

Lovelessness and Love:

The Promethean and the Orphic in Henri Bergson and Simone Weil



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*Love bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew back
 Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
 From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
 If I lacked any thing.
A guest, I answered, worthy to be here:
 Love said, You shall be he.
I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,
 I cannot look on thee.
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
 Who made the eyes but I?
Truth Lord, but I have marred them: let my shame
 Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?
 My dear, then I will serve.
You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:
 So I did sit and eat.*

Love (III) – George Herbert (1559-1633)

SUBMISSION STATEMENT

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge; the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes. I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

ABBREVIATIONS

Pierre Hadot

Philosophy as a Way of Life – (WL)

The Present Alone is Our Happiness – (PAH)

The Veil of Isis – (VI)

What Is Ancient Philosophy? – (AP)

Henri Bergson

Creative Evolution – (CE)

Laughter – (L)

The Creative Mind – (CM)

The Two Sources of Morality and Religion – (TSMR)

Time and Free Will – (TFW)

Simone Weil

Gravity and Grace – (GG)

Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks – (ICG)

The Need for Roots – (NR)

First and Last Notebooks – (NB)

The Notebooks of Simone Weil – (NBS)

Waiting for God – (WFG)

Seventy Letters – (SL)

Other Sources

On Certainty (Ludwig Wittgenstein) – (OC)

Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus (Ludwig Wittgenstein) – (T)

The Critique of Pure Reason (Immanuel Kant) – (CPR)

The Critique of Judgement (Immanuel Kant) – (CJ)

Phaedrus (Plato) – (P)

The Apology of Socrates (Plato) – (A)

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Soli Deo Gloria

ABSTRACT

“Aesthetic and philosophical perceptions of the world are only possible by means of a complete transformation of our relationship to the world” (*WL*, p. 253)

16 years ago – when I was nine years old – I remember watching on television the Hon Kevin Rudd (the 26th Prime Minister of Australia) speak at the National Climate Summit at Parliament House, in Canberra. There, he famously declared climate change to be “the great moral challenge of our generation”.¹ The term moral is all encompassing; and this is especially the case given the age we live in. As I argue, the ‘*Anthropocene*’ (as a both a time and phenomenon) invites us to consider a wide range of philosophical questions in an interconnected and holistic manner. These include (to name a few) metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics and, of course, numerous political questions.

Some philosophers have started to engage with the Anthropocene. One of them, Timothy Morton, argues in his *Hyperobjects* that within the Anthropocene, everything is interconnected. He, being a proponent of ‘*Object Oriented Ontology*’ (hereafter OOO) sees humanity as one object among many. They as a movement (including of course Graham Harman) offer both a diagnosis and prescription to our predicament. At issue with this is that some commentators have pointed out their philosophies have anti-humanistic overtones. Throughout the dissertation, I shall be challenging OOO by enlisting Henri Bergson (1859-1941) and Simone Weil (1909-1943) as intellectual guides. I shall be reading them as “way of life” thinkers (in Pierre Hadot’s sense). The aim of this is to offer an alternative reframing of the problem of living within the Anthropocene by addressing OOO’s framing of our predicament. In doing so, I also draw upon Hadot’s heuristic distinction between the ‘Promethean’ and the ‘Orphic’ in his last work, the ‘*Veil of Isis*’. As I argue, both show us how we might live and gain a cosmic consciousness within the Anthropocene through their respective forms of mysticism. Indeed, within the Anthropocene, citizens must act and ‘be’ in ways that will promote an ecologically sustainable society. This is significant because Bergson and Weil offer Orphic philosophies which seek to better live within reality as opposed to manipulate it in a Promethean manner. Indeed, questions such as, “*how can we love?*”, are prime within the Anthropocene and are questions which Bergson and Weil provide answers to.

¹ “Rudd Says Climate Change Is The Great Moral Challenge Of Our Generation.” *Australian Politics*, 6 Aug. 2007, <https://australianpolitics.com/2007/08/06/rudd-says-climate-change-is-great-moral-challenge.html>

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

“Ethics and aesthetics are one” (*Wittgenstein’s Private Notebooks*, p. 184).²

What is the ‘Anthropocene’?

Nobel Laureates Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer coined the term ‘*Anthropocene*’ in 2000.³ In their paper, ‘*The Anthropocene*’ they argue that this era should be dubbed as the Anthropocene (or the human age). As they argue, our actions affect the nitrogen, phosphorus, and water cycles; we move more rock and soil every year than all natural processes combined, and we’ve seemingly caused the sixth mass extinction. Jason M. Kelly sees our predicament similarly. Indeed, as he notes in the edited collection of essays in *Rivers of the Anthropocene*:

Humanity is facing a crisis of its own making. The climate is changing. Oceans are warming. Dead zones of hundreds and thousands of square miles hover off our coasts. A mass extinction is in progress... Our environments can no longer absorb human pressures. This is the condition of the Anthropocene – an age in which humans are altering the planet to such an extent that we are leaving a permanent and irreversible mark on its biological, hydrological, atmospheric, and geological systems.⁴

What we can infer from this is perhaps the holistic nature of the problem and challenges we face. My focus here will be specifically on what I see to be the *ethical* dimensions of the Anthropocene and seek to explore our capacity to act. Indeed, as Willis Jenkins writes in his *Future of Ethics*, above all the “Anthropocene is an epoch of ethics, because it is an epoch of dominion by a *moral* species”.⁵ If the Anthropocene involves an ethical reckoning of the species, it surely calls us to rethink our most cherished ideas. If anything, we need intellectual guides, and this is why we turn to OOO below.

² Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Private Notebooks 1914-1916*. Translated by Marjorie Perloff, Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2022, p. 184, *emphasis added*.

³ Crutzen, Paul, and Eugene Stoermer. “The ‘Anthropocene.’” *International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme Newsletter*, May 2000, pp. 17-18.

⁴ Kelly, Jason M. “Preface”. *Rivers of the Anthropocene*, edited by Jason M. Kelly et al., University of California Press, 2018, p. xv.

⁵ Jenkins, Willis. *The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity*. Georgetown University Press, 2013, p. 2, *emphasis added*.

A Flat Ontology for the Anthropocene?

The emergence of the enormous and intricate phenomena known as ‘*Hyperobjects*’ (argues philosopher Timothy Morton) is a distinguishing feature of the Anthropocene. What undergirds Morton’s argument is that we ought to acknowledge that human actions hasten, if not cause, climate change. But he does so in a unique way. For him, it is there not just when politicians meet to discuss significant climate deals, but also when people shop with plastic bags, drive their cars or even water their yard. Every decision we make impacts the environment. What we see here then is that for Morton, everything is linked. Indeed, as he writes in his *Ecological Thought* (that is, the ‘prequel’ to his *Hyperobjects*) “ecology shows us that all beings are connected” adding that “ecological thought *is* the thinking of interconnectedness”.⁶ Let’s unpack it as a concept. Hyperobjects (such as climate change) are difficult to comprehend, and this is in part given their enormity relative to human scale. As Morton writes, hyperobjects “are not simply the products of a human gaze”, rather they transcend our everyday experiences all the while being concrete in our lives.⁷ Indeed, this is because they “are objects in their own right”, objects which challenge not only our belief in control, but also influence our everyday lives.⁸ What Morton is trying to communicate to us then is the following. *First*, hyperobjects force us to question any metaphysical separation between us and our surroundings: they force us to accept our interconnectedness with everything around us. *Second*, due to their enormity, they escape everyday human perception. This, as Morton argues, inhibits our ability to control, manipulate, and use these objects. Indeed, as Morton writes, there is a sort of “asymmetry” between our “powers of cognition” and “the infinite being of things” that are hyperobjects.⁹ The aim of these two points is essentially to disorient if not question our status as subjects in the world. Indeed, as Morton argues, inherent within western philosophy (or, more specifically, metaphysics and political philosophy) is a vision of control, choice, and autonomy from the natural world.¹⁰ These metaphysical beliefs, Morton writes, must be questioned and in turn, rejected. Borrowing from this, Alex Blasdel in his piece *A Reckoning for Our Species* argues that “we must wake up to the fact that we never stood apart from or controlled the non-human things on the planet but have always been thoroughly bound up with them”.

⁶ Morton, Timothy. *The Ecological Thought*. Harvard University Press, 2010, p. 7, *emphasis added*.

⁷ Ibid, *Hyperobjects* (2013), p. 199.

⁸ Ibid, *Hyperobjects* (2013), p. 2.

⁹ Ibid, *Hyperobjects* (2013), p. 22.

¹⁰ But, as we shall see, it may introduce a sense of fatalism in our predicament.

Further noting that “we can’t even burn, throw or flush things away without them coming back to us in some form, such as harmful pollution”.¹¹ What this means is that hyperobjects influence “all aspects of life, culture, and society”.¹² But, hyperobjects also render us powerless. Indeed, this is due to the very nature of hyperobjects, which Morton sees as being “massively distributed in time and space relative to humans”.¹³

What began as a technical argument among earth scientists has developed into a discussion over our most basic assumptions about reality. Graham Harman is a philosopher who, like Morton, has taken up this challenge. He, like Morton, is a key proponent the OOO movement in contemporary metaphysics. OOO’s goal is to dethrone humans as the metaphysical centre of the universe. Their reading on the Anthropocene is particularly intriguing. For them, we shouldn’t be surprised by the situation we’re in; it exposes our erroneous metaphysical assumptions by ‘privileging’ humanity as a subject. The basis of this ‘privilege’ (according to Harman) is the post-Kantian *subject-object distinction*, which is a key principle of western metaphysics. It is based on Kant’s notion that humanity just manipulates other entities in a vacuum. This assumption, as Morton sees it, is something which hyperobjects essentially challenges. In a similar fashion, as Harman argues, the emphasis on language and the human in philosophy has obscured the true nature of things. As a result, it has implanted in us an apathetic mentality that allows us to carelessly transform reality and the objects around us. This, according to Harman (and other proponents of OOO) is owing to our proclivity to consider ourselves as the center of the universe.

It is for this very reason that they see the Anthropocene as a significant development. They see it as evidence that we have always been intricately related to nonhumans, rather than having any kind of separation or dominance over them. They achieve this by questioning dualistic metaphysics which prioritise divisions of the human and the world, the human and the nonhuman, the subject, and the object. For OOO, undergirding all these dualisms is a belief in human uniqueness. This is done to blame the semiotic properties of human reason, consciousness, perception, and agency for reflecting an erroneous sense of human superiority. Anything less constitutes anthropocentrism. But what does Harman mean by ‘anthropocentrism’? Well, as he argues in a recent interview:

¹¹ Blasdel, Alex. “A reckoning for our species’: the philosopher prophet of the Anthropocene.” *The Guardian*, 7 June 2017, www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/15/timothy-morton-anthropocene-philosopher.

¹² Ibid, *The Ecological Thought* (2010), p. 11.

¹³ Morton, Timothy. *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. University of Minnesota Press, 2013, p. 1.

As for anthropocentrism, I see this as referring primarily to the long era of modern philosophy, which holds that reality consists of two and only two basic zones: (1) humans, and (2) everything else.¹⁴

He goes on to say that “this is a philosophical error with serious consequences”.¹⁵ Indeed, going back to hyperobjects, their very existence questions whether there is a clear demarcation line between subject and object. As Harman argues in his piece, *Object-Oriented Ontology*, (a sort of ‘primer’ to the movement) “to think a reality beyond our thinking is not nonsense, but obligatory”.¹⁶ He contends that this is our shared metaphysical conundrum: the world does not appear as humans and our interests wish to see it. Harman sees OOO as a type of Kantianism with no subject; everything is an unknowable object in and of itself.¹⁷ As a result, objects exist independently of human desires. The object ontologist is concerned that describing the object solely through its connections with other objects will brush aside the object itself: relations hide the object’s intrinsic essence. Indeed, an object is defined as anything that lacks agency. It could then be used by us as subjects as a tool, a means to an end, or an instrument. As a result, as he writes in his *Immaterialism*, the only way to protect an object’s essence and reality is to “vacuum-seal” it from all of its relationships.¹⁸ Such is our anthropocentrism; we explain objects away and do violence to them. It is what drives its critique of contemporary metaphysics; they highlight the distortionary nature of human experience. Indeed, it aims to correct our anthropocentric bias by arguing that humans and non-humans have equal position in the world. As he writes in his *Prince of Networks*, “what exists is only actants: cars, subways, canoe-varnish, quarrelling spouses, celestial bodies, and scientists, all on the *same* metaphysical footing”.¹⁹ What OOO seeks (as he notes in his *Art and Objects*) is an “explicit embrace of the *autonomous* thing-in-itself”, and for us, as subjects, to see the damage we wrought when choose to view objects purely from our anthropocentric perspective.²⁰ Any metaphysics that continues to see humans as “ontologically special” are in for a “hard fall”; further noting that “the modern distinction between subject and object still haunts contemporary philosophy”.²¹

¹⁴ Ottaviani, Gabriele. “Graham Harman and Object-Oriented Ontology.” *Conventional*, 1 July 2021, <https://convenzionali.wordpress.com/2021/07/01/graham-harman-e-lontologia-orientata-agli-oggetti/>

¹⁵ Ibid, *Graham Harman and Object-Oriented Ontology* (2021).

