weil refers to 'a certain arrangement of human nature' whereby the thought or desire of the soul or spirit remains unreal until passing through the body.⁴¹⁴ Weil also refers to an 'alliance between matter and real feelings'.⁴¹⁵ These statements alone do not, however, tell us very much.

Weil initially thought that the proper relation between the soul and the body ought to mirror the relationship between a skilled laborer and his tool, but she also saw that the conditions of modern industrialized labor disrupted that proper relationship. However, through her analysis of what would happen in an ideal work situation, she came to see that the relationship of the soul to the body is not that of the worker/tool dualism, because the skilled laborer, in her eyes, did not have a dualistic relationship to his tools. Weil also came to see, in the actual situation of labor that gave rise to her initial criticism, a condition of affliction that was also involved in her ideal image of labor and was, in fact, a universal condition of human existence.⁴¹⁶ Weil's analysis of labor as, in general,

⁴¹⁴ See PSO, p. 135.

⁴¹⁵ See CS, pp. 336-337.

⁴¹⁶ From her experiences working in factories Weil came to feel that there was something about the way factory work was organized that was destructive to the soul. Jacques Cabaud [Simone Weil: A Fellowship in Love, (New York: Channel Press, 1964), p. 107-108] writes: "During her first weeks on the job, she noted her experiences and reactions with a scientific detachment, as if the work were a kind of game. [But then] More and more Simone became aware of the gap between her expectations and reality [...] Slowly, gradually, Simone Weil felt her energies drain away until the temptation to just stop thinking obsessed her. It seemed the one and only way to escape the unendurable suffering." [See also, Weil, "Factory Journal" in Formative Writings: 1929-1941, ed. & tr. by Dorothy Tuck McFarland & Wilhelmina Van Ness, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), p. 171: "The effect of exhaustion is to make me forget my real reasons for spending time in the factory, and to make it almost impossible for me to overcome the strongest temptation that this life entails: that of not thinking anymore, which is the one and only way of not suffering from it. [...] Revolt is impossible, except for momentary flashes (I mean even as a feeling). [...] We are like horses who hurt themselves as soon as they pull on their bits - and we bow our heads. We even lose consciousness of the situation; we just submit. Any

involving affliction (the source of spiritual development) enabled her to drop, altogether, the question of the relationship of body and soul as tool and user from her analysis of spiritual development.

We will first look at Weil's explanation of how the modern day forms of labor destroy what she thought at the time to be the 'proper' body-soul relationship, preventing man from relating to the world as a product of his labor:

Les conditions de la vie moderne rompent partout l'équilibre de l'esprit et du corps dans la pensée et dans l'action — toutes les actions: le travail, le combat... La civilisation où nous vivons, sous tous ses aspects, écrase le CORPS humain. L'esprit et le corps sont devenus étrangers l'un à l'autre. Le contact est perdu.⁴¹⁷

Man's body was thought of, by Weil, as man's tool par excellence because it is

reawakening of thought is then painful"]. The worker could either think or work but not both. Thinking slowed one down and distracted one (causing injuries). It also made the work an anguish to the self. Feeling it harder and harder to think (and observing in her fellow workers a refusal to think) led Weil to the conclusion that oppression did not insight rebellion but, on the contrary, submission. [See Dorothy Tuck McFarland, Simone Weil, (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1983), p. 68 & p. 86]. After leaving her last factory job Weil went on a cruise to Spain and Portugal. While in Portugal, she experienced a cultural expression of Christianity in the feast celebration of a small fishing village. She was struck with the realization that Christianity was the religion of the oppressed [See McLellan, p. 103-104 & p. 136]. Christianity was a type of thought that was compatible with situations of physical anguish and could counteract oppression by re-positioning the individual *vis-à-vis* nature or the universe. Christianity provides the type of consciousness (rootedness) through which man is able to preserve his humanity in the face of affliction [See David McLellan, Utopian Pessimist: The Life and thought of Simone Weil, (New York: Poseidon Press, 1990), p. 166-170]. This led her to begin thinking of social transformation in terms of a cultural revolution. She came, for example, to think of beauty as the culture of the people [See McLellan, p. 184-185]. The meaning structure of Christianity as well as certain other forms of religious thinking relate directly to the theme of suffering and somehow gave the individual a human dignity even within the suffering context (i.e., not simply by allowing the person to dream of a better life). During her period spent in Marseille and in the nearby countryside working as a field hand (1940-1942), her thought was very much focused on deepening her understanding of the way in which 'Christian' inspiration illuminated the individual's profound connection to the world that was achieved primarily through manual labor.⁴¹⁷ CAH, I, pp. 63-64 (text in italics). See also, CAH, I, p. 73: "Retrouver à nouveau ce pacte entre le corps et l'âme [...]"

through the body that man establishes the crucial relationship between himself, as creator, and that which he created. It is only by relating to what one makes of the world through the instrument by which it was made, that the creator can achieve his true nature, i.e., that of worker or pseudo-creator. For Weil, man's greatness always lies in the re-creation of his physical existence. Ideally, we are constantly re-creating the world, the universe and ourselves. For example, we re-create the physical reality of a marriage by celebrating an anniversary dinner. The dinner is a physical thing that is itself a part of the physical reality of the marriage (as is any meal) but at the same time it symbolizes the whole relationship itself. And we can already see here, in Weil's emphasis on physical work as the condition of man's self-actualization already, the focus on man's physical existence that was eventually to force Weil away from the dualistic conception of man's 'proper' relationship to the world and his body, i.e., the user/tool analysis of man:

*L'homme crée l'univers autour de lui par le travail. Souviens-toi du regard que tu jetais sur les champs, après une journée de moisson... Combien différent du regard du promeneur, pour qui les champs ne sont qu'un fond de décor! Or c'est précisément en CELA que consiste la puissance d'un véritable monument sur l'univers qui l'entoure [...]*⁴¹⁸

Science re-creates as a symbolic representation, but art re-creates as an alliance between soul and body where, for example, in the case of painting, the internal state of the soul is expressed visually and perceived by the body.⁴¹⁹ There is nothing wrong with scientific representation because, even though it formalizes the universe, it is nevertheless

⁴¹⁸ CAH, I, p. 27 (text in italics). See also, PG, p. 178: "Le secret de la condition humaine, c'est qu'il n'y a pas d'équilibre entre l'homme et les forces de la nature environnantes qui le dépassent infiniment dans l'inaction; il n'y a équilibre que dans l'Action par laquelle l'homme recrée sa propre vie dans le travail."

⁴¹⁹ See CAH, I, p. 70.

still something real that is formalized. The problem arises when science as technology becomes the medium through which man works and lives. Technology creates a gulf between what is re-created and what it is a re-creation of:

Quand il faut en venir à interpréter les signes, il n'y a plus qu'un simulacre abstrait de l'action, d'une part ordres donnés parmi des signes sans réalité, d'autre part ordres exécutés parmi des choses sans signification.⁴²⁰

Thus, what Weil would find wrong with the modern ideal of being freed from bondage to nature, measurable by the amount of time spent in labor directly concerned with survival, is that there results only the abstract image of existence. The key to human existence and the 'proper' relation between body and soul lies in work or action in general. The separation between thought and action that characterizes modern labor is truly regrettable because it is not a form of work that involves both the body and the soul.⁴²¹ Work must take the form of art in the sense of skilled labor, because it is only in this type of work that man re-establishes "[...] le pacte originel de l'homme avec la nature, de l'âme avec son corps."⁴²²

⁴²⁰ CAH, I, p. 63. See also, in La condition ouvrière, p. 244: "qu'on y est un étranger admis comme simple intermédiaire entre les machines et les pièces usinées, ce fait vient atteindre le corps et l'âme; sous cette atteinte, la chair et la pensée se rétractant."; CAH, I, p. 29: "L'homme est esclave autant qu'entre l'action et son effet, entre l'effort et l'oeuvre se trouve placée l'intervention de *volontés* étrangères. C'est le cas *et* pour l'esclave *et* pour le maître, de nos jours. Jamais l'homme n'est en face des conditions de sa propre activité. La société fait écran entre la nature et l'homme."; CAH, I, p. 33: "L'esprit est esclave toutes les fois qu'il accepte des liaisons *non établies* par lui. Déjà l'addition..." It is this aspect of slavery that Weil later came to identify as the essential condition for spiritual development, making the injustice of modern industrial labor simply an instance of the human condition. See, for example, her description of the effect that work in a factory had on her in La condition ouvrière, (Gallimard, 1951), pp. 20-21.

⁴²¹ See Anne Reynaud's appendix to Weil's Leçons de philosophie, (Paris: Plon, 1959), p. 256: "Séparation regrettable entre pensée et action, puisque le vrai 'travail' est celui qui met en jeu l'âme et le corps."

⁴²² CAH, I, p. 61. Skilled labor involves the body and the soul in a synthesis because it allows the laborer to see the end product of his work. Weil was captivated by the idea of a harmonious

Whenever we use things and work through them they become extensions of our own body. But when we are properly related to the product of our work then that thing (and by extension, nature or the world in general) also becomes intimately related to us:

Habitude, habileté, transport de la conscience dans un objet autre que le corps propre. Que cet objet soit l'univers, les saisons, le soleil, les étoiles. [...] Le rapport entre le corps et l'outil change, dans l'apprentissage. Il faut changer le rapport entre le corps et le monde.⁴²³

Through skilled labor (or any type of labor in which the worker is not alienated from the end product of his labor), man's soul is brought into an immediate relation to the world. The body becomes a bridge connecting the soul with the material world but, because this connection puts the soul into direct contact with the world, the world can no

interweaving of intellectual reflection and manual labor [see Jacques Cabaud, Simone Weil: A Fellowship in Love, (New York: Channel Press, 1964), p. 109]. Seeing the end product is what allows the worker to think about the process of activity and ultimately understand the balance of forces that goes into the different aspects of production. But the way in which work is organized in factories (where, for example, the worker does not have an immediate grasp of the relation between what he does and the end product of his labor) makes it impossible for the worker to understand what he is doing. [See, Weil, "Factory Journal" in Formative Writings: 1929-1941, ed. & tr. by Dorothy Tuck McFarland & Wilhelmina Van Ness, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), p. 193-4: "Guihéneuf: the machine is a mystery for the worker who hasn't studied mathematics. He doesn't see a balance of forces in it. [...] The press that wasn't working and Jacquot. Clearly the press was a mystery for Jacquot [...] Of course, the worker does not know how each piece is used: (1) how it is combined with other pieces; (2) the successive operations carried out on it; (3) the ultimate use of the whole [...]"] See also, Weil, "Factory Work", in The Simone Weil Reader, ed. by George A. Panichas, (New York: David McKay Co., 1977), p. 63] Consequently the way that factory work is organized prevents it from providing a synthesis of body and soul. The agricultural work of the peasants offered the same sort of opportunity for this sort of synthesis as skilled labor did since the worker was involved in the full cycle of the crops.

⁴²³ CAH, I, p. 130. See also, CAH, I, p. 128: "Que l'univers entier soit pour moi, par rapport à mon corps, ce qu'est le bâton d'un aveugle, pour l'aveugle, par rapport à sa main. Il n'a réellement plus sa sensibilité dans sa main, mais au bout du bâton."; CAH, I, pp. 129-30: "Changer le rapport physique entre soi et le monde (physique, est-ce le mot propre?), comme, par l'apprentissage, l'ouvrier change le rapport physique entre soi et l'outil. [...] Blessures: c'est le métier qui rentre dans le corps. Que toute souffrance fasse rentrer l'univers dans le corps."; CAH, I, p. 131; CS, p. 81.

longer exists for the soul as an abstraction. The world that the soul is brought up against in labor is the real world - harsh and dangerous. It is in this way that Weil's analysis of skilled labor led her to conceive of the body as the point in space and time at which the divine and the human can meet.

Affliction

We can now turn to the analysis of how skilled labor involves affliction and how Weil's analysis of the affliction involved in skilled labor breaks down not only the ideal of the user-tool model but also the distinction between skilled and unskilled labor. Through the suffering of injuries and fatigue involved in any apprenticeship, the worker's tools cease to be, for the worker, external objects and become part of the worker's body. In the same way, through affliction, the body, which might have been thought of as a tool, loses that designation and becomes an extension of the soul. Through affliction the soul loses its sense of being a distinct subject, autonomous and impervious to harm or destruction from without. When the soul loses this sense of being a distinct subject, the body loses its aspect of being an object distinct from the soul. So, in the case of skilled labor, the relationship between body and soul becomes an identity of worker and tool, soul and body. As Weil says in a later journal entry: "Tout est intermédiaire dans le travail, tout est moyen — la matière, l'outil, le corps et l'âme."⁴²⁴

If we take, for example, the case of a blind man's stick, we can see that as the instrument becomes an extension of the body, the soul's awareness moves from being

⁴²⁴ CAH, III, p. 239.

located at the tips of the person's fingers, to being located at the tip of the stick where it makes contact with the world. Thus the more that an external object becomes associated with one's body, the closer the 'natural' body becomes related to the soul.

Weil slowly came to believe that the important question is not really one of what relationship between soul and body is most conducive to human existence but, rather, what relationship resulted from spiritual development. And, given that spiritual development seemed to bring into question the clear distinction between body and soul, Weil began to question the scientific and philosophical basis for this distinction. She had to find a way of explaining the mechanism which made spiritual development, as she understood it, possible.

Weil saw traditional science as giving an analysis of the body as a purely material entity ruled solely by mechanical forces.⁴²⁵ She felt that philosophy, by and large, retained the notion of a soul or self that could manipulate the body (in some mysterious way) to produce some desired effect only in the sense of manipulating mechanical forces in the same way one steers a boat in a river. But Weil also held that the reality of this necessity depended on the perspective adopted. Matter was, for Weil, simply what was obedient to necessity or, in other words, what is thought of as matter is nothing else but this obedience itself.⁴²⁶ Moreover, as we have seen, the 'reading' of the world as material (i.e., as determined by necessity) depended on the fact that the soul believed itself to be an autonomous subject. Science failed to see that there is, at an objective level, something

⁴²⁵ Weil's conception of science seems, for the most part, to have been restricted to the views of Descartes.

⁴²⁶ See Gateway to God, p. 53: "For us, matter is simply what is subject to necessity. We know nothing else about it."

more than blind mechanism at work in matter or, in other words, that from a different (but equally objective) perspective, matter was not only obedient to necessity, but also obedient to the good. Science, says Weil, is a representation "de l'univers, mais non complète. Car en certains cas la matière (le corps étant matière) obéit au sage comme elle n'obéit pas à l'idiot. D'autre part, en certains cas, elle est belle."⁴²⁷

So, matter can be seen as obedient not only to necessity but also to the good as well. If one 'reads' the universe as a blind mechanism, then matter is obedient to necessity. But, if one is to 'read' the universe as good, then matter must be seen as obedient to the good. And in order for matter to be seen as obedient to the good we must give a metaphysical analysis to what is material (which would normally be given a mechanical structure of explanation):

Pour que le bien passe dans l'existence, il faut que le bien puisse être cause de ce qui est déjà entièrement causé par la nécessité.⁴²⁸

We have seen an example of reading the good as the cause of what is already caused by necessity in Weil's first category of obedience to God.⁴²⁹ According to this first category of obedience, we are supposed to see obedience to God's will behind all natural phenomena that are not dependent on our will, even the actions and attitudes of other people.

Weil tries to explain how the reading of the universe can be subjective in this way by giving to the soul itself a mechanical structure of analysis and, thereby, locating the

⁴²⁷ *CAH*, I, p. 101.

⁴²⁸ *CAH*, I, p. 225 (text in italics).

⁴²⁹ Chapter V, p. 88.

soul within the realm of necessity. In other words, if we assume that the universe is a manifestation of the good (which seems to be required, given that spiritual development is possible), then the soul must also be determined according to laws similar to those that determine the physical manifestation of the good. That the soul is subject to laws in its reading of the universe explains how it can have such a subjective reading of the universe:

Dans la 'manifestation subtile' non plus, rien d'illimité, et c'est pourquoi il y a lieu de chercher à formuler en 'psychologie' des principes analogues à la conservation de l'énergie et à l'entropie. [...] Le bien suprême, passant dans le corps, est soumis à la distance, à la pesanteur, etc. — Dans l'âme, il est soumis aux lois de la 'manifestation subtile' [...] ⁴³⁰

The Void and Transference of Suffering

As an example of the need to give to the soul a mechanical structure of analysis, we have Weil's theory of the transference of suffering:

Mécanique humaine. Quiconque souffre cherche à communiquer sa souffrance — soit en maltraitant, soit en provoquant la pitié — afin de la diminuer, et la diminue vraiment ainsi. Celui qui est tout en bas, que personne ne plaint, qui n'a le pouvoir de maltraiter personne (s'il n'a pas d'enfant ou d'être qui l'aime), sa souffrance reste en lui et l'empoisonne. Cela est impérieux comme la pesanteur. Comment s'en délivre-t-on? Comment se délivre-t-on de ce qui est comme la pesanteur?⁴³¹

Body and soul are brought together in their common need to overcome the natural mechanism of laws to which they are both subject. The soul is freed through the suffering

⁴³⁰ CAH, I, p. 213. 'Subtle manifestation' seems to refer to the stoic notion of light matter, of which the soul is composed, as opposed to heavy matter, out of which physical bodies are composed. See, for example, AD, p. 146.

⁴³¹ CAH, I, p. 252.

of the body. The soul is freed from itself and although, in one sense, this acquired freedom involves the destruction of the soul, in another sense, this freedom means that the soul is transformed into spirit. The soul (as spirit) frees the body by sanctifying it, by making it (through charity, for example) conform to the laws of supernatural love whereby the body becomes subject to the laws of the good and not those of necessity:

Celui qui consent à obéir à Dieu, l'esprit en lui obéit, c'est-à-dire est soumis aux lois des phénomènes spirituels; le reste de l'être, par un mécanisme que nous ignorons, s'adapte à l'esprit autant qu'il faut pour que ces lois jouent. Celui qui ne consent pas à obéir à Dieu, en lui il n'y a pas d'esprit. L'âme charnelle et la chair qui sont tout son être obéissent, c'est-à-dire sont soumis aux lois mécaniques.⁴³²

When one is unable to transfer one's sufferings there arises in the person's soul, what Weil calls, a 'void' . There are two types of void.⁴³³ One corresponds to a simple lack of power: when one is unable through a lack of opportunity to transfer one's suffering, it stays within one as a void or imbalance and destroys the person.⁴³⁴ The second form of void arises out of love. Love is a spiritual form of apprenticeship through which the world becomes coextended with one's body. When one does not transfer his or her suffering out of love and not simply due to a lack of opportunity, there is an

⁴³² CS, p. 225.

⁴³³ See CAH, III, p. 89.

⁴³⁴ See CAH, I, pp. 271-272: "*Pesanteur*. Le vide (non accepté) produit de la haine, de l'aigreur, de l'amertume, de la rancune. Le mal qu'on désire à ce qu'on hait, et qu'on imagine, rétablit l'équilibre. *L'imagination (non contrôlée) est productrice d'équilibre, réparatrice des déséquilibres et des vides.*" See also, CAH, III, pp. 274-275: "Mais quand nous sommes trop épuisés, quand nous n'avons pas le courage de jouer, alors il nous faut de vrais mots. Nous crions pour en avoir. Le cri nous déchire les entrailles. Nous n'obtenons que le silence. Après avoir passé par là, les uns se mettent à se parler à eux-mêmes, comme les fous. Quoi qu'ils fassent après cela, il ne faut avoir pour eux que de la pitié. Les autres, peu nombreux, donnent tout le coeur au silence."

acceptance of the void, an acceptance that what is necessary for happiness and even survival is not the same as what is good:

Accepter un vide en soi-même, cela est surnaturel. Où trouver l'énergie pour un acte sans contrepartie? L'énergie doit venir d'ailleurs. Mais pourtant il faut d'abord un arrachement, quelque chose de désespéré, que d'abord un vide se produise — Vide: nuit obscure.⁴³⁵

The 'expansion' of the body to include objects and finally the world induces the opposite movement in the soul. As the body's limits become indefinite, so do those of the soul. For the body this is an increase, but a decrease for the soul. It is through acceptance of a void that love causes a 'shrinking' or a pulling back of the soul from its sense of being all.

The breakdown of the distinction between soul and the world is, in one sense, a dissipation of the sense of being an 'I' and, in another sense, a stepping back of the soul from the world (considered as object of desire). The sense of being an 'I' depends on there being a clearly defined 'object' distinct from the self, there for the self. Acceptance of the void removes the designation of the world as being there for the subject. Thus, the acceptance of a void is a stepping back from the world in the sense of not approaching it through desire and imagination:

L'homme n'échappe aux lois de ce monde que la durée d'un éclair. Instants d'arrêt, de contemplation, d'intuition pure, de vide mental, d'acceptation du vide moral. C'est par ces instants qu'il est capable de surnaturel.⁴³⁶

⁴³⁵ CAH, I, p. 267. See also, CAH, III, pp. 120-121: "La difficulté est que les biens limités — habitudes de vie, satisfaction des besoins matériels, famille, amis, etc. — tout cela nous est nécessaire; nous y puisons notre énergie vitale. Tout cela est de la nourriture, et un manque dans cela produit réellement une faim. Il est difficile de concevoir que ce qui nous est nécessaire n'est pas de ce fait bien. 'Mais, Monseigneur, il faut que je vive. — Je n'en vois pas la nécessité.'"

⁴³⁶ CAH, II, p. 22.

Weil conceived of the void as creating a sort of disruption or 'crack' in the soul's representation of the universe as necessity, because the affliction suffered impairs the soul's sense of being an autonomous subject and the soul's representation of the universe as necessity depends upon the soul's sense of being an autonomous subject. Through this 'crack' in the soul, supernatural love (the good) rushes in as would air into a vacuum.⁴³⁷ If the person accepts the supernatural love that rushes in, then the supernatural love is the grace that helps the person to consent to necessity as God's will.

However, in accordance with the principle of reality that we saw above, an acceptance of the void in the soul would have no reality if it was not mirrored by an acceptance of the void in the body.⁴³⁸ In order for the soul's acceptance of the void to actually bring the soul into relation with the supernatural, i.e., to bring into being the spirit, the acceptance in the soul must have a corresponding acceptance in the body:

*Accepter le vide. Se retrouve sous beaucoup de formes. [...] [(Soif, faim, chasteté — privations charnelles de toutes sortes — dans la recherche de Dieu. Formes sensibles du vide. Le corps n'a pas d'autre manière d'accepter le vide. (Avoir faim, soif de Dieu [...] littéral et métaphorique à la fois.)]*⁴³⁹

We can see how Weil developed this principle of reality from her reflections on the nature of work and the implications of work on the relation between soul and body. She says that the world is a text with different meanings inherent in it. We cannot, however, pass from one meaning to another purely at the level of intellect but only by

⁴³⁷ See CAH, I, p. 267; p. 278; p. 279; CAH, II, p. 29.

⁴³⁸ See *intra*, Chapter VII. See also, CAH, II, p. 118: "Pour changer quelque chose (supprimer un mal), dans l'ordre moral, en soi ou dans la société, il faut une action correspondant à l'effet à obtenir."

⁴³⁹ CAH, I, p. 269 (square brackets around text are Weil's).

means of work.⁴⁴⁰ Just as when learning a new alphabet the letters must be assimilated into the body by tracing them out with a pen, so too 'reading' the world requires that it be assimilated into the body through work. It is not so much that one's activity would be different depending on whether the person 'read', for example, the world as determined by necessity, instead of as obedient to God but, rather, what is important is that each reading be related back to one's physical existence.

The importance of work lies in the relation that it establishes between body and soul. For example, because it is through an acceptance of a void in the soul that one has access to the supernatural, and the void in the soul is not real until it is mirrored by a void in the body, one could say that the supernatural enters into the soul through the body. For, the acceptance of the void by the body must also involve the establishment of a physical relationship to the supernatural.

In the case of the void, however, it is not, as in the case of desire for the good, simply a matter of making real what would otherwise be only imaginary if it stayed internal to the soul. As concerns the void, there is the further problem of what Weil calls the 'law of conservation of matter in the order of evil'. There is a constant amount of evil in the world that is continually being passed around. The evil is never without a material body:

**Evangile, les démons passés dans le troupeau de porcs qui va se noyer.
Conservation de la matière dans l'ordre spirituel, dans l'ordre du bien et du mal. Pour éliminer le mal, il faut le transporter.⁴⁴¹**

⁴⁴⁰ See **PG**, p. 132.

⁴⁴¹ **CS**, p. 330. There is here, mention of a law of conservation of matter in the case of good also. This would mean that there was a constant amount of good in the world that was never without a

Weil conceived of suffering as a quantity of 'stuff' that remains constant. When someone suffers, he/she receives a portion of suffering. The suffering remains as a certain stable quantity of 'stuff' and does not disappear over time. When someone suffers he or she cannot psychologically and emotionally 'digest' the suffering. The only way to ease the suffering is to pass it on to someone else by making the other person suffer.⁴⁴²

When one accepts a void, the suffering does not disappear. As the suffering, even accepted, would destroy the soul without giving rise to the spirit, there must be some sort of transformation of the evil.⁴⁴³ The evil is transformed when it is exposed to something absolutely pure. And absolute purity is not present in the soul itself because, for human beings, in this world, the only access we have to purity is as possessed by material objects:

Car l'homme ne peut diriger la plénitude de son attention que sur une chose sensible. Et il a besoin de diriger parfois son attention sur la pureté parfaite. Cet acte seul peut lui permettre par une opération de transfert, de détruire une partie du mal qui est en lui.⁴⁴⁴

body. But this is the only such reference that I have come across. As far as I know, Weil never developed the idea.

⁴⁴² Although the idea of suffering as a stable quantity of 'stuff' is ludicrous in itself the analysis which makes use of this idea does explain why people who have suffered often can only find relief from their own suffering by making others suffer. Weil calls this 'transference'.

⁴⁴³ Weil uses the word evil in this context to mean the suffering as it is experienced in its destructive aspect by the soul. Any suffering experienced by the soul is evil in this sense.

⁴⁴⁴ AD, pp. 184-85. See also, CS, p. 330: "Dieu seul a le pouvoir de le détruire vraiment. Pour détruire du mal, nous devons le transporter sur Dieu. C'est ce que nous faisons, par exemple, en contemplant le Saint-Sacrement."; CS, pp. 105-106: "Tout mal suscité dans ce monde voyage de tête en tête [...] jusqu'à ce qu'il tombe sur un être parfaitement pur qui le subit tout entier et le détruit." CS, p. 106: "Dieu qui est dans les cieux ne peut pas détruire le mal, il ne peut que le renvoyer sous forme de malédiction. Seul Dieu ici-bas, devenu victime, peut détruire le mal en le subissant."; CS, p. 176: "Souffrir le mal est l'unique manière de le détruire. Aucune action ne détruit du mal, mais seulement la souffrance en apparence inutile et parfaitement patiente."

According to Weil, affliction kills the soul. The destruction of the soul, however, is in itself neither good nor bad, because such affliction (as a void) does not automatically give rise to spirit. Untransferred affliction and suffering can only have a destructive effect in us unless we bring it up against something absolutely good:

Mais au contact d'un être parfaitement pur il y a transmutation, et le péché devient souffrance. Toute la partie du péché du monde qui vient le toucher, l'être parfaitement pur le transforme en souffrance. [...] Toute la violence criminelle de l'Empire romain [...] s'est heurtée au Christ, et en lui est devenue pure souffrance. Les êtres mauvais au contraire transforment la simple souffrance (ex. maladie) en péché.⁴⁴⁵

So, we are destroyed when we suffer and do not transfer the suffering onto someone else because, as evil suffered involuntarily, it does not give rise to spirit. But, even when we bring the evil up against pure good, as love, it is not the case that the evil or its destruction stops. Rather, the presence of the absolute good that we direct our attention to becomes a part of us, a part of us that seems to absorb or destroy the evil only because it actually grows out of the affliction. The affliction is transformed by love into food for the spirit, as pure suffering instead of evil.

The Purity of Affliction

Where the suffering is not transformed into spirit and has a purely destructive effect (where one is also unable to transfer it) there is, nevertheless, the attempt by the soul to compensate for the suffering by distorting it in various ways. For example, one thinks that one deserved it, that it is edifying in some way, or that it is really good, being

⁴⁴⁵ CAH, III, p. 135.

part of some 'big plan' that we cannot see. However, when suffering reaches a certain level of intensity it simply overwhelms the soul. At this point the soul is no longer able to compensate for the suffering and is able only to beg for it to stop. After a certain point, if it does not stop, one is destroyed. Where, however, the suffering is accepted, it is kept pure, being accepted out of love in all its utter bitterness without rationalization or compensation:

Non pas désirer la souffrance en vue du progrès spirituel, mais désirer le progrès spirituel en vue de la pureté de la souffrance.⁴⁴⁶

In order for the absolute good to absorb the affliction and grow in someone as spirit, the absolute good must be taken in physically. This is achieved through the actual presence of the good in the body of Christ that is eaten as sacrament. For the person taking part in the sacrament the flesh of Christ becomes that person's flesh. Thus, for Weil, Christ, as an incarnation of the good, is literally food for the one partaking in the sacrament and becomes the seed in us that grows into the spirit. It is this physical presence of the good in us, as the food that feeds our very flesh, which is the good that the evil is brought up against and which transforms the evil into pure suffering. So, although one consumes the good whenever one partakes of a sacrament, the good therein only becomes spirit if there is affliction in the soul.

Physical suffering is necessary for the growth of the spirit because, until the physical self is actually at risk, the good has a quality of unreality. One must experience affliction as God's love. God's love is seen clearly in its absoluteness only when there is

⁴⁴⁶ CAH, II, p. 221 (text in brackets).

enough affliction to incapacitate the lower sensibilities to happiness and pleasure. It is equally present in the happiness of pleasure, but it is not seen clearly in the pleasurable circumstance because there is the possibility of distortion, for the sake of the pleasure, with no way of telling what is illusion and what is real. It is only in extreme affliction, when one would give anything for the suffering to stop, when one's capacities of distortion are overwhelmed, that one can be sure that the experience is of what is truly good.

Thus, pure suffering is distinguished from 'regular' suffering as being the life of the spirit whereby the good is felt in its purity, as the suffering itself:

[...] j'ai seulement senti à travers la souffrance la présence d'un amour analogue à celui qu'on lit dans le sourire d'un visage aimé.⁴⁴⁷

C'est dans le malheur lui-même que resplendit la miséricorde de Dieu. Tout au fond, au centre de son amertume inconsolable.⁴⁴⁸

Weil's use of Manichaeian Imagery

Just as there is a pure suffering possible for the soul, as spirit, there is also a pure suffering possible for the body. Likewise, just as Weil distinguishes between the soul and

⁴⁴⁷ AD, p. 45.

⁴⁴⁸ AD, p. 69. See also, CAH, II, p. 305: "Comparaison (mais ce n'est qu'une comparaison?) — Comme Dieu est présent dans la perception sensible d'un morceau de pain par la consécration de l'eucharistie, il est présent dans le mal extrême par la douleur rédemptrice, par la croix."; CS, p. 89: "La grâce de Dieu est telle que parfois dans notre malheur même il nous fait sentir une beauté. C'est alors la révélation d'une beauté plus pure que celle qu'on connaissait jusque-là. Job."; AD, pp. 69-70: "La miséricorde de Dieu est manifeste dans le malheur comme dans la joie, au même titre, plus encore peut-être, parce que sous cette forme elle n'a aucun analogue humain [...] On sait alors que la joie est la douceur du contact avec l'amour de Dieu, que le malheur est la blessure de ce même contact quand il est douloureux, et que le contact lui-même importe seul, non pas la modalité. [...] Mais on sait d'une manière certaine que l'amour de Dieu pour nous est la substance même de cette amertume et de cette mutilation."

the spirit so, too, she makes the distinction between body (or flesh) and matter:

Une pensée humaine peut habiter la chair. Mais si une pensée habite de la matière inerte, ce ne peut être qu'une pensée divine. C'est pourquoi, si un homme est transformé en être parfait, et sa pensée remplacée par la pensée divine, sa chair, sous les espèces de la chair vivante, est devenue en un sens du cadavre. Il faut qu'un homme ait péri et que le cadavre soit animé de nouveau par un souffle vital venu directement d'au-dessus des cieux.⁴⁴⁹

The soul's relation to physicality is to a distinct entity or object under its direction.

The soul cannot relate to its physicality but as a tool. The spirit, however, goes infinitely further into the matter of its physicality and becomes, in a Manichaeian sense, spirit dispersed in matter.⁴⁵⁰ Not only is the soul transformed into spirit through suffering, but also the flesh is transformed into matter through suffering:

Le travail manuel. Le temps qui entre dans le corps. Qu'il soit régulier et inexorable. Mais varié, comme les jours et les saisons. Par le travail l'homme se fait matière comme le Christ par l'eucharistie. Le travail est comme une mort.⁴⁵¹

So, when Weil says, for example, that "Dieu ici-bas ne peut pas nous être parfaitement présent, à cause de la chair", she is referring to the imperfect state of the body as it is related to the soul.⁴⁵² But, even as concerns the flesh, Weil is uncomfortable with attributing to it the source of man's imperfection. As we saw in the Chapter II, the very existence of the flesh is dependent upon the soul desiring to be separated from God and needing a screen to constitute the possibility of this separation. Weil says, for

⁴⁴⁹ CS, p. 261.

⁴⁵⁰ Weil found this a beautiful notion. See, for example CAH, II, p. 354: "L'esprit crucifié, dispersé en morceaux à travers l'espace et la matière."

⁴⁵¹ CAH, I, p. 202.

⁴⁵² AD, p. 110.

example:

La chair fournit les faux biens. La chair n'est pas ce qui nous éloigne de Dieu, elle est le voile que nous mettons devant nous pour faire écran entre Dieu et nous.⁴⁵³

Weil uses Manichaean imagery of spirit and water to describe the way that spirit and body become directly related in the 'new man', a way that was not possible for the soul and the flesh:

Ce qui est engendré à partir de la chair est chair, ce qui est engendré à partir du souffle est souffle. Le souffle ne peut pas s'unir à la chair pour engendrer. Seulement à l'eau.⁴⁵⁴

Spirit cannot unite with 'flesh'. Weil uses the term 'flesh' to refer to the body as it seems to the soul. Once the soul is destroyed (or to the extent that it is destroyed) the body ceases to be flesh and can be considered simply as matter. The body, in this sense of being matter, is what she means by water.

However for Weil, unlike the Manichaeans (it would seem), the new creation is a new human life and not an end to human life. Weil had no use for a theory of how to separate the good from the evil in man so that the good would then 'float up' to heaven while the matter (evil) was discarded.

Weil's interest in Manichaean thought stems directly from her analysis of work.

⁴⁵³ CAH, III, p. 271. See also, PSO, p. 40: "L'âme incapable de supporter cette présence meurtrière de Dieu, cette brûlure, se réfugie derrière la chair, prend la chair comme écran. En ce cas, ce n'est pas la chair qui fait oublier Dieu, c'est l'âme qui cherche l'oubli de Dieu dans la chair, qui s'y cache."

⁴⁵⁴ CS, pp. 59-60. See also, CS, p. 161: "Engendré d'en haut. Que l'Esprit descende dans l'homme de chair y composer avec l'eau un sang nouveau."; CS, p. 253: "C'est là être engendré de nouveau; être engendré d'en haut; être engendré à partir de l'eau et de l'esprit [...]"; CS, p. 256.

The close relationship between body and soul that results from actual work led to Weil's critique of traditional philosophy and science. But Weil's analysis of work also led her to criticize the separation between intellectual life and physical life that results from the modern method of labor and also, indirectly, the distinction between philosophy and religion.

For Weil, religion (true religion) is simply a philosophy that is expressed in every aspect of the lives of a people and in every aspect of the society in which they live. This, for her, is not only the criterion of a true religion, i.e. that it is so embodied, but also the criterion of a true philosophy, that it can be so embodied.⁴⁵⁵ The proper role of pure doctrine is to formulate a sort of intellectual parable that links the good with every form of activity in every aspect of social and individual life:

Une vie où dans tous les travaux, dans chacun des actes du travail, dans toutes les fêtes, dans tous les rapports de hiérarchie sociale, dans tout l'art, dans toute la science, dans toute la philosophie, se liraient les vérités surnaturelles.⁴⁵⁶

Weil felt that one of the problems with contemporary civilization is that our notion of philosophy or religion is of a strictly intellectual or spiritual occupation

⁴⁵⁵ On the one hand, one could, of course, object that not every philosophy that is embodied in all aspects of personal and social life is thereby a religion. For example, Marxism can be embodied in this way but it is not thereby a religion. It can, at the most, be said to resemble a religion or take the place of religion. And, on the other hand, it is true that not every religion can be seen as a philosophy. But Weil is thinking here of the Cathars for whom what she says might be true. One could find other cases as well, such as Buddhism.

⁴⁵⁶ CS, p. 126. See also, CS, p. 231: "Il faut que dans toute vie humaine une vie de sainteté parfaite puisse être vécue. S'il y a une condition pour laquelle c'est impossible, elle doit être supprimée. Pour en juger, il faut concevoir concrètement toutes les modalités possibles de la marche vers la perfection. Cela aussi est le monopole du Saint-Esprit. Chaque action impliquant un rapport d'un être humain avec d'autres ou d'un être humain avec des choses enveloppe véritablement un rapport original et spécifique à Dieu qu'il faut découvrir."

(respectively), that have at best an uneasy relation to the sphere of activity and physical life. In fact, what drew Weil's attention to Manichaeism was the way that it was expressed by the Cathars. Catharism was, for Weil, a true philosophy:

Il y a chez les manichéens [...] quelques conceptions splendides, telles que la divinité descendant parmi les hommes, et l'esprit déchiré, dispersé parmi la matière. Mais surtout ce qui fait du catharisme une espèce de miracle, c'est qu'ils s'agissait d'une religion et non simplement d'une philosophie. Je veux dire qu'autour de Toulouse au XIIe siècle la plus haute pensée vivait dans un milieu humain et non pas seulement dans l'esprit d'un certain nombre d'individus.⁴⁵⁷

Weil was interested in a new way of life. The 'new man' becomes good in every aspect, so that even the material aspect of the person is made perfect. Although, considered metaphysically, matter remains the opposite of spirit, it is not contrary or opposed to spirit — it is not evil:

Λοπειρον d'Anaximandre, c'est la Mère du *Timée*, la matière pure, indifférente, miroir de la justice. C'est le contraire du bien, mais non pas le mal; c'est le corrélatif du bien. Le mal n'est pas le contraire du bien, non plus que l'erreur de la vérité.⁴⁵⁸

The New Man: A Unity of Matter and Spirit

Thus we can say that, for Weil, the perfected body becomes like a sacrament ratified by God, in the sense that the spirit goes right down into the very materiality of the thing so that the body is more real as man than as matter. But, to compare the natural man (i.e., a person before being re-created) to a human convention (flesh engendering flesh),

⁴⁵⁷ PSO, p. 65.

⁴⁵⁸ CAH, III, pp. 77-78.

the natural soul does not really unite with the flesh. In this case, the flesh is more real as matter than as man.

The relation between the body and the spirit is not a relation between two independent things.⁴⁵⁹ Although matter and spirit are in a sense opposite, there is no sense of an independence in operation or vocation between them. In effect, the body serves to mediate between spirit and the good. The body ideally expresses the state of the spirit and the spirit ideally expresses the state of the body. Although the good that can be said of man is not achieved through action alone, it is also not achieved without action. There must be a way of acting that corresponds to every aspect of one's desire for the good:

La question d'Arjuna: 'Celui qui possède la lumière, comment parle-t-il? Comment s'assoit-il? Comment marche-t-il?' C'est la vraie question.⁴⁶⁰

But crucially, at the same time, there must be an aspect of the spirit's desire for the good that corresponds to every action because, although the good that can be said of man is not achieved through desire alone, it is also not achieved without desire:

Décalage entre l'intérieur et l'extérieur, de deux espèces. Des êtres qui ont des aspirations élevées, mais qui, dans telles circonstances données, réagissent d'une manière plus ou moins basse (ex. excès de temps, d'attention et d'effort consacré à la nourriture; excès de prudence, attitude à l'égard de l'argent, etc.) [...] Et encore: des actions difficiles, irréprochables (ex. certains cas d'austérité et d'ascétisme — et bien d'autres exemples) qui

⁴⁵⁹ Although Weil speaks of the 'new man' as spirit in matter, it is nevertheless still a body that is meant. When she speaks of matter as water, she is referring to a state of physicality which corresponds to that where desires are brought down to a basic level at which they are real or true. She refers to this as the vegetative level.

⁴⁶⁰ *CAH*, I, p. 185 (the question is cited by Weil from the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*, II, 54 in Sanskrit). See also, *CAH*, II, p. 280: "Comme le dit Krishna, l'homme ne peut en aucun cas rester absolument immobile. Le mouvement est irréductiblement attaché à la vie humaine. Mais un saint n'a pas les mêmes mouvements qu'un escroc quand tous deux marchent dans la rue."

ne correspondent à rien d'intérieur.⁴⁶¹

A spiritually dualistic analysis would focus on the question of causation: that the desire in the soul or spirit was not strong enough to determine the movement of the will against contrary desires and, was, thus unable to cause the corresponding behavior. Also, the spiritually dualistic analysis would be unable to deal with the second case, where 'good' actions are without the corresponding good will. The spiritual dualist, it seems, would have to deny that this is possible and explain the phenomena by assuming that there would have to be some ulterior motive behind the seemingly good actions.

From a spiritually monistic point of view, however, there is no question of disobedience or will:

[...] il faut que la partie éternelle de l'âme soit obéie du corps. Cela se fait sans violence. Le corps consent à cette domination. La partie éternelle de l'âme ayant conçu un commandement au corps, le corps ne peut pas faire autrement qu'obéir. S'il en est autrement, le commandement n'est pas parti du point éternel de l'âme, ou bien l'attention ne s'est par arrêtée sur le commandement.⁴⁶²

The process of spiritual development, from a monistic point of view, is a coming together of the body and spirit. Spiritual development re-configures the human being in a way that brings the body and the spirit (through the elimination of the soul) into direct

⁴⁶¹ CAH, I, p. 276.

⁴⁶² CS, p. 189. See also, CAH, II, p. 129: "C'est le seul domaine où Dieu soit cause immédiate. Mais la liaison de l'esprit humain avec le corps fait qu'il y a nécessairement des effets physiques de la grâce." These two quotations seem to contradict my claim that, for Weil, the spirit is not a faculty of will that causes movement in the body. But there is a distinction to be made. At the level of action, the body is a simple matrix between God the spirit and God the creator. At this level of action, the body is moved directly by God. However, at the level of the human person, there remains the relationship between body and spirit. When the person desires the good (where the desire is itself the spirit) in any given situation, if the desire is pure, then God acts through the body to perform the appropriate action. But there is no causal relationship between body and spirit.

association. The issue of a discrepancy between the inward and the outward is, from a spiritually monistic point of view, no longer a question of causation, but rather a question of a certain type of symmetry, whereby the spirit and the body mirror each other.

In a natural state, the body is inherently closer to the good than is the soul since matter obeys God automatically whereas the very existence of soul implies a movement away from the good. Of all the other created beings, it is man that is furthest removed from God because only man has soul.⁴⁶³ All other created beings obey God out of necessity and infallibly. Instead of being situated somewhere halfway on a hierarchical ordering between God and things, man is at the very bottom. Moreover, since matter is naturally closer to the good than man (because it obeys God infallibly), it makes sense that man's movement towards the good should be a movement through the body. Although the soul also follows natural laws, the way towards the good through the soul is impeded by the soul's own inherent deceitfulness. It is only because we imagine ourselves as 'half divine' by nature that we conceive of a movement towards necessity, towards the world, as a 'going down' or a movement away from God:

Simplement nous sommes nés avec une déformation congénitale du sens de la direction, qui fait qu'en montant nous avons la sensation de descendre, et en descendant nous avons la sensation de monter.⁴⁶⁴

The Body After Death

It is hard to tell what Weil held the fate of the body after death to be. On the one

⁴⁶³ See CAH, III, p. 203. Weil clearly inverts the traditional view of the place of man in the universe.

⁴⁶⁴ CS, p. 327.

hand, the closer union or mingling of matter and spirit (as correlatives) achieved through the process of spiritual perfection, results in what Christian theology calls 'the spiritualized' body:

Il transformera le corps de notre humiliation à la ressemblance du corps de sa gloire [...]⁴⁶⁵

Il est descendu au plus bas de la terre — Revêtir le nouvel homme. Changement dans la chair [...]⁴⁶⁶

On the other hand, however, Weil's conception of a spiritual body is not a traditional one. Weil saw the descent to the depths of the earth which results in the new body (and is an image of baptism) as the 'going down' to the world. The 'lowest depths' is a reference to hell which could be meant as an image of the suffering through which the being is re-created. It is through the suffering that the spirit penetrates the very materiality of one's body. The 'other law' that was at work in one's members would then refer to the soul's influence on the body, which is eliminated in the 'going down'. So, our 'glorious' body, that is like Christ's, is the body as it is in this life perfected through suffering. The spiritual body is still corruptible and still subject to time and space. Thus, for Weil, it seems fairly certain that the body, however 'glorious', is still mortal and in no way survives one's death. Weil does, however, incidentally mention the doctrine of resurrection, and this would be more consistent with the notion that the spirit needs an aspect of temporality to desire the good, and thereby continue to possess it, but she does

⁴⁶⁵ CAH, II, p. 103.

⁴⁶⁶ CAH, II, p. 101.

not seem to have been interested in resolving this issue.⁴⁶⁷

However, even if we assume that Weil held that death brings one's physical existence to a final end, it is still nevertheless the case that the survival of the spirit after death would not involve, in itself, any further sort of perfection. As Weil puts it:

La désobéissance [of Adam and Eve] était de vouloir sans Dieu devenir *sicut dei*. (L'homme a péché en cherchant à devenir Dieu (sur le plan de l'imagination), et Dieu a racheté cette faute en devenant homme. Par quoi l'homme peut vraiment devenir *sicut deus*. Ainsi le serpent avait dit vrai.) [...] Eve et Adam ont voulu chercher la divinité dans l'énergie vitale. Un arbre, un fruit. Mais elle nous est préparée sur du bois mort géométriquement équarri où pend un cadavre. Le secret de notre parenté à Dieu doit être cherché dans notre mortalité.⁴⁶⁸

We develop the relationship to the good through our mortality, i.e., sacrifice (relation to objects and 'the downward movement') and this is because we must only imitate God in his powerlessness and not God in his power. God took on humanity (mortality - in a sense) to show us that it was within the context of the material limitations of finite existence that one can be properly related to the good because it is only with respect to these conditions of existence that we can imitate God in his powerlessness.

The fact that the spirit needs the body to grow, but not to exist, does not mean that perfection applies more properly to the spirit than to the body, because perfection is and can only be achieved in this life. And, so, the body can be as perfect as the spirit. Perfection, according to Weil, is not said with respect to existence so it is not contradictory for Weil to hold that the body reaches perfection and yet remains mortal.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁷ See CAH, I, p. 135.

⁴⁶⁸ CAH, II, pp. 144-145.

⁴⁶⁹ Recall the distinction between what is necessary for existence and what is good.

The spirit is not more perfect than the body because it survives, nor does it survive because it is more perfect.⁴⁷⁰

The body achieves the perfection appropriate to its nature for, a thing's perfection lies in its being and being is achieved only through sacrifice. Thus, the only true being that the body can have is its sacrifice of the energy that it needs to live to the spirit, since once the soul is de-created, the spirit feeds on the vital energy of the body. The sacrifice does not necessarily imply death, but the perfection of the body does put it in constant mortal risk. The mortality of the body is what allows for the body's perfection, since it is only because the sacrifice is real that it is constitutive of being.

Conclusion

What has become apparent through this Chapter is that Weil conceived of the process of spiritual development as involving primarily an alteration of the person's ontological constitution (i.e., a fundamental change with respect to the component parts that constitute its nature). Spiritual development implies the growth or introduction of part of the person that was not there initially (spirit), and the destruction and elimination of an element that was initially part of the person's nature (the soul), as well as the radical transformation of the body due to the different way it exists in relation to spirit.

⁴⁷⁰ Although this goes beyond what Weil might be construed as saying, it would seem to follow that the spirit could not even remain good in a disembodied state. If true being (as a love of the good) implies sacrifice (and, by extension, material conditions - which explains why even God needed a material creation which diminished His allness in order to be as good as He is) then the spirit could not be good without the body and would have no true being without the body. The spirit could not be perfect without the body because it is not a thing but a direction of love of the person which would no longer exist without the body. It could not incorporate an aspect of sacrifice in its existence.

Although one might object that the change is so radical that there is no ontological continuity between the 'new man' and the natural man and, thus, strictly speaking, no process of perfection, Weil would answer that the objection is misguided because the natural man is not truly a being. The process is simply one of becoming. It is not a process involving one being becoming another being, but rather it is a process of one being coming to be.

The perfection of man lies properly in the sacrifice and only secondarily in the resulting being. So, the perfection of man refers more properly to man in this life: as matter and spirit. Thus, it is the anthropological structure of matter and spirit as correlatives and as directly related which is (properly speaking) the good of man. Although one is tempted to say that the 'new' man is an incarnation of the good, this is imprecise for two related reasons: first, the spirit is united with matter at such a level that if the spirit is good then so is matter, and it would therefore be equally true to say that the new man is an 'in-spiritualization' of the good; second, to be an incarnation of the good, the matter or carnal element is seen as the stuff that the good is in but still distinct from. For Weil, however, it is through existing in this world with the particular anthropological structure which the new man has that man achieves his end and his ultimate good.

SECTION II CONCLUSION

In this section (chapters IV-IX), we tried to show that spiritual development, as conceived by Weil, does not involve a movement towards one's salvation, either of the soul or of the body. Neither does her theory involve a belief in God which would make one's relationship to the divine a relationship exclusive to the soul. Although we have seen that the divine presence is exclusive to the soul, we have tried to emphasize that this does not constitute a relationship between the soul and the divine. In fact, the divine presence is not 'in' the soul. It exists as a supernatural food or energy that nourishes the divine 'seed' in the soul and which actually grows (into what Weil calls spirit) at the expense of the soul, and brings the body, rather than the soul, into a relation with the divine:

La partie éternelle de l'âme se nourrit de faim. Quand on ne mange pas, l'organisme digère sa propre chair et la transforme [...] Faire mourir de faim la partie périssable de l'âme, le corps étant encore vivant. Ainsi un corps de chair passe directement au service de Dieu.⁴⁷¹

We can now see how the interpretation of Weil as a spiritual dualist, given in Chapter II, is wrong. The dualistic interpretation of spiritual development is only possible in a conception where this development is the result of an effort of an 'I' and its will.

⁴⁷¹ CS, p. 252.

Weil talks about using violence to destroy the part of oneself that resists spiritual development. For example Weil says:

D'autre part, comme on a aussi en soi un principe de violence, à savoir la volonté, il faut aussi, dans une mesure limitée, mais dans la plénitude de cette mesure, user violemment de ce principe violent; se contraindre par violence à agir comme si on n'avait pas tel désir, telle aversion; sans essayer de persuader la sensibilité, en la contraignant d'obéir [...] Chaque fois qu'on se fait violence dans cet esprit, on avance peu ou beaucoup, mais réellement, dans l'opération du dressage de l'animal en soi. Comme c'est une opération finie, car il n'y a pas d'infini dans l'animal, on est tout à fait sûr qu'à moins que la mort ne survienne auparavant le dressage finira par être parfaitement accompli.⁴⁷²

However, these acts of violence are characteristic of an inferior sort of spirituality and are not present at a higher level of spiritual progress.⁴⁷³ That we require such violence indicates our imperfection. But the imperfection is not on the side of the 'animal' (the body), rather, it is the willful attitude itself:

Tant qu'on a besoin de se faire violence, on est encore dans la 'nuit obscure de la sensibilité', dans la caverne. 'Qui veut sauver son âme la perdra.'
Salut imaginaire.⁴⁷⁴

Tout ce qui tant qu'on est au niveau de la volonté apparaît comme résistance à vaincre, inertie, fatigue, désir inférieur, tout cela, quand on a passé un certain seuil, devient souffrance passivement subie [...]⁴⁷⁵

It is this willful attitude of the 'I' that actually gives rise to the dualistic understanding whereby the elements in man which do not participate in the soul's sense of autonomy are conceived of as a resistance to effort.

⁴⁷² CAH, II, p. 40.

⁴⁷³ See CAH, II, p. 165.

⁴⁷⁴ CAH, II, p. 276.

⁴⁷⁵ CAH, II, p. 336.

For the purposes of spiritual development, it is not the body or the world that must be renounced, but only the 'I' or the will:

Nous ne possédons rien au monde — car le hasard peut tout nous ôter — sinon le pouvoir de dire je. C'est cela qu'il faut donner à Dieu, c'est-à-dire détruire. Il n'y a absolument aucun autre acte libre qui nous soit permis, sinon la destruction du *je*.⁴⁷⁶

Seulement l'homme n'a le droit de détruire que ce qui lui appartient; c'est-à-dire non pas même son corps, mais exclusivement sa volonté.⁴⁷⁷

Thus we can see that the 'animal' referred to above is, in fact, the willful effort and it is the willful effort that must be overcome.⁴⁷⁸ The use of the will as a 'principle of violence' is, from the point of view of spiritual development, really meant to wear down the will itself and not any other parts of oneself. Although there is a type of evil in oneself, for example, one's imaginary sense of autonomy (as we have seen), this is a feature of oneself which arises out of being willful in the first place. One must subject one's will to the rule of duty, because the spiritual ideal is obedience to necessity and obedience is not an operation of the will. The will must be eliminated because it obstructs spiritual development:

Pour parvenir à la parfaite obéissance il faut exercer sa volonté, il faut faire effort jusqu'à ce qu'on ait épuisé en soi-même la quantité finie de l'espèce d'imperfection qui correspond à l'effort et à la volonté. Cette imperfection en quantité finie, l'effort de volonté doit l'user comme une meule use un morceau de métal. Après cela, il n'y a plus effort ni volonté. [...] Le devoir représentable a pour usage l'exercice de la volonté dans ce travail d'usure.

⁴⁷⁶ CAH, II, p. 295.

⁴⁷⁷ CS, p. 169.

⁴⁷⁸ Weil is using 'animal' in a figurative sense. But there is, nevertheless, an inconsistency even in the figurative imagery since she would have held that animals are without will.