¹⁶ Harman, Graham. *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything*. Pelican Books, 2018.

¹⁷ Harman, Graham. *Immaterialism: Objects and Social Theory*. Polity Press, 2016, pp. 27-29.

¹⁸ Ibid, *Immaterialism* (2016), p. 13, 15.

¹⁹ Harman, Graham. *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics*. Re.press, 2009, p. 22, *emphasis added*.

²⁰ Harman, Graham. *Art and Objects*. Polity Press, 2019, p. 4, *emphasis added*.

²¹ “Graham Harman on Art and Ecology”. Experimental Emerging Art, 2016, <http://eejournal.no/home/2016/11/1/graham-harman-on-art-and-ecology>

While I am sympathetic to OOO's diagnosis of the Anthropocene, I have reservations. For them, even though the Anthropocene warns us about the limits of human dominance, their theory appears to have anti-humanist overtones. This is an argument put forward by Benjamin Boysen in his paper, *The Embarrassment of Being Human*.²² Boysen reads OOO's gloomy outlook as a form of '*semiophobia*' which he defines as "an unease with human reality" being "embedded in a semiotic reality" (or, in other words, how we relate, mediate, and witness to the world).²³ For this reason, OOO criticizes the subject-object distinction. As a result, OOO critiques and opposes the subject-object distinction. Indeed, proponents see the distinction as anthropocentric, leading us down a path of lovelessness and indifference to the world around us. But herein lies the issue; although they critique lovelessness, I argue that their prescription is itself a form of lovelessness. By making a clear distinction between things in themselves and things as they appear we can never truly know anything; all we can do is perceive *how* things appear to us. We cannot approach or penetrate the true object. We only cause harm to objects by failing to recognise this; no intimacy is possible, only violence. In its flat ontology, not only is the natural world an object, but so are we. Everything in this metaphysical vision is cold, impersonal, and objectified. What I wish to suggest is that raising the ontological weight of objects in metaphysics may have unforeseen consequences. In essence, they push us to preserve a collection of objects that we can either rescue or destroy but with which we have no meaningful relationship. This is because nothing encounters anything else, and an object is detached from itself in the same way that it is not in contact with any of its constituent parts. Everything is concealed, not just from human perception but also from one another.²⁴ Contra Kant (as Harman claims in his *Guerilla Metaphysics*) "the founding concept of object-oriented philosophy is the insight that such objects make no direct link whatsoever" to persons or objects.²⁵ This basically means that, for Harman, "reality is *free* of all relation".²⁶ This is unmistakably anti-Kantian; it is concerned not only with our mediated interaction with reality, but also with the preservation of noumena in and of itself. Therefore, human agency should go in a disempowered path. In fact, Morton's account of hyperobjects promotes this. At first glance, wouldn't it inspire us to behave more morally and responsibly? Despite how alluring this may seem, there are a number of reasons to be sceptical. Indeed, it is necessary to consider the ethical and political implications of a flat ontology.

²² Boysen, Benjamin. "The Embarrassment of Being Human: A Critique of New Materialism and Object-Oriented Ontology." *Orbis Litterarum*, vol. 73, no. 3, 2018, pp. 225–42, <https://doi.org/10.1111/oli.12174>.

²³ Ibid, *The Embarrassment of Being Human* (2018), p. 225.

²⁴ Harman, Graham. *Guerilla metaphysics: Phenomenology and the carpentry of things*. Open Court, 2005, p. 94, 172

²⁵ Ibid, *Guerilla metaphysics* (2005), p. 128.

²⁶ Ibid, *Guerilla metaphysics* (2005), p. 47.

What I wish to suggest is that it's difficult to sustain both political and personal responsibility within such a metaphysical picture. This is since it jeopardises the capacities that we ordinarily identify with agency, so indirectly diminishing our responsibility and capacity to act and to love. Indeed, as Sharon Krause argues in her *Bodies in Action*, “we should not lose sight” of our distinctiveness (that is, as subjects) precisely “because it is our distinctive agency that enables us to hold ourselves accountable for the damage we have done and for the good we ought to do. We need to protect the natural world and repair the harm we have inflicted on it”.²⁷ Here, Krause highlights some important normative points. Indeed, by collapsing us (or, relegating us) to the status of objects, we lose the capacity to act. We see similar comments made by Maurizia Boscagli, in her piece, *Stuff Theory* where she cautions against the “fatalist tendency to the apolitical, or the anaesthetic” in OOO.²⁸ Indeed, any notion of responsibility vanishes within this picture. This is what happens when the subject-object distinction is collapsed in favour of a flat ontology. It is for this reason that Elizabeth Boulton, in her review of Morton's *Hyperobjects* comments that Morton's conclusions are both “harsh and disempowering”.²⁹ By viewing all interactions as anthropocentric, OOO side-steps some important normative questions. Although they critique our ‘anthropocentrism’, what they eliminate from consideration is a rich vision of our agency within the Anthropocene; rather, the human subject is essentially dismissed and left undesired. In what follows, I shall be discussing my issues with OOO (some of which have been hinted at already). In doing so, I aim to set up and introduce how I shall be tackling their thought throughout this dissertation.

OOO Interrogated

Perhaps this fundamental question undergirds and frames all thinking of this dissertation, namely, *how* can we love all reality (not just humanity) within the Anthropocene? In terms of both, is there really a simple binary between Anthropocentric (exploitative view) and a ‘non-anthropocentric’ view? The latter can take many different forms and humans are allocated little (if any) metaphysical worth in both these pictures of reality. Indeed, as noted above, OOO laments such mediacy in a seemingly anti-Kantian move.

²⁷ Krause, Sharon R. “Bodies in Action: Corporeal Agency and Democratic Politics.” *Political Theory*, vol. 39, no. 3, 2011, p. 312, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591711400025>.

²⁸ Boscagli, Maurizia. *Stuff Theory: Everyday Objects, Radical Materialism*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014, p. 27.

²⁹ Boulton, Elizabeth. “Climate Change as a ‘Hyperobject’: a Critical Review of Timothy Morton's Reframing Narrative.” *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*, vol. 7, no. 5, 2016, p. 772, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.410>.

While I accept the guiding intuition behind Morton's vision of hyperobjects I disagree with his (and Harman's) assessment of human agency as subjects. If humans are just one object among many, there appears to be little room for love. What emerges from this is perhaps the following question, namely, can we, the anthropos, be better? As I argue, although Morton and Harman are correct to question the subject-object distinction (in a *diagnostic* manner) it is in their prescription where they fall short. At issue is that they only see a violent metaphysical subject. Indeed, they simultaneously reduce us to one object among many, but in doing so, fail to properly consider the importance of the dispositional attitude of the metaphysical subject (and, with it, our agency within the Anthropocene. Simply put, their "vaunted anti-humanism" (which Levi Bryant discusses in his *Speculative Turn*) precludes possibility of us being better within the Anthropocene.³⁰ The issue is not so much the subject-object distinction itself (and, thus, Harman's comments concerning anthropocentrism), rather, it is the metaphysical orientation of the subject which is at issue (that is, how we see and act in the world). After all, what they critique is "the self-enclosed" subject.³¹ This is perhaps OOO's own philosophical error insofar that our objectification ironically is seen as the path of salvation. It is not (to quote Harman) a "dictatorship".³²

It is here where I seek to qualify OOO's critique. Indeed, the issue is not so much the dualistic distinction itself, rather, the problem seems to be how the subject treats and engages with reality around them. As I argue, a metaphysical subject imbued with love will of course be rooted and motivated by different concerns than a loveless agent. In other words, by preserving and qualifying this metaphysical distinction, it allows us to engage with a wider range of philosophical questions. This, I argue, is perhaps the unintended effect of OOO's flat ontology. It is here where I seek to engage with OOO as my primary interlocutors. Indeed, I seek to sketch out the possibilities of us being imbued with love. In doing so, I also seek to address Kant (and, other Kantian philosophers) as they (like me) seek to preserve the subject-object distinction. This, as I see it, will enhance the depth of the thesis' engagement with the problem of the Anthropocene. By addressing OOO's main opponents, I seek to articulate that a Kantian approach is also deficient within the Anthropocene. Kantianism, as I argue, simultaneously commits us to philosophical idealism as well as lovelessness. Nonetheless, by providing alternative metaphysical subjects (in and through Henri Bergson and Simone Weil), I suggest that we can chart the path to love *without* collapsing the subject-object distinction.

³⁰ Bryant, Levi., et al. *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*. Re.press, 2011, pp. 2-3.

³¹ Ibid, *The Speculative Turn* (2011), pp. 2-3.

³² Ibid, *Tool-Being* (2002), p. 2.

The Approach Taken

In order to properly ground my approach of seeking to preserve but *qualify* the subject-object distinction (akin to OOO) it has also forced me to offer my own diagnostics and prescriptions to our lovelessness in the Anthropocene. In what follows, I look to the work of Pierre Hadot (1988-2010) to ground a more historical approach to the problem. The absence of historical considerations is one critique made of Morton's account of hyperobjects. Indeed, as Ursula Heise points out in her review of the piece, "why" (that is, hyperobjects) "do they come knocking now?" This, as I see it, is the strength of Hadot's work and helps us to historically appreciate the ways through which humanity has interacted with nature.³³ In doing so, I build on his distinction between the so called 'Promethean' and 'Orphic' tendencies in his *Veil of Isis*. Hadot's distinction between the two tendencies allows us to sketch a richer philosophical approach than that what OOO offers. Indeed, the former is synonymous with a subject of lovelessness. The Promethean attitude, as Hadot notes, "is inspired by audacity, boundless curiosity, the will to power, and the search for utility", and, importantly, seeks to "penetrate the secrets of nature... through violence" (*V*, pp. 91-98). As I see it, the Promethean tendency is the *implicit* attitude which proponents of OOO argue fervently against. Although it is motivated by a love of mankind, it is also equally moved by an indifference (or, rather, a lovelessness) towards that which is nonhuman in a voluntaristic manner. In contrast, the Orphic attitude can be viewed as a subject imbued with love. It, Hadot writes "is inspired by respect in the face of mystery and disinterestedness" and seeks to "penetrate the secrets of nature not through violence but through melody, rhythm, and harmony" (*V*, pp. 91-98). In other words, the Orphic (in contrast to the Promethean) is not indifferent to reality around them and seeks to respect the autonomy and value of the world around them. Although OOO seeks to interrogate the subject-object distinction which has dominated metaphysics, perhaps what they *only* see is the Promethean attitude itself. My question, however, is can we (as a whole) be something other than 'Promethean'? Indeed, Hadot's answer is *yes*. What I seek to put forward (and this will become clearer in subsequent chapters) is that the Promethean subject is the root cause of the Anthropocene. It is, as Hadot notes, a "project of dominating nature" with man at the centre of things (*V*, p. 123).

³³ Moreover, it is one of the key conceptual problems I address throughout the piece. See, Heise, Ursula K. "Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 41, no. 2, University of Chicago Press, 2015, p. 461, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1086/679088>.

The Orphic attitude offers us an alternative, or, rather, a prescription for our predicament. Indeed, the Orphic is (as Hadot writes) “radically and fundamentally opposed” to the Promethean picture of the world (V, p. 98). Instead, an Orphic approach seeks peaceful interactions with objects. In other words, the issue within the Anthropocene is not the subject-object distinction. Hadot allows us to *reframe* the Anthropocene. In doing so, he sees it as a problem of controlling and addressing the Promethean attitude in and through the Orphic.³⁴ In what follows, I seek to provide plausible existential options; ones which prioritise love, and not lovelessness within the Anthropocene. I offer philosophies which (as Alexander Galloway argues in his *Poverty of Philosophy*) do not put us on equal footing as garbage; but, simultaneously, do not make us to be the metaphysical centre of all things.³⁵ In other words, I seek to engage with philosophers who present us with the Orphic. It is for this reason why (like Simone Kotva in her *Effort and Grace*) I shall be making appeals to the French Spiritualist tradition, and, in particular to two key figures in the school, Henri Bergson and Simone Weil. Both start off (like OOO) with a picture of violence but seek to move beyond it. Bergson, as we shall see, criticizes, and seeks to qualify the bounds and limits of the Promethean intellect. Similarly, Weil criticizes our propensity for egoism and self-centeredness. Yet, both seek to rub against the grain of our own intellectual habits in a way which does not degrade humanity, but, rather, *calls us to be more*. As I argue, this is what their respective spiritual exercises of intuition and attention seek to instil in the reader. Bergson wishes for us to immerse ourselves into reality by connecting with durations other than our own. Similarly, Weil wishes us to truly see and become ethically intertwined with the world around us through care and respect.