Quand on est allé au bout du mal, il n'y a plus non plus de devoir.⁴⁷⁹

This same analysis also applies to Weil's claim that we must become detached from the things of this world:

Tout le désir que la nature a mis dans l'âme humaine et attaché à la nourriture, à la boisson [...] doit être enlevé à ces choses et dirigé exclusivement sur l'obéissance à Dieu.⁴⁸⁰

In Chapter II, this quotation was used to show how, for Weil, the movement towards the good is a movement away from the things of this world. But, as we have seen in our exposition of Weil's theory of spiritual development, the problem does not lie in the things or the attachment. The problem lies in our very way of being able to relate to these things as things of the world, as ontologically other than us. It is a necessary condition for these things to be desired that the desire stems from the imaginary sense of being an 'I' which is above or removed from the world and, thus, other than these things. By removing ourselves from the order of necessity, the things of this world take on a character of otherness that determines their appearing to us as ends. This dualistic structure between the 'I' (and its desires) and the world (including other human beings) limits the things to their being seen as ends.⁴⁸¹ Although they can be used as means, their

⁴⁷⁹ CAH, II, p. 336. One way of conceiving of the substitution of necessity for will is as a sort of conformity of desire and obligation as in Kant's notion of the 'good will', were what one wants and what one must do are the same, so that duty is no longer necessary. The good is perceived of as a duty only when one has not totally identified one's desire with it.

⁴⁸⁰ CS, p. 86.

⁴⁸¹ Again, Weil is not talking of 'means' and 'ends' with respect to how the object is used or treated. Rather, she is talking about the intentional structure of desire for the object. Whether or not an object is desired in order to be used as a means or as an end, the way it is desired by an 'I' is necessarily as an end — meaning that it is desired as an object for me, to possess and consume or use as I wish.

primary determination is that of an end for the 'I'. With the destruction of the 'I' and the transformation of necessity into obedience, all things are seen as being primarily determined as means. It is, however, through the dualistic attitude of detachment that characterizes the above citation that the 'I' is destroyed. It is, therefore, a useful attitude from the point of view of spiritual development, but, perhaps, only as a starting point.

We can also see Weil's movement away from spiritual dualism in her claim that things can only be desired as means and never as ends. This implies that, since God can be the only end for man, the things of this world can only truly be means through which man can be related to God. They are not just 'means' by themselves nor can they be means towards other things in the world because things cannot be ends. Thus every thing in the world is, for man, a means towards the good. Therefore it is only through being related to the things of the world, through love, that we can approach the transcendent:

Ce sont les objets, les choses inertes qui sauvent à l'instant décisif.⁴⁸²

La matière qui a causé la perte procure le salut.⁴⁸³

We can also see now that the distance, between God and creation, outlined in Chapter II, is characteristic of a conception of one's situation *vis-a-vis* spiritual perfection that is of a spiritually dualistic nature:

Quand nous manquons de miséricorde, nous séparons violemment une créature et Dieu. Par la miséricorde nous pouvons mettre en communication avec Dieu la partie créée, temporelle d'une créature.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸² CS, p. 188.

⁴⁸³ CS, p. 189.

⁴⁸⁴ CS, p. 49.

The conception of an absolute distance between God and creation is based on an emphasis of the nothingness of 'me' as opposed to the allness of God. But the sense of nothingness is relative to an imaginary idea of God and oneself as one would be in a false state of salvation. In other words, one's sense of nothingness is relative to an imaginary conception of the 'allness' of God and the 'greatness' or 'perfection' that one could receive from God. The imaginary idea of God is an idea of an infinite 'power' and the corresponding false notion of one's salvation is of oneself sharing in that power. In other words, there is at the basis of spiritual dualism a desire that 'I' should be closer to God by an infinite increase of my 'I', but am prevented by creation which limits me by my somehow being attached to it:

La mauvaise humiliation amène à croire qu'on est néant en tant que soi, en tant que tel être humain particulier. L'humilité est la connaissance qu'on est néant en tant qu'être humain, et plus généralement en tant que créature.⁴⁸⁵

Thus, for Weil, true humility, as an awareness of being nothing, would negate any sense of being an 'I' apart from, even in terms of, a vocation, the world, let alone the body. But, at the same time, a humility which reduces one to the level of the world causes a shift in one's perspective. The world can no longer appear as blind necessity, absolutely distant from God.

Just as spiritual development reduces the distance between the world and the good

⁴⁸⁵ CAH, II, p. 206. The contrast here is between two different conceptions of one's nothingness. The first is with reference to oneself as a particular individual and states that in particular I am nothing. Other creatures, other individuals are not nothing. I, in particular, am nothing because of something having to do specifically with me. The other conception of oneself as nothing rests at a more general level. One's nothingness has to do with oneself only with reference to the nothingness of **man** or **creatures** as general classifications that include oneself.

it also involves a reduction in the distance between the body and the soul or, rather, to be more precise, the movement of spiritual development that brings the body closer to the soul is the same movement that destroys the soul (replacing it with spirit). The movement of spiritual development involves the unification (mixture) of spirit and matter. The body can no longer be seen as an object or tool through which one can act but also be acted upon.

What has become apparent through this section is that Weil conceived of the process of spiritual development as involving primarily a development in one's ontological nature. Spiritual development implies the growth or introduction of part of the person that was not there initially (spirit) and the destruction and elimination of an element that was initially part of the person's nature (the soul) as well as the radical transformation of the body due to the different way it exists in relation to soul and spirit.

SECTION III

Further Test Cases

This section is devoted to the examination of further 'ascetic' theories of human perfection in order to verify how well such an investigation is capable of revealing these authors' valuations of material existence.

Because we have so far only discussed the role of the body in Weil's theory of asceticism and the reasons Weil had for needing asceticism, we shall first, in Chapter X, treat of other related aspects of asceticism and address the importance of an analysis of asceticism to the philosophy of human nature.

In Chapter XI, we will examine the spiritually dualistic philosophy of Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Kierkegaard is used as an example of a religious spiritual dualist whereas Schopenhauer and Nietzsche are used to represent non-religious spiritual dualists. Kierkegaard presents himself as a good candidate for examination because the enormous significance he puts on suffering is potentially misleading with respect to whether or not his theory is spiritually dualistic or not. The choice of Schopenhauer as a non-religious spiritual dualist is justified because of the enormous influence that the philosophy of Schopenhauer had on Weil and, in particular, its influence on her theory of asceticism. It will then be interesting to compare Weil's conception of asceticism with that of Nietzsche's, who was also influenced by

Schopenhauer.

In contrast to these both religious and non-religious spiritually dualistic theories of asceticism, the last chapter of this section (Chapter XII) will discuss non spiritually dualistic (i.e., monistic) theories of asceticism. As representatives of this class, we will look at the asceticism of certain medieval holy women and that of the Desert Fathers.

CHAPTER X : Asceticism

It will be useful to say something about asceticism in general and also the religious aspect of asceticism before going on with this investigation of the relevance of the study of asceticism to philosophical inquiry.

What Asceticism is

The standard sort of definition of asceticism that one might find will go something like this: 'severe abstinence, austerity or self-discipline, especially for spiritual benefit'.⁴⁸⁶ Definitions of this sort are not very helpful because they really only describe what sorts of behavior (and motivation) are called 'ascetic'. What is needed is a definition that gets at the essential feature of what is called 'ascetic behavior'. Without going into the question of motives, one could very roughly define ascetic behavior as those actions and attitudes which are an expression or manifestation of a consent to suffering.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁶ This example is paraphrased from The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 7th edition, ed. by J.B. Sykes, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 50. Of course, this example is meant to be 'popular' in nature and is in no way intended as a scholarly definition of asceticism.

⁴⁸⁷ With the condition, however, that the consent is not from the anticipation of pleasure, and, in some way, that the suffering be undesirable to the person. Weil argues that one could desire any degree of (false) asceticism but not true suffering, since true suffering destroys the 'I', and so the masochist, for example, is not really ascetic since he does not really desire true suffering (See, for example, CAH, III, pp. 28-29; p. 34; CS, pp. 222-223). But here Weil parts with the entire tradition in that her criticism of the masochist applies to all types of voluntary asceticism. True asceticism must be essentially involuntary, endured against one's will through an external necessity.

The suffering that is consented to is usually seen as a means to some further end, but we shall see that some, like Weil, actually held suffering to be an inherent aspect of the end sought, in such a way that suffering itself was understood to be not only a means but also, in part, the goal of the ascetic behavior. With respect to asceticism as a means, asceticism has to do with the achievement of some end through suffering.

Not every activity that involves suffering can properly be called ascetic. The suffering has to be (at least) the central means through which the end is achieved. The athlete who avoids all comfort in order to retain or increase a high pain tolerance (a strengthening of the will) is being ascetic because it is the suffering itself that is bringing about the desired end. The more specific activities involved in avoiding comfort are only indirect means to the end and direct means only to the suffering. It is only the suffering that is the direct means to the end. But, for example, the 'Southern Belles', who wore painfully restrictive clothing in order to conform to the ideal image of a woman were not being ascetic because the suffering played no direct role in the achievement of the end. In other words, it was not the discomfort of the tight clothing that produced the desired 'look' it was, rather, simply the tightness of the clothing.

However, the specific role that suffering does have in an ascetic situation will vary greatly from being vaguely edifying, to being somehow instrumental, to being integral to the end itself. An author can also move from one emphasis to the other. For example, Weil initially thought of suffering as a means but came to see suffering, in common with the group of medieval holy women that we shall look at in Chapter XII, as being itself an experience of the divine. Suffering was, for these ascetics, ultimately not an evil but,

rather, the experience of the divine which was, in itself, supremely joyful. It is no coincidence that a spiritually monistic attitude towards spiritual development, such as was held by Weil and the medieval ascetic women, will involve taking suffering as, at least in part, an end in itself.⁴⁸⁸ There is, however, a significant difference between Weil and these medieval women. For these medieval women the ultimate good of man was to experience the divine, regardless of the form that the divine took (as suffering or as joy). However, for Weil, the ultimate good of man was simply to be men, although this can only be achieved when the person is properly related to the good and, for Weil, being properly related to the good necessarily involves suffering.

In general, asceticism has to do with the attainment of man's ultimate good, whatever that may be thought to be. Asceticism is, with respect to achieving man's ultimate good, primarily an issue of moral development, i.e., the conformity of external comportment with internal attitude of virtue. There is nothing intrinsically religious about asceticism in this context of man's ultimate end. When the ultimate good of man is, for example, conceived of as going beyond a natural form of existence, then the asceticism relevant to the attainment of that end is still not going to be religious in character but, rather, can at most be called 'ethical', having to do with the relationship of morality between oneself and an absolute Good. Asceticism connected to Plato's system of philosophy would be an example of this, since one relates oneself to the absolute good of Plato's system through being good, in a moral sense. And, as is clear in this example, although concerned with supernatural ends, the asceticism is still wholly a moral

⁴⁸⁸ Although, of course, it is an end in itself as divine and not as evil.

phenomenon and not at all religious.

A large portion of ascetic phenomenon that is normally considered religious is really only moral in character. Asceticism becomes religious in character only with respect to those ends which are religious in character. An end that is religious in character is one that is conceived of as a personal deity, to which one is related in a personal way. And even in this context, personal deities are always conceived of as having some moral component: being good or evil. Moreover, it is through this moral component that one normally relates oneself to the deity. In other words, one's relationship to the Christian God, for example, involves first and foremost being good. Thus, even when man's ultimate end is considered religious in character (involving a personal relationship), the asceticism is a purely moral phenomenon constituting either an essential part of that end or the achievement of that end.

When, for example, Nietzsche speaks of asceticism, there is no religious aspect to it,⁴⁸⁹ and when we look at the asceticism of medieval holy women, the asceticism obviously has a strong religious component. The cases of Schopenhauer and Weil are not so straightforward. Schopenhauer's form of asceticism is perhaps religious in flavor but not in fact. Weil's asceticism is difficult to label. It is often hard to tell whether, for example, she is using the word God to mean simply a metaphysically absolute principle, or some deity. I am, however, quite certain that for Weil asceticism is not a religious category because even when she does speak of man's ultimate good with reference to

⁴⁸⁹ See for example: Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals, tr. Walter Kaufmann & R. J. Hollindale, (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), p. 171.

God, she nevertheless speaks of man's ultimate good as primarily a moral category that does not work itself out in one's relationship to God but, rather, in relation to the world and one's fellow man.

In general, it seems to be the case that, for people who take a monistic position on spiritual development, there is actually a moral or ethical phenomenon behind even what seems to be a religious character of asceticism. For example, according to Weil, asceticism and spiritual development have primarily moral or ethical value rather than what could be called 'spiritual' value. Charity, for example, is usually thought of as a 'spiritual' virtue, meaning that it is an operation of the spirit in oneself and that the virtue has no natural basis or affinity. Accordingly, the 'spiritual' virtue of charity does not correspond to any attitude towards anything non-spiritual. For Weil, charity is not primarily a 'spiritual' virtue and is essentially related to one's material environment. Accordingly she found Christian charity incompatible with material wealth.

Hence, I maintain that, in general, the study of asceticism is not essentially a study of a religious phenomenon and that even when the actual content of a particular study is religious in character, the study itself will not necessarily be religious in character.

Philosophical Significance of Asceticism

An examination of asceticism is philosophically interesting because the valuation of matter and material existence is revealed in an author's theory of asceticism in a much sharper and clearer way than in his/her anthropology proper. This is because an author's valuation of material existence can easily remain ambiguous within the restricted domain

of philosophical anthropology.

A complete understanding of an author's philosophy depends in an important way upon access to his or her valuation of material existence because this valuation is the link which connects the anthropology to the rest of the author's philosophy and, hence, is a key to the understanding of the author's philosophy as a whole. To the extent that philosophy is an analysis of human, material existence, anthropology can only tell us that we are material (and to what extent, and exactly in what sense), but cannot tell us how the fact of being material is significant to human existence.

Knowing an author's attitude towards material existence is crucial in order to understand the author's philosophy in general since a philosophy requires a valuation of human existence, and in the end, the location of man's material existence somewhere in relation to man's ultimate good. In other words, the author must supply us with what is, in the author's opinion, the value of human existence in general, the value of man's material existence, and most importantly, the place of the good (if any) of material existence in the larger context of the good of man in general.

Thus an understanding of the author's theory of human perfection and philosophy in general, will be clarified by an analysis of the author's attitude towards asceticism and suffering. An author's spiritual dualism or spiritual monism and, therefore, his/her negative or positive valuation of material existence is best revealed in how an author envisions asceticism functioning in the context of spiritual perfection. In the following chapters, I will maintain that, unless an author takes asceticism and suffering to be more than just a means, i.e., also an end in itself, the author is a spiritual dualist and,

accordingly, has a negative valuation of human material existence.

CHAPTER XI : Spiritually Dualistic Asceticism

Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche are all spiritual dualists. Kierkegaard is a religious spiritual dualist and Schopenhauer and Nietzsche are non-religious spiritual dualists. Both, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are good examples of authors who might be thought of as being spiritual monists but who can be shown to be spiritual dualists. Kierkegaard seems to be a spiritual monist because of the enormous significance he places on suffering in his theory of spiritual development. Nietzsche might be thought to be a spiritual monist because of the emphasis he places on affirming life.

In this chapter, we will compare Weil's theory of asceticism with these three authors. Weil was greatly influenced by Schopenhauer and had a deep respect and sympathy for Nietzsche's social criticism. But, at the same time, she developed her thought in profound contrast to their theories. I take Weil's theory of asceticism as the archetype of spiritual monism. It will, therefore, be very helpful to see clearly the differences between Weil's theory of asceticism and those of Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, considered as spiritual dualists. This comparison will help in getting at the fundamental difference in attitude that separates the spiritual dualist from the spiritual monist.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁹⁰ It is not my intention to claim that Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer or Nietzsche had fully developed theories of human nature which could be called dualistic. My intention, rather, is to

Kierkegaard

We will now look at Kierkegaard's theory of spiritual development. Apart from being an example of a theory which is religious and spiritually dualistic, Kierkegaard is interesting because of the great importance he placed on suffering in his conception of human perfection. Because Kierkegaard has such a developed theory of suffering his thought makes a good example of how the spiritual dualism or monism of a theory of spiritual development can be seen more clearly when the theory of spiritual development is seen in relation to the author's theory of asceticism or suffering.

Kierkegaard makes an interesting test case for my thesis because it seems as though he would have a positive attitude towards the body since he places a large emphasis of suffering and the 'concrete moment'. It is material finitude that gives concreteness to time making the fact of actually 'choosing' so decisive. It is only through the finitude of material existence that choices have the quality of being absolute (i.e., exclusive between contrary options). If Kierkegaard does have a negative attitude towards material existence, it will be interesting to see how he reconciles this with the dependence of the 'crisis of reason' upon material finitude.

It is interesting to see, also, whether existentialism, which is supposed to herald in a new appreciation for human existence, begins with a positive or a negative valuation of the body. If we see, for example, that Kierkegaard's notion of Christian life presupposes a

demonstrate only that the examination of their theories of human perfection indicates that they are spiritual dualists and that, in some sense, there is at least an implicit anthropologically dualistic attitude in their writings.

negative attitude towards the body we can conclude that, the value of his authorship depends to some extent upon the truth of this negative valuation. We can then ask: does he offer any support for this assumed valuation? As someone interested in human perfection, he should have been aware that this is a significant question.

According to Kierkegaard, suffering is the mark or criterion of knowing that one is involved with God.⁴⁹¹ Any relation between the divine and the temporal must result in suffering because the two, being opposites, cannot have a direct relation but, rather, must have a dialectical relation. For Kierkegaard, the divine, which is in itself absolute love, can only come into contact with the temporal as suffering.

Kierkegaard's emphasis on suffering has intimately to do with the religious mode of existence.⁴⁹² Kierkegaard envisioned roughly three main stages in human development: the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious stage. Kierkegaard held that one escapes the aesthetic mode of existence through an instantaneous 'jump' and thereby enters the ethical (in a Kantian sense) mode of being. The 'jump' from the aesthetic mode to the ethical mode of existence is an act of will instigated by reason. In turn, one also 'jumps' from the ethical mode of existence to the religious mode through will. There is a sort of suffering of reason that causes this second jump from the ethical mode to the religious mode of existence.

Suffering of reason consists in a despairing of the intellect which forces the will to

⁴⁹¹ Søren Kierkegaard, Journals, tr. Alexander Dru, (London : Oxford University Press, 1938), X A 456: "[...] suffering means neither more nor less than the mark, the criterion, of my actually being involved with the absolute and of my relating to it." See also, X, 481, 570, 573; XI A 404.

⁴⁹² See Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, tr. David Swenson and Walter Lowrie, (Princeton: University Press, 1941), p. 390. See also, Postscript, p. 475.

rely on faith rather than reason.⁴⁹³ The will is torn between worldly motives (ethical considerations), where it is guided by reason, and spiritual motives, where the only guide is faith (which is no guide at all). Kierkegaard describes this as swimming in water that is ten thousand fathoms deep. Faith is the suffering of the intellect, which is forced to operate in the absence of evidence and certitude.

The pain and suffering involved in this second leap, from the ethical to the religious mode of existence, can be compared to Weil's description of the suffering involved in the destruction of the natural soul and its replacement by spirit. According to Weil this transformation from worldly existence to a more spiritually developed mode of existence involves the excruciating splitting, wrenching and tearing asunder of the soul into two.

The suffering involved in the religious mode of existence has to do directly with being an individual, since it is in the context of faith that one stands naked before God and one becomes an individual through the sense of standing naked before God. The sense of standing before God makes one acutely aware of one's sin. Almost nothing belongs to oneself so intimately and so uniquely as one's sin. It is the awareness of oneself as being sinful in such a unique and intimate way that gives someone the awareness of

⁴⁹³ See Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, ed. & tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, (Princeton: University Press, 1985), pp. 49-54. See also, Kierkegaard, Postscript, pp 169-179. Accepting the contradiction which Christ is for the understanding is an act of faith which involves terrible agonies for the understanding. In speaking of Christ, Anti-Climacus states: "There is neither in heaven nor on earth, nor in the depths, nor in the aberrations of the most fantastic thinking the possibility of a humanly speaking more insane combination" [Training in Christianity, tr. Walter Lowrie, (Princeton: University Press, 1941), p. 84]. And, as Kierkegaard himself puts it, "Faith is against the understanding" [Christian Discourses, tr. Walter Lowrie, (Princeton: University Press, 1971), p. 375].

being an individual, i.e., of having a unique relationship with God.

With respect to standing naked before God, suffering intensifies one's sense of being an individual. When suffering is related to one's sense of being a sinner, then suffering becomes related to one's individuality. The suffering becomes my suffering. Suffering becomes part of one's unique relationship with God: God sends me a special suffering. Only this suffering belongs to the individual as intimately as sin.

What are we to make of Kierkegaard's emphasis on suffering? Kierkegaard could have, consistently, talked of suffering as itself divine and in itself good, except for his negative attitude towards human existence. The dialectical 'twisting' of love (equivalent to the divine) into suffering is, for Kierkegaard, more than just the logical inversion that he claims it is. Rather, the dialectical inversion is ethical in nature and, although he would try to deny it, involves the transformation of what is good (love) into what is evil (suffering). It is because the world (i.e., the temporal) is intrinsically in opposition to the divine that love becomes inverted into something evil. For Kierkegaard, the good does not, therefore, seem to have a proper place in the world or in this life (except as it relates to one's orientation towards the next life). Suffering must be endured because although it is an evil for us, it is really love from God's perspective. Indicative of the absence of asceticism in Kierkegaard's thought, the evil remains 'spiritual' and is never physically embraced; the dialectical divide never bridged: suffering remains mental — it is intellectually accepted, and endured. Because suffering is endured but never embraced in one's physical existence, the material aspects of man's existence are never incorporated

into the context of spiritual development.⁴⁹⁴

Despite the large amount of attention Kierkegaard gave to suffering in his philosophy, it never amounts to more than a result, albeit a necessary one, of what he would call being Christian.⁴⁹⁵ So, not only is suffering of no significance in actually being Christian, but even further, since the body is of no significance even in suffering, there is doubly no role for the body in man's ultimate good.⁴⁹⁶

Kierkegaard would maintain that, like the rain, God's love shines on the just and the unjust alike, but with certain qualifications. First of all, some, like Sören's father, are accursed and as a sign of this accursedness do not suffer at all. Secondly, only those who relate themselves to God can see the suffering as love. The Christian believes that, as love, suffering is in itself (i.e., not with reference to worldly profit) somehow useful.

⁴⁹⁴ This idea that mental suffering can be endured but not really accepted into one's being and that it is only through physical suffering that suffering can be embraced, is perhaps controversial and I offer it here without support in an exploratory way because it is an interesting idea. The point in this paragraph does not rest on this idea. The point in this paragraph is simply that Kierkegaard did not conceive of man's relation to God as involving an aspect of physical suffering which indicates that, for Kierkegaard, man's relation to God in effect involves primarily the soul.

⁴⁹⁵ See for example, Sören Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers, ed. tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1970), pp. 408-409. It seems common amongst Kierkegaard commentators to confuse a result of spiritual development with a condition for spiritual development on the basis that the result is inescapable. See for example, John William Elrod, "Climacus, Anti-Climacus, and the Problem of Suffering," Thought Vol.55 No.218 (September, 1980), p. 307: "Both Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms understand suffering to be not simply accidentally related to the individual's quest for self-realization but essential to its attainment. Climacus in CUP [Concluding Unscientific Postscript], for example, insists that suffering is inescapable for those who progress through the ethical-religious way of life." (My emphasis). Note the invalid conclusion that suffering is a condition because it is an inescapable result. At best one could conclude that the acceptance of suffering becomes a condition.

⁴⁹⁶ All forms of suffering, are significant for Kierkegaard only as they relate to the person's sense of being an individual, and thus are only 'real' in their aspect of being psychological, i.e., as they relate to the soul's mental anguish, the anguish of the individual. For Weil, however, suffering is 'real' precisely to the extent that it negates the sense of being an individual.

But Kierkegaard wants to claim, further, that suffering actually is useful to the Christian. According to Kierkegaard, suffering is useful to the Christian because it can help him/her die to the world: "L'homme doit par les souffrances être sevré du monde et des chose du monde [...] l'école des souffrances est une mort lente."⁴⁹⁷ In order to die to the world, one must detach one's will from all worldly goals and will one thing.

We can see from Kierkegaard's opinions on suffering that he viewed the process of becoming Christian, through the movement of inwardness, as synonymous with an escape from material existence. As A. Koutsouvilis points out, according to Kierkegaard, "it is the existential condition of man that towards God he is always in the wrong; he is eternally guilty and hence always guilty [...]"⁴⁹⁸ And, for Kierkegaard, our material, temporal existence is the mode of life that corresponds to that eternal guilt.⁴⁹⁹

Weil would sympathize with Kierkegaard's method of absurdity and conflict as a means of breaking down the rational structure that keeps one 'safely' removed at a distance from true commitment, but she would have thought the process incomplete without physical suffering as the context of that process. Kierkegaard thought that a purely psychological context was adequate, but Weil was perhaps more suspicious of the ability of the soul to go beyond itself purely by means of itself. For Weil, it is only when

⁴⁹⁷ Kierkegaard, "L'évangile des souffrances", tr. Jean Brun in Les oeuvres completes de Sören Kierkegaard, vol.XIII, (Paris: Editions de l'orante, 1966), p. 253.

⁴⁹⁸ A. Koutsouvilis, "Is Suffering Necessary for the Good Life?" Heythrop Journal XIII (1972), p. 51.

⁴⁹⁹ See John J. Ansbro, "Kierkegaard's Gospel of Suffering," Philosophical Studies XVI (1967), p. 191 (my emphasis): "it is apparent from our examination that [according to Kierkegaard] the Christian's only real joy is actualized in the eternal, while the temporal is the theater of endless suffering and struggle for the individual who **in painful isolation from community and in opposition to the demands of his own reason and sensuousness** works out his salvation in fear and trembling."

thought comes up against the reality, the absolute otherness of the material world, through suffering, that it starts to give way. Until then, any change is only imaginary, a change of the same with the same and not a change that involves some aspect of what is purely other.

For Kierkegaard, individuality implies a movement of extraction from the rest of creation: it is a movement away from the general. Moreover, in its connection to individuality, suffering helps remove the individual from generality, from material existence. For Weil, suffering has the opposite effect. Suffering destroys one's sense of being an individual and brings one closer to creation in general.⁵⁰⁰

We have found that Kierkegaard had a spiritually dualistic notion of spiritual development which also points to an anthropologically dualistic understanding of human nature. While it is true that Kierkegaard placed a lot of significance upon intellectual suffering, it is also true that he does not seem to have placed very much significance upon physical suffering. The entire value of Kierkegaard's work rests on its ability to demonstrate that, in fact, the soul alone is called to beatitude and that the movement of the soul towards its own perfection is a movement away from, in spite of and even against the body. I doubt very much that Kierkegaard offers any such proof anywhere in his writing. We can see, therefore, that, ironically, existentialism begins with a negative valuation of human material existence.

⁵⁰⁰ The 'general' for Kierkegaard is the universal moral precept. For him, to live in the 'general' is to live according to socially adopted norms. But for Weil, the 'general' is the whole of creation.