Concluding Remarks

The Anthropocene poses in many ways a reversal of some of the most accepted metaphysical assumptions. Many contemporary theorists, in particular, those belonging to OOO seek to put forward before an either/or between anthropocentric and so called non-anthropocentric metaphysics and ways of life.

³⁴ Indeed, perhaps one of the reasons why I became interested in the Anthropocene as a Christian in the first place was because it linked well with general questions concerning the stewardship of creation. If man is indeed made in His image, it certainly calls us to live up to our sense of vocation. It calls us to love; to live up to our telos and calling.

³⁵ Galloway, Alexander R. “The Poverty of Philosophy: Realism and Post-Fordism.” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2013, p. 364, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1086/668529>.

However, the dissertation seeks to navigate a via media so called anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric approaches within the Anthropocene in and through Hadot's vision of the Orphic as a live possibility. In doing so, it seeks to undertake a more historical approach (not, of course at the expense of normative conceptual thinking) to the problem at hand.

PIERRE HADOT'S METAPHILOSOPHY

“Such a cosmic perspective radically transforms the feeling one has of oneself”

(*WL*, p. 208)

Who and Why Pierre Hadot?

The goal of Hadot's meta-philosophy endeavours to transform the whole person (*WL*, p. 274). Philosophy ought to, he argues, be engaged with the “totality of one's being” (*WL*, p. 265). This is the reason why he is an important theorist within the Anthropocene; we have a choice to be better. Indeed, we have the freedom to choose whether to live according to a specific “vision of the world” (*AP*, p. 3). We can discern an underlying link between metaphysics and ethics here insofar that philosophy (for Hadot) seeks to “transform” our “perception of the world” (*WL*, p. 257). In other words, I consider Hadot as a key ally, since, rather than viewing humanity as just another object, he seeks to mould us to more (if not better) ethical agents. Indeed, the generally accepted view of philosophy as “theoretical activity” should be called into question (*AP*, p. 3). Philosophers in antiquity concerned themselves with how people choose to live their lives; philosophy sought to “form”, not merely “inform” (*WL*, p. 20). Philosophy seeks to make “us ‘be’ in a different way”; it “was a mode of existing-in-the-world” whose stated goal “was to transform the whole of the individual's life” (*WL*, p. 265).

In what follows, I first provide an overview of Hadot's philosophy of spiritual exercise. The aim of this is to set-up the foundations for the rest of the dissertation. In doing so, I elaborate on Hadot's distinction between the Promethean and Orphic tendencies. What we see here is that far from being a mere heuristic device, the distinction itself also highlights the historical bent of Hadot's project and the story he himself sought to tell. Indeed, it is a story which (as I seek to articulate) is relevant to both my diagnosis and prescription for the Anthropocene. What we see in Hadot's *Veil of Isis* is his subtle lament of what could have been. Nonetheless, Hadot's message is not so much that these options are lost to us. Rather, he stresses *contingency*, of how the Orphic (and, not the Promethean) could have been dominant. Notwithstanding, (as we'll see in relation to *P2*) Orphic is still a live possibility within the Anthropocene.

Spiritual Exercises and Cosmic Consciousness

I contend that spiritual exercises are critical for the prospect of love in the Anthropocene.

Hadot believed that philosophy is necessary for transcending the “egoist self” (our default state without the aid of philosophy (*PAH*, p. 86). This is essential because, unlike OOO, Hadot does not rule out the possibility of the subject being more; rather, he sees “the necessity of pursuing spiritual progress” (*WL*, p. 265). Indeed, this is in line with the Socratic vision for philosophy. Philosophy, as Socrates argues in his *Apology*, seeks to nurture, and mature our souls (*A*, 29e). This was a “divine service” insofar that (like Hadot), Socrates believed we tend to drift through life in a state of pretentious ignorance and egoism (*A*, 30e). This is the basis of Hadot’s idea of spiritual exercises, but what precisely are they? In his *Ancient Philosophy*, Hadot defines the as “voluntary” and “personal practices” which, he writes, intend “to cause a transformation of the self” (*AP*, pp. 179-180). One pursued self-transformation simply because they have a deep-seated desire to pursue transformation (*WL* p. 83). Until they partake in philosophy, all are in a “state of unhappy disquiet”. One is “darkened by *unconsciousness*” before this (*WL*, p. 83, *emphasis added*). This is life without philosophy; the life of the egoist self (*PAH*, p. 86).

This might help to explain why the idea of cosmic consciousness is so central to his philosophy and why it is relevant within the Anthropocene. Hadot believed a life of philosophy led to and ultimately resulted in cosmic consciousness. This is essential in my attempt to articulate a metaphysical subject that is filled with and moved by love. But why is this the case? To answer this, we must first comprehend what Hadot means by cosmic consciousness in order to address this issue. He asserts that cosmic consciousness aims to transform our vision of reality, and, in turn, how we choose to live (*WL*, p. 82). We, Hadot writes, come to see our “individual existence within the immense current of the cosmos” and, in turn, the perspective of the whole (*WL*, p. 266, 273). It above all is a “view from above” (*WL*, pp. 238-250). It expands our consciousness beyond its natural and usual purview.

Now, to relate Hadot to OOO, I argue that an important connection can be made between Hadot’s idea of cosmic consciousness and Morton’s metaphysical concept of hyperobjects within the Anthropocene. Indeed, consider his comments in his *Being Ecological*:

Several thousand years from now, nothing about you as an individual will matter. But what you did will have huge consequences. This is the paradox of the ecological age.³⁶

However, (and this is perhaps the difference between them) although Morton provides us with a metaphysical account of hyperobjects, what I believe Hadot offers us here is not only a vision hyperobjects, but, importantly, how-to live-in tune, or, in step with them. And, he does so (as will become pertinent later on) without disempowering us as agents. Cosmic consciousness he writes, involves:

Seeing things as they are, *not* from an anthropological and egoistical point of view, but the perspective of the cosmos and nature...Lived physics is what is meant by cosmic consciousness; it consists in becoming aware of the fact that we are a part of the Whole... (*PAH*, p. 95, *emphasis added*)

Here, it is important to take note of Hadot's distinction between real and lived physics. As I see it, it enables us to formally draw a connection between cosmic consciousness and hyperobjects. In fact, the latter is how one becomes aware of hyperobjects (in and through cosmic consciousness). This physics is lived in the sense that it highlights the importance of perception, but more importantly, it is real physics. This is because in cosmic consciousness, one strives to live in tune with reality as it is in and of itself. As I argue, within the Anthropocene, what is needed are philosophies that not only enable us to achieve cosmic consciousness but also, critically, philosophies that see an interplay between ethics and metaphysics (*AP*, p. 3). This connection, as I see it, is holistic through and through. The boundaries and restrictions of our ethical behaviour are given to us by metaphysics, or a vision of reality.

In other words, cosmic consciousness gives the metaphysical subject a frame for action. However, an existence "darkened by *unconsciousness*" (i.e., one without cosmic consciousness), leads a loveless form of life within the Anthropocene (*WL*, p. 83, *emphasis added*). Indeed, as Hadot notes, within a state of cosmic consciousness, one is meant to "rise to a universal viewpoint"; one tries "to see things within the perspective of the All" (*AP*, p. 178). What I have attempted here is on one hand to sketch out why I see Hadot is of relevance to our discussion of the Anthropocene, and, on the other, to articulate how I seek to *use* Hadot. Undergirding both is his notion of cosmic consciousness, which, as I see it, is the end result of the philosophical life. Indeed, it is this which differentiates it from Morton's metaphysical concept of hyperobjects.

³⁶ Morton, Timothy. *Being Ecological*. MIT Press, 2019, p. xlii

In what follows, I seek to better frame the historical bent of Hadot's project. The aim of this is again to frame the diagnosis and prescriptions I seek to articulate within the Anthropocene. As such, I now seek to provide the groundwork to Hadot's distinction between the Promethean and Orphic tendencies, and, importantly, to link and relate them to his idea of cosmic consciousness.

Orienting Ourselves to Nature

Philosophy can assist us in becoming more self-aware, which can result in improved ethical behaviour and ultimately, love. It is for this reason that Hadot's *Veil of Isis* (as noted at the end of the previous chapter) is essential. In it, Hadot makes a distinction between two perspectives on nature, the Orphic and the Promethean. As will become apparent, this distinction will be critical to the vision of cosmic consciousness I seek to articulate. The Promethean sees nature as dangerous and seeks to use the tools of science (that is, experiments) for humanity's benefit. The Orphic (in contrast) sees nature as a peaceful and harmonious whole. In turn (unlike the Promethean's use of science) is sees meditation and the arts as effective ways to commune with nature. Drawing out the implications of these two distinctions is perhaps pertinent to (and maybe even essential to) contextualising our plight within the Anthropocene. Indeed, as Hadot reasons:

If man feels nature to be an enemy, hostile and jealous... Man will seek, through technology, to affirm his power, domination, and rights over nature. If, on the contrary, people consider themselves a part of nature... There will no longer be any relation of dominance between nature and mankind. The occultation of nature will be perceived not as a resistance that must be conquered but as a mystery into which human beings can gradually be initiated (*V*, p. 92).³⁷

Later, we again see him juxtaposing (and elaborating on) the distinction:

On the one hand, nature can present itself to us in a hostile aspect, against which we must defend ourselves, and a set of resources necessary for life, which must be exploited... On the other hand, nature is both a spectacle that fascinates us, even if it terrifies us, and a process that surrounds us. The Orphic attitude, which respects it, seeks to preserve a *living* perception of nature (*V*, p. 98, *emphasis added*).

³⁷ That is, the attitudes are neutral, but, as forms (or, ways of life), they are not neutral, nor should we judge them to be so.

In other words, hostility leads to Prometheism, while awe and wonder may inspire the Orphic; a “living perception of nature” (*V*, p. 98). Now, although the opposing perspectives are completely at odds with one another, they reflect Hadot’s goal of showcasing how humanity (*historically*) has both viewed and interacted with their surroundings:

By opposing the Promethean to the Orphic attitude, I do not mean to oppose a good and bad attitude. I simply want, through this recourse to Greek myths, to attract attention to these two orientations that can be manifested in the relations between man and nature – two orientations that are equally essential, do not necessarily exclude each other, and are often found united in the same person (*V*, p. 97).

What is important here to highlight is that they (above all else) embody two distinct ways of life. This, too, will be pertinent to the Anthropocene insofar as one mindset, as opposed to the other, is more prone to cosmic consciousness saturated with love. In what follows, I will provide an overview of the two outlooks before putting the two attitudes in conversation with one another in relation to cosmic consciousness within the Anthropocene.

The Promethean Outlook

Hadot (etymologically) links the orientation to the Greek mythological figure, Prometheus. As he notes, Prometheus stole fire from the gods to gift it to humankind, to, as it were, pave the road for “technology and civilization”. This was done “to improve the life of mankind” (*V*, p. 95). As I see it, Prometheism is often motivated by the desire for safety in a dangerous world (which we treat in depth later on).

It is important to recognise that the Promethean subject (in contrast to its Orphic counterpart) has dominated human history. The connection between the Promethean subject and our lovelessness within the Anthropocene should be immediately apparent to us. Indeed, Prometheans, in Hadot’s words, “seek, through technology, to affirm power, domination, and rights over nature” (*V*, p. 92). Hadot saw the early modern period as the “decisive turn” towards the “mathematisation of nature” (*V*, p. 128). Indeed, the “mechanization of the world” was pivotal to the “evolution” of human civilisation as we know it today (*V*, p. 105). Hadot makes similar comments later on in his *Veil of Isis* when he suggests that scientists came to see themselves as engineers “who had to reconstruct the gears and functions of the machine known as nature” (*V*, p. 126, *emphasis added*). It is (echoing Nietzsche) an expression of the “will to power” where we, as a species, came to view reality in a purely instrumental way (*V*, p. 91).

In turn, the metaphor of nature as a machine began to take root as well (V, p. 123). However, why is the idea of nature as a machine relevant? As I see it (and, perhaps Hadot as well) it is necessarily because of its ‘use’ language. The meaning of nature comes to be seen as something extrinsic to itself (that is, as opposed to intrinsic). This is important insofar that it essentially represents a metaphysical shift from viewing reality aesthetically, (or, as Charles Taylor would stress, enchantedly), to one which is thoroughly instrumental in nature (that is, like a machine). Indeed, he describes this disenchantment (or shift in the social imaginary) in his *Secular Age* as the process in which we came to no longer relate to things “in terms of the normative patterns they reveal”. Rather, as Taylor argues, they become “extrinsic” to them and argues that it involved an “active instrumental stance towards the world”.³⁸ This, as I wish to suggest is the “inherited background” which informs our perception and everyday decisions (OC, 15a).