Schopenhauer

Schopenhauer makes his contempt for material existence explicit. Therefore, it is not necessary to show that Schopenhauer was a spiritual dualist even though he does not put his contempt in these terms. But the application of the concept of spiritual dualism to Schopenhauer does still provide a more explicit understanding of that aspect of his thought. And, further, with reference to showing the versatility of this methodological tool, it is interesting to see that the application of the concept of spiritual dualism does sometimes simply confirm what was known beforehand.

Let us begin with a brief synopsis of Schopenhauer's thought. Schopenhauer adopts Kant's distinction between the world in itself and the world of possible experience. Schopenhauer, however, postulates the notion of Will as the world in itself. All phenomena are manifestations of Will understood as the vital force which is at the foundation of reality. Even one's inner nature is one particular aspect of Will, and it is this inner nature that is manifested, to oneself, as one's body. Will is a constantly striving blind impulse towards life. Will, however, is not an essence, it is not a metaphysical 'thing'.⁵⁰¹ Moreover, since 'life' only makes sense with reference to material existence, Will, as the will to life, necessarily manifests itself as the existence of material beings.

Schopenhauer held that, as individualized Will, our internal natures are all determined.⁵⁰² Although our inner motivation is fixed through this determination, we can

⁵⁰¹ The best analogy is to Thomas Aquinas' notion of God as Esse Subsistens in the sense that, as Esse Subsistens, God is seen as Being but not as being a 'this or that', nor as "being in general". According to Aquinas, God's whatness is His being.

⁵⁰² See Schopenhauer, "On Ethics", in vol.2 of Parerga and Paralipomena, tr. E.F.J. Payne, (Oxford:Clarendon Press, 1974), chap. 116, pp. 227-228.

nevertheless be said to be free in the sense that the particulars of our actions are contingent. Schopenhauer gives the example of the man who does not give money to the beggar out of greed, but who then changes and now gives money believing that he will receive more in reward. The motive remains the same but the action is different.

Schopenhauer assumed, first and foremost, that the world was intrinsically bad. However, in order to maintain that the world or nature is bad or good in itself one must first show that natural phenomenon fall within the domain of moral significance.⁵⁰³ In other words, in order to say that the world or nature in general was evil, one had to be able to say that individual natural phenomena were morally evil and one must hold that nature is within the domain of moral significance to say that an earthquake, for example, is evil in the moral sense. Schopenhauer wanted (needed) to show that there was an inherent morality to the world despite its not being pre-determined by a rational structure. He tried to do this by showing that the world is intimately related to something that has an inherent moral character, i.e., Will.

Schopenhauer tried to show that Will was evil by claiming that the evil of Will logically follows from the evil of the world because, according to Schopenhauer, the moral character of the material manifestation (i.e., the world) of Will must correspond to the moral character of Will in itself.⁵⁰⁴ Schopenhauer thought that he had successfully connected the force that 'causes' the phenomena of the world, with the disposition or

⁵⁰³ Weil also needed to include the natural world in the sphere moral relevance, i.e., that natural phenomena in general are proper objects of moral categories. Weil, however, wanted to support the opposite claim, i.e., that the world was inherently good.

⁵⁰⁴ See Arthur Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Representation, tr. E.F.J. Payne, (Clinton, Mass.: Falcon's Wing Press, 1958), II, p. 591.

character of the phenomena and, thus, establish a moral order of the world as the foundation of its physical order.⁵⁰⁵ In Schopenhauer's eyes, the character of the world is overwhelmingly wretched. This wretchedness was, for Schopenhauer, enough to show that Will is fundamentally evil.

The striving of Will, as individual beings, is the cause of all evil in the world. Schopenhauer thought that this evil permeated the very fabric of phenomenal manifestation. Hence, the denial of Will is the highest act of moral good that is possible. The will to live expresses itself in its phenomenal objectification in the form of self-assertion and egoism: "And so in the heart of everyone there actually resides a wild beast which merely waits for the opportunity to rage and rave and would like to injure and even destroy others if they even obstructed its path."⁵⁰⁶

In aesthetic contemplation, one is temporarily released from the slavery to Will, in that the aesthetic appreciation is objective, i.e., not a servant of desire. However, man can escape more permanently from this determinism:

[...] in the transition from virtue to asceticism, when a man has thoroughly penetrated the principle of individuation, seen through it, realized the horrible nature of the thing-in-itself, of which all individual beings are but phenomena, and denies the will to live, renounces himself, practices asceticism and abnegation.⁵⁰⁷

The point, then, of Schopenhauer's theory of asceticism is to escape Will and the world. The ascetic who denies the will to live "ceases to will anything, guards against

⁵⁰⁵ See The World as Will and Representation, II, p. 590.

⁵⁰⁶ Schopenhauer, "On Ethics", chap. 114, p. 215. See also, Frederick Copleston, Arthur Schopenhauer: Philosopher of Pessimism, (Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd. 1946), p. 143.

⁵⁰⁷ Copleston, Arthur Schopenhauer..., p. 154.

attaching his will to anything, and seeks to confirm in himself the greatest indifference to everything."⁵⁰⁸

Schopenhauer outlines three stages to the denial of the will to live. The first stage in the process of denial has to do with Will asserting itself beyond the individual phenomenon through sexual reproduction: hence, the first stage on the road of the denial of the will to live is the denial of the sexual impulse.

The second stage in Schopenhauer's asceticism is poverty, arising not merely by giving away all one's possessions to ease the suffering of others, but as deliberately willed in itself. Poverty is willed in itself as a constant mortification of the will and to prevent seduction by the pleasures of life. Although the ascetic denies the will as appearing in himself, he will not resist the will of some other person, asserted upon him to the disadvantage of his own will, by inflicting injuries upon him. He will feel these injuries also as part of his own denial of his will and will welcome all suffering that comes his way, whether it comes by chance or through the wickedness of other men.

The third stage involves the mortification of the visible manifestation of his will, that is, his body, through fasting, self-chastisement and all manner of self-inflicted suffering.⁵⁰⁹ The ascetic hates his will because he sees it as the source of evil.⁵¹⁰

Although Schopenhauer does not seem to be saying that one should develop an

⁵⁰⁸ Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Representation, I, chap. 68, p. 380.

⁵⁰⁹ See The World as Will and Representation, I, p. 400-01: "There appears to be a special kind of suicide, quite different from the ordinary, which has perhaps not yet been adequately verified. This is voluntarily chosen death by starvation at the highest degree of asceticism. [...] Yet it seems that the complete denial of the will can reach that degree where even the necessary will to maintain the vegetative life of the body, by the assimilation of nourishment, ceases to exist."

⁵¹⁰ For these three levels of asceticism see Copleston, Arthur Schopenhauer..., pp. 177-78.

individual will through ascetic practices but trying to escape Will by willing things, like poverty, is clearly problematic. Schopenhauer's notion of denial as the key to asceticism is thoroughly Buddhist in character.⁵¹¹ The same tension, between renouncing all willing and willing the good, can be found in the Buddha's famous promise that when he had achieved the great nothingness beyond all desire and willing he would return to the world (and would not just slip away into eternal bliss) until every blade of grass also achieves nothingness. The problem is that concern conflicts with denial and renunciation. The Buddha's concern for 'the other', in his promise, is inconsistent with an absence of will and desire. Schopenhauer's concern for the individual's freedom (a concern for 'self') conflicts with his ascetic principle of denial.

Weil differs from Schopenhauer and the Buddha precisely on this point. For her, Will (as God) is good and its manifestation (as creation) is good. Man, however, gets in the way of the relation or interaction of Will with its manifestation to the extent that man is willful at an individual level (with respect to an 'I'). To the same extent, then, as he gets in the way, man also obstructs the good itself and the goodness of the manifestation. But, most importantly, by being willful, man obstructs the working of goodness in himself. Asceticism, for Weil, thus has a completely different flavor than that of Schopenhauer or the Buddha. For Weil, asceticism is directed towards eliminating one's own willfulness, to be able to take part in the goodness of the world more fully, in that the movement away from willfulness involves a movement towards the world. For

⁵¹¹ Schopenhauer seems to have borrowed the fundamental assumption that the Will (or willing) is evil and can only result in further evil from Buddhism.

Schopenhauer, however, one does not want to be just a manifestation of Will (a consequence of willing), because the world is evil and not because this would mean being willful.

Despite the similarities between Schopenhauer and Weil we can pin-point three major areas of difference:

(1) For Weil "willing", as a movement of the 'I' (the soul), is bad because it moves one away from the world (spirit is good because it represents a movement towards the world) and for Schopenhauer willing is bad because it moves one towards the world.

(2) For Weil (from the point of view of spirit) the world is good and, for Schopenhauer, it is evil.

(3) For Weil the 'self' is valued negatively, for Schopenhauer it is valued positively.

What is interesting is that we can see that it is the attitude towards the world that is at the basis of the other two points. Both Weil's and Schopenhauer's valuation of the 'self' (and willing) is a function of whether or not the self brings the person closer or further from the world. For Weil the self takes one away from the world and is therefore bad. For Schopenhauer, also, the self takes one away from the world and is therefore good. Thus, from comparing Weil and Schopenhauer we have found that the valuation of the world (terrestrial existence) is at the very basis of theories of spiritual perfection.

Nietzsche

Nietzsche's philosophy is intended to be a breath of fresh (philosophical) air which blows away the old moral values based on a hatred of mankind. He claims that he has a truer, healthier, life affirming understanding of human existence. Obviously, then, if

Nietzsche turns out to be a spiritual dualist we will conclude that he has not provided any more healthy conception of human existence and we will have to question the consistency of his philosophy.

Nietzsche rejected Schopenhauer's notion of an all pervasive Will and assumed simply that we each have our own will. Nietzsche also rejected Schopenhauer's basic assumption that the suffering and hardship that comes from a conflict of wills is evil and accordingly attacked any notion of a denial of will. The rejection of a metaphysical notion of the good enabled Nietzsche to claim that the good is not a transcendental value outside of time but, rather, an historical value. Accordingly, the good has a history and Nietzsche attempted to provide its outline in his work On the Genealogy of Morals. According to Nietzsche, the goodness or evilness of one's willing becomes relative to who benefits and who loses. He held that there is a natural character to any will according to which, if left unrestrained, would try to dominate all other wills in its sphere of influence, i.e., would attempt to expand its sphere of dominance indefinitely.

Despite the natural character of the will, it is each man's ultimate aim to rid himself of all repressive forces that are internalized as self-restraining devices to check the will. These devices of restraint are implanted by those who are individually weak and wish to keep any individual from becoming uncontrollably strong. Thus the ideal man is, for Nietzsche, on the one hand, the Napoleon figure who is not afraid of his own strength and exerts his will in an outward direction and, on the other hand, the ascetic figure who takes complete control of himself, ridding himself of all that is not subject to his will, even to the extent of one's natural bodily functions.

Nietzsche criticizes what he saw as the traditional type of asceticism as an attempt to escape from the will to life (which for him was the will to power).⁵¹² But since, according to Nietzsche, it is impossible to escape from will, the attempt only leads to a perversion, or disease, of will:

We can no longer conceal from ourselves what is expressed by all that willing which has taken its direction from the ascetic ideal: this hatred of the human, and even more of the animal, and more still of the material, this horror of the senses, of reason itself, this fear of happiness and beauty, this longing to get away from all appearance, change, becoming, death, wishing, from longing itself — all this means — let us dare to grasp it — a will to nothingness, an aversion to life, a rebellion against the most fundamental presupposition of life [...]⁵¹³

Nietzsche does admit, however, that asceticism does not always mean a denial of life. He maintains, for example, that Schopenhauer did not mean to imply, by his ascetic ideal, a denial of life but, rather, only a denial of life within the confines of the vulgar (common) will. Nietzsche even says of himself that he has a hatred of sensuality and marriage and a strong inclination towards asceticism, as he claims does any philosopher, but only because of the way these things fetter his philosophical life and not for any moral reason.⁵¹⁴ For Nietzsche, ascetic control of oneself gives one the strength and freedom to exert one's will to power. Nietzsche tries to make a sharp distinction between this freedom to exert one's will to power, gained through ascetic control of oneself, and the ideal of traditional asceticism which he saw as the pathetic attempt at self-domination

⁵¹² See On the Genealogy of Morals, p. 142.

⁵¹³ On the Genealogy of Morals, pp. 162-163 (Kaufmann's emphasis).

⁵¹⁴ See On the Genealogy of Morals, p. 107; pp. 108-9; p. 111.

arising as the last resort from the need to have power over something. The need for self-domination is pathetic when all that one can have power over is one's own self.⁵¹⁵

There is a lot of truth in Nietzsche's critique of asceticism, but Nietzsche's own version of asceticism as an expression of the will to power seems to be identical to the ascetic ideal of the 'life-haters', like those who advocated a contempt for the world, because the ideal of the contempt for the world was nothing but a will to power. Nietzsche saw this but said that it was a twisted will to power.

It is, however, easy to show that, for Weil, any will to power is twisted and ultimately does imply a hatred of life. Weil would, presumably, find it evident that Nietzsche's ideal of a will to power is in fact the same contempt of life as that advocated by the practitioners of *contemptus mundi* in the middle ages.

The attitude of *contemptus mundi* implied that one could gain true life, one's true home, body etc., through a control of oneself which limits one's involvement in this life (and with one's body). The world that those who adopted this attitude had contempt for is the human world, the vulgar, material world of everyday life. Although Nietzsche claims that he affirms the material world (admitting, however, that he hates the vulgar one), from Weil's point of view the control implied by the will to power over the material world always removes one from it. This was the point behind the monastic life, i.e., that the monastery provided a physical environment that — through control over nature — was able to emulate an existence free of material finitude. Power over something always implies a contempt for the thing and expresses an attempt to distance oneself from it by

⁵¹⁵ See On the Genealogy of Morals, p. 171.

rising above it.

Levinas brings this same criticism against what he saw as a whole idealist tradition of the will to power characterized by the need to reduce the other to oneself, whether the other be an object of knowledge or another person:

Freedom, autonomy, the reduction of the Other to the Same, lead to this formula: the conquest of being by man over the course of history. This reduction does not represent some abstract schema; it is man's Ego. The existence of an Ego takes place as an identification of the diverse. So many events happen to it, so many years age it, and yet the Ego remains the Same! The Ego, the Self [...] does not remain invariable in the midst of change like a rock assailed by the waves (which is anything but invariable); the Ego remains the Same by making of disparate and diverse events a history — its history.⁵¹⁶

Weil would say that Nietzsche's ideal of will to power and the asceticism akin to it illustrate the moral decline that results from an Ego which assimilates all that crosses its path, and, perhaps, the complete entrenchment of the illusion of self-power which results when the self, as body, is itself assimilated in a feast of self-mastery. Truth, for Nietzsche, is nothing but the victory over, and integration of, the Other to the Same. But this 'truth' is nothing except contempt for the thing in question and, like all contempt, reveals a pathetic need to make oneself seem more important by degrading the other. It is an attempt to raise oneself up to heaven by climbing upon the world that one has piled at one's feet as a tribute to one's victory.⁵¹⁷

Levinas characterizes this sort of ego-mania advocated by Nietzsche thus:

⁵¹⁶ Lévinas, Totalité et infini, (Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965), p. 91.

⁵¹⁷ Or, in Nietzsche's case, to become superhuman.

When, in the philosophical life that realizes this freedom, there arises a term foreign to the philosophical life, other — [an] obstacle; it has to be surmounted and integrated into this life [of the self].⁵¹⁸

The type of asceticism which stems from a need to do violence to oneself is nothing else but the inward directed will to power and is the same as an outward directed will to power that is a need to do violence to what is outside of oneself. Nietzsche tries to establish a distinction between the one who has a 'healthy' internal will to power and the one who directs a frustrated will to power inward as a last resort. The diseased inward will to power is a dead end, one has nowhere to go with one's triumph, and so one just sits on his conquered body. But the healthy inward will to power expresses the need to master one's body in order to achieve self-mastery which is at the same time directed at improving one's outward directed will to power. This, however, only brings home the connection between self-mastery and will to power which are both types of contempt for the world. According to Nietzsche, one must be one's own master before one can conquer the Other in a 'healthy', resentment-free way. Weil warns:

Tant qu'on a besoin de se faire violence, on est encore dans la 'nuit obscure de la sensibilité', dans la caverne. 'Qui veut sauver son âme la perdra.'
Salut imaginaire.⁵¹⁹

Although the language Weil uses is religious, what she is saying is relevant even at a non-religious level. One could reformulate her warning thus: 'so long as one finds it necessary to do oneself, or some other, violence, i.e., to dominate, one is still dealing with a diseased will to life. He that wishes to achieve true life by force (by willing it) shall find

⁵¹⁸ Lévinas, Totalité et infini, p. 94.

⁵¹⁹ CAH, II, p. 276.

only death. This is a false notion of life.' Nietzsche seems to have only been able to think of two possibilities: to be unfree or to dominate; to be slave or to be master; to be weak or to be powerful; to be conquered or to be victorious.

Ultimately, for Nietzsche, one must master one's bodily needs, one's natural existence, in order to be properly human. All natural aspects of existence must be mastered because all weakness must be mastered and he equated natural aspects of existence with weakness. Because he defined good as a purely cultural phenomenon determined by the powerful in society, Nietzsche was incapable of seeing any good in what was natural. We must not, therefore, be fooled by Nietzsche's talk of life affirming will to power: it is not an affirmation of human existence but, rather, like the medieval practitioners of *contemptus mundi*, a call to rise above one's natural life. Nietzsche's conception of true life as a ceaseless striving, an endless struggle of self-assertion, was really nothing but the same old conception that our true life is not found in our natural existence and can only be found through a ceaseless flight from all that is finite and material.

According to Nietzsche, stagnation is death. Life is an endless becoming of self-creation. To be something by nature, in the sense of having an essence that is an unchanging principle in a life of flux is to be dead. We must remember, however, that being something means being finite, since being something implies not being any other thing. So, when Nietzsche fights against having a fixed nature, he is fighting against human finitude, which is exactly the position of *contemptus mundi*. Hence, although Nietzsche seems to be asserting a positive value to matter in precisely that aspect (its

mutability) which was traditionally given as reason for devaluing matter and material things, this is not the case. We have seen from the ascetic implications of Nietzsche's theory of life, as a will to power, that for him one's material state and the type of everchangingness of matter is not at all the type of everchangingness implied in his conception of life as a constant becoming, since the everchangingness of matter is constitutive of finitude. Hence, life as a constant becoming actually implies, for Nietzsche, a movement away from one's material existence and, to a significant extent, even implies a movement against one's material nature.

We have found that Nietzsche has a spiritually dualistic conception of human perfection, one, in fact, not very different from the medieval practitioners of contemptus mundi.

Asceticism, Spiritual Dualism and Spiritual Monism

Weil has the reputation of having been personally very ascetic. One would be perfectly justified in asking why Weil 'did those terrible things to herself'. In order, however, to give an answer to that question, and at the same time show that Weil was not spiritually dualistic, we must first recall how Weil thought of suffering.

Weil was interested in suffering under its aspect of affecting the soul. Any suffering that was intense enough to affect the soul she called affliction. Suffering is the painful and destructive character of an experience which reveals the blind mechanical necessity that is at the basis of material existence. As Weil says:

Dieu envoie le malheur indistinctement aux méchants comme aux bons, ainsi que la pluie et le soleil.⁵²⁰

Because Weil was interested in suffering only as it affects the soul, the distinction between natural evil and moral evil is without meaning for her. Weil was not primarily interested in evil (or the problem of evil) and it is only when one is interested primarily in evil that the distinction between natural and moral evil would be significant. For Weil, naturally caused affliction was as much affliction as humanly caused affliction. And, in fact, Weil tended to conflate the two because she saw people's actions as stemming from a sort of mechanical (psychological) necessity.⁵²¹

However, from what we have seen of Weil's theory of spiritual development, we know that a soul which is threatened by suffering is led necessarily to consider it an evil for the soul. But the soul also necessarily sees the suffering as evil in itself (i.e., not just for the soul) because the soul necessarily takes its existence as being of absolute value. And there is no illusion as to the destructive effect of suffering on the soul: the affliction quite literally destroys the soul and God can do nothing to save the dying soul.⁵²² So the fact that it is only from the soul's point of view that affliction is evil does not mean that affliction is not really evil or that it is not really destructive.

With respect to Weil's theory of spiritual development, then, we can say that

⁵²⁰ CAH, II, p. 202.

⁵²¹ See PSO, p. 113.

⁵²² What comes to mind is, of course, the story of Job. God gives Satan control over everything Job has, his children and then his health. But there are important differences. First, for Weil, 'Satan' (the world) has dominion over everything including one's life and one's inner self. Second, for Weil, this is not just a test, although, even in the Job story it does not seem as though Job would have got everything back if he had failed the test. But for Weil, even if one passes the test the affliction is not reversed. When God renounces power it is unconditional.

every person is naturally, or initially, in a position of equating finitude as the cause of one's susceptibility to suffering with evil, when the suffering is intense enough to threaten the soul.⁵²³ Moreover, as Weil saw it, the first step towards spiritual development involves acknowledging this meaninglessness (and therefore evil) of affliction and yet, at the same time, accepting that this terrible evil is somehow caused by God. Affliction which is endured out of love leads the person to this seemingly self-contradictory thought:

"Douleur, je n'avouerai jamais que tu es un mal, quoi que tu me fasses".
Cette parole est très belle. Mais de préférence encore: Douleur, tu es un mal, mais tu as pour auteur celui qui n'est que bien et n'est auteur que du bien. Contradiction [...] ⁵²⁴

⁵²³ This is the movement that Job's friends tried to get Job to make when they tried to make him curse God, i.e., they tried to get Job to equate his finitude with evil.

⁵²⁴ CAH, II, p. 303. God is the cause of the suffering to the extent that God is the cause of finitude. God wills some particular suffering indirectly by allowing for suffering in general. So God wills suffering but does not desire suffering. See also, CAH, II, p. 193: "On ne doit pas dire que Dieu veut la souffrance d'un saint en vue de son progrès vers la perfection, mais: il veut sa souffrance, et il veut son progrès, et il veut la liaison entre les deux — et une infinité d'autres liaisons encore." This might seem very similar to the view held by Kierkegaard, but we must remember that, for Kierkegaard, what we experience, as suffering, exists in God only as love. The created world has no aspect of suffering from God's point of view. Also, we should remember that, for Kierkegaard, God tailors experiences to the individual. In other words, for Kierkegaard, God does not love our existence he loves us. Therefore what I experience as suffering is sent to me as love. For Weil, however, what is experienced as suffering is sent by god as suffering and it is sent out of love. The reason why it is not contradictory to speak of God sending suffering out of love is because it is not sent to me personally. God's love for a deadly virus is equal with God's love for me. God wills the existence of the virus and God wills my existence but he also wills the fact that the virus is deadly. God knows that the virus cannot exist without me to feed off of. God also knows that I could not exist without the virus and the susceptibility to the virus. This is, according to Weil, what is most difficult for us to understand about suffering. God knows that finitude is the condition of existence. God himself became finite in creating what is other than himself. If I was not 'only this' I would not be anything at all. And I cannot be 'only this' without sometimes being sick and dying. Being 'only this' (i.e., finitude) is not the result of existence it is the condition of existence. Weil preferred to see the resolution of the contradiction in reference to a vertical hierarchy of values rather than an horizontal dialectical synthesis. See Devaux, André, "On the right use of Contradiction according to Simone Weil," in Simone Weil's Philosophy of Culture: Readings Towards a Divine Humanity, ed. by Richard Bell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 150-157, where Devaux explains that Weil probably got this idea of value hierarchy and the importance of contradiction from her Lycée teacher René Le Senne. While it is important to understand that Weil was writing

Being faced with this puzzle, the afflicted one is supposed to be led to realize that God has abdicated his position of being all-powerful in creating the world. God created the world but is absent from it:

Le mal et l'innocence de Dieu. Il faut placer Dieu à une distance infinie pour le concevoir innocent du mal; réciproquement, le mal indique qu'il faut placer Dieu à une distance infinie.⁵²⁵

The afflicted one must realize that God, as absent, does not cause the person's particular suffering. God cannot be said to 'allow' affliction to happen because He is powerless to stop it. The answer to the question of 'why God abdicated his power' is that abdication was a necessary condition for the existence of the created world. As Weil puts it:

L'inflexible nécessité, la misère, la détresse, le poids écrasant du besoin et du travail qui épuise, la cruauté, les tortures, la mort violente, la contrainte, la terreur, les maladies — tout cela, c'est l'amour divin. C'est Dieu qui par amour se retire de nous afin que nous puissions l'aimer. Car si nous étions exposés au rayonnement direct de son amour, sans la protection de l'espace, du temps, de la matière, nous serions évaporés comme l'eau au soleil [...] La nécessité est l'écran mis entre Dieu et nous pour que nous puissions être.⁵²⁶

According to Weil, then, necessity (which determines the movements of matter) is

in the intellectual context of authors like Le Senne, Lavelle and Brunschvicg, it is also important not to overestimate the influence of these thinkers on Weil. Petrement (p. 25), for example, says: "Simone always thought of Le Senne with esteem, affection, and gratitude, but his philosophy does not appear to have had a lasting effect on her." Petrement also points out (pp. 64 & 66) that although Brunschvicg was Weil's thesis advisor, she rarely consulted him. He gave her only 10 out of 20, which was the lowest possible passing grade. Petrement quotes Weil (p. 146) saying that Brunschvicg was the stuffiest of bourgeois theoreticians.

⁵²⁵ CAH, II, p. 173.

⁵²⁶ CAH, III, p. 13. See also, CAH, II, p. 261.

not only the condition for the existence of the world, it is also the condition for the creation of the world. In other words, God could only create a finite and material world. Finitude is not some unfortunate side effect of God's act of creation or of human imperfection. God's intention to create a world is equivalent to an intention to have finitude.

If one is committed to the goodness of God then one will be led to the realization that, if God was willing to accept to create even under conditions that involved the necessity of suffering, then the created world must possess its own goodness, a goodness that is present despite the absence of God. In other words, for Weil, spiritual development implies the realization that it is the very same conditions of creation that allow for the good and for the suffering in the world. Moreover, this condition of creation that involves the possibility of both good and suffering is matter.

The contradictory idea of God being the cause of evil leads one to realize that, despite the world being exclusively the domain of mechanical necessity, good is nevertheless possible in the world and not just by escaping material existence and revolting against finitude. Finally, one is led to the further realization that goodness of the world is impossible without affliction being necessary and that affliction is not really an evil because the soul is not an absolute good. This dissolves the association of evil with finitude.

Weil uses the analogy of a cherry blossom to illustrate how vulnerability to destruction is part of the perfection of a thing. The blossom is vulnerable to destruction (to suffering) as a condition of its beauty (existence). If the beauty is good then the

vulnerability to destruction must also be good, to the extent even that an actual destruction, as the realization of a real possibility, is also good. Suffering, as a consequence of the material condition of human existence, is a sign pointing to the reality (and goodness) of that existence.

The goodness of existence is not a function of some absolute value of my self. The goodness of existence is therefore unaffected by whether or not I happen to be suffering, for example. The goodness of my existence does not depend on being free from suffering. The condition of my existence is matter and that is the source of both the goodness of my existence and the suffering of finitude.