Non-human reality (within this social imaginary) is effectively transformed into a machine that serves human goals. For the Promethean, nature is without a soul and is instead seen as a machine, and, as such there is no “living perception of nature” (V, p. 98). Indeed, take note of Francis Bacon’s description of his methodology in his *New Organon*. Here, he argues that “the secrets of nature reveal themselves more readily under the vexations of art than when they go their own way”.³⁹ Moreover, take note of the subtitle of the *New Organon*, namely, the *True Directions concerning the Interpretation of Nature*. In turn, nature itself came to be reducible to mechanical and mathematical systems which have allowed us to transform (or, manipulate) nature for our needs and purposes. What Prometheanism seeks above all else is “to improve the life of mankind” (which, it should be pointed out, are noble desires in and of themselves) (V, p. 95). Of course, this is how the myth itself ought to be interpreted (V, p. 95). Though meddling with the intricacies of nature reflects humanity’s love for itself, it came at the expense of the non-human. The “great machine of the world” after all existed mostly to meet our needs and wants (V, p. 129). This perhaps allows us to link Prometheanism with OOO. Indeed, consider Harman’s comment in his *Tool-Being* regarding “the long dictatorship of human beings in philosophy”.⁴⁰ Take note of the word dictatorship here. Dictators are hardly (if ever) kind and benevolent, and, for Harman, this is what human centred philosophy does. We (as it were) become “engineers” who come to repurpose reality for our uses (V, p. 126).

³⁸ Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007, pp. 97-98.

³⁹ Rooks, Mark C., editor. *British Philosophy 1600-1900*. IntelLex Corporation, 1993, p. 94.

⁴⁰ Harman, Graham. *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*. Open Court, 2002, p. 2.

Indeed, what undergirds such comments is that a human-centered perspective of reality produces tyranny. Prometheism has resulted in devastation, and, if anything, it hastens the need, as Harman writes, to return to “the drama of the things themselves”.⁴¹ Hadot is at pains to show out how a hegemonic Prometheism has jeopardised our relationship with nature, and nature itself (*V*, p. 98). But again, perhaps Harman (and, in turn, OOO) go too far in their semiophobia, for we can know and seek to preserve things in themselves without foregoing the human. Indeed, this is what the Orphic offers.

The Orphic Outlook

Again (etymologically) Hadot links the orientation to Orpheus who used the arts to commune with both humans as well as animals (*V*, p. 96). The Orphic (through perception) seeks to highlight the interconnections between people, nature, and the cosmos. It, as a way of life, stresses “mankind’s existential and ethical relationship to nature and existence” (*V*, p. 95). As such, there is no “will to power” (*V*, p. 91). Indeed, its sole ‘instrument’ (to borrow from Promethean language) is perception (*V*, p. 155).

The Orphic sees nature as “joyful, prodigal, and exuberant” not as something that is “rigid, strict, and methodical” (*V*, p. 200). While the Promethean seeks knowledge for humanity’s welfare, the Orphic seeks knowledge “without any other utilitarian consideration” (*V*, p. 95, 186). Hadot’s comment on utilitarian considerations is significant; he implicitly seeks to juxtapose Promethean and Orphic approaches to reality. Indeed, to understand, articulate, and commune with nature, it (that is, the Orphic) seeks to instil its practitioners with an aesthetic sensitivity. In doing so, we come to not only perceive and know things-in-themselves, but, more importantly, come to gaze in awe “before the world’s beauty” (*V*, p. 219). What we can discern from this is that the Orphic seeks to marry (if not map) art and our aesthetic sensibilities harmoniously with nature. As examples, Hadot cites poetry, art, and music as modes which express the Orphic akin to how experiments reflect Prometheism (*V*, p. 218, 318).

What I wish to suggest is that Orphic practitioners are propelled by a distinct virtue epistemology (such as Bergson’s emphasis on joy and Weil’s stress on humility) to their Promethean counterparts (which, as I see it, is one of arrogance and pride). Or, to put it another way, they refrain from the Promethean demand for control.

⁴¹ Ibid, *Tool-Being* (2002), p. 16.

Indeed, as Hadot argues in his essay, *Ancient Man and Nature*, the Orphic overcomes:

The habitude which make our way of seeing the world banal and mechanical. This exercise aims also to detach us from all interest, egotism or worry which prevent us from seeing the world as it is, because they constrain us to focus our attention upon particular objects in which we find pleasure and utility.⁴²

That is, while the Promethean is interested, the Orphic can be seen to be disinterested. And, as I wish to suggest, it allows practitioners to achieve cosmic consciousness. Indeed, by seeking to instil a “living perception of nature” within us, those who undergo the Orphic come to see things from “perspective of the cosmos and nature” (*V*, p. 98). This is something which a Promethean is never able to achieve, instead, their perception of reality is driven by anthropological and egoistical concerns (*PAH*, p. 95).

My Use of the Two Outlooks

If (as I have put forward to the reader) the Anthropocene can be tied to our rampant Prometheanism, the *Veil of Isis* as a work is more than purely descriptive, rather, it could be said that it anticipates our current predicament. We see this below in the two cited passages. In turn, what I shall put to the reader is that what are urgently needed are philosophies which have resources to respond to the Anthropocene. This, as I see it, is what the Orphic provides. The Promethean and Orphic play two crucial roles within this dissertation. *First*, as I argue, it aids us in understanding and framing the Anthropocene historically (something that is perhaps missing within OOO’s conceptual framing of the problem). *Second*, insofar that the planet is populated by Prometheans, Promethean ways of seeing and interacting with reality will drive out and outweigh Orphic forms of life (that is, utilitarian values will win over aesthetic ones).

But, why is this the case? As I see it, it is necessarily the case because Prometheanism becomes historically entrenched and thus self-perpetuating. For convenience, we can call these two problems *P1* and *P2*. The attentive reader will notice that the two problems are interconnected. Indeed, what ungirds both is simultaneously the contingency and entrenchment of Prometheanism as a way and form of life. We as it were, become accustomed to only see reality in and through Promethean modes of being.

⁴² Hadot, Pierre, et al. *The Selected Writings of Pierre Hadot: Philosophy as Practice*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020, p. 146.

If (as I have put forward to the reader) the Anthropocene can be tied to our rampant Prometheanism, the *Veil of Isis* as a work is more than purely descriptive, rather, it could be said that it anticipates our current predicament. Indeed, the Anthropocene is most likely evidence of the Promethean outlook's shortcomings. This is something which Hadot himself (interestingly) muses about, indeed, as suggests:

Yet if nature hides herself, does she not have her reasons? Does she not want to protect us in this way from the dangers that await us lest, once we have dominated and mastered her, we may be threatened by our own technical progress? (*V*, p. 141).

We see similar comments near the conclusion of his *Veil of Isis*:

If Nature seeks to hide, it is, in particular, because the discovery of her secrets is dangerous for man. By intervening technologically in natural processes, man risks discovering them and, what is worse, unleashing unforeseeable consequences (*V*, p. 317).

What we see here is that Hadot provides a subtle diagnosis of the Anthropocene. For him, it is fundamentally the outcome of a dominant Promethean mindset that has lost control, a Doctor Faustus who cannot control the forces he has called. We have, in a word, unleashed the “unforeseeable consequences” Hadot spoke about (*V*, p. 317). Again, going back to OOO, (in a reversal of traditional metaphysics), they seek to grant greater ontological weight to objects. In turn, what I shall put to the reader is that what are urgently needed are philosophies which have resources to respond to the Anthropocene. This, as I see it, is what the Orphic provides.

Interestingly, Hadot's historical narrative demonstrates that this dominance was *contingent*. For all intents and purposes, the Orphic, rather than the Promethean, perspective to reality may have won out. Which takes me to the thesis' primary point: the Orphic, as opposed to the Promethean, can be understood as Hadot's prescription for life within the Anthropocene. However, proponents of OOO may object here. Relationships between all objects (not just human, but also non-human) corrupt things-in-themselves. In other words, when they look at the history of philosophy, culture, society, and technology in Western History *all* they see is the Promethean. The Orphic alternative never seems live or possible to them – either in the past or in the present and future. Nonetheless, in the following chapters, I seek to entertain the Orphic; in all its ethical, political, and aesthetic dimensions, as a live option for us.

In other words, we can ground philosophy (to cite Harman) which sees us as being “ontologically special” in order to ground our agency and therefore, our capacity to act.⁴³ In doing so, I enlist two Orphic metaphysicians; Henri Bergson and Simone Weil, and use Hadot’s vision of the Promethean and Orphic not only as a heuristic device to interpret them, but, rather, to ground two Orphic perspectives of reality (albeit, to different degrees) within the Anthropocene. However, before we embark on this journey, I see it as apt to discuss some conceptual problems related to the two stated problems in this sub-section (that is, *P1* and *P2*).

Love, “Pictures” and Social Imaginaries

In what follows, I shall be discussing the notions of the ‘aesthetic’ and ‘love’ (as well as ‘lovelessness’) in greater detail and relate it to *P1* and *P2* in the Orphic sub-section above. I do so, of course, through a recourse to what I see to a relevant Wittgensteinian framing of the concepts. Talking about love is of course difficult, and, is made even more difficult if one seeks to bridge and map it onto Hadot’s vision of the Promethean and the Orphic. This is all the more difficult given that love is a concept which I have read into Hadot’s framing of the two tendencies in his *Veil of Isis*. Nonetheless, love, and its counterpart of lovelessness, as I see it, are embodied in terms of distinctive forms of life. What I mean by this is that their ‘definitions’ (if we were to put it like this) are shown by our ways of *living* within the world. As such, words cannot be understood in isolation from the context in which they are used. Indeed, as he writes in his *Philosophical Investigations*, “the meaning of a word is its use in the language”.⁴⁴ This is something which Hadot himself acknowledges when he writes that “we are in the world as we are in language” (*V*, p. 313). In other words, this gives us credence to read into the Promethean and Orphic a tension of loves. In Prometheanism, we see an orientation and way of being which is primarily driven by a love for humanity. This is juxtaposed to the Orphic, namely, ways of life which is better attuned to the needs and intricacies of non-human forms of life.

Hadot himself seemed to have struggled to articulate his ideas. For instance, the ‘aesthetic’ is both sensible but also something beyond our comprehension. Indeed, he writes of the “great laws of the appearance of forms” as well as the “world’s beauty” (*V*, pp. 218-219). As I read him, this ambiguity concerning the ‘aesthetic’ arises from the Orphic form of life itself.

⁴³ Ibid, *Graham Harman on Art and Ecology* (2016).

⁴⁴ Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, Blackwell, 1953, p. 20.

It, as such, escapes conceptual clarity precisely because meaning is shown as opposed to discerned from necessary and sufficient condition. Similarly, in order to grasp ‘love’, we ought to pay attention to forms of life seen through the Orphic. It is, in other words, shown through ways of life. This means that language (and therefore, our understanding of love) becomes (as Bernard Williams argues in his *Moral Luck*) “embodied” and “this-worldly”.⁴⁵ Thus, “to imagine a language” and therefore, love “means to *imagine* a form of life”.⁴⁶ Forms of life supply us with language, and, in turn, ways in which we can see and approach the world. How does this relate to the Promethean and the Orphic? As perhaps Hadot himself sought to articulate, they are representative of two *distinct* forms of life. They are the mediums in and through which we inscribe meaning into the world (as in the Promethean), or, interpret what is around us (as in the Orphic).⁴⁷ In other words, they offer us pictures of the world, as well as principal ways of seeing and engaging with reality. This is of significance precisely because (as Michael Chase notes) Hadot himself was influenced (and drew from) Wittgenstein’s thought.⁴⁸ Formally, we see this in his piece, *Wittgenstein et les limites du langage*.⁴⁹ Hadot saw Wittgenstein’s idea of language games in his *Philosophical Investigations* as insightful (if not informative) for notion of philosophy as a way of life. Indeed, as he writes in his *Present Alone is our Happiness*:

Spiritual exercises are often language games, in which one tells oneself a phrase to provoke an effect, whether on others or on oneself, hence under certain circumstances and with a certain goal. Moreover, in the same context, Wittgenstein also used the expression ‘form of life’. This also inspired me to understand philosophy as a form or way of life. (*PAH*, p. 135).⁵⁰

Both these suggest that there is an intimate connection between ways and forms of life as concepts; language and practices (that is, spiritual exercises) help one to become grounded in a life of philosophy. Indeed, they teach us how to inhabit certain pictures of the world in a “voluntary” manner (*AP*, p. 3). Now, returning to both *P1* and *P2*, recall again our vision for the Promethean and Orphic. The Promethean teaches, and moulds us (as a form of life) to see nature only as an instrument for our use.

⁴⁵ Williams, Bernard. *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers*, 1973-1980. Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 147.

⁴⁶ Ibid, *On Certainty* (1953), p. 10

⁴⁷ Ibid, *Wittgenstein and Idealism* (1981), p. 147.

⁴⁸ Michael Chase, Stephen R. L. Clark. *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Ancients and Moderns - Essays in Honor of Pierre Hadot*. Wiley, 2013, p. 2.

⁴⁹ Hadot, Pierre, et al. *Wittgenstein et les limites du langage*. Libr. philosophique J. Vrin, 2004.

⁵⁰ For an overview, see, Laugier, Sandra. “Pierre Hadot as a Reader of Wittgenstein.” *Paragraph*, vol. 34, no. 3, 2011, pp. 322–37, doi: <https://doi.org/10.3366/para.2011.0028>.

It, as Hadot writes, engages in “violence” towards that what is not us (*V*, p. 98). Such a form of life (in terms of a society’s values and cultural practices) moulds us to see the world in a purely instrumental way. In turn, with regards to *P1*, these forms of life become historically entrenched. This I argue is problematic insofar as that it has come to inform what Taylor calls our social imaginaries (which, as it were, further perpetuates *P2*). These, Taylor writes in his *Secular Age*, are:

The ways in which they *imagine* their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows... and the deeper normative notions and images which underlie these expectations.⁵¹

The issue then is if Prometheism has been embedded into our social imaginaries, what are we to do? We shall return to this question shortly, but, if I am seeking to offer the Orphic as a prescription within the Anthropocene, why is the Orphic a life of love? As I see it, it comes down to the “picture” of the world it offers us; pictures which we, as subjects, can *choose* (despite the two problems) to mould ourselves to inhabit (*AP*, p. 3). In contrast, Prometheism, at its core, is a “project of dominating nature” (*V*, pp. 91). The sort of love which is needed within the Anthropocene is a self-giving love; one that prioritises harmony and “is inspired by respect in the face of mystery and disinterestedness” (*V*, pp. 91). Crucially, there is no “violence” within an Orphic picture of reality (*V*, p. 98). The issue within the Anthropocene however is that, as Hadot notes, there is an imbalance in favour of Prometheism; and, in turn, a lovelessness towards the non-human. The question which arises in relation to the two problems is the following, namely, how can we imagine (or, rather, re-imagine and learn to live) Orphic ways of life? Is this possible if we, today, are seeped within Prometheism? Do we have the means to express and “*imagine*” this form of life?⁵² Or, to put another way, is the Orphic lost to us? Indeed, (to borrow from Charles Taylor again), what we have seen since the early modern period is the rise and dominance of a Promethean social imaginary. This makes our situation problematic when trying to address *P2*. We can only wonder (as Melissa Lane muses in her seminal piece, *Eco-Republic*) “are we trapping ourselves in Plato’s cave?”.⁵³ Lane explores both *P1* and *P2* in a holistic fashion and I intend (in my own small way) to do so as well. In doing so, I “challenge” (again to borrow from Lane) our historically entrenched Promethean ways of life.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Ibid, *A Secular Age* (2007), p. 171, *emphasis added*.

⁵² Ibid, *On Certainty* (1953), 8e.

⁵³ Lane, Melissa. *Eco-Republic: What the Ancients Can Teach Us About Ethics, Virtue, and Sustainable Living*. Princeton University Press, 2012, p. 4.

⁵⁴ Ibid, *Eco-Republic* (2012), p. 3.

It is here where I believe Wittgenstein can deepen Hadot's conceptions of the Promethean and the Orphic. Although Hadot stresses that they are "radically and fundamentally opposed", for Wittgenstein, it is also crucial to understand that these different ways of 'seeing' the world are *not* cognitively inaccessible to one another (*V*, p. 98). Indeed, he presents us with the following example in *On Certainty*:

I can imagine a man who had grown up in quite special circumstances and been taught that the earth came into being 50 years ago, and therefore believed this. We might instruct him: the earth has long... etc. – We should be trying to give him our picture of the world. This would happen through a kind of persuasion (*OC*, 43e)

In other words, as *P2* makes clear, this person (as it were) lives within a distinct social imaginary to us; one, which *P1* also sees as historically engrained. What undergirds this is that their "picture of the world" (Wittgenstein writes) is "the *inherited* background against which I distinguish between true and false (*OC*, 15a). We see something similar in his earlier work (the *Tractatus*) when he muses that "the world of the happy man is a different one from that of the unhappy man" (*T*, 6.43). Of course, the *Tractatus* (like much of his philosophy) is riddled with interpretive difficulties. But what exactly does he mean by this? Indeed, conceptually speaking, how can this be? After all, don't both inhabit the same world (that is, a world bound by facts) (*T*, 1.1)? I interpret this as Wittgenstein seeing us as transcendental (that is, "ontologically special" within a world of facts).⁵⁵ In turn (as *OOO* would lament) we organise the world (*T*, 5.632-5.633). To put it another way, we give the world its shape, which, in relation to *P1* and *P2*, can either be Promethean or Orphic (or, even a mix of both). As a result, the 'facts' experienced by a Promethean are no different than an Orphic subject. Rather, their worlds are 'shaped' differently. By distinguishing between the happy and unhappy man, he is presenting us with something more than two forms of existence, but, importantly two distinct worlds which we can choose to occupy (*AP*, p. 3). Indeed, spiritual exercises help us to "imagine" these forms of life and, in turn, (re)introduce love in our lives and interactions with the non-human Other.⁵⁶ In particular, this is how I both read and interpret the respective spiritual exercises which Bergson and Weil bequeath to us. What I wish to put to the reader is that Orphic forms of life better map and show love to the non-human. The Orphic life is harmonic and is self-giving; the Promethean life in contrast encompasses none of these.

⁵⁵ Ibid, *Graham Harman on Art and Ecology* (2016).

⁵⁶ Ibid, *On Certainty* (1953), p. 10

In turn, when discussing Orphic forms of life (and this will become clear) love comes to be seen as a family resembling term “embodied” in and through spiritual exercises.⁵⁷ For Bergson, the mode of the Orphic calls us become more intuitive, and, in turn, to achieve sympathy with the objects around us. Similarly, for Weil, attention achieves a similar outcome. Indeed, what unites the two is a de-centering of the self and perhaps most importantly, our *interested* orientation. Or, to return the argument back to Hadot, it is a respect for the veil, a respect for the Other and its autonomy. This is precisely because love, as I understand it, ought and should be Other-centred. What unites both intuition and attention as spiritual exercises is that they draw us out of egoist selves and bring us in tune with the life and being of Other. Within the context of this thesis, this done (as well as argued) through a rebalancing of the Promethean through the Orphic. Although the Promethean is moved by a love for humankind, this is done, as Hadot implies, at the expense of the non-human (V, p. 95). In contrast, the love embodied in and through the Orphic seeks to instil within us a “living perception of nature” by making us aware of an Other which is more-than-human (V, p. 98). The latter, in contrast to the former is thoroughly disinterested. This lends us credence (with some creativity!) to rehash the passage from *On Certainty*. Below, I intentionally seek to contrast to the reader the loves available to use in and through the Promethean and the Orphic. What we see here then is the distinction between an interested morality that we see through the Promethean, and one which is disinterested:

I can imagine a man who had grown up in quite special circumstances and been taught that nature is a machine to be pillaged for our use, and therefore believed this. We might instruct him: nature is alive, something worthy of dignity and respect.

Now, given the two conceptual problems, it is important to take note of Wittgenstein prescription to us. Indeed, we, as he writes, “should be trying to give him our picture of the world” in and through “a kind of persuasion” (OC, 43e). As such, convincing subjects of the Promethean form of life’s unsuitability, or inadequacy within the Anthropocene cannot solely only be a matter of rational argument. Rather, in relation to the two problems, it is a matter of persuasion between ‘forms of life’: whether (in the case of Bergson) we ought to introduce movement to the intellect through intuition, or, for Weil, whether we should restrain our bent for force through attention. This is why I tackle OOO for their “picture” of the world is beginning to inform and influence the wider public.

⁵⁷ Williams, Bernard. *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers*, 1973-1980. Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 147.

Indeed, we this see this in the numerous news articles, interviews, speaking events, and educational piece proponents of OOO have been invited to and or taken part. One (as we saw) even called Morton a “prophet”.⁵⁸ This I argue is dangerous given their anti-humanism when understood as a ‘form’ or way of life.

Concluding Remarks

What I have intended to articulate throughout this chapter (and, through Wittgenstein above) is that what is needed are philosophies which deepen and transform our habitual perception (*WL*, p. 253). Matthew Sharpe in his piece, *Situating Hadot Today*, asks a startling question in relation to the Anthropocene:

Is it possible to conceive and reactivate an Orphic sense of nature today, and would not this seem to be an especially vital task if we are to restore a sustainable balance between human need and ambition and the natural world?⁵⁹

I argue in the affirmative. Although we (as it were) are seeped within Prometheanism, it is still possible to achieve a rebalance towards the Orphic. This is the manner in which I also seek to approach my treatment of Henri Bergson and Simone Weil’s philosophies. They as it were, diagnose the Promethean (albeit, in distinct ways) but, also allow us to “imagine” and chart for us paths which allow us to live out Orphic ways of life. They, as it were, seek to give us (as Prometheans) a new “picture of the world”, and, in turn, new ways to approach, describe and live within the world (*OC*, 43e).

⁵⁸ Ibid, *A Reckoning for Our Species* (2017).

⁵⁹ Hadot, Pierre. *The Selected Writings of Pierre Hadot: Philosophy As Practice*, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2020, p. 20.

HENRI BERGSON'S INTUITIVE ORPHIC PHILOSOPHY

“Intelligence... is the faculty of manufacturing artificial objects” (*CE*, p. 153)

Who and Why Henri Bergson?

Henri Bergson was a preeminent European philosopher of the early twentieth century who belonged to the influential French Spiritualist school of philosophy. His influence across disciplines beyond philosophy was far reaching. Within theology, famed French poet (and friend as well as student) Charles Péguy called Bergson “the most *revolutionary* philosopher since Plato” and sought to remove him from the Catholic Index.⁶⁰ In what might shock contemporary philosophers, it’s said that a public lecture he gave in New York in 1913 caused the first ever traffic jam on Broadway.⁶¹ As France’s first celebrity philosopher, some 2000 students turned up to his public lecture at New York City college. Yet his popularity did not outlive him.⁶² He, I believe, is worth considering given the aim of his philosophical oeuvre, namely, to “put more of science into metaphysics and more metaphysics into science” (*CM*, p. 227). Indeed, given our use of Hadot’s distinction between the Promethean and Orphic tendencies, here, I seek to use Bergson as an interlocutor to further guide the discussion. As we shall see, for Bergson, due to the evolution of the human species, we are naturally *predisposed* towards being Promethean subjects. In relation to *P1* and *P2*, this (for him) is both the root cause of the Anthropocene, and, also, what he seeks to address not only in his metaphysics of intuition (which I read as an Orphic spiritual exercise), but also in his political philosophy. The latter in particular shall be of interest going forward for it is here where Bergson grounds our capacity as a species qualify Prometheanism.

That is, what we see here is that he not only offers us a diagnosis of the Anthropocene, but also a prescription and cure. Bergson, I will argue, provides a thoroughly Orphic philosophy. He teaches us how we can aspire to be subjects imbued and moved by love.⁶³

⁶⁰ Milbank, John. "The Most Revolutionary Philosopher Since Plato?" *Church life Journal*, University of Notre Dame, 25 Apr. 2019, <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/the-most-revolutionary-philosopher-since-plato/>, *emphasis added*.

⁶¹ Goldhill, Olivia. "The first traffic jam on Broadway was caused by a philosophy lecture." Quartz, 20 Nov. 2018, <https://qz.com/1468694/broadways-first-traffic-jam-was-due-to-a-henri-bergson-philosophy-lecture/>

⁶² See, Kolakowski, Leszek. *Bergson*. Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 1.

⁶³ This however is notably absent from Simone Kotva’s account. Indeed, she on one hand underplays the overall goal of Bergson’s oeuvre (*CM*, p. 227) and, simultaneously, neglects the *implicit* political philosophy apparent in his ‘*Two Sources of Morality and Religion*’. In doing so, she fails to properly consider the Promethean and Orphic

In doing so, I seek to communicate Bergson's continued relevance within the context of the Anthropocene. As Gilles Deleuze writes in his *Bergsonism*, such an enterprise hinges on renewing him along new avenues of investigation:

“A ‘*return to Bergson*’ does not only mean a renewed admiration for a great philosopher but a renewal or an extension of his project today.... He had made metaphysics a rigorous discipline, one capable of being continued along new paths which constantly appear in the world”.⁶⁴

Deleuze here sets a challenge to future interpreters of Bergson: to *expand*, if not modify Bergson's ideas within the flux and becoming of our contemporary circumstances. In doing so, I read Bergson in a manner analogous to Keith Ansell Pearson (and, Alexandre Lefebvre), namely, as a way of life thinker.⁶⁵ Going forward, the aim of this chapter is twofold. *First*, to use Bergson to frame and diagnose our predicament within the Anthropocene. In doing so, I provide an overview of his metaphysics with the aim of communicating to the reader that, for Bergson, the Promethean tendency is *not* a contingent phenomenon. Rather, it is grounded in biological necessity and the evolutionary success of intelligence within the human species. The metaphysical subject endowed and moved by the intelligence, as I seek to communicate, is solely motivated by utilitarian concerns. They are, in other words, loveless. *Second*, I look to Bergson's own suggestions as to how the Promethean tendency can and has been overcome. It is in these sections that, despite how engrained the intelligence is within us, I consider the Orphic a live possibility within the Anthropocene.