Weil went even further and claimed that spiritual perfection requires extreme suffering. She felt that only intense suffering ensures full existence for human beings. Only by being able to see the good of the world in the very midst of intense suffering can one be sure that one fully exists, i.e., that one is truly part of the world, in full communion with worldly beings and their goodness. It is only in this situation of extreme suffering that one can be sure that there is not part of oneself (i.e., the soul) that has refused God's invitation and has tried to remain aloft from material existence. For this reason the answer to the question of why Weil 'did those terrible things to herself' is best answered in an analysis of how Weil conceived of the consent to affliction as a consent to God's will and the goodness latent in its effects.⁵²⁷

In this passage below, Weil distinguishes between being called to suffer and

⁵²⁷ We have already seen how an appreciation of the beauty of the world, i.e., its reality and goodness, involves a painful destruction of the soul.

feeling it necessary to do oneself violence:

Les violences sur soi sont permises seulement soit quand elles procèdent de la raison — soit quand elles sont imposées par une impulsion irrésistible; mais ce n'est pas alors de soi que procède la violence.⁵²⁸

For Weil, asceticism has two possible functions. One function is the destruction of the will and the self. This type of asceticism, called expiatory suffering, which amounts to the destruction of the 'I'.⁵²⁹ The second function of asceticism is to make one suffer. This type of asceticism aims at inducing suffering and does not attempt to eliminate anything. This second type of suffering is called redemptive suffering.⁵³⁰ The suffering of a person who is perfectly good, in whom the 'I' is dead, effects a purification of the world. Weil says:

Quand dans l'homme la nature, étant coupée de toute impulsion charnelle, étant aveugle et privée de toute lumière surnaturelle, exécute des actions conformes à ce que la lumière surnaturelle imposerait si elle était présente, c'est la plénitude de la pureté. C'est le point central de la Passion. Il y a rédemption, la nature a reçu sa perfection. L'esprit, auquel seul appartient la perfection, s'est fait nature pour que la nature reçoive la perfection.⁵³¹

Although redemptive suffering has this effect of the perfection of the world it is, nevertheless, not sought for this reason. In a sense it is not sought at all, i.e., it is not willed. But in another sense, suffering is sought because it corresponds to one's desire for the good. She felt that suffering was itself divine. When suffering is personified in one who is perfected, it constitutes the presence of God in the world through which the good

⁵²⁸ CAH, III, p. 41.

⁵²⁹ See CAH, II, p. 304.

⁵³⁰ See CAH, III, p. 29: "Il y a une souffrance qui est l'ombre du bien pur qu'on désire. Souffrance rédemptrice."

⁵³¹ CAH, II, p. 354. See also, CAH, II, pp. 303-304.

is accomplished:

Dieu a souffert. Donc la souffrance est une chose divine. En elle-même. Non par les compensations, consolations, récompenses. Mais la souffrance qui fait horreur, qu'on subit malgré soi, qu'on voudrait fuir, dont on supplie de ne pas être frappé.⁵³²

It is perhaps shocking to find out that Weil held asceticism, in the sense of the third sphere of obedience to divine necessity, to be an end in itself and not a means to something else.⁵³³

Normally, the first thing that commentators seem to find necessary to say about an ascetic figure is that, for this person, asceticism was not an end in itself but only a means (however important) to some further end.⁵³⁴ And, in theory, there seems to be a link between asceticism which is spiritually dualistic, in which it is the soul that benefits, and the restriction of asceticism to being no more than a means. In other words, it seems that a conception of asceticism that is spiritually dualistic cannot conceive of asceticism as an

⁵³² CS, p. 26.

⁵³³ Suffering, in this sense, is an end in itself in the same way that various aspects of existence are ends in themselves. Another example would be joy. To say why one is joyful would require saying why one exists. Thus I do not wish to imply that holding suffering to be an end in itself means that one's ultimate end is wholly or exclusively achieved therein. For Weil, the achievement of one's end also involves joy and it would be incomplete without joy. But it is still correct to say that, for Weil, one's ultimate end is achieved in suffering because such suffering that is a direct union with the divine is inseparable from joy. Further I do not wish to imply that any spiritually monistic theory of human perfection would need to place such a large emphasis on suffering and I would not like to be in a position of having to defend Weil's emphasis of suffering.

⁵³⁴ We can take as an example J. Aumann's article "Ascetical Teaching of St. John of the Cross," Angelicum 68 (1991). In that article, Aumann says (p. 339) of St. John's ascetical techniques that they "are simply the means, but important means, to the attainment of the transforming union in which the soul experiences to the fullest the presence and activity of God." See also, Ibid., p. 343: "Consequently, if there is to be a union between God and the soul, it is necessary that the soul be elevated by God through the gift of his grace [...]."

end in itself, otherwise, no matter how instrumental the body is to the soul's good the body would be involved directly in that good. However it does not seem to follow that a theory that is not spiritually dualistic requires that suffering be an end in itself. Suffering can, conceivably, be instrumental as long as the body has an equal share in whatever good is achieved.

What is absolutely crucial, as concerns Weil, is not that she held suffering to be an end in itself, but that it is only through the inclusion of our material aspects in the good of man that the search for the realization of the good of man becomes more than the search for some individual possibility. Because it is through being good in one's body that brings one down to the world and across to others, it is the search for human perfection at the level of material existence that makes the search for human perfection a movement "vers [...] la plénitude de l'être, au lieu du bien qui est inconditinnnellement."⁵³⁵ The good does not conform to individual good but, rather, individual good must conform to the good. The deliberate movement of the soul towards a purely individual share in the good (even if this is God Himself) is bound to fail. Man's good must be the good that permeates all of creation which we have access to through our physicality. My physicality unites me with my good equally as it unites me to all other creatures.

Conclusion

In Chapter III we looked at the thought of Plato, Augustine and the monastic tradition and found that they were all spiritually dualistic in character. And we identified,

⁵³⁵ CAH, II, p. 212.

as the distinguishing characteristic of spiritual dualism a negative valuation of the body and the material world in general. In this chapter (XI) we have confirmed those findings in three more recent authors. In Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche we have found that at the basis of their spiritual dualism is a negative valuation of material existence and especially its aspect of finitude.

We have seen that for Kierkegaard the process of becoming Christian, through the movement of inwardness, is synonymous with an escape from material existence.

According to Kierkegaard, the good of man is achieved as a function of dying to the world. For Schopenhauer, the world is simply evil because it involves suffering. And we found that Nietzsche has an attitude of contempt for the world which is revealed in his need to distance himself from it through the sense of agency that the will to power gives. At root, the will to power is a fear of susceptibility to the other, i.e., finitude.

Chapter XII : Spiritually Monistic Asceticism

Simone Weil was not alone in her understanding of spiritual development. Along with the Desert Fathers of Egypt and Syria, there were certain ascetic women that lived in Medieval times, roughly between 1200 and 1400 A.D. that, to a significant extent, shared Weil's conception of spiritual development. Although both the Desert Fathers and the medieval ascetic women that we shall look at saw their natural existence as somehow fallen or 'tainted', they nevertheless saw the process of spiritual development as involving a redemption of that natural existence rather than a movement away from it. Both groups of ascetics believed (if only implicitly) that it is only because of one's material nature and existence that one can realize one's ultimate good.

It is important to try to see the true attitude that these two groups of thinkers had towards the body and the role it plays in the acquisition and enjoyment of human perfection because this knowledge will allow us to have a better understanding of their anthropological assumptions and their theories of human perfection.

The medieval ascetic women that we will consider sought their ultimate good in the experience of Christ. And what is most significant for our study is that the experience of this ultimate good was intrinsically bodily. They embraced ascetic suffering as an end in itself and not as a means to some further end. The asceticism of these medieval women

is very much like Weil's notion of redemptive suffering described in the last chapter.⁵³⁶ It was as 'suffering physicality' that Christ was experienced. The heights of religious ecstasy were not thought to move one beyond one's suffering body but, rather, the heights of religious ecstasy were synchronous with heights of ascetic — bodily — suffering.

The practice of certain medieval ascetic women indicates that, for them, the only way of achieving and enjoying the highest end of man was through the body. Thus our study of certain medieval ascetic women gives us an example of spiritually monistic practice. Our study of certain medieval ascetic women also illustrates how a spiritually monistic practice of spiritual development can lead to the reversal of negative valuations of man's physicality. And, as we shall see, spiritually monistic practices can lead to a reevaluation of material existence, because these practices actually challenge (or breakdown) the anthropologically dualistic view of man that these women seem to have had. Our study of certain medieval ascetic women also shows how negative valuations of physicality and anthropological assumptions can be challenged from the outside, that is, from the way one's own sense of self is affected by bodily experience.

Our study of certain Desert Fathers offers us a slightly different perspective. It shows us how this challenge to negative valuations and anthropological dualism can come from the inside, that is, from the way in which bodily experience is affected by the nature of the self. The Desert Fathers that we shall look at offer us an example of a spiritual monism which emphasizes ascetic practices that aim at changing the person's psychological make-up in the Weilian sense of the destruction of the natural soul or the

⁵³⁶ See above, p. 227.

'I'. The asceticism of the Desert Fathers, as exemplified in the examples we shall examine, can be seen as involving the replacement of the 'natural' self with a 'supernatural' self, where the new self has a more positive attitude towards the body and the material world.

Although there is a strong religious component to the lives of medieval ascetic women and the Desert Fathers it is, however, important to recall that spiritual development is primarily an ethical movement. The fact that an ascetic finds Christ at the end of his or her search indicates only that, to this person, Christ is the personification of good. The good was in this context primarily a physical state and the physical experience of absolute good translated into moral behavior like acts of charity and service to others. Things like love and sacrifice are, in the Christian context, moral virtues. Even ascetic practices which seem to be without moral significance, like fasting, sometimes took on moral meaning through the experience of divinity to which they led. The fasting did not so much provide individual union with the divine person of Christ, but rather, physical union with the redemptive suffering of Christ (an act of infinite love, done for our good) that was seen as the epitome of goodness.⁵³⁷

Medieval Ascetic Women

The ascetic women who lived roughly between 1200 and 1400 AD. can be

⁵³⁷ Where there is an issue of union with the divine person of Christ, it is always as a result of a prior union with the divine as suffering that transforms the person into a quasi-Christ whose body is food for others.

identified as a group because of the particular religious symbolism they shared.⁵³⁸ Their religiosity is characterized by an emphasis on physical or bodily asceticism that implied an embracing of the material conditions of existence. The transformation that allowed for this embrace, between the soul and the world, can be seen as a change in attitude towards material finitude.⁵³⁹

These ascetic women seem, in part, to have been concerned with the aspect of human materiality that they associated with sin and the fall of man. This post-fall material finitude indicated to them an imperfection or absence of goodness which was the latent result of man's sin. Vulnerability to hunger, for example, was just one more indication of man's sinful nature. But some ascetic women also came to see another side to this material finitude. The finitude that Christ took on was this very same post-fall materiality which was the result of man's sin and weakness and yet, in Christ, it was good. For example, the weakness or vulnerability that Christ took on was, in him, seen as compassion and love. So, for these ascetic women, since it was through Christ's material finitude that man was saved, it could only be seen as a good thing. To embrace material finitude voluntarily was a way of being good that did not involve an overcoming of man's material (finite) nature. To be vulnerable, or, to be at a disadvantage, became a virtue and the material condition of this virtue became seen as something divine.

⁵³⁸ See Appendix II for a sample list of the women in question and the relevant texts.

⁵³⁹ I use the term 'material finitude' to refer to human materiality as conditioned and weakened by the fall of man. All the aspects of our materiality that indicated a weakness or vulnerability seem, for these ascetic women, to have been associated not with finitude in general (i.e., the metaphysical determination that is proper to any creature) neither with finite material nature (which was essential even to man's pre-fall constitution) but, rather, with the condition of materiality that resulted through the fall of man.

Ascetic suffering was, then, for these women, a way of physically embracing the material conditions of finitude by reducing themselves to a level of existence identical with that of materiality (as, for example, exposing oneself to as much sickness and pain as possible) while at the same time forcing themselves to constantly remember that this materiality (that was associated with the original sin of man - and viewed negatively for this reason) had been embraced by the divine in order to redeem it. In other words, ascetic suffering was the way of being reduced, as much as possible, to a purely material state of existence. And, as such, ascetic suffering was seen by these women as a way of being good since, in this close association with matter, they saw their lives as, in a sense, a prolonged intimate communion with the divine, that took the form of a eucharistic sacrament, i.e., a divine material sacrifice.⁵⁴⁰

Fasting and Food-Centered Religiosity

Like Weil, some of these women manifested their religious practices and experiences mainly through attitudes of eating and not eating:

⁵⁴⁰ For a discussion of this aspect of medieval views on the Eucharist, see Jaroslav Pelikan, "The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300)," The Christian Tradition, vol. 6, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 188: "Berengar's opponents charged him with 'teaching otherwise than the catholic faith holds concerning the body and the blood of the Lord, which is sacrificed daily throughout the world,' [Adelmannus "Epistle to Berengar," (in Heurtevent, Raoul, Durand de Troarn st les origines de l'hérésie bérengarienne, Paris, 1912), p. 288] but they recognized that he, too, affirmed that Christ 'is immolated every day in the Sacrament.' [Berengar of Tours Opusculum according to Lanfranc of Bec, De corpore et sanguine Domini, 15 (PL 150:425)] Indeed, the sacrificial understanding of the Mass was so dominant over all other aspects of the Eucharist that a theologian of the late twelfth century felt obliged to say: 'This sacrifice was instituted by the Lord not only to be offered, but also to be eaten.' [Baldwin of Ford, The Sacrament of the Altar, 2.1.2 (in Sources chrétiennes, Paris, 1940), 93:138] Later he combined the sacrifice of Christ, the eating of Christ, and the imitation of Christ as themes of the eucharistic celebration. [Baldwin of Ford, The Sacrament of the Altar, 2.2.2 (in Sources chrétiennes, Paris, 1940), 93:226]" See also, appendix 2, Christ as Savior of our Physical Nature.

Medieval woman fed others. They abstained in order to feed others. They fed others with their own bodies, which, as milk or oil, became food. They ate or drank the suffering of their fellow creatures by putting their mouths to putrefying sores. Moreover, women achieved ecstatic union by fusing with a God who became food on the altar. In a fierce imitation of the cross that included self-flagellation, self-starvation, and acute illness, women became the macerated body of the Savior, the bleeding meat they often saw in Eucharist visions. In erotic union with the adorable body of Jesus, they felt grace within as inebriating drink or as a melting honeycomb.⁵⁴¹

If we compare this description of the importance of food to medieval women's religiosity to the following statement by Weil, one could think that it was Weil being described:

Thème spécial à ce moment, mais qui doit aussi pourtant être rappelé toute l'année: "Je suis le pain de vie... Ce pain, c'est ma chair que je donne pour le salut du monde." Les paysans devraient garder du grain qu'ils moudraient eux-mêmes et duquel ils feraient eux-mêmes des hosties tout le long de l'année. Leur expliquer que le travail brûle littéralement de la chair, et qu'ainsi en un sens leur propre chair a été transformée en ce pain. De ce pain la consécration fait la chair du Christ. Ils le mangent, et par la digestion la chair du Christ devient leur chair. Le cycle est bouclé. Demander que nous nous transportions dans le Christ et le Christ en nous. Demander que Dieu fasse de notre chair la chair du Christ pour que nous soyons comestibles à tous les malheureux.⁵⁴²

Women turned easily to a body centered religiosity because both women themselves and men associated female with bodiliness. 'Woman' or 'the feminine' was seen as symbolizing the physical part of human nature (man's humanity), whereas 'man'

⁵⁴¹ Caroline Walker Bynum, Holy Feast, Holy Fast: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 114. See also, by the same author, "The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages", in Fragments for a History of the Human Body, 3 vol., (New York: Urzone 1989), vol.I, pp. 160-219; "Fast, Feast and Flesh: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women," Representations 11 (summer 1985), pp. 1-25.

⁵⁴² CS, p. 228.

symbolized the spiritual or rational (man's divinity).⁵⁴³ Moreover, the association of women with human physicality coincided with the association of women with Christ's humanity which was divine food.

The theme of the humanity of Christ brings out a further continuity between these medieval women and Weil. The following words by Hadewijch could have easily summed up the point of Chapter VIII, i.e., how to desire the good in one's whole being and the suffering involved therein. Hadewijch says:

We all indeed wish to be God with God, but God knows there are few of us who want to live as men with his humanity, or want to carry his cross with him, or want to hang on the cross. But before love can burst her dikes, and before she ravishes man out of himself [...], he must offer her noble service and the life of exile.⁵⁴⁴

For some of these medieval ascetic women the humanity of Christ was associated with food, as we can see in the following quotation from Catherine of Siena (d. 1380). She wrote to her sister nuns of the importance of nursing their souls on Christ's charity:

For we cannot nourish others if first we do not nourish our own souls with true and real virtues. Do as the child does who, wanting to take milk, takes the mother's breast and places it in his mouth and draws to himself the milk by means of the flesh. So [...] we must attach ourselves to the breast of the crucified Christ, in whom we find the mother of charity, and draw from there by means of his flesh (that is, the humanity) the milk that nourishes our soul [...] For it is Christ's humanity that suffered, not his divinity; and, without suffering, we cannot nourish ourselves with this

⁵⁴³ The precise nature of this association is, of course, more complicated, involving Aristotle's theory of the elements and later theories of the humors. There was also a wide range of opinions amongst philosophers who wrote about it. See Prudence Allen, R.S.M., The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution (750BC-AD1250), (Montreal: Eden Press, 1985), esp. p. 126. See also, by the same author, "Hildegard of Bingen's Philosophy of Sex Identity," Thought, 64 no.254 (September 1989), p. 233.

⁵⁴⁴ Hadewijch, Collected Works, trans. by Mother Columba Hart, O.S.B., (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), p. 61.

milk which we draw from charity.⁵⁴⁵

Weil gives an explanation of why fasting and food asceticism is able to lead to such a radical transformation in the person's attitude towards material existence. Fasting brings one into direct contact with necessity in a way that perhaps other types of asceticism do not. As Weil puts it: "Le jeûne constitue une connaissance expérimentale du caractère irréductible de la nourriture, et par suite de la réalité de l'univers sensible."⁵⁴⁶ And, as we have seen, Weil held that 'seeing the reality of something' is identical to a movement of love. One cannot see the reality of something and not love it, which explains how ascetic practices can lead to a more positive attitude towards the world.⁵⁴⁷ The connection between fasting and love for the world lies in the fact (for Weil, at least) that fasting reduces the person's sense of being a 'self' or an 'I' and 'seeing the reality of something is a function of some such reduction in oneself of the sense of being an 'I'.

For Weil, fasting reduces the sense of being an 'I' in two ways. First it causes overwhelming suffering that makes the self incapable of maintaining clearly defined boundaries separating it from the suffering body. Second, fasting makes the self feel its

⁵⁴⁵ Le lettere de S. Catherina de Siena, ridotta a miglior lezione, e in ordine nuovo disposte con note di Niccolò Tommaseo, ed. Piero Misciattelli, 6 vols. (Siena, 1913-22), Letter 2' (a separately numbered series), vol.6, pp. 5-6. Cited in Bynum, Feast, Fast and Flesh, p. 9. Note also the Weilian association of real virtues with the realm of physical existence.

⁵⁴⁶ CAH, II, p. 68. See also, CS, p. 43: "La faim (soif, etc.) et tout désir de la chair est une orientation du corps vers l'avenir. Toute la partie charnelle de notre âme est orientée vers l'avenir. La mort la glace. La privation ressemble de loin à la mort. La chair vit orientée vers l'avenir. La concupiscence est la vie même. Le détachement est une mort. 'Terit carni superbiam — potus cibique parcitas.' Le superbe de la chair est de croire qu'elle puise sa vie en elle-même. La faim et la soif lui font sentir qu'elle dépend du dehors. Le sentiment de dépendance la rend humble."

⁵⁴⁷ We have also seen how Weil identifies seeing the reality of something with seeing it as good. See CAH, II, p. 337 (above, Chapter VIII, p. 162): "[reality] est pour la pensée humaine la même chose que le bien."

contingency, i.e., that there is no necessity to its continued existence. In other words, fasting challenges the automatic cry of the soul for food that is based on the soul's assumption that its existence is necessary.

As we will recall from Chapter VIII, according to Weil, to pledge oneself to the good completely implies that one's physicality is also in some way pledged. The person's physicality is pledged when there arises a critical situation in which one's vital energy is needed to survive and to do the good, but is not sufficient to do both. This situation can be brought about by fasting, and of course, indirectly by renunciation of wealth. This critical situation brought about by food deprivation and, in general, the theme of pledging oneself physically, is related to the issue of a metaphysical transformation. In the transformation of the body from natural to divine, there is the tearing away of energy that the body needs to live and the putting of that energy at the disposal of the good. One thereby becomes food for others:

Quand les circonstances mettent l'énergie végétative à nu et commencent à la consommer, il faut que cette énergie même s'arrache aux fonctions biologiques qu'elle alimente et se consacre à Dieu. C'est la mort spirituelle, qui est aussi une opération corporelle. L'homme se donne à manger aux créatures de Dieu.⁵⁴⁸

This is an ongoing theme in Weil's writings. She felt that all survival was at the expense of some other. Either one eats or one is eaten, either one suffers or one makes others suffer; there is no neutral ground. For example, she says: "Il n'y a dans le monde que nourriture et mangeur, soma et agni."⁵⁴⁹ Or again, "Socrate; je désire n'être ni auteur

⁵⁴⁸ CS, pp. 181-182.

⁵⁴⁹ CAH, I, p. 242.

ni victime de l'injustice; mais je préfère être victime. Or en fait il faut l'un ou l'autre."⁵⁵⁰

In this context there is also Weil's idea to send volunteer nurses to the front lines (WW II) in order to be slaughtered.⁵⁵¹ Although Weil never says so, she presumably saw them as a sort of 'sponge' to absorb evil (having gone knowingly to their death), ultimately decreasing the overall amount of evil. These nurses could also have been seen as food and the killing of them could have been seen as equivalent to the eating of them. They would be 'good' or divine food in the sense of being a sacrament (the lamb going knowingly to slaughter) and the people who ate (slaughtered) would become 'more good'. There is a sense even in the Eucharist of Christ slaughtered by evil and constituting at the same time a redeeming effect for that sin. Weil says:

Pour qu'un homme soit réellement habité par le Christ comme l'hostie après la consécration, il faut qu'au préalable sa chair et son sang soient devenus matière inerte, et de plus comestible pour ses semblables. Alors cette matière peut devenir par une consécration secrète chair et sang du

⁵⁵⁰ CAH, III, p. 28.

⁵⁵¹ See ELL, p. 189: "Elles devraient avoir fait le sacrifice de leur vie. Il faut qu'elles soient prêtes à être toujours aux endroits les plus durs [...]"; p. 192: "Nos ennemis sont poussés en avant par une idolâtrie, un ersatz de foi religieuse. Notre victoire a peut-être pour condition la présence parmi nous d'une inspiration analogue, mais authentique et pure. Et non seulement la présence d'une telle inspiration, mais son expression à travers des symboles appropriés. Une inspiration n'est agissante que si elle s'exprime, et cela non pas par des paroles, mais par des faits. [...] Aucun symbole ne peut mieux exprimer notre inspiration que la formation féminine proposée ici. La simple persistance de quelques offices d'humanité au centre même de la bataille, au point culminant de la sauvagerie, serait un défi éclatant à cette sauvagerie que l'ennemi a choisie et qu'il nous impose à notre tour. Le défi serait d'autant plus frappant que ces offices d'humanité seraient accomplis par des femmes et enveloppés d'une tendresse maternelle. En fait ces femmes seraient une poignée et le nombre de soldats dont elles pourraient s'occuper serait proportionnellement petit; mais l'efficacité morale d'un symbole est indépendant de la quantité." See also, Pétrement, pp. 192-193. To have this symbolic effect the aspect of the nurses being a sacrifice is necessary. When we consider this in conjunction with Weil's idea of a 'principle of the conservation of evil' (according to which evil is passed from person to person until it comes up against a pure spirit and is transformed into redemptive suffering) we seem led to conclude that Weil thought that the symbolic power of these nurses lies in their role as pure suffering - a redemptive presence lowering the overall evil in those who made them suffer, i.e., food for the hunger that might be hidden in those full of hate.

Christ. Cette seconde transmutation est l'affaire de Dieu seul, mais la première est en partie notre affaire. Il suffit de regarder ma chair et mon sang comme de la matière inerte, insensible, et comestible pour autrui.⁵⁵²

As we have seen, the religious imagery of fasting was sometimes bound up with the theme of God as food in that the human food that is not eaten is replaced with divine food which feeds the body, transforming the flesh into something divine. The image of God as food revolves, of course, around the sacrament of the Eucharist, which was given a very literal understanding in medieval times. Piero Camporesi tells a great story of how not all Christians could accept the doctrine of the literal presence of Christ's flesh and blood in the Eucharist host in his article The Consecrated Host: A wondrous Excess.⁵⁵³ It is the story of an old hermit, who was famous for his holy life, but who could not accept the literal doctrine, and started going around preaching that the doctrine was wrong and that the sacrament involved only the representation of Christ. Two other old hermits prayed for him for one full week, and when all three of them went to mass that week they had a vision:

All three saw a young child on the altar, and when the priest started breaking the host, it seemed to them that an angel came down from Heaven and divided the child in two with a knife, and collected his blood in the chalice. And when the priest divided the host into several parts to give Communion to the people, they saw that the angel was also dividing the child into several small parts. And when, at the end of mass, the hermit went to receive Communion, it seemed to him that he alone was given a part of the bloodied flesh of that child. Seeing this, he was filled with such dread that he screamed and said: "My Lord, now I really believe that the bread which is consecrated on the altar is Your holy body and the chalice,

⁵⁵² CS, p. 41. Like Weil, these ascetic women seem to have held an ultra-physicalist account of the Eucharist. This is one of the things that sets these women apart from their social and cultural contexts and makes them identifiable as a group.

⁵⁵³ See Piero Camporesi, "The Consecrated Host: A Wondrous Excess," tr. Anna Canogne, in Fragments for a History of the Human Body, vol.3, (New York: Urzone, 1989), vol.I, pp. 221-237.

that is to say the wine, is Your blood." And immediately it seemed to him that the flesh had turned again into bread and he received communion. Then the other two hermits told him: "God, knowing that to eat raw flesh horrifies human nature, ordered that this sacrament assume the guise of bread and wine."⁵⁵⁴

The human flesh, that was food on the altar, was divine in its embodiment of the suffering of Christ. For Weil, it is the actual suffering on the cross that makes Christ's body divine, because it is only in this suffering that Christ is completely cut off from the Father, and thus only in this suffering is Christ completely incarnate. In other words, it is the suffering on the cross that makes Christ's body divine because it is this suffering that brings Christ's physicality into direct contact with His divine nature, causing a fusion. Only in consenting to become fully incarnate was the divine fully pledged to the good through matter. Christ's incarnation (crucifixion) represents, therefore, the redemption of man's humanity by justifying it as a medium through which the good exists.

For these ascetic women, as for many others in the medieval period who held a very physicalist interpretation of the Eucharist, the conception of Christ as food went hand in hand with the religious experiences of visions and sensations of the bread and wine as actual flesh and blood.⁵⁵⁵ Not only did some religious women experience the

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 233. The story is cited from Alfonse de Liguori, Apparecchio alla morte, cioe considerazioni sulle massime eterne, (Bassano: Remondini, 1767), p. 390.