Bergson's Philosophy of Time

Bergson often argued that philosophers have one single idea that they ‘rinse and repeat’. Such comments are reminiscent of Isaiah Berlin's comments in his piece, *The Hedgehog and the Fox*. Here, he contrasts hedgehogs (those who perceive the world through the lens of a single defining thought) with foxes (individuals who draw on an array of experiences and ideas).⁶⁶ What is accepted within Bergsonian scholarship is that Bergson's idea (as a hedgehog) is that time is not space.

tendencies, and, in turn, the live possibility of the Bergsonian metaphysical subject, see, Kotva, Simone. *Effort and Grace: On the Spiritual Exercise of Philosophy*. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2020.

⁶⁴ Deleuze, Gilles. *Bergsonism*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, Zone Books, 1991, p. 115.

⁶⁵ Lefebvre, Alexandre, and Nils F. Schott. “Bergson and Philosophy as a Way of Life.” *Interpreting Bergson*, Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 121–38, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108367455.008>.

⁶⁶ Berlin, Isaiah, et al. *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History*. Princeton University Press, 2013.

In his first work, *Time and Free Will*, begins to ground his critique of the intelligence, and, in turn, the Promethean metaphysical subject. Indeed, for Bergson, scientists translated fleeting transient realities such as time into quantitative units to measure and obtain a solid grasp on them. They, in other words, in a Promethean manner, are thoroughly motivated by human instrumental concerns. But, he wondered, do these units of time truly convey the reality of change and movement? As he later wrote to his friend, American philosopher and psychologist, William James: “Scientific time does not endure, that it would make no difference to our scientific knowledge if the totality of reality, past, present and future, was given one and for all, in one instant, and that science was essentially, *the negation of duration*”.⁶⁷ For Bergson, to quantify and measure reality was always to spatialise it. Indeed, insofar that duration is “succession without distinction”, this implies that the fundamental nature of time is one of “mutual penetration, an interconnexion and organisation of elements, each one of which represents the whole, and cannot be distinguished or isolated from it except by abstract thought.” (*TFW*, p. 101). The way science measures time is to translate it into spatial terms. What he meant is that time and movement, when measured, are decomposed into identical units, for instance, minutes, seconds, or points on a line. And these units are then juxtaposed and then placed against one another as if they are objects in space. These units are interchangeable because they are identical and homogeneous. But why is this relevant? It is relevant insofar that it shows that, for Bergson, the Promethean metaphysical subject only sees the aspects of reality that interest them. It, as it were, is the Promethean way of life. They remain trapped within a metaphysical idealism; true, and real reality escapes us, and, in turn, we manipulate and use objects to our ends without truly seeing them in themselves. It is this, which we have seen, is what underpins the ‘OOO’ critique: we, as metaphysical subjects merely distort and do violence to reality. Indeed, for Bergson time, and much metaphysical reality is best understood as a ‘*continuous multiplicity*’. What he means by this is that much of reality is qualitative and is in turn heterogeneous.⁶⁸ We could say that time is like a *melody*. On the page, musical notes are represented as separate and interchangeable and can be moved around like objects in space. But annotations on a piece of paper have nothing to do with how the melody is played and lives within each listener. To the performer and listener, the notes are not the succession of separate parts, *rather*, the notes spill into one another forming a pleasing cohesive whole.

⁶⁷ James, William. *The Letters of William James*, Vol. 2. Project Gutenberg, p. 294.

⁶⁸ As we shall see, Bergson changed his view, of course, in *Creative Evolution*. There he thinks that science truly does reach one half of the absolute: space and matter; and he thought philosophy and intuition could represent the other half.

Visually, we can grasp the distinction between a durational understanding of reality (that is, as a melody denoted by [B]) and the static vision of reality afforded to us by the intellect (seen by [A] as we move from point 1 to point 5) below in *Figure 1.0*:

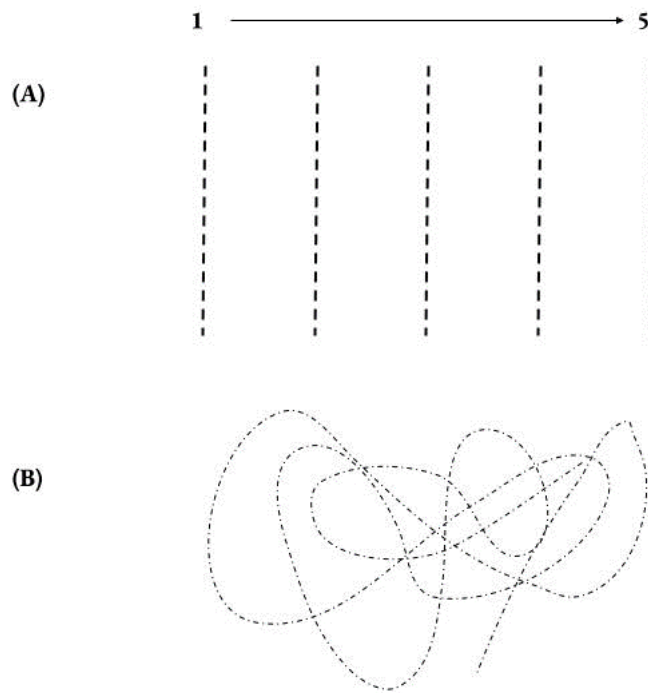


Figure 1.0: Static versus Durational Time⁶⁹

For Bergson, reality endures as a continuous multiplicity wherein past, present, and future co-exist in an intermeshing (as in [B] in *Figure 1.0*) (*CE*, p. 7). However, we force it to be (or seem static). This, as it were, is what underpins the “picture of the world” he seeks to supply us with (*OC*, 43e). Reality, in other words, is thoroughly aesthetic; and an Orphic metaphysical subject is closer to reality as it exists in and for itself than its Promethean counterpart. This is necessarily because Bergson’s vision of the Orphic helps us to see and inhabit a world in becoming. It is this which he seeks to reintroduce us as readers into. Indeed, it is this reality which the Promethean subject is partially blind to.

⁶⁹ It is perhaps important to recognize that (B) in *Figure 1.0* is not intended to be representative of true duration (indeed, attempting to map duration diagrammatically is very *un-Bergsonian*). Nonetheless, the aim of (B) is to signpost and direct us to a vision of time that places a primacy on movement in contrast to (A) above.

We, as Prometheans, can't see, hear, and live in tune with this melody. As such, before we proceed, we need to understand why this is the case. We now turn to Bergson's critique of the intelligence.

Bergson's Critique of the Intellect

A poignant question remains for us. If duration is real, and, if reality is to be truly seen and understood in an Orphic aesthetic fashion, why is 'clock' time 'natural' for us? Why are we predisposed to being Promethean subjects? Bergson's short answer is the human intellect. As he writes, the intellect is "...a *light* for our conduct" and it enables us "to make ready for our action on things" (*CE*, p. 34, *emphasis added*). Indeed, as Hadot argues (citing, Bergson of course):

Life requires that we put on blinkers...In order to live, we must be *selective* in our knowledge and our memories and retain only that which may contribute to our action upon things (*WL*, p. 254, *emphasis added*).

Indeed, insofar as it is interested, the intellect is the primary means through which we give the world its shape. This argument is put forward in his seminal work, *Creative Evolution*.

Here, Bergson makes the case that human intellect itself is implicated within the evolutionary process. And, most importantly, it has evolved in such a way that it struggles to comprehend fluid reality. This, as it were, is quite literally our inherited background (*OC*, 15a). At first this may seem to be reminiscent of OOO's semiophobia, Bergson doesn't go down this route.

This is because, as Michael Ruse argues in his '*Critique of Intellect*', according to Bergson, intellect is equipped to manipulate inert matter.⁷⁰ Here, we see that the Promethean attitude is natural for us. As Bergson argues, science reveals only the *partial* essence of things.

Its primary goal is merely to facilitate action. The intellect for Bergson (in a manner akin to language for Wittgenstein) is a tool, a tool which neglects duration to act. It is thus practical and achieves its goals by substituting signs for the thing-in-itself as opposed to thing-in-itself sub specie durationis. "The intellect" (and, in turn, our Promethean predisposition), is "so skilful, in dealing with the inert, is awkward the moment it touches the living. We are at ease only in the discontinuous, in the immobile, in the dead. The intellect is characterised by a natural inability to comprehend life" (*CE*, p. 181).

⁷⁰ Ruse, Michael S. "The Critique of Intellect: Henri Bergson's Prologue to an Organic Epistemology." *Continental Philosophy Review*, vol. 35, no. 3, 2002, pp. 281-302, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1022689023583>.

This, I believe is powerful assertion for it explains how we, in a Promethean fashion interact with reality. Indeed, his cinematograph analogy best captures the Promethean view of metaphysical reality (*CE*, p. 306). For Bergson, we treat space as immobile sections and time as a succession of regular, abstract instants. This is what results when we ignore duration, and, in turn, fail to live in turn with reality as it is. Rather, as he argues in his *Creative Mind*, “they must have ‘fixed’ points to which they can attach thought and existence” (*CM*, p. 125). A rather intuitive way to picture this is to visualize a young *Clarke Kent* in *Man of Steel* who is disoriented by the array of images brought forth by his untrained sense. Although reality may best be captured and seen through the lens of the Orphic, it may be too much for us. Instead, we reduce real time and real change to dust. What see here is that we’ve been so enslaved by the intellect that we believe reality can be built and understood like a *Lego house*. The impact of the intellect is that (akin to Harman) we fail to give objects and in turn, reality itself, any ontological weight. The intellect disrupts “the continuous flow of reality”. It, as he argues, “give us nothing of the life and movement of reality; all it gives is “a patchwork of dead fragments” (*TFW*, p. x). This is essentially what the Promethean metaphysics amounts to for Bergson. And (in tandem with Harman), it violates things-in-themselves for it “starts from the immobile, and only conceives and expresses movement as a function of immobility” (*CM*, p. 105). If philosophy is to gain knowledge of ultimate reality, it must begin by apprehending change. In other words, it must look *beyond* the Promethean:

We said there is more in a movement than in the successive positions attributed to the moving object, more in a becoming than in the forms passed through in turn, more in the evolution of form than the forms assumed one after another. Philosophy can therefore derive terms of the second kind from those of the first, but not the first, from the second; from the first terms speculation must take its start (*CE*, p. 343).

Bergson maintains that intuition alone, in its capacity for the Orphic, apprehends ultimate reality. And, as we shall see, it is a central element of his philosophic method. As we have seen, the intellect makes the error of starting with immobility. It is here where Bergson seeks to ground another faculty which begins with mobility: *intuition*.

This, as I seek to articulate, provides us with an avenue for an Orphic as opposed to Promethean metaphysics. To see why intuition is more suited to apprehend duration than intellect, I now examine Bergson’s theory of intuition and introduce philosophers who I see to be worthwhile interlocutors, namely, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Immanuel Kant in the following sub-sections.

The aim of this is not so much to ground the Orphic, but, rather, to cement it due to its ability to better comprehend and live in tune with reality. Crucially, this is of interest insofar that OOO seeks to resist and overturn the linguistic turn within philosophy. Indeed, OOO sees that a focus on language and human existence clouds things as they are in themselves. But, for Bergson, this is perhaps a pseudo problem. The issue is not so much the human, rather, it is the intellect's inability to touch, know, and connect with the reality of duration.