⁵⁵⁵ For a discussion of this aspect of medieval views on the Eucharist, see Jaroslav Pelikan, "The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300)," The Christian Tradition, vol. 6, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 200-201: "The formal rule of prayer in the liturgy was reinforced by the informal rule of prayer in the piety of the people. Above all, it was through 'miracles that are congruous to this faith of ours' [Lanfranc of Bec, De corpore et sanguine Domini, 19 (PL 150:435)] in the real presence that the doctrine was confirmed. Although Berengar criticized Radbertus for his credulity in repeating tales of eucharistic miracles, his adversaries used 'very well-known miracles' [Guitmond of Aversa, De corporis et sanguinis Christi veritate in eucharistia, 3 (PL 149:1479-80)] as proof in 'rational confutation' [Ibid.] of his teachings. Through these miracles God had revealed to his faithful not only what glories awaited them in

bread and wine turning into bloody flesh as they took it into their mouths, but also there were frequent claims of mystical feedings on Christ's body itself: either in the form of Eucharist hosts pulled out of Christ's wound, or in the form of nursing on Christ's chest wound or his other stigmatic wounds, all interpreted as breasts.⁵⁵⁶

One of the interesting aspects of fasting in this context, where Christ is food, is that it was not uncommon for someone to claim to have fasted for several years, living miraculously off the Eucharist. The theme of Christ as food really comes out when the Eucharist is seen as a divine food that actually nourishes someone in their physicality. This sort of miracle, along with others like failure to decompose after death, is of a different type from those miracles of a psychosomatic variety, since living off of nothing is in no sense the physical manifestation of a psychological state. This indicates that there was an aspect to the religiosity of these women that involved, however subliminally, the conception of religious perfection as a metaphysical transformation of one's matter or body into something divine, which could then be nourished by something else that was also material and divine.

However, taking the Eucharist was not the only way of becoming one with the

heaven, but also 'what a gift he left for them here on earth' [Geza of Saint Martian, De corpore et sanguine Christi, pr. (PL 137:373)] in the Eucharist. A primary purpose of the miracles was to 'show the visible reality of the body of the Lord.' [Peter Damian, Opuscula, 34 pr (PL 145:573)] Sometimes this happened through a special revelation by which a spectator at Mass saw a human form, often the form of a child, replace the form of the consecrated host. [c.f. Herbert of Losinga, Sermons, I (in E. Goulburn and H. Symonds ed. The Life, Letters and Sermons of Bishop Herbert de Losinga, vol.2: The Sermons, Oxford, 1878), p. 30-32; Guibert of Nogent, De pignoribus sanctorum, 1.2 (PL 156:616); Geza of Saint Martian, De corpore et sanguine Christi, 41 (PL 137:393); Hugh of Metellu, Epistles, 4 (PL 188:1275)]." See also, Appendix II, Christ as Savior of our Physical Nature.

⁵⁵⁶ See Appendix II for textual examples.

suffering flesh of Christ. The mystical unions that women experienced were often explicitly sexual. There are reports, for example, of women kissing Him 'deeply'.⁵⁵⁷ The mystic/poet Hadewijch describes her experience of Christ 'penetrating her until she lost herself in the ecstasy of love'.

All this sounds, of course, very bizarre. Weil herself raises the objection that sexuality is not the appropriate or even possible mode of relationship between man and God.⁵⁵⁸ She argues that one could have a perverted sexual desire for just about anything (a shoe, for example) including God. The desire, however, would only seem to be for the object (in this case God) but would, in fact, be only of some imaginary conception.

However we must keep in mind that a desire that necessarily involves a distorted understanding of God or any object is more of an obsession (psychological malaise) than real love. Weil would argue that one could not love just any object. For example, Weil says:

L'amour [...] est une disposition de la partie surnaturelle de l'âme. La foi est une disposition de *toutes* les parties de l'âme — et du corps aussi — ayant chacune à l'égard de l'objet de l'amour l'attitude qui convient à sa nature.⁵⁵⁹

Thus, love guarantees that the physical expression of faith (as bodily desire) is guided properly to the true object of love, no matter how completely transcendent. She argues that any form of carnal desire is basically a desire for the beauty of the world possessed by a human being and that the desire for the beauty possessed by a human

⁵⁵⁷ See Elizabeth Petroff, Consolation of the Blessed, (New York: Alta Gaia Society, 1979), pp. 70-73.

⁵⁵⁸ See CS, p. 252: "On peut transposer la sexualité sur des objets quelconques: collection, or, pouvoir, parti, chat, canari, Dieu (ce n'est pas alors le vrai Dieu)."

⁵⁵⁹ CAH, II, p. 154.

being is really the desire for the incarnation of Christ, i.e., that the good should be present in matter.⁵⁶⁰ Weil concludes that: "Aussi est-ce bien à tort qu'on reproche parfois aux mystiques d'employer le langage amoureux. C'est eux qui en sont les légitimes propriétaires. Les autres n'ont droit qu'à l'emprunter."⁵⁶¹ Weil is arguing that the relation between man and God is properly sexual, and that the relations between people can only be sexual in a derivative way. This is why she argues elsewhere that marriage is the most 'holy' or good form of human relationship because it comes closest to the proper relationship with God.⁵⁶² Weil also argues against any hidden claim that the relation between man and God cannot properly be sexual because sexuality is 'bad', the absurdity of which she feels is made apparent if, by analogy, one were to say that people should not relate sexually because it is 'bad':

Reprocher à des mystiques d'aimer Dieu avec la faculté d'amour sexuel, c'est comme si on reprochait à un peintre de faire des tableaux avec des couleurs qui sont composées de substances matérielles. Nous n'avons pas autre chose avec quoi aimer. On pourrait d'ailleurs aussi bien faire le même reproche à un homme qui aime une femme.⁵⁶³

In general, this line of argument is central to the claim that the asceticism of these women was not a movement away from, but a movement towards physicality. If one was to admit that man is to some extent essentially a physical being, one must then acknowledge that one's relation to God (if there is at all an issue of such) must be physical

⁵⁶⁰ See AD, p. 163: "Le désir d'aimer dans un être humain la beauté du monde est essentiellement le désir de l'Incarnation." See also CAH, II, pp. 276-277 (note 155 above).

⁵⁶¹ AD, p. 163. Despite the distinction between obsession and love, Weil seems to contradict herself on this point.

⁵⁶² See CAH, III, pp. 161-162. Weil goes so far as to imply that all physical desire is desire for the good to be incarnate in matter.

⁵⁶³ CAH, III, p. 99. See also, CS, p. 129: "L'énergie sexuelle humaine n'est pas saisonnière. C'est le meilleur signe qu'elle n'est pas destinée à un usage naturel, mais à l'amour de Dieu."

in part. The body-centered religiosity of these medieval women, and of Weil, can be taken as proof that they thought of themselves as, in some essential way, physical. As we saw in Chapter VIII (see note 376 above), according to Weil's theory, when the spirit is joined directly to matter, the desire for God is felt as bodily hunger and thirst and it is only then that God is actual food which nourishes one in a material sense.

Apart from these two ways of taking God in, i.e., through the Eucharist and mystical (sexual) union, suffering itself offered a third way of assimilating God into oneself. As Weil says:

Comparaison (mais ce n'est qu'une comparaison?) — Comme Dieu est présent dans la perception sensible d'un morceau de pain par la consécration de l'eucharistie, il est présent dans le mal extrême par la douleur rédemptrice, par la croix.⁵⁶⁴

Not only the self-inflicted sufferings of ascetic practice but, also, the sufferings that come with physical and mental illness were seen as effecting a transformation of one's body into Christ's, if however, the suffering was accepted in the right way. Some, such as Julian of Norwich, prayed for disease and saw it as a blessing. The holiness of these women was seen by their followers as present in the bodiliness of the woman, at least the aspect of that holiness that was accessible to them, and in which they could share.

Not only did people revere the holy women as a source of health and grace; ingesting their filth and bodily fluids, the holy women themselves sought to embrace the disease and suffering of common people holding that it was divine as well. In this they

⁵⁶⁴ CAH, II, p. 305.

were following the tradition of Francis of Assisi, who kissed lepers in order to transcend his natural repulsion, which typified his distance from God and Christ. This is a very interesting aspect of medieval asceticism. The natural repulsion is basically a lack of love, which places a limit on charity and which is therefore unacceptable. The ability to look into the deepest, most disgusting aspects of bodiliness and physical existence, and see the face of God — that is the religious perfection they sought. It is a religiosity that goes down into the lowest levels of physicality and breaks down the classical dichotomies between above and below, pure and impure. Thus, some holy women would embrace, or 'eat', the suffering of the ill in an attempt to transform their bodies into Christ's body, as they also did by taking the Eucharist.

Contact with Christ, as body, had a healing effect for these medieval ascetic women both on their individual neuroses (and, one could say, self-hatred) towards the body and the cultural attitude of body contempt. Even though it stemmed from an initial self or body hatred, contact with the divine body of Christ through such extreme ascetic practices led one into a world of bodies and a world of charitable service to bodies which ultimately had a healing effect on these initial negative attitudes.⁵⁶⁵

The fact that it was through their severe ascetic practices that these medieval ascetic women came to see and accept themselves as inherently physical can be seen, for example, in the case of eating the suffering (lice and pus) of others. When suffering was taken in as food, it was equated with the suffering that was felt in the (most intimate) self, indicating that the self had taken in the physicality (of the food) into its most intimate

⁵⁶⁵See Appendix II for relevant texts.

part, i.e., its most spiritual part. The eating of suffering in this way caused such a violence to the self (taking one outside her nature) that it eradicated the self's boundaries and the person was no longer able to discern the difference between her self and the lice or pus which symbolized the purest form of physicality and at the same time divine goodness.

Another example of how it was through their severe ascetic practices that these medieval ascetic women came to see and accept themselves as inherently physical is the suffering associated with intense fasting that destroyed the self's sense of transcending the body, and thus the self's sense of being separate from it. Christ's own hunger reassured the person that this was the way to achieve perfection. The incorruptible body that could live off just the Eucharist was Christ's body. The ability to live off the Eucharist indicated an equality or identity between one's flesh and the divine flesh one takes in as food. When the body was thought to be sustained on only heavenly food this meant that there was an aspect of the body, of physicality, that was compatible with a purely spiritual existence, i.e., that the self could identify itself with the body without therein becoming corruptible just as Christ becoming incarnate did not make him mortal.

The Question of Anthropological Dualism and Spiritual Development

No doubt some women went (or tried to go) the way of spiritual dualism. It is not hard to find in the lives of these women examples of *contemptus mundi* type attitudes and behavior (which characterize an initial presence of an anthropological dualistic attitude). The question is, however, whether these ascetic practices involved a transformation of the desire to escape physicality (and become pure spirit) into a desire to embrace physicality

as the way in which one can be related to the divine. The issue has to do with a conception of ascetic practices as bringing about a conversion of physicality from a natural state to a state of divinity.

The fact that these women began their spiritual development with anthropologically dualistic assumptions (and the corresponding negative attitudes towards physicality) does not mean that they were locked into a spiritually dualistic method of spiritual development. In fact, if there was nothing wrong with the natural, there would be nothing pushing one to seek its perfection. Culturally, it seems obvious that these women started from an even stronger hatred for the body than their contemporaries, since unlike most people, in their culture these few women were driven to fanatic extremes. It was, presumably, an even stronger than usual hatred of the physical what drove them.

From what we have seen above it is plausible that as some medieval ascetic women developed in their religiosity they came to see 'the physical' as more than a symbol of human corruption. Physicality in general came to mean, for them, the humanity that was redeemed in Christ. This is the way in which certain medieval ascetic women moved from spiritual dualism to spiritual monism. Angela of Foligno, for example, reports having a vision in which Christ says to her that her whole life, her eating, drinking, sleeping and everything she does to live, is pleasing to Christ, if she loves him.⁵⁶⁶

Thus, one must not underestimate the initial anthropological dualism of these women and the extent to which the society in which they lived was anthropologically

⁵⁶⁶ See Appendix II for relevant texts.

dualistic. Without keeping in mind the profound anthropological dualism that initially permeated the attitudes of these women, we cannot see how they progressed in their religious development from a spiritually and anthropologically dualistic attitude to a more spiritually and anthropologically monistic one.

The ascetic women in question could only embrace their physicality as a religious avenue if they at the same time accepted the commonly accepted negative connotation of physicality. If physicality had no negative connotation, it would not have been associated with femaleness, or vice versa.⁵⁶⁷

The fact that the spiritual monists in the middle ages were overwhelmingly female seems to be just a cultural or historical accident. It was a cultural accident that women were pushed towards the one direction (spiritual monism) by the cultural association of women as food and flesh and by their economic and political situation. Men (associated with spirit and intellect) seeking religious perfection were equally pushed into the *contemptus mundi* spiritual dualism point of view. Certain men did go the way of the lower (the way through the physical) such as Francis of Assisi, but it was rare. And, interestingly, in the few cases, there is a real sense of rejecting one's maleness.⁵⁶⁸

As we have seen, the medieval ascetic women were faced with conflicting cultural assumptions. On the one hand, as human, each woman was a soul tied to a body. And, on the other hand, women were supposed to be more bodily or material than men, which

⁵⁶⁷ See R. Bultot, "Cosmologie et *contemptus mundi*," in *Revue de théologie ancienne et médiévale*, numéro spécial 1: *Sapientia Doctrina: Mélanges...O.S.B.*; (1980), pp. 4,5,18,21. See also, p. 16, where Bultot reminds us that the world of the medievals was, as he puts it, "diabolocentrique"!

⁵⁶⁸ See Bynum, *Holy Feast, Holy Fast*, pp. 105; 282-288.

meant that they were, as souls, united more intimately to their bodies and as a result their souls were less pure, less spiritual.

So, with respect to the task of spiritual development, the medieval ascetic woman was faced with having to actually becoming more material, i.e., forging a more intimate bond with the body.⁵⁶⁹ In this way, their spiritually monistic practices drove these women to have experiences that broke down dualistic conceptions of human nature. For these ascetic women, to have a positive notion of the body was not simply an abstract judgment. Having a positive notion of the body meant embracing physicality, because to say that the body was good meant that it was a possible source of contact with the divine. They had to incorporate the saving divinity of physicality into themselves, into their innermost self, to ensure their own experience of Christ.

It was through suffering that this was possible because the suffering was so intense that it broke down the natural barriers to the self. In intense suffering, it is only one's sense of being physical which is not destroyed. As Weil claimed, intense suffering constitutes experimental proof that one is a body because it is through the body that one is exposed to the suffering and while one is suffering one cannot retain a sense of being something separate.

Desert Fathers

The ascetics referred to as the 'Desert Fathers' can be roughly grouped together as

⁵⁶⁹ Assuming that the woman chose the way of Christ's humanity and not the way of contempt for the world. My analysis also assumes that, of course, women were not really more material than men.

the ascetic hermits and monks who lived in the deserts of Egypt and Syria from about 250 A.D.⁵⁷⁰ The Desert Fathers generally practiced a severe form of asceticism. As Peter Brown has noted, scholars have often been misled into thinking that the principle motive for this behavior is a contempt for the human existence and a hatred of the body:

The ascetics imposed severe restraints on their bodies because they were convinced that they could sweep the body into a desperate venture. [...] The ascetics thought of themselves as men and women who had gained a precious freedom to mourn for their sins and to suffer in this life so that they may regain a future glory for their bodies.⁵⁷¹

The Desert Fathers are similar to Weil in their conception of spiritual development as involving the transformation of what is natural (body and soul) into something divine. However, unlike the medieval ascetic women that we have presented, the Desert Fathers seem not to have thought of their bodies as the 'locus' of the divine. They were not limited to seeking the divine through their material aspect as were the medieval ascetic women that we looked at. The material realm was, for the Desert Fathers, more like the battle-ground upon which the natural soul and the spirit battle, each of which struggles for domination over the other through domination over the body. We are reminded immediately of Weil's example of someone wanting to keep money that they do not own and nevertheless, as if possessed by something alien, being forced in a physical sense, to put one foot in front of the other etc. until one has actually returned the money in a physical sense but against one's will.

⁵⁷⁰ There is no definitive end date, given that the Coptic church is still in existence. Also the date of 250 AD. is meant to correspond to the birth of Anthony the Great, but when he went into the desert, there were already hermits to be found.

⁵⁷¹ Brown, Peter, The Body and Society, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 222; p. 235.

Weil's conception of the body as a weapon that the spirit uses against the soul is implied in the writings of some Desert Fathers. It is the idea behind their rigorous practice of asceticism. For example:

He [Isaac] went to the holy mountain of Shietin which were Choirs of the holy angels of God, these being blessed monks, who crucify their flesh with the afflictions of virtue, carrying at all times the death of Jesus in their bodies.⁵⁷²

The point of this crucifixion is not to transform or convert the body itself into something divine, because in a sense matter in itself is always neutral. The body is 'worldly' when ruled by the natural soul, and divine when ruled by the spirit.⁵⁷³ The point of the mortification, then, is to bring the body into a state of goodness in a way that is in spite of (independent from) the natural soul, and essentially against the will. The body's goodness forces the natural soul — the willful self — into direct contact with goodness. This contact causes the destruction of the natural soul because the goodness is in the form of suffering and suffering goes essentially against the will.

This battle is not restricted to the ascetic's body, but rather is going on in the world at large. For some Desert Fathers, every bit of matter in the whole universe is a battleground between the divine and the evil in nature. Their view of religion was very much like that of the manichaeans, except only with respect to this world, i.e., there was no metaphysical principle of evil, no cosmic struggle, only the struggle of evil in this world

⁵⁷² "Vie d'Isaac. Patriarche d'Alexandrie de 686 à 689," in Patrologia Orientalis, ed. E. Porcher, Tome XI, fasc.3, (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1914), p. 312 (no.6).

⁵⁷³ See Brown, The Body and Society, p. 225: "It was the human will, sensed by the monk as an impacted mass of willfulness lodged at the very bottom of the heart, and not the malleable 'clay' of the body itself, that stood 'like a brazen wall' between the monk and God."

(the Devil — a finite persona) for domination of its inhabitants. This is indicated through the examples of the incidents reported in which an ascetic was physically attacked by a demon. These attacks were called temptations, but were not psychological in nature. For example:

He was beaten with innumerable stripes by the devils, and he learned by experience much about their cunning.⁵⁷⁴

One of the ways to be victorious against such attacks was to make known that since the demon acted only through the implicit permission of God, no evil could result from the suffering inflicted. For example:

The Devil observed Anthony. As David says in the *Psalms*: 'He gnashed his teeth against him.' Anthony was comforted by the Savior, who saved him from the works of the Enemy and his many deceits. As Anthony was keeping vigil in the night the Enemy sent wild animals against him and all the hyenas which are in that desert. They came forth from their holes, they surrounded him like a circle. Each one opened his mouth at him threatening to bite him. But he knew the craft of the Enemy. He said to them all: 'If you have been given authority over me, I am prepared that you should eat me, but if the demons are they who have sent you, do not remain in this place but withdraw; for I am the servant of Christ.' When Anthony said this, they fled, as if his words followed them like a whip.⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷⁴ E.A.W. Budge, The Book of Paradise (Lady Meux Manuscript No.6): being the histories and sayings of the monks and ascetics of the Egyptian Desert by Palladius, Hieronymus and others, (London, 1904), p. 279 (no.10).

⁵⁷⁵ "S. Antonii Vita. Versio Sahidici," in Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium. Scriptores Coptici, ed. G. Garitte, Vol.177, (Louvain, 1949), p. 58 (no.12). Another method of dispelling demons who came in the form of angels was to always, upon seeing an angel, say to it 'I am not worthy to receive you' and if it was a demon it would disappear, if it was an angel it would not. See for example, "Le Manuscrit de la Version Copte en Dialecte Sahidique des 'Apothegmata Patrum'," ed. M Chaine, in Revue de l'Orient Chrétien, 3^e série, tome VII (XXVII),(Paris, 1930), p. 32 (no.5): "The Devil changed himself into the form of an angel of light. He appeared to one of the brothers and said to him: 'I am Gabriel, I have been sent to thee.' He said to him: 'Thou hast been sent to another brother; for I am not worthy.' Immediately he became invisible.

This view should not be confused with that whereby the evil is thought to be unarmful because it was not real, or at least not seriously harmful being only quasi-real. The evil of demons was accepted as God's will even when it ended in the death of the ascetic. In this quotation above, Anthony must, presumably, have been sincere in his acceptance of the evil committed by the demons on God's authority, since if he was not sincere, again presumably, the demons would not have withdrawn. Here is an example of demons actually causing the death of an ascetic:

And when those devils had remained with him a long time and had done nothing, as they were speaking, these wicked and evil devils laid hold of him and smote him with severe blows and wounded his whole body and tore him cruelly and they left him with little life remaining in him. Then he lay groaning in the place in which they left him and after a little time, when his breath came to him, the members of his house and helpers who were near him went forth in grief to seek him. [...] Then on the third night in a short time, from the many blows of the devils, he departed from this present life; for without mercy they fell upon him and they smote him with blows upon the former blows and thus they injured him until he struggled for breath.⁵⁷⁶

This strategy is a perfect application of Weil's idea of loving the will of God through necessity, where the beauty and goodness of reality are revealed in the actual evil of necessity.⁵⁷⁷ This position, shared by Weil and the Desert Fathers, goes against the tradition that assumes that evil is incompatible with an absolutely good divinity, claiming therefore that evil is either illusory, or a concept characteristic of man's finite grasp on

⁵⁷⁶ Budge, The Book of Paradise, p. 360 (no.1).

⁵⁷⁷ See for example, "The Life of Apa Onnophrius the Anchorite," in Oriental Text Series I, ed. E.A.W. Budge, (London, 1888), p. 213 (no.27): "The blessed old man said to me: 'I suffered greatly many times from hunger and thirst and from the fire outside by day and the great cold at night. My flesh swelled in the dew of heaven.'" Here the 'dew of heaven' is intended to mean the excessive heat of the day and cold of the night.

reality, and/or, that evil is really good because it is useful in some, perhaps unforeseen, way.

Although, for some Desert Fathers, every bit of matter in the whole universe is a battle ground between the divine and the evil in nature, when the desert ascetic is warring upon all that is evil in nature, it is wrong to conclude that they are warring upon the materiality of what is natural. When the divine wins, it is not the matter itself that has been transformed into something divine, but rather, the evil state of the material thing has been transformed into a divine state. For example, they held that religious perfection was achievable in this material state. Their conception of the perfected body implied the achievement of a sort of primordial equilibrium which involved the elimination of all need for natural food and sleep.⁵⁷⁸ These, along with other minor characteristics of natural existence like sexual need, were thought to be eliminated, but the equilibrium was nevertheless a material state.

But it is important to note that the elimination of the need for food (the case of sleep is less clear) was only the substitution of the need for natural food for the need for spiritual food, and was not a reaction against being dependent upon nature for one's subsistence, as was the case with the practitioners of *contemptus mundi*. The Desert

⁵⁷⁸ See The Body and Society, p. 223: "The ascetics of late antiquity tended to view the human body as an 'autarkic' system. In ideal conditions, it was thought capable of running on its own 'heat'; it would need only enough nourishment to keep that heat alive. In its 'natural' state — a state with which the ascetics tended to identify the bodies of Adam and Eve — the body had acted like a finely tuned engine, capable of 'idling' indefinitely. It was only the twisted will of fallen men that had crammed the body with unnecessary food, thereby generating in it the dire surplus of energy that showed itself in physical appetite, in anger, and in the sexual urge." See Appendix III for examples of no longer needing natural food or sleep and receiving heavenly food.

Fathers were similar to medieval ascetic women in the sense that they did not conceive of the perfected body as needing no food at all, but rather, in its divine state, it needed divine food. The idea of heavenly food is very interesting because it brings home the idea that one can be nourished in one's physicality — one's materiality — by the sheer goodness of something: that being good does not imply a movement away from being material and further even, that being good implies in an essential way, being material.

Of course, one could ask why the Desert Fathers thought there was something wrong or inadequate about natural existence in the first place. I think it is fair to say that they more or less took the inadequacy of natural existence for granted, accepting the biblical account of the fall, which was not just the fall of man's nature, but rather involved in effect the fall of nature in general. For the purposes of this study, what is significant about the Desert Fathers is that even while accepting that what is natural is 'tainted', they nevertheless sometimes conceived of spiritual perfection as including what is material instead of as a movement away from what is material.

Just as the ideal of going without sleep or natural food is expressed through the stories from the lives of famous desert monks who achieved the ideal in their lives, so too the ideal of life in harmony with perfected nature is expressed in stories of monks' lives.

We can take for example:

[Apa Marcarious of Egypt said]: 'I went into the desert and found there a lake of water with an island in the middle of it and beasts of the desert came to drink at that place. I saw, in their midst, two naked men.'⁵⁷⁹

We found some antelopes in the depth of the valley, with a monk in the

⁵⁷⁹ "Le Manuscrit de la Version Copte en Dialecte Sahidique des 'Apophthegmata Patrum'," p. 74 (no.15).

midst. My father made his way, he embraced him. He said to him: 'What is thy name?' He said: 'My name is Aphou. Remember me, my father, Apa Paul. May the Lord perfect me well.' My father said to him: 'Behold, for how many years hast thou been in this place?' He said: 'Behold, for forty five years.' My father said to him: 'Who gave thee the monk's robe?' He said: 'Apa Anthony of Shiet.' My father said to him: 'On what dost thou live as thou walkest with these antelopes?' He said: 'My food and that of these antelopes is one food, this is herbs of the field and these vegetables.' My father said to him: 'Dost thou not freeze in the Winter and burn in the summer?' He said to him: 'If it is Winter, I sleep in the midst of these antelopes and they keep me warm with their breath which is in their mouths. If it is Summer they gather together and stand and give shade to me against the heat which troubles me.'⁵⁸⁰

Because all of nature fell through the fall of man, so too can the redemption of man constitute the redemption of the natural world. Although the Desert Fathers thought of spiritual development as primarily a movement of the soul, they nevertheless thought that the soul's struggle could be observed in the body and the world around them. Nature was thought of as reflecting the good or evil (or the struggle between them) of the soul like a mirror.

Yet, nature was not just a passive medium like a mirror. The soul's struggle between good and evil requires the material battle-ground in order to be fought and therefore, also, in order to be won. There is thus, in the thought of the Desert Fathers, a continuity between the good and the physical. Although, for the Desert Fathers, the good of man is identified with the soul's good, the soul's good requires the body for its achievement and is reflected in nature.

⁵⁸⁰ "Vie de Paul de Tamoueh," in Annales du Musée Guimet, ed. E. Amelineau, vol.17: Monuments pour servir a l'histoire de l'Egypte Chretien au IV^e siècle, (Paris: Leroux, 1889), p. 761 (no.12); cf. also Budge, The Life of Apa Onnophrius the Anchorite, p. 206, no.13.; p. 210, no.1. See also, Susan Power Bratton, "The Original Desert Solitaire: Early Christian Monasticism and Wilderness," Environ Ethics, 10 (spring, 1988), pp. 31-53.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to show that Simone Weil was not alone in her spiritual monism. Through an examination of the actual practices and religious development that certain medieval ascetic women and the Desert Fathers experienced, we can see that they did not necessarily have a negative attitude towards human existence or at least, that the religious experiences were based on a spiritually monistic spiritual development and represented a movement away from these negative valuations. The physical or material aspect of man is involved in man's goodness not just as a means but, rather, as integral to the goodness itself.

When the spirit is alive in man, all of nature, including the body, is good. For the Desert Fathers, it is through matter that goodness exists for man and all of creation. This, however, differs slightly from the position of Weil and the medieval ascetic women, for whom matter itself took on goodness or divinity. But, as we have seen, there are also striking similarities between Weil's thought and that of the Desert Fathers when it comes to the motivation behind ascetic practices and the way in which ascetic suffering affects the natural soul.

The study of medieval ascetic women and of the Desert Fathers both offered examples of how negative attitudes towards the body and anthropologically dualistic conceptions of man can be challenged through bodily experiences. The study of medieval ascetic women showed how this attack can come from the outside, that is, from the way one's own sense of self is affected by bodily experience. The study of the Desert Fathers

shows us how this attack on negative valuations and anthropological dualism comes from the inside, that is, from the way in which bodily experience is affected by the nature of the self.

Both of these aspects are represented in Weil's theory of spiritual development. Like some Desert Fathers, Weil emphasized the need for an inner transformation from the natural soul to supernatural spirit. But unlike the Desert Fathers, Weil did not see matter as essentially neutral but, rather, she saw matter as being, at least in some cases, actually divine.

It is interesting to see that in both cases, that of the medieval ascetic woman and the Desert Fathers, there is an incompleteness to the spiritual monism. On the one hand, medieval ascetic women fall short of complete spiritual monism because their idea of human perfection is of an experience of Christ and not of actually being good humans in the world. This is tied to the fact that they did not see the need for a transformation of the self. For the medieval ascetic woman, the good of man may involve the body but it is nevertheless primarily the good of the soul.

The Desert Fathers, on the other hand, fail in being fully spiritually monistic in that their asceticism did not go very far in breaking down anthropological dualism. The perfection of matter meant simply the elimination of sin from it. From the point of view of the Desert Fathers, there is no need to forge an anthropological union with matter because it is not in itself good.

From these two studies we are better able to see the essential character of spiritual monism and, in particular, that it involves a sense that being a man (in the right way) is

the final good of man, i.e., that there is a unique good that belongs to man by virtue of being a man. Moreover, connected to this is the other fundamental aspect of spiritual monism, namely, that matter itself can be good. Weil's theory of spiritual development exemplifies these properties of spiritual monism to a greater extent than either that of the Desert Fathers or the medieval ascetic women, as can be seen from the following passage from Weil:

Et la réalité pour un homme est d'exister ici-bas. [...] La plénitude de la réalité de Dieu est hors de ce monde, mais la plénitude de la réalité d'un homme est dans ce monde, cet homme fût-il parfait.⁵⁸¹

⁵⁸¹ CAH, II, p. 351.

SECTION III : Conclusion

In this section we first discussed (Chapter X) the best way to apply our analysis of spiritual dualism and spiritual monism to theories of spiritual development in general. We found that it is best to apply this analysis to that part of the theory which has to do with the achievement of man's perfection through asceticism. We concluded that a theory will be spiritually dualistic to the extent that the body has only an instrumental role to play in the achievement of man's good which is indicated by a tendency to down play the role of asceticism in the theory of spiritual development.

We then (Chapter XI and XII) analysed various theories of spiritual development in order to see what the essential characteristics of spiritual dualism are. In all cases we found that at the root of spiritual dualism there is a negative valuation of physical existence. We also found two essential characteristics of spiritual monism. The first was that materiality is somehow good in itself. The second essential characteristic of spiritual monism that we identified is the conception of man's good as being proper to man himself, i.e., that man's good does not lie in some relation of man to something else, even when this other thing is God.

We have looked at various types of theory of spiritual development. We were surprised to find that Kierkegaard's religious theory of spiritual development was

spiritually dualistic because of the importance he placed on suffering in his theory of spiritual perfection and because of the large emphasis he placed on the need for an indirect method. The non-religious theories of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer were also seen to be spiritually dualistic which was, at least in the case of Nietzsche, surprising since he claims that his theory is 'life affirming'.

We then turned to the religious theories of spiritual development of medieval ascetic women and the Desert Fathers and found that, while they were spiritually monistic, that they nevertheless fell short in certain respects. This is also interesting because it brings home the obvious fact that just because a theory is spiritually monistic does not mean that it is a good theory. There could be just as much a variety of spiritually monistic theories as there are of spiritually dualistic ones.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this work is to show that an examination of an author's theory of human perfection can, in certain cases, contribute to an understanding of an author's valuation of man's material nature. A negative valuation of material existence is a basic attitude that in effect implies that there is no aspect of man's ultimate good that involves material existence. An author who starts off as an anthropological dualist may change his/her anthropological doctrine upon realizing the implications of anthropological dualism. I wanted to make the connection between an anthropological dualism and a negative valuation of man's material existence susceptible to philosophical analysis because valuations of this are rarely stated explicitly, and even so can be misleading or ambiguous.

To my knowledge no one has developed an adequate conceptual apparatus capable of properly bringing out an author's valuation. The discussion has traditionally remained at the level of an analysis of an author's anthropological formulations, where the issue revolved around the extent to which the body and the soul were thought to be ontologically separate. An anthropological doctrine does not, in itself, make explicit the valuation of man's physical existence that it nevertheless implicitly contains.

Knowing an author's attitude towards material existence is crucial in order to

understand the author's philosophy in general, since a philosophy requires a valuation of human existence and, in the end, the location of man's material existence somewhere in relation to man's ultimate good. In other words, the author must supply us with what is, in the author's opinion, the value of human existence in general, the value of man's material existence, and most importantly, the place of the good of material existence (if any) in the larger context of the good of man in general.

An author's implicit valuation of material existence is, thus, best made explicit through an examination of his/her theory of human perfection since the negative or positive valuation has to do with man's final end. In the more dynamic context of theories dealing with the issue of man's ultimate end, the notion of ontological separation of different aspects of man translates into the notion of an operational independence. The operational independence becomes significant with respect to the achievement of man's ultimate end, since that achievement seems naturally to be the operation that is most properly human. And because, accordingly, one would expect the achievement of this end to be the operation of that part (or those parts) of man deemed most properly his, the analysis at this point becomes very telling on the question of valuation. We can now ask, with reference to a particular theory, what role man's physicality plays in the achievement of man's ultimate good. The answer can vary from man's physicality playing no significant role, to it playing an instrumental role or even being integral to the enjoyment of the end.

Theories which hold man's physical aspect as either instrumental or insignificant in the achievement of man's ultimate good I called 'spiritually dualistic'. A spiritually

dualistic theory of human development or perfection is one in which the ultimate good is achieved through a movement of the soul towards a good that is exclusively the soul's and is a movement of the soul that is in spite of, away from, and to some extent against the body or man's physicality.

Theories which hold the material aspect of man as integral to the achievement of man's ultimate good I call 'spiritually monistic'. A spiritually monistic theory of human perfection is one according to which the ultimate good that is achieved through a movement of man as a whole (physical and spiritual aspects) is a good that belongs to all of man. We also saw that what becomes important here is some conception of a good that belongs properly to man.

The bulk of our thesis consists in the analysis of various authors' theories of human perfection in an attempt to reveal the author's valuation of human existence, which can be put in terms of whether the author is a spiritual dualist or not. The authors which we look at consist of both, authors who seem to have a negative valuation of material existence, as well as those that seem to have a positive valuation. In some cases the initial appearance is shown to be correct and in some cases it is shown to be incorrect.

There are, of course, other philosophers who would have been very interesting to look at had space permitted. The two that immediately come to mind are Thomas Aquinas and Merleau-Ponty. The point, however, of the thesis was not to exhaustively analyze every possible author's theory of human perfection but, rather, to provide enough examples to support my claim that this sort of analysis can be useful not only to bring to light the author's valuation of human materiality but also to shed light on the author's

anthropology. I have adequately shown that it is a strategy which in all probability could be applied to other individual philosophers with beneficial results.

To some extent, however, the usefulness of giving an analysis of various theories of human perfection and the ability of such to bring out the author's valuation of human materiality rests on the assumption that the author's theory holds there to be both spiritual and material aspects to human existence. This assumption does, perhaps, limit the applicability of the notions of spiritual dualism and monism. However, this is not a serious limitation because (a) we must keep in mind that the assumption that there are both spiritual and material aspects to human existence is not the same as an assumption of anthropological dualism, and (b) I do not know of any theories of human perfection that do not share that assumption. In other words, neither spiritual dualism nor spiritual monism could be used to characterize a purely materialist position, not simply because a pure materialism excludes spiritual aspects from human nature, but because a pure materialism cannot have a theory of human perfection. This is not to say that one state of material organization cannot be more pleasant than another, but only that from the principles of pure materialism one could not say why 'more pleasant' is better (closer to perfection). Of course one does not have to be able to say why an increase in pleasure is better for it to be better, but one would have to be able to say why an increase in pleasure is better in order to have a theory of perfection.

It might also seem that the notions of spiritual monism and spiritual dualism are only applicable to theories which use notions like body, soul, matter and spirit. This would make the usefulness of analysing theories of human perfection largely irrelevant in

the contemporary environment where such 'onto-theological' terms are not used. It seems, however, quite clear from our study that the terms which are of central importance to such an are ones like: corporeality, finitude and self. These terms are, moreover, of contemporary usage. Likewise, as we have seen in the case of Nietzsche, the notion of 'theory of human perfection' is not limited to theological contexts. It would, for example, apply to psychoanalytic theories which speak of human development.

The analysis of an author's theory of human perfection is, nevertheless, best suited to that aspect of the theory of human perfection which deals with suffering of finitude. This is because, in general, for any given theory of human perfection, the 'body' (or man's physical aspect) will have the same degree of significance in the achievement of man's ultimate good as will suffering and finitude. When a theory of human perfection is spiritually dualistic, then asceticism and suffering will have at most an instrumental role in the achievement of man's highest good.

By far the most significant test case was that of Simone Weil's philosophy. I provided a detailed analysis of Weil's philosophy in order to bring to light the positive value she placed on the material aspects of human existence in relation to man's final end. The reason why Weil's thought made such a good test case is that she overwhelmingly seems to have a negative valuation of material existence. Thus, I also used Weil's philosophy to demonstrate that an investigation of an author's philosophical anthropology alone does not reveal their true assessment of human existence in all its aspects.

Apart from being such a good test case, Weil's thought provided an answer to the possible question of what is wrong with a negative valuation of material existence and, by

extension, what is wrong with anthropological dualism. She argues that a negative valuation of material existence is incompatible with any adequate or plausible theory of spiritual development. According to Weil, spiritual development involves a movement away from the negative valuation of material existence that is directly tied to anthropological dualism. Thus, it is through an embracing of one's material aspect in one's movement towards perfection that one can begin to change one's attitude towards human nature.

However, although I have emphasized Weil's thought throughout this work, I do not wish to imply that one should accept her theory of spiritual development. I am not so much interested in her 'doctrine' (in the sense of her thoughts taken as a coherent whole) as I am in certain assumptions that she makes which lead her to integrate a positive attitude towards the body with a commitment towards moral perfection. I feel that she has done this to an extent that is simply not paralleled by any other thinker in the entire history of our western philosophical and religious tradition.

I feel that she only began to actually work out in concrete how man should proceed in life as perfected. But I have, nevertheless, found some key aspects of her theory useful. For example according to Weil, the ultimate end of man can be achieved only because of man's material existence. In other words, it is only as a material being that man can be good. Her theory of human perfection involves an unmediated unity between matter and spirit. Not only is man's material aspect crucial to the achievement of his ultimate good, but is also crucial to the enjoyment of that good and, as such, man's ultimate good represents as much the perfection of man's material aspect as his spiritual

aspect. In fact, as we have seen, for Weil, spirit (as desire for the good) is itself the perfection of man's material existence.

The analysis of Weil's thought reveals that a positive attitude towards the material aspect of existence and an anthropological dualism are incompatible. This, in turn, indicates that an anthropological dualism actually implies a negative valuation of the material aspects of human existence. Making explicit the negative implications of anthropological dualism will, we hope, make it difficult for someone to consistently hold an anthropologically dualistic position *in abstracto* without, also, accepting the negative implications of that theory. And accepting the negative implications means having to defend those negative valuations which would not, I think, be very easy.

But, equally, making the negative implications of anthropological dualism explicit poses a challenge for the anthropological monist. This challenge is that of working out exactly how man, as a unity of material and immaterial principles, should proceed in life. The anthropological monist risks falling into spiritually dualistic modes of being because our tradition of moral theory has developed almost exclusively from spiritually dualistic assumptions. In other words, the anthropological monist is faced with the challenge of developing a non spiritually dualistic theory of moral development.

APPENDIX I

A Methodological Note on My Treatment of Weil

In the course of this thesis I claim that Weil, as she developed her unique theory of spiritual development, came to believe that real development involved attitudes which were incompatible with the assumptions associated with anthropological dualism. Furthermore, I claim that she moved from being an anthropological dualist to holding a much more complicated theory of human nature according to which man begins in a natural state of duality (of body and soul) and, in the course of becoming perfect, moves to being a unity of matter and spirit.

The way in which I approach the issues of the development and consistency of Weil's thought requires some attention. First of all, this is not a thesis on Simone Weil, but a thesis which proposes to critically review anthropological statements in the light of an author's theory of human perfection. I am, therefore, not concerned with examining Weil's doctrines in view of determining their truth, nor am I interested in reconstructing the evolution of Weil's thought in general except as it related directly to the point that I am trying to make.⁵⁸² My main concern is

⁵⁸² McFarland gives the following account of Weil's background in her book entitled Simone Weil, (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1983), p. 20: "Alain's teachings drew heavily on Plato, Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, Maine de Biran, Jules Lachelier, and his own teacher, Jules Lagneau. Broadly speaking, all these men can be said to belong to the tradition which the French call 'philosophies of reflection,' that is, philosophies in which the individual mind, through the act of thought, recognizes its intimate relationship to Being, to Thought itself. Historically, the orientation of philosophy toward the realm of Being has often tended to have as its counterpart a turning away from and a devaluation of the world of things, and such philosophies have tended to produce a dualism of mind/body, thought/action, essence/existence in which body, action, and existence are relegated to an inferior role. The specifically French line of reflective philosophy which begins with Maine de Biran in the early nineteenth century attempted to bridge the mind/body split by positing that knowledge of the thinking consciousness, of the self, is not dependent on the activity of the mind alone but on the mind's relation to the body, on willed

not to establish the truth value or the consistency of Weil's doctrine for the sake of itself, but to test the extent to which an examination of her theory of spiritual development sheds light on her valuation of human materiality and allows us to read her anthropological statements in the light of ethics. This investigation is particularly useful in the case of an author like Weil, whose statements about human nature (philosophical anthropology) seem often to be ambiguous if not contradictory.

Secondly I am not interested in a straightforward textual proof of the hypothesis of the evolution of her philosophical anthropology. Such an undertaking would be very difficult given the short span of time in which she wrote and the provisional way in which she wrote her journal (from which I draw most heavily). Weil wrote very few complete 'works' (especially in the latter period). I rely very heavily on Weil's journals and essays. Her journals do not constitute 'works' with a coherent line of argument or development.⁵⁸³ She would often introduce ideas into her journals in an exploratory way, not because she felt it was true but to see what truth there was in it. She was, for example, able to acknowledge that two contradictory statements both had a share in truth. She was in this sense an inherently unsystematic writer.⁵⁸⁴ Further, I am interested, primarily, in her 'religious' period from about 1935 until her death in August of 1943, which leaves even less place for an historical text based analysis of how her thought developed within

bodily movement, and hence on action in the world." For a more biographical account of Weil's intellectual background (relating also to her social / political thought), see David McLellan, Utopian Pessimist: The Life and thought of Simone Weil, (New York: Poseidon Press, 1990), pp. 12-13 & 36-37.

⁵⁸³ See the introduction to Simone Weil, First and Last Notebooks, trans. by Richard Rees (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. viii: "Taken all together, the notebooks provide an unselfconscious and unintentional self-portrait of one of the most remarkable minds and characters of this century. She is, so to speak, thinking aloud; and it is an inestimable privilege to be able to listen in."

⁵⁸⁴ See Dorothy Tuck McFarland, Simone Weil, (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1983), p. 8: "Her late thought is also characterized by a complex, almost dialectical structure that must be taken into consideration if she is to be adequately understood. Typically, she approaches a problem both from the vantage point of human experience in the world and from the point of view of eternity, and then explores the contradictions that result."

that period (of about nine years).⁵⁸⁵

Thus, one could possibly find both anthropologically dualistic and anthropologically monistic statements in her earlier journal entries and in her latest entries. And, one could try to show that there are (a statistically significant number) more anthropologically dualistic type statements in the earlier years and more anthropologically monistic type statements in the later period. But, aside from its questionable validity, this sort of analysis is clearly outside the scope of this thesis which is not a thesis on Weil.

Another, more appropriate, way to argue that Weil moved away from being a straightforward anthropological dualist as her understanding of the nature of spiritual development matured is, however, adopted. I try to present and develop Weil's theory of spiritual development as a coherent whole which is possible because although Weil might have written her journals in an unsystematic way, I do not believe she was an unsystematic thinker.⁵⁸⁶ Taking as given that Weil began her intellectual career as a strong anthropological dualist, I show that an anthropological dualism became incompatible with her mature theory of spiritual development and that there is, thus, at least an implicit movement away from anthropological dualism in her thought. I try to give ample textual support to my presentation of her theory of spiritual development because there are frequently texts that can be taken as contradicting my presentation of her theory. I always try to support my presentation with enough textual basis to show that, despite contradictory texts, my presentation reflects the overall tendency of her thought.

⁵⁸⁵ See, for example, Jacques Cabaud, Simone Weil: A Fellowship in Love, (New York: Channel Press, 1964), p. 174: "Simone Weil's interest in certain aspects of Christianity went back as far as 1935. There is nothing to indicate that, on the purely human level, any new element intruded into her life in 1938 [when she reports having two supernatural experiences of the divine]. And yet, if the event is viewed with the hindsight of all the subsequent developments of her thought, it was like the bursting through into a new world, a new dimension, like a chrysalis out of its cocoon." See also, McFarland, p. 91 ff.

⁵⁸⁶ See McFarland, p. 7: "Contrary to what has been frequently said, Weil's thought is not fragmentary. Quite the opposite; it is so much all of a piece that with very few exceptions it is almost impossible to appreciate the full dimensions of any one part read singly and out of relationship to the whole."

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| AD | <i>Attente de Dieu.</i> |
| CAH, I | <i>Cahiers. Vol.1</i> |
| CAH, II | <i>Cahiers. Vol.2</i> |
| CAH, III | <i>Cahiers. Vol.3</i> |
| ELL | <i>Écrits de Londres et dernières lettres.</i> |
| CO | <i>La condition ouvrière.</i> |
| CS | <i>La connaissance surnaturelle.</i> |
| PG | <i>La pesanteur et la grâce.</i> |
| OL | <i>Oppression et liberté.</i> |
| PSO | <i>Pensées sans ordre concernant l'amour de Dieu.</i> |

Appendix II

A Sample List of Holy Women

1) Angela of Foligno (d. 1309)⁵⁸⁷

- marries Christ in a vision
- ate pus from the ill ('as sweet as communion')
- drank lepers' wash water
- nursed from Christ's side

2) Catherine of Genoa (1447-1510)⁵⁸⁸

- ate lice
- extreme fasting
- supernatural hunger
- main images of union with divine are of eating and being eaten

3) Catherine of Siena (d. 1380)⁵⁸⁹

- married Christ (with his foreskin as a ring)
- eating as metaphor for the saving of souls
- drank pus
- supernatural hunger for Christ's blood

⁵⁸⁷ Angela of Foligno, The Complete Works, tr. & ed. Paul Lachance, Classics of Western Spirituality Series, (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1993).

⁵⁸⁸ Catherine of Genoa, Purgation and Purgatory & The Spiritual Dialogue, tr. Serge Hughes, Classics of Western Spirituality Series, (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

⁵⁸⁹ Catherine of Siena, Dialogue, tr. & ed. Suzanne Noffke, Classics of Western Spirituality Series, (New York: Paulist Press, 1987).

4) Hadewijch (between 1220 - 1240)⁵⁹⁰

- dedicated to Christ's humanity
- erotic union with Christ
- eating and hunger are main metaphors for union with divine suffering
- service for sick and poor

5) Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179)⁵⁹¹

- extreme fasting
- women as humanity
- erotic union with Christ

6) Julian of Norwich (1342, and died after 1416)⁵⁹²

- saw Christ as mother
- saw Christ as food
- nursed on Christ's wounds

⁵⁹⁰ Hadewijch, The Complete Works.

⁵⁹¹ Hildegard of Bingen, Scivias, tr. & ed. Mother Columba Hart and Jane Bishop, Classics of Western Spirituality Series, (New York: Paulist Press, 1990).

⁵⁹² Julian of Norwich, Showings, tr. & ed. Eric Colledge and James Walsh, Classics of Western Spirituality, (New York: Paulist Press, 1978).

Textual Illustrations

Woman as Human physicality

Hildegard of Bingen

Eve - whose soul was innocent, for she had been raised out of innocent Adam, bearing in her body the whole multitude of the human race [...] ⁵⁹³

Hildegard of Bingen

For Eve was formed from a rib by Adam's engrafted heat and vigor [...] He who brought forth the woman from the man instituted this union honorably and virtuously, forming flesh from flesh. ⁵⁹⁴

Hildegard of Bingen

In this way the human race is begotten by men on woman, as God made humanity from the mud of the earth; and as the earth in its freshness is constituted to bring forth from seeds the fruits of the field, so women are to bring forth children in the waters of birth. ⁵⁹⁵

Betrothal to Christ (as The Humanity He took on), and Physical Union

Hildegard of Bingen

But she who desires My Son and wants to keep her virginity for His love is greatly ornamented in His nuptial chamber [...] O dearest seeds, O flowers sweeter and more exquisite than any perfumes, whose soft fragility rises like the dawn to betrothal with My Son, loving Him dearly with chaste love; she is His bride and He is her Bridegroom, for this race of virgins loves Him dearly and is to be adorned in the Heavenly Kingdom with glorious ornaments! ⁵⁹⁶

Hildegard of Bingen

And after these things I saw the Son of God hanging on the cross, and the

⁵⁹³ Hildegard of Bingen, Scivias, p. 77.

⁵⁹⁴ Hildegard of Bingen, Scivias, p. 77.

⁵⁹⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, Scivias, p. 177.

⁵⁹⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, Scivias, p. 178.

aforementioned image of a woman coming forth like a bright radiance from the ancient counsel. By divine power she was led to Him, and raised herself upward so that she was sprinkled by the blood from His side; and thus, by the will of the Heavenly Father, she was joined with Him in happy betrothal and nobly dowered with His body and blood.⁵⁹⁷

Angela of Foligno

Then he began to say: "My daughter, my dear and sweet daughter, my delight, my temple, my beloved daughter, love me, because you are very much loved by me [...] My daughter and my sweet spouse."⁵⁹⁸

Angela of Foligno

"Once back in your home, you will feel a sweetness different from any you have ever experienced. And I will not speak to you then as I have until now; but you will feel me." True enough I did feel this sweet and ineffable consolation in which I felt so peaceful and quiet that I cannot find words to describe it. I lay in bed for eight days hardly able to speak, say the Our Father, or get up to move around. [...] He then said to me: "You are holding the ring of my love. From now on you are engaged to me and you will never leave me [...]"⁵⁹⁹

Angela of Foligno

During this same period, while I was once again in prayer, I suddenly heard him speaking to me very graciously in these words: "My daughter, sweeter to me than I am to you, my temple, my delight, the heart of God almighty is now upon your heart." And these words were accompanied with a feeling of God's presence far greater than I had ever experienced. All the members of my body thrilled with delights as I lay in this experience.⁶⁰⁰

Catherine of Siena

This bridge [between heaven and earth], my only-begotten Son, has three stairs. [...] The first stair is the feet, which symbolizes the affections. For just as the feet carry the body, the affections carry the soul. My Son's nailed feet are a stair by which you can climb to his side, where you will see revealed his inmost heart [...] So, having climbed the second stair, she reaches the third. This is his mouth, where she finds peace from the terrible war she has to wage because of her sins.⁶⁰¹

⁵⁹⁷ Hildegard of Bingen, Scivias, p. 237.

⁵⁹⁸ Angela of Foligno, The Complete Works, pp. 139-40.

⁵⁹⁹ Angela of Foligno, The Complete Works, p. 142.

⁶⁰⁰ Angela of Foligno, The Complete Works, p. 148.

⁶⁰¹ Catherine of Siena, The Dialogue, p. 64.

Catherine of Siena

[Jesus] made of his blood a drink and his flesh a food for all those who wish it. There is no other means for man to be satisfied. He can appease his hunger and thirst only in this blood [...] A man can possess the whole world and not be satisfied (for the world is less than man) until blood satisfies him, for only that blood is united to the divinity.⁶⁰²

Hadewijch

With that he came in the form and clothing of a Man, as he was on the day when he gave us his Body for the first time; looking like a Human Being and a Man, wonderful, and beautiful, and with glorious face, he came to me as humbly as anyone who wholly belongs to another. Then he gave himself to me in the shape of the Sacrament, in its outward form, as the custom is; and then he gave me to drink from the chalice, in form and taste, as the custom is. After that he came himself to me, took me entirely in his arms, and pressed me to him; and all my members felt his in full felicity, in accordance with the desire of my heart and my humanity. So I was outwardly satisfied and fully transported. And then, for a short while, I had the strength to bear this; but soon, after a short time, I lost that manly beauty outwardly in the sight of his form. I saw him completely come to naught and so fade and all at once dissolve that I could no longer recognize or perceive him outside me, and I could no longer distinguish him within me. Then it was to me as if we were one without difference. It was thus: outwardly, to see, taste, and feel, as one can outwardly taste, see, and feel in the reception of the outward Sacrament. So can the Beloved, with the loved one, each wholly receive the other in all full satisfaction of the sight, the hearing, and the passing away of the one in the other.⁶⁰³

Hadewijch

Where the abyss of his wisdom is, he will teach you what he is, and with what wondrous sweetness the loved one and the Beloved dwell one in the other, and how they penetrate each other in such a way that neither of the two distinguishes himself from the other. But they abide in one another in fruition, mouth in mouth, heart in heart, body in body, and soul in soul, while one sweet *divine Nature* flows through them both [...] and they are both one thing through each other, but at the same time remain two different selves - yes, and remain so forever.⁶⁰⁴

Angela of Foligno

Once I was at Vespers and was gazing at the cross. And while I was thus

⁶⁰² Misciattelli, Le Lettere de S. Caterina da Siena, Letter 87, vol.2, pp. 90-92. Cited by Bynum, p. 176.

⁶⁰³ Hadewijch, The Complete Works, pp. 281-82.