Bergsonian Intuition and Supra-Intellectualism

If we adopt the philosophy of duration, our metaphysical conception of reality must be fluid. Despite our Promethean desire for 'spatialised' time, Bergson believes the mind is capable of Orphic perception. This is possible by a deliberate effort of intuition: making direct contact, deep inside, with the concrete duration that is the very stuff of our existence and of all things. What we see here I believe is a direct contradiction to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.⁷¹ Bergson's goal was to save metaphysics from Kant's critique. In doing so, he attempted to reconstruct the bridge by dismissing Kant's views on science and metaphysics in order to demonstrate how one can understand the essence of things by intuition in an Orphic way. Bergson despised science's Promethean proclivity for conflating its conceptualisations of reality with reality itself. All of Bergson's major writings are oriented against this fallacy, demonstrating that, (like Wittgenstein), his ultimate goal was to clear the way for vision. In doing so, I believe he subtly seeks to cement an Orphic metaphysics, for, it is this which undergirds his comment that "to think intuitively is to think in duration" (CM, p. 22). It is (as Bergson writes) a "sympathetic communication" (CE, p. 195). Instead of standing over and against reality (namely, what OOO objects to) – intuition seeks to *install* oneself within the phenomenon which they deem unknowable (CM, p. 142). He argues that we can know what OOO deems to be unknowable without distorting the object in the process. Insofar as the subject wants to bridge the gap between themselves and the objects around them, I argue that this is a completely Orphic manner of striving to know reality intimately. Indeed, the distinction between Bergson's Orphic science (a true life-science capable of comprehending vital living phenomena) and one that is Promethean is clear. As seen below *Figure 2.0*, we typically begin with the concept that what we immediately know are objects such as trees or grass, and that these sentient things have features such as solidity, greenness.

⁷¹ Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Revised Second Edition. *Palgrave Macmillan*, 2007, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-10016-0>.

That is, we immediately seek for what is not just observable, but also controllable.

Bergson, on the other hand, believes that the more people shake themselves free of static cognition, the more we will be able to recognise the Orphic. Indeed, as he writes, “in vain we force the living into this or that one of our moulds. All the moulds crack” (*CE*, p. xx).

Intuition grasps reality as it is, rather than picking out of it those aspect which interest us.

“We must strive to see in order to see”, Bergson commands us, “and no longer see in order to act” (*CE*, p. 324). Because intuition is formed not by merging intellect and instinct, but by finding the root from which they have originated, it is reasonable to wonder whether such a faculty can be developed in humans. Bergson acknowledges the difficulties of reversing the path of intellect and returning to a direct vision of reality. What we see here is that, for Bergson, the Promethean tendency is *not* contingent. Nonetheless, he believes that such an endeavour is not impossible. Indeed, Bergson considered painters’ and poets’ efforts as ventures that best expressed intuitional modalities of knowledge. They (in my opinion) are instances of the Orphic. Aesthetic perception is evidence of our Orphic potential. In doing so, Bergson stresses the cognitive importance of both art and aesthetic experience in comprehending fluid reality in an Orphic manner. Indeed, as he writes in his lesser-known pieces, *Laughter*, “between nature and ourselves nay, between ourselves and our own consciousness a veil is interposed: a veil that is dense and opaque for the common herd – thin, almost transparent for the artist and poet” (*L*, p. 151). This is because composers, (he mentions *Beethoven* explicitly) are intuitive. And they relate to the world in a manner diametrically opposed to their Promethean counterparts: “When they look at a thing, they see it for itself, and not for themselves. They do not perceive simply with a view to action; they perceive in order to perceive – for nothing, for the pleasure of doing so” (*CM*, p. 114). This is because, as Bergson argues, artists perceive for ‘pleasure’; they look to see rather than to act. In contrast to Promethean subjects, those who approach reality in an Orphic manner can see, hear, and live in sync with reality’s melody.

Nonetheless, the question persists. How does an Orphic metaphysics attempt to know (in an aesthetic manner) metaphysical reality? It is here that I believe it is desirable to engage Bergson’s Orphic approach in dialogue with some of the basic metaphysical questions that perplexed early Wittgenstein. Indeed, as he sought to argue in his *Tractatus*, language works by triggering pictures of how things are in the world.

This is what interpreters such as David Keyt have termed Wittgenstein’s ‘*picture theory*’ of language.⁷² What I intend to argue here is that when Bergson (or, rather, the Orphic metaphysical subject) uses images or metaphors in their explanations of reality, they are aiming to express to us their picture of a world in duration. Indeed, we are continuously communicating ‘images’ but we are generally quite lousy at it due to our Promethean predictions. This is complicated if the world is metaphysically in flux (as in [B] in *Figure 1.0*). Words and objects are both cut off from the flow of reality by intellect. However, intuition is an unbroken stream of that flow. What we see here I believe is a subtle distinction between our metaphysical capacities for the Orphic and Promethean within Bergson and *early* Wittgenstein. This is due to Bergson’s Orphic quest to communicate the inexpressible through images of movement. However (unlike *early* Wittgenstein) what we see in the Orphic is that we don’t require precise images, but rather images that evoke the sense of movement, change, and flux. What we see here, to borrow from Charles Taylor in his rather interesting work, ‘*Language Animal*’, is the limits of a purely instrumentalist view of language.⁷³

<i>Three Movements in Reality</i>	Qualitative	Evolutionary	Extensive
<i>Three Stable Views in Perception</i>	Qualities	Forms	Acts

Figure 2.0: *Intuition and the Intellect in Science*

Instrumentalism, as its name suggests, sees language as a tool, and its basic task as representing the world. In other words, it’s practically Promethean. However, if Bergson is correct and the world and reality are always in flux, and if we accept the fact of duration, the way we communicate must be able to ‘map’ and express it in an Orphic fashion.

⁷² Keyt, David. “Wittgenstein’s Picture Theory of Language.” *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 73, no. 4, 1964, pp. 493–511, doi: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2183303>.

⁷³ Taylor, Charles. *The Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity*. Harvard University Press, 2016, doi: <https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674970250>.

It is hardly surprising that Bergson's works are rich in such images. Indeed, with regards to 'life', which, in a Promethean manner is often seen to be dead, Bergson offers the images of a stream jet (*CE*, p. 159), fireworks (*CE*, p. 271), ocean currents (*CE*, p. 210), a rising wave (*CE*, p. 273) and a hand thrust into iron filings (*CE*, p. 105). This, as it were, is the "persuasion" Bergson's efforts were directed towards; he sought to provide us with a "picture" of a world in duration (*OC*, 43e). In doing so, he (as Taylor would suggest) "introduces new meanings in our world" by offering us "new ways of articulating our grasp of reality".⁷⁴ Indeed, Bergson's images strive to retrieve and be in sync with becoming (through a fairly expressivist philosophy of language). In doing so, he asserts that language can be utilized in ways that contradict its regular spatialising and categorising functions. Yet, there are limitations; for we needn't forget that the Promethean is not metaphysically contingent in our being. It is perhaps for this reason that Paul Atkinson writes the following in his *Henri Bergson and Visual Culture* "*lifting the utilitarian veil is never absolute*" stressing that "more flexible concepts...act as signposts to the real".⁷⁵ Nonetheless, as I have demonstrated, the Orphic can better represent the shape of our reality; it produces what Taylor refers to as an *expressivist* vision of language. This should come as no surprise. Bergson contends that there are instances when metaphors map onto reality better than science, and that the latter is, in fact, more falsifying than the former. What we find here is that the goal of philosophy is not so much to describe intuition so as to obtain knowledge. Rather, Bergson seeks to draw the reader to her own intuitive experience; to imbue them with the Orphic spirit:

No image will replace the intuition of duration, but many different images, taken from quite different orders of things, will be able, through the convergence of their action, to direct the consciousness to the precise point where there is a certain intuition to seize on (*CM*, p. 139).

As a result, Bergson suggested that intuition seeks to reshape our language and concept of reality along the contours of duration by modifying our knowledge and perception of the world around us. Intuition is both possible and expressible. It is a faculty that transcends the limits of the intellect, and, in turn, the lovelessness of the Promethean tendency. However, take note of Bergson's subtle comment in the passage above, namely, that "no image will replace the intuition of duration" (*CM*, p. 139). What this means is that intuition, in its pure tendency (to put it in Deleuze's reading of Bergson in his *Bergsonism*) escapes us (or, we are only able to partially express B in *Figure 1.0*). Should we be worried by this? I think not.

⁷⁴ Ibid, *The Language Animal* (2016), p. 37, 174.

⁷⁵ Atkinson, Paul. *Henri Bergson and Visual Culture: A Philosophy for a New Aesthetic*. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2020, p. 210, *emphasis added*.

Instead, the intellect (insofar as language is static) mediates this vision of a world in duration to us in an expressionist fashion. In other words, intuition (as with much of Bergson's philosophy I might add) is a composite phenomenon. In other words, it is a mix of both the pure tendencies of the intellect (the Promethean) and intuition (the Orphic). Should we be worried? Again, I argue no. This is because, intuition, in its pure form is unfathomable to us. We, in a word, need the intellect to make sense of it. As such, Bergson's Orphic method of intuition, as I seek to put before the reader, can and should be read (in a Hadotian manner) as a spiritual exercise. This is because it is a form of sympathy and moves us towards love, care, and respect for the objects around us (*CE*, p. 372). Why is this significant? If we return to OOO, recall Harman's assertion that "the founding principle of object-oriented philosophy is the insight that such objects make no direct link whatsoever" to humans or objects.⁷⁶ In turn, "reality is free of all relation".⁷⁷ We should not side-step these remarks. What we observe here is that the real object is forever shut off for Harman. This creates a conundrum. Indeed, when one weighs ethical concerns, why would one love what one may never completely know or appreciate intimately? Reality appears strange within this metaphysical picture, but perhaps the unintended consequence is that we, as subjects, are unable to create meaningful connections with anything. Everything is concealed. It may reinforce our Prometheanism by making relating foreign and unfathomable. Indeed, this metaphysics' *implicit* moral philosophy is that of a radical Other. It is one in which we cannot truly know and love. In contrast, the subject strives to know things from the inside to access durations outside ourselves. By seeking to introduce us and live in tune with duration, the Orphic subject can reach a state of cosmic consciousness. This, as I see it, is what underpins Bergson's notion of love. He wants us to perceive things as they are, not through the lens of our own prejudices. We see this in his stress on the idea of sympathy in the following passage: "This second kind of knowledge would have this cinematographical method aside...It would have transported us by an effort of sympathy" (*CE*, p. 372). In other words, through Orphic spiritual exercises, Bergson wants to qualify our Promethean biases by immersing us "within the object" (*CE*, p. 194), an object he believes we may both know and love. However, Promethean operates cinematographically; it is habitual. What it sees (or, its "picture") is devoid of life, there is no "living perception of nature" (*V*, p. 98). However, philosophy (understood in the Hadotian sense) seeks to undo this (*OC*, 43e). Yet, Leszek Kolakowski (in his *Bergson*) attributes Bergson's notoriety within the history of philosophy due to his lack of method, arguing that he "inspired" but "left them *no ready-made instruments* for further research".⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Ibid, *Guerrilla metaphysics* (2005), p. 128.

⁷⁷ Ibid, *Guerrilla metaphysics* (2005), p. 47.

⁷⁸ Kolakowski, Leszek. *Bergson*. Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 101, *emphasis added*.

Indeed, he sees intuition as a primitive appeal to emotional experiences stemming from ‘eureka’ moments. However, I argue that this stems from a fundamental misinterpretation of his vision of intuition and intellect as complimentary faculties. Indeed, as Deleuze argues in the first page of masterpiece, *Bergsonism*, “intuition is *neither* a feeling, an inspiration, nor a disorderly sympathy, but a fully developed method, one of the most fully developed methods in philosophy”.⁷⁹ It aims to achieve (as he writes on the first page of his *Creative Mind*) is “precision” (CM, p. 1).

What I seek to demonstrate here is that the accusations of irrationalism and futility are based on a fundamental misunderstanding of Bergson’s views of the intellect and intuition (as well as their relationship). Bergson, in fact, devised an intuitive technique in which intuition and intellect complement and analyse one another. In other words, for him, the Orphic cannot function in isolation; it requires the metaphysical tools offered by a Promethean attitude to reality.

However, if we return to Harman, perhaps these remarks made by Kolakowski can be directed at him. Unlike Bergson, OOO’s method is controversial. Indeed, in contrast to Kant’s critical philosophy, which warns us not to let speculative reason go beyond the bounds of experience, OOO demands that we do just that. For instance, as Steven Shaviro writes in his *Universe of Things*, “we must think outside of our own thought: and we must positively conceive the existence of things outside our own perceptions of them”.⁸⁰ However, still, in their austere preservation of noumena, reality remains truly unknowable and thus, no intimacy is really possible. What Bergson seeks to do is constantly to bring us into proximity to the problem of knowing and living *in* nature through a stress on sympathy. This is absent within OOO.

Bergson as a Reader of Kant

As previously stated, Bergson challenged the intellect’s (and consequently the Promethean’s) capacity for knowing reality. This critique bolstered Bergson’s reputation as an irrationalist. Given that he was drawing on Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, such conclusions are startling. Bergson opposed Kant’s thesis that almost all knowledge is relative, although his own thought ought to be read as a continuation of Kant’s strategy of illustrating what happens to human faculties once their competencies are exceeded (in this case, attempting to express the truths of movement and life). Indeed, both believe that the intellect actively constructs reality and fails to see reality as it is.

⁷⁹ Ibid, *Bergsonism* (1988), p. 13, *emphasis added*.

⁸⁰ Shaviro, Steven. *The Universe of Things: On Speculative Realism*. University of Minnesota Press, 2014, p. 67.

Similarly, both argued that we are prone to committing errors when engaging in metaphysical enquiry. They differ when Bergson claims that humans possess an Orphic capacity for perceiving that really can lead to absolute knowledge. In other words, Bergson (unlike Kant) maintains that the Orphic enables us to better comprehend as well as live within nature. Recall what Kant himself argued in his *First Critique*. Kant believes that we cannot acquire a priori knowledge of things whose existence and essence are entirely outside the scope of the human intellect:

We can never transcend the limits of possible experience... such knowledge has to do only with appearances and must leave the thing in itself as indeed real *per se*, but as not known by us. (*CPR*, Bxix–xx).

In other words, our “picture” of the world is *our* picture of the world, a picture constructed by us and us alone (*OC*, 43e). As such, we shouldn’t at all be surprised by our tendency to see nature as a machine (*V*, p. 126). Nonetheless, Bergson criticizes Kant for never clarifying *why* the intellect is the way it is; our Promethean inclinations are just there for Kant. Bergson, on the other hand, considers the mind within an evolutionary context. In doing so, he provides a unique explanation to *P1* (and, as we shall see, a solution to *P2* as well). Bergson considers the intellect (and therefore the Promethean urge) to be human adaptations to their surroundings (*CE*, p. 168). Nonetheless, Bergson’s evolutionary approach to the problem allows us to value and esteem the intellect (as a faculty) more than a Kantian. Indeed, Bergson claims that intelligence only partially comprehends things-in-themselves and that ultimate knowledge of reality is possible. This is a result of Bergson’s empiricist inclinations. Perception is precisely where knowledge begins (and the notion that action changes perception suggests that we do in fact possess Orphic faculties). Human knowledge is defined by Kant as prospective experience, and potential experience is that which can be intuited and consolidated over space and time. As a result, Kant considers metaphysical science to be impossible. We can’t live in harmony with reality if we’re constantly cut off from it. We (as Kant would argue) are accustomed to only our way of perceiving the world around us. Is cosmic consciousness even possible with such a strong belief in the impossibility of metaphysics? Bergson remains in agreement with Kant. He too is also interested with how the intellect’s conceptual activity extends well beyond its immediate sphere. Because intelligence doesn’t quite understand temporal mobility, we only perceive the ‘snapshot’ of things before and after our action while missing the transition between the two. As a result, to reconcile the sequence of static states of events that we observe, we generate an abstract idea of movement or change. This is what Bergson means when he writes that we, as subjects, “take snapshots” of “the passing reality” (*CE*, p. 332).

This is an empirical description of change, a distortion of true duration (as in [B] in *Figure 1.0*). Bergson, like Kant, believes that metaphysics ought not to be entangled with the intellect, and the Promethean is no exception. Its activities produce deceptive beliefs which influence our perception of reality. We simply look at what serves our purposes. Bergson, on the other hand, believes that metaphysics is not impossible. In doing so, he establishes the Orphic not only as a viable option within the Anthropocene, but also as the primary channel through which we can fully comprehend and, more importantly, love reality. As previously said, intellect comprehends just a portion of reality; it does not fully grasp everything. It rejects any activity that does not serve its objectives. If we could uncover a disinterested faculty, we might experience reality as it is.⁸¹ This, I believe, is what an Orphic approach to metaphysics offers us. The intellect, as Suzanne Guerlac argues in her *Thinking with Bergson*, “imposes static frameworks... on the everchanging world of concrete becoming in order to know it and make *profitable* use of it”.⁸² Bergson, like Harman, laments the incapacity of our mediated faculties to truly know reality. Bergson, on the other hand, (despite this) does not succumb to semiophobia. It is worth noticing that Kant briefly describes a manner of knowing that he thinks is exclusively possessed by God. This, of course, is intuition, which, as he notes, is “an understanding in which through self-consciousness all the manifold would *eo ipso* be given, would be intuitive; our understanding can only think, and for intuition must look to the senses” (CPR, p. 155). Bergson agreed with Kant’s critique of the intellect. As he argues in his *Creative Mind*, the “greatest service” Kant performed for philosophy was having established that: “If metaphysics is possible, it can be so only through an *effort* of intuition. Only, having proved that intuition alone would be capable of giving us a metaphysics, he added: this intuition is *impossible*” (CM, p. 116, *emphasis added*). It is from this point that Bergson has two criticisms of Kant’s argument. *First*, that intelligence perceives a piece of reality (or, more accurately, that portion of reality he deems “matter”, which is not living and therefore does not “endure” in the critical sense) and is not wholly unconscious of things-in-themselves. *Second*, intelligence’s shortcomings are driven by its interested orientation, and minimising this enables us to recover the direct perception of reality that Kant thought was unattainable. This “displacement of our attention”, as it were, allows us to achieve a more (Orphic) “complete perception of reality” (WL, p. 253).

⁸¹ Interestingly, with regards to disinterestedness, for Kant, the aesthetic experience (i.e., and his emphasis on disinterestedness), is the closest the subject is able to get to the ‘*thing-in-itself*’. This is something which both Bergson and Weil drew from.

⁸² Guerlac, Suzanne. “Thinking with Bergson. The Last Problem: The Planet, and What It Is to Know.” *Nature and Culture*, vol. 2, 2022, pp. 18-19, doi: <https://doi.org/10.4000/bergsoniana.968>.

In other words, the purpose of intuition, contrary to Harman, is to think “beyond the human” (as Keith Ansell Pearson puts it).⁸³ The goal is to know and touch things within themselves. In terms of the former, Bergson’s Promethean metaphysical subject can know reality but does not have to exist inside nature. It cannot love life. This is because life is much more than just matter. As a result, the Promethean is partially blind to life. However, for both Hadot and Bergson, we shouldn’t at all be surprised by this. Notwithstanding (with regards to the latter) Bergson plainly places his hope in an Orphic vision of reality insofar as it allows us to not only know, but also live in sync with nature’s melody. He calls us “to look”, to “see it for itself”. In doing so, they “perceive for the sake of perceiving” for the “pure pleasure of it” (*WL*, p. 254). The contrasting metaphysical schemas are shown in *Figure 3.0*. The dichotomy between Promethean metaphysics, which values intellect, and Orphic metaphysics, which aims to know and love reality through an intuitive approach, is obvious here. As A.W Moore points out in his seminal piece, *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics*, an interesting parallel to Bergson’s Orphic approach here would be W.V Quine. Indeed, as Moore writes (in relation to Quine’s naturalistic metaphysics, or what can be described as a Promethean approach): “His opposition is not to *analysis*. It is the misappropriation of analysis... He wants to free us from the idea that analysis is the way to make sense of things”.⁸⁴ Yes, as we can see here, intuition would be impossible without the abstractions of analysis. Whatever the conflict between intuition and intellect, intuition presupposes a level of complexity that no non-human animal can attain. Indeed, as he writes, though intuition “transcends intelligence” he stresses that “it is from intelligence that has come the push that has made it rise to the point it has reached”. As such, “without intelligence, it would have remained in the form of instinct, riveted to the special object of its practical interest, and turned outward by it into movements of locomotion”. (*CE*, p. 195). As a result, Bergson respects intellect; but he despises *idolatry* of the intellect. In terms of the Promethean tendency, it requires the Orphic to not only know reality, but also live in harmony with it. Indeed, Bergson envisages a tighter collaboration between the Promethean and Orphic attitudes for this very reason. As previously said, intuition is Orphic in nature. As a result, it is better adapted to track and live in tandem with a reality in flux. The Promethean impulse, on the other hand, is not inherently adapted to do this; it, as we have seen, is not disinterested. Moreover, as Hadot would stress, it is a metaphysics predicated on egoist selves (*PAH*, p. 86).

⁸³ Ansell-Pearson, Keith. *Bergson Thinking Beyond the Human Condition*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2018.

⁸⁴ Moore, A. W. *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics: Making Sense of Things*. Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 409, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139029223>.

Indeed, as proponents of OOO would stress, the Promethean metaphysical subject will necessarily distort reality to its wishes. Bergson attempted to demonstrate that intellect-based metaphysics is essentially inadequate and unsuitable for the task. Instead of humility, the Promethean metaphysical picture presents us with a slew of dead, distinct, and immutable fragments. It is a completely artificial schema.

<i>Intuition (Orphic)</i>	<i>The Intellect (Promethean)</i>
Manifest in wholes	Manifest in parts
Duration	Space
Images	Snapshots
Useless	Practical
Continuous Multiplicities	Discrete Multiplicities
Differences in Kind	Differences in Degree

Figure 3.0: *The Promethean and Orphic in Bergson*

If we were solely trapped within the intellect, I would agree with Harman's critique of the *dictatorship* of the human within philosophy.⁸⁵ However, when one looks at reality through the lens duration, as Bergson argues, "all things acquire depth"; "something like a fourth dimension" (CM, p. 131). This is why I not only entertain the Orphic as a live possibility. This life of philosophy (as Hadot stresses) is not easy (WL, p. 275). It involves, as Bergson stresses, doing violence to the normal bent of our intellect (CM, p. 160). But, consider the benefits, indeed, recall what Hadot argues in his essay, *Ancient Man and Nature*: "It is the result of an inner effort, of a spiritual exercise designed to overcome the habitude which make our way of seeing the world banal and mechanical". These, he writes, "prevent us from seeing the world as it is, because they constrain us to focus our attention upon particular objects in which we find pleasure and utility".⁸⁶ This, as argued in the previous sub-section through language is what Bergson seeks to achieve. In doing so, he (like Charles Taylor in his *Secular Age*) allows us to re-enchant our "pictures" of the world.⁸⁷ Indeed, as I show in the following section, I look to the example of Julian Huxley, who, having read and become influenced by Bergson, sought to marry the Promethean and the Orphic. And, perhaps, the same can be done today.

Intuition's Horizons

One example of an Orphic practitioner is perhaps Julian Huxley, who, it must be stressed, was deeply Bergsonian in his metaphysical outlook. Indeed, in the preface of *The Individual in the Animal Kingdom* (a book dedicated to Bergson), Huxley states, "it will easily be seen how much I owe to M. Bergson, who, whether one agrees or not with his views, has *given a stimulus* (most valuable gift of all) to Biology and Philosophy alike".⁸⁸ Take note of the word stimulus. The question which arises here is perhaps what kind of stimulus. Indeed, both the Promethean and Orphic tendencies (understood in a Bergsonian manner) have distinct stimuli (V, p. 92, 98). What I wish to suggest here is that the stimuli Bergson offered Huxley was primarily Orphic. Indeed, as he notes in his *Essays of a Biologist*, "Bergson is a *good poet but a bad scientist*".⁸⁹ Although Huxley appears critical at first (if, that is, one reads his characterisation of Bergson as a poet as negative); yet it can be balance with the following crucial passage:

⁸⁵ Ibid, *Tool-Being* (2002), p. 2.

⁸⁶ Hadot, Pierre, et al. *The Selected Writings of Pierre Hadot: Philosophy as Practice*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020, p. 146.

⁸⁷ Ibid, *A Secular Age* (2007), p. 32.

⁸⁸ Huxley, Julian. *The Individual in the Animal Kingdom*. MIT press, 1912, pp. vii-viii.

⁸⁹ Huxley, Julian. *Essays of a Biologist*. Alfred A. Knopf, 1923, p. 33.

Intellectual vision of evolution as a fact, as something happening, something whole, to be approached in a unitary way – that is unsurpassed. Bergson seems to see it as vividly as you or I might see a hundred yards race, holding its different incidents and movements all in his mind together to form one picture.⁹⁰

What we see here is that, in Huxley's view, Bergson (and his Orphic metaphysics), was an ally to his scientific enterprise. It, after all, helps us to form a "picture" insofar that Bergsonian images seek to reintroduce the metaphysical subject within the flow of duration. This is furthered by the fact that Huxley, in a not-so-subtle hint of his Orphic tendencies, was himself a poet (as we see below). What is important here is to see the complementariness of the Orphic and Promethean attitudes. Both, for Huxley, sharpen each other; the Orphic instils in the metaphysical subject an aura of disinterestedness, while the Promethean imbues the subject the tools to truly know reality. In other words, as Emily Herring argues in her piece, *Julian Huxley's other evolutionary synthesis*, "even though Huxley did not grant the élan vital explanatory value, he did attach importance to its *descriptive power*".⁹¹ The importance of this cannot be overstated. Indeed, it implies that Bergson's Orphic vision of reality, for Huxley, was at times, closer than that which the Promethean approach offers us. Indeed, what Bergsonian Orphic metaphysics offers us is *first*, an image of life in transition, and *second*, a methodology which, in qualifying the limits of the Promethean intellect, allows the metaphysical subject to make sense of reality as it exists in and of itself. In terms of both these points, it seems as though Huxley himself engaged in *Bergsonian* spiritual