⁶⁰⁴ Hadewijch, The Complete Works, p. 66.

gazing at the cross with the eyes of the body, suddenly my soul was set ablaze with love; and every member of my body felt it with the greatest joy. I saw and felt that Christ was within me, embracing my soul with the very arm with which he was crucified. [...] At times it seems to my soul that it enters into Christ's side, and this is a source of great joy and delight [...] ⁶⁰⁵

Christ Saves Through His Humanity (Thus, Woman as Savior)

Hildegard of Bingen

By giving His body and blood to sanctify those who believe; and so the Heavenly Father delivered Him up to the Passion for the redemption of the peoples and conquered the ancient serpent through Him in humility and justice. He did not want His Son to conquer by His power and strength [...] ⁶⁰⁶

Hildegard of Bingen

[...] His Son, Who in His body brought back His lost sheep to Heaven with great humility. How? The blood that came forth from His body appeared in Heaven as soon as it flowed from His open wounds, pleading that the salvation of souls should be granted. ⁶⁰⁷

Hadewijch

[...] I was chosen in order that I might taste Man and God in one knowledge, what no man could do unless he were as God, and wholly such as he was who is our Love. ⁶⁰⁸

Christ as Mother and Food

Julian of Norwich

And furthermore I saw that the second person [of the trinity], who is our Mother, substantially the same beloved person, has now become our Mother sensually, because we are double by God's creating, that is to say substantial and sensual. Our substance is the higher part, which we have in our Father almighty; and the second person of the Trinity is our Mother in nature in our substantial creation, in whom we are founded and rooted, and

⁶⁰⁵ Angela of Foligno, The Complete Works, pp. 175-76.

⁶⁰⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, Scivias, p. 239.

⁶⁰⁷ Hildegard of Bingen, Scivias, p. 240.

⁶⁰⁸ Hadewijch, The Complete Works, p. 305.

he is our Mother of mercy in taking our sensuality.⁶⁰⁹

Julian of Norwich

For in the same time that God joined himself to our body in the maiden's womb, he took our soul, which is sensual, and in taking it, having enclosed us all in himself, he united it to our substance. In this union he was perfect man, for Christ, having joined in himself every man who will be saved, is perfect man. So our Lady is our mother, in whom we are all enclosed and born of her in Christ, for she who is mother of our savior is mother of all who are saved in our savior; and our savior is our true Mother, in whom we are endlessly born and out of whom we shall never come.⁶¹⁰

Julian of Norwich

The mother can give her child to suck of her milk, but our precious Mother Jesus can feed us with himself, and does, most courteously and most tenderly, with the blessed sacrament, which is the precious food of true life; and with all the sweet sacraments he sustains us most mercifully and graciously [...] The mother can lay her child tenderly to her breast, but our tender Mother Jesus can lead us easily into his blessed breast through his sweet open side, and show us there a part of the godhead and of the joys of heaven [...]⁶¹¹

Catherine of Siena

In that open heart you will find charity for me and for your neighbors, for to honor me his eternal Father and to fulfill the obedience I had placed on him for your salvation, he ran to his shameful death on the most holy cross. Once you see and taste this love you will follow his teaching and find your nourishment at the table of the cross.⁶¹²

Catherine of Siena

Now she has arrived at his mouth, and she shows this by fulfilling the mouth's functions. The mouth speaks with its tongue and tastes flavors. [...] So it is with the soul. First she speaks to me with the tongue of holy and constant prayer that is the mouth of her holy desire [...] She eats the food of souls for my honor at the table of the most holy cross.⁶¹³

Catherine of Siena

This is how the soul who has reached this final stage rests on the breast of my divine charity and takes into the mouth of her holy desire the flesh of

⁶⁰⁹ Julian of Norwich, Showings, p. 294.

⁶¹⁰ Julian of Norwich, Showings, p. 292.

⁶¹¹ Julian of Norwich, Showings, p. 298.

⁶¹² Catherine of Siena, The Dialogue, p. 239.

⁶¹³ Catherine of Siena, The Dialogue, p. 140.

Christ crucified. [...] So the Soul rests on the breast of Christ crucified who is love, and so drinks in the milk of virtue. In this virtue she gets the life of grace and tastes within herself my divine nature, which gives the virtues their sweetness.⁶¹⁴

Catherine of Siena

My servants find their nourishment at the table of holy desire [...]⁶¹⁵

Catherine of Siena

Seat yourself at the table of the cross [...] There, all inebriated with the precious blood, take the food of souls, suffering pain, opprobrium, curses, villainy, hunger, thirst, and nudity [...] You must suffer pain and be in shadow.⁶¹⁶

Hadewijch

As he who is Love itself showed us
When he gave us himself to eat,
Disconcerting all the thoughts of man.
By this he made known to us
That love's most intimate union
Is through eating, tasting, and seeing interiorly.
He eats us; we think we eat him, And we do eat him, of this we can be certain.⁶¹⁷

Christ as Savior of our Physical Nature

Julian of Norwich

The body lay in the grave until Easter morning; and from that time it never lay again. For then the tossing about and writhing, the groaning and the moaning ended, rightly; and our foul mortal flesh, which God's Son took upon him, which was Adam's old tunic, tight-fitting, threadbare and short, was then made lovely by our savior, new, white and bright and forever clean [...]⁶¹⁸

Catherine of Siena

And in this great abyss, to satisfy her longing, she received holy communion from me. And as a sign that I had in truth satisfied her, for

⁶¹⁴ Catherine of Siena, The Dialogue, pp. 179-80.

⁶¹⁵ Catherine of Siena, The Dialogue, p. 192.

⁶¹⁶ Misciattelli, Le Lettere de S. Caterina da Siena, Letter 329, vol.5, pp. 106-7 (cited by Bynum, p. 176).

⁶¹⁷ Hadewijch, The Complete Works, p. 353.

⁶¹⁸ Julian of Norwich, Showings, pp. 277-78.

several days she sensed in a wonderful way, in her bodily taste, the savor and the fragrance of the blood and body of Christ crucified, my Truth.⁶¹⁹

Hadewijch

Since, then, you are a human being, live in misery as man. I wish that on earth my life in you should be so fully lived in all virtues that you may in no point fail me in myself.⁶²⁰

Hadewijch

O you have much to do if you are to live the Divinity and the Humanity and come to full growth, according to the measure of the dignity in which you are loved and destined by God!⁶²¹

Hadewijch

If you wish to be like me in my Humanity, as you desire to possess me wholly in my Divinity and Humanity, you shall desire to be poor, miserable, and despised by all men [...]⁶²²

Hadewijch

Nowadays this is the way everyone loves himself; people wish to live with God in consolations and repose, in wealth and power, and to share the fruition of his glory. We all indeed wish to be God with God, but God knows there are few of us who want to live as men with his Humanity, or want to carry his cross with him, or want to hang on the cross with him and pay humanity's debt to the full.⁶²³

Angela of Foligno

During my return by way of this St. Francis road, he told me among other things: "I give you this sign that I am the one who is speaking and who has spoken to you. You will experience the cross and the love of God within you. This sign will be with you for eternity." And immediately I felt that cross and that love in the depths of my soul, and even the bodily repercussions of the presence of the cross; and feeling all this, my soul melted in the love of God. I remember now that he had also said to me on the road going to Assisi: "Your whole life, your eating, drinking, sleeping, and all that you do are pleasing to me."⁶²⁴

⁶¹⁹ Catherine of Siena, The Dialogue, p. 295.

⁶²⁰ Hadewijch, The Complete Works, p. 269.

⁶²¹ Hadewijch, The Complete Works, p. 85.

⁶²² Hadewijch, The Complete Works, p. 268.

⁶²³ Hadewijch, The Complete Works, p. 61.

⁶²⁴ Angela of Foligno, The Complete Works, p. 142.

Man's Suffering (Physicality) as Christ

Catherine of Siena

Never in my life have I tasted any food and drink sweeter or more exquisite [than this pus].⁶²⁵

Catherine of Siena

[And] on the night following [...] a vision was granted to her as she was at prayer [...] "My beloved", [Christ] said to her, "you have now gone through many struggles for my sake [...] Previously you had renounced all that the body takes pleasure in [...] But yesterday the intensity of your ardent love for me overcame even the instinctive reflexes of your body itself: you forced yourself to swallow without a qualm a drink from which nature recoiled in disgust [...] As you then went far beyond what mere human nature could ever have achieved, so I today shall give you a drink that transcends in perfection any that human nature can provide [...]" With that, he tenderly placed his right hand on her neck, and drew her toward the wound in his side. "Drink, daughter, from my side", he said, "and by that draught your soul shall become enraptured with such delight that your very body, which for my sake you denied, shall be inundated with its overflowing goodness."⁶²⁶

Catherine of Genoa

In this transformation, the action of God in penetrating the soul is so fierce that it seems to set the body on fire and to keep it burning until death. The overwhelming love of God gives it a joy beyond words. Yet this joy does not do away with one bit of pain in the suffering of the souls in purgatory. As the soul grows in its perfection, so does it suffer more because of what impedes the final consummation, the end for which God made it; so that in purgatory great joy and great suffering do not exclude one another.⁶²⁷

Catherine of Genoa

Now to assure the annihilation of her Human Frailty, since dealing with lice made Catherine almost vomit, the Spirit said: "Take a handful of them, put them in your mouth and swallow them. That way you will free yourself of your nausea." She shuddered but did as she was told, learning

⁶²⁵ Raymond of Capua, "The Life of Catherine of Siena," in *Acta sanctorum*, ed. J. Carnandet et al., (Paris: Palmé, 1863-) April, vol. 3, pt.2, chap. 4, par.162, p. 902 (cited in Bynum, p. 172).

⁶²⁶ Coneth, Kearns, The Life of Catherine of Siena, (Wilmington, Del.: Glazier, 1980), pp. 155-56.

⁶²⁷ Catherine of Genoa, Purgation and Purgatory & The Spiritual Dialogue, pp. 81-82.

to handle them as if they were pearls. Dealing with particularly big lice was harder yet, but even then she obeyed. She did this so often that she overcame that repugnance and nausea once and for all.⁶²⁸

Angela of Foligno

And after we had distributed all that we had, we washed the feet of the women and the hands of the men, and especially those of one of the lepers which were festering and in an advanced stage of decomposition. Then we drank the very water with which we had washed him. And the drink was so sweet that, all the way home, we tasted its sweetness and it was as if we had received Holy Communion. As a small scale of the leper's sores was stuck in my throat, I tried to swallow it. My conscience would not let me spit it out, just as if I had received Holy Communion.⁶²⁹

⁶²⁸ Catherine of Genoa, Purgation and Purgatory & The Spiritual Dialogue, p. 131.

⁶²⁹ Angela of Foligno, The Complete Works, p. 163.

Appendix III

Examples of the Desert Fathers' Ideal of Not Needing Sleep, Receiving Heavenly Food, and Being Attacked by Demons

Elimination of the Need for Sleep:

[It was said of Apa Bané] that he did not sleep at all until he completed his life course.⁶³⁰

I never saw this man stretch out and lie down as [men] are wont. And he never slept upon a bed of palm leaves or anything else, but he worked the whole night, weaving baskets to provide his food for nourishment.⁶³¹

There is in this desert one of our brethren, whose name is John [...] and he never sat down at all or slept, but he snatched a little as he stood.⁶³²

If he [Daniel] took a short time for sleep from vigil, he would fall while he spoke, prolonging his recitation.⁶³³

Further, they bear witness concerning him that he did not sleep either by day or night, except for a brief slumber, leaning against the wall, after which he would arise quickly and would sing in this psalm.⁶³⁴

[I] ascertained that this had been his manner of life from youth and that he had never deliberately gone to sleep. Only when working or eating he closed his eyes overcome by sleep, so that often the piece of food fell from his mouth at the moment of eating, so great was his drowsiness. [He said]: 'If you can persuade angels to sleep, you will also persuade the zealous

⁶³⁰ "Le Ms de la version Copte....," p. 75, no.32(243).

⁶³¹ Budge, The Book of Paradise, p. 110, no.24.

⁶³² Budge, The Book of Paradise, p. 397, no.20.

⁶³³ "Le Ms de la version Copte....," p. 78, no.8 (250).

⁶³⁴ "The Life of Abba John Khame," tr. M. H. Davis, in Patrologia Orientalis, ed. R. Graffin and F. Nau, vol.XIV, fasc.2, (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1919), p. 342, no.14.

man'.⁶³⁵

He went to his cell and he made a covenant before God that he would not sleep the whole night, nor bend his knees. And he dwelt in this cell for seven years. And he remained standing the whole night with his eyes open and he never closed them. And afterwards he set himself other ascetic labors; for he would go forth during the nights and go to the cells of the old men and take their water skins and fill them with water.⁶³⁶

For by reason of his excessive [...] vigils he was even suspected of being a phantom. [...] But his greatest act of asceticism was this. From evening until the time when the brotherhood began to assemble again in their house of prayer, he would continue on his feet singing psalms and praying, on the Mount of Olives, the Hill of the Ascension, whence Jesus was taken up. And whether it snowed or rained or there was white frost, he remained undaunted.⁶³⁷

Many times he would spend the night in vigil without sleep. And this, not once or twice, but many times.⁶³⁸

He did not sleep at all at night, until the light began. Then he would take a little sleep for the sake of the body, lest it perish quickly.⁶³⁹

He worked all day in the garden and towards sunset he [...] went into his cell, and, sitting on a chair in the middle of his cell, he twisted ropes until the service of the night. And thus it happened that he would snatch a little sleep, because of the need of his corporeal nature; and he slept while he was sitting.⁶⁴⁰

Heavenly Food

It happened that during the Forty Days of our salvation, the blessed Isaac went forth to the small dwelling according to his custom. The brothers forgot to take bread to him. He spent the first day, and the second, and the

⁶³⁵ "The Lausiatic History of Palladius," in Translations of Christian Literature, ed. W.K. Lowther Clarke, Series 1, (New York, 1918), p. 49 (II).

⁶³⁶ Budge, The Book of Paradise, p. 268, no.14.

⁶³⁷ "The Lausiatic History of Palladius," p. 143 (XLIII).

⁶³⁸ "Antonii Vita. Versio Sahidici," p. 11, no.12.

⁶³⁹ "Sinuthi Archimandritae Vitae et Opera Omnia. Sinuthi Vita Bohairice," in Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium. Scriptores Coptici., ed. I Leipoldt, series II, vol.41, (Louvain, 1946), p. 13, no.17.

⁶⁴⁰ Budge, The Book of Paradise, p. 335, no.21.

third until the fifth day without eating. On the fifth day of his being without eating he looked and saw a large loaf of bread, placed in his presence.⁶⁴¹

My father said to him: 'What dost thou eat or drink? Who serves thee?' The holy man, Apa Phib answered: 'Since the time of my youth, when I came forth from my house, until today, wherever I live, when I have completed my Forty Days fast, every time I find a bread and a jug of water placed in my presence.'⁶⁴²

He went forth from them and departed into the desert. [...] And when he had been for five weeks without bread, a man came to him carrying bread and water and he entreated him to taste and refresh himself. And he was there for three years [...] and he ate the roots of the wilderness and was nourished by them. [...] And this blessed man was worthy of a great gift from heaven; for regularly bread was found every Sunday in his pillow cloth. And then when he had prayed and given thanks, he ate and then fasted again until the following Sunday with no suffering.⁶⁴³

Voici encore ce qu'il nous dit sur le temps où il vint vivre ermite dans ce lieu-ci: '[...] Un jour que nous avons manqué de pain, j'étais assis à midi au portail et, plein de tristesse, je m'endormis. Je vois alors un vieillard brillant qui vient à moi, me frappe du pied au côté et me dit: 'Tu te chagrines, Hypatios, de n'avoir de pains? Allons, lève-toi, ne sois pas triste. Car de ce jour, jamais le pain ne manquera sur la table, ni pour toi ni pour tes compagnons.'⁶⁴⁴

Her food was brought to her by the angels of God from heaven. And she was serving in the Temple, while the angels of God ministered to her. And many times they would bring her fruits from the Tree of Life, that she might eat of them with joy.⁶⁴⁵

There is in this desert one of our brethren, whose name is John [...] And from Sunday to Sunday, a certain priest brought him the Sacrament and nothing else did he taste [...] He went around in the desert and ate roots and Sunday by Sunday he came to his place and partook of the Holy

⁶⁴¹ "Vie d'Isaac. Patriarche d'Alexandrie de 686 a 689," p. 339, no.10.

⁶⁴² "Vie de Paul de Tamoueh," p. 763, no.12.

⁶⁴³ Budge, The Book of Paradise, p. 409, no.6.

⁶⁴⁴ "Vie d'Hypatios," in Les Moines d'Orient, ed. A.-J. Festugière, v.II, pp. 9-86, (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1961-64), p. 32 (XVII).

⁶⁴⁵ "Of the life of the Virgin," in Texts and Studies, ed. J. F. Robinson, vol.4, no.2, Coptic Apocryphal Gospels series, IIA; IV, pp. 14-16, (Cambridge: 1986 /Kraus Reprint: 1967), p. 14, no.21.

Offering.⁶⁴⁶

I said to him: 'O my holy father, where do you celebrate the service on the Sabbath and the Lord's Day?'. He said to me: 'An angel of God, O my holy father, comes and serves me on the Sabbath and the Lord's Day. And to every one who is in the desert, who lives for God and not to see men, an angel comes and serves them.'⁶⁴⁷

When it was evening, he said to me: 'Brother Serapion, is it not time to make an oblation of love?' I did not answer him a word. He arose and stretched out his hands to heaven and recited this psalm: 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want'. He turned to me and said: 'My son, He has prepared the table.' Thereupon I said to him: 'excuse me, Abba.' And he said to me: 'Come, my son, let us enjoy what God has sent us.' And I marveled and I was seized with dizziness, for there was no one inside the cave and there was nothing in it. When we entered within the cave I looked and saw a beautiful table prepared, with two chairs in place, bread, white as snow, beautiful choice fruits, two great fishes roasted with fire, fine vegetables, olives, dates and a large water pot filled with water. When we sat down he said to me: 'Say Grace, brother Serapion.' But I said to him: 'Excuse me, Abba.' And thereupon he said: 'Blessed is my Lord.' And I saw, as it were, a hand of fire, stretched out and it drew a cross upon that wall. And when we had eaten, he said: 'My son, remove from here.' And immediately that table was taken away. And in all my life I have never eaten food which was as pleasant and enjoyable as that, or drank as enjoyable as that.⁶⁴⁸

Michael, the Archangel, brought to him a table. The blessed man ate. He placed bread of heaven upon the table of the widow which was filled with the most choice bread.⁶⁴⁹

And once when they were in the cave they lacked bread and an angel in the form of a brother brought them food. Another occasion was when ten of the brethren sought him. After seven days of their fast they found him and he commanded them to refresh themselves in his cave. Then when they reminded him about food, he said to them: 'God is able to prepare food for us in the desert.' And immediately an angel of God in the form of a beautiful youth stood and knocked at the door while they were praying.

⁶⁴⁶ Budge, The Book of Paradise, p. 397, no.20.

⁶⁴⁷ "The Life of Apa Onnophrius...", p. 214, no.19.

⁶⁴⁸ A.E. Look, The History of Abba Marcus of Mount Tharmaka, (Oxford: 1929), p. 14, no.3.

⁶⁴⁹ "Theodoti Ancyрани oratio in laudem sancti Georgi Diospolitaeni," in Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium. Scriptores Coptici, ed. I. Balestri and H. Hyvernats, vol.43., Acta Martyrum I (1924), (Louvain, 1947), p. 230, no.6.

Then they opened the door and found the youth carrying a great basket in which were bread and olives. And the youth departed from them. These and many other wonderful things were performed by the blessed man Apellen.⁶⁵⁰

Behold Michael, the Archangel, came to the holy man Helias. And brought him fruits of the trees of Paradise so that he should eat of them. For he had not eaten since the day that he was sent to sea with the animals.⁶⁵¹

[It was said of Apa Bané] that he did not eat human food [...] until he completed his life course.⁶⁵²

Abba Nopi said to them: [...] 'I have never taken any earthly thing; for an angel has fed me daily with heavenly food.'⁶⁵³

'Je sais un homme qui, au désert, n'a pris pendant dix ans aucun aliment terrestre: un ange, tous les trois jours, lui apportait une nourriture céleste, la lui mettait dans la bouche, et cela lui tenait lieu de nourriture et de boisson.'⁶⁵⁴

When God saw that I endured in my good practice of fasting and that I was devoted to austerity, he caused his holy angels to serve me with my daily food. He gives it to me in the evening, sustaining my body.⁶⁵⁵

It was said of Apa Simeon, the Syrian, that he spent more than sixty years standing upon a column. He ate nothing of human food and no man knew how he lived [...] One [...] who was without blemish in his life saw him while he was standing before him on the top of the column. And behold, an angel came from the East with food in his hand, which when he had given to Apa Simeon, he gave also of this very food to the other who was there.⁶⁵⁶

And when I had endured patiently for thirty years through hunger [and] thirst [...] then finally the mercy of God rested on me [...] A continual

⁶⁵⁰ Budge, The Book of Paradise, p. 396, no.20.

⁶⁵¹ "Le Martyre de Saint Helias," in Bibliothèque d'études Coptes, ed. G.P.G. Sobhy, tome I, Publications de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, (Le Caire, 1919), p. 33b, no.26.

⁶⁵² "Le Ms de la version Copte....," p. 75, no.32 (244).

⁶⁵³ Budge, The Book of Paradise, p. 418, no.10.

⁶⁵⁴ "Historia Monachorum in Aegypto," in Les Moines d'Orient, ed. A.-J. Festugière, IV/I, (Paris: Cerf, 1961-1964), p. 32 (II).

⁶⁵⁵ "The Life of Apa Onnophrius....," p. 213, no.31.

⁶⁵⁶ "Le Ms de la version Copte....," p. 75, no.3 (243).

supply of spiritual food from the Lord was sent to me.⁶⁵⁷

Physical attack by demons

That evening, he [the Devil] came with these deceptions, so that the whole place seemed to be shaking, as if the four walls were being burst, with demons entering in through them [...] But Anthony, beaten by them, felt a great pain in his body. In his soul, he was more alert and he stayed prostrate, strong without fear. He groaned because of the pain in his body, but his mind was firm and he mocked them.⁶⁵⁸

The demons saw the work of piety and the number of souls whom the saint (Macarius) helped, especially that he brought them as gifts to God, so that they should follow Him. They were greatly angered and they came upon him at midday as he was sitting alone and they all surrounded him like dogs. They leapt upon his face and they tore his flesh without mercy, so that his whole body was like a bruise.⁶⁵⁹

'Demons fought with me, they were dragging me along the ground and torturing me. And God permitted me to be persecuted by them for thirty years [...] And from that time the evil spirits were not able to touch me.'⁶⁶⁰

'I have been in great tribulations. Sometimes myriads of demons who were in the sea lay in wait for me that they might drown me. Frequently they dragged me from here to the base of the mountain until there was no skin or flesh left on my limbs [...]'⁶⁶¹

On many occasions the devils beat this man and they brought many illnesses upon him so that he was not able to stand beside the altar nor even to offer up the Offering, but an angel came and took him by the hand and he straightway was strengthened. And he made him stand up healed before the altar. Then the brethren saw the scars of the beatings and they marveled.⁶⁶²

One night the demon watched for him, having lost his patience, and as he stooped down at the well, he gave him a blow with a cudgel across the loins and left him [apparently] dead, with no perception of what he had

⁶⁵⁷ Look, The History of Abba Marcus of Mount Tharmaka, p. 9, no.11.

⁶⁵⁸ "Antonii Vita. Versio Sahidici," p. 14, no.16.

⁶⁵⁹ "Vie de Macaire de Scete," pp. 46-117.

⁶⁶⁰ Look, The History of Abba Marcus..., p. 15, no.14.

⁶⁶¹ Look, The History of Abba Marcus..., p. 10, no.5.

⁶⁶² Budge, The Book of Paradise, p. 427, no.20.

suffered or from whom [...] And for a year he was so ill that with great difficulty did his body and soul recover strength.⁶⁶³

⁶⁶³ "The Lausiatic History of Palladius," p. 89 (XIX).

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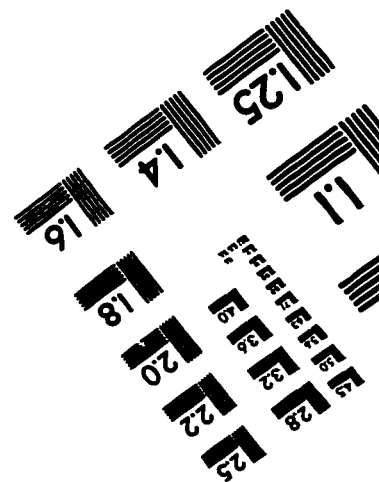
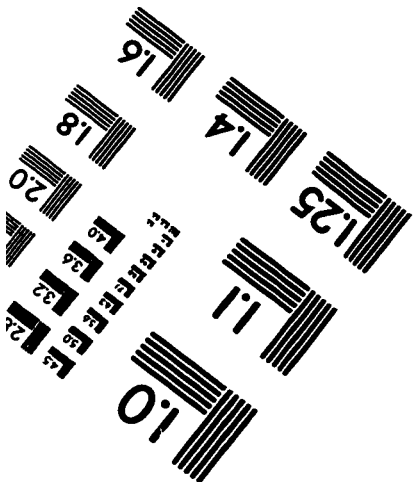
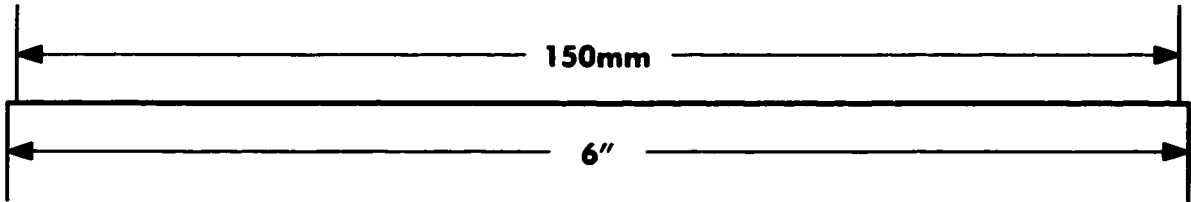
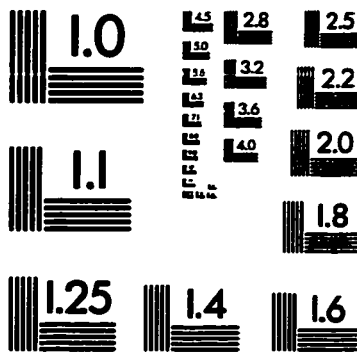
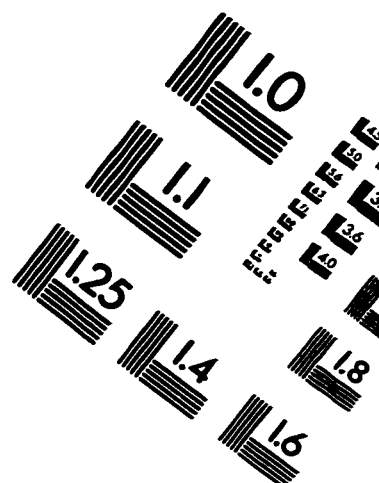
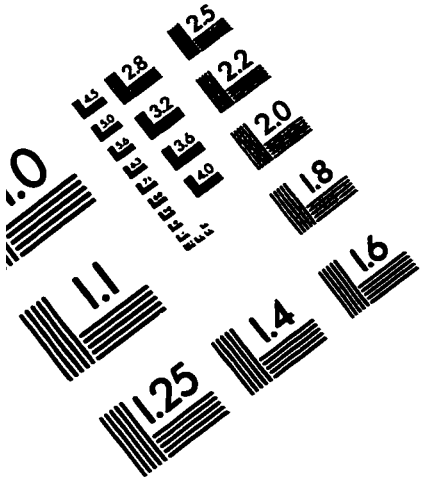
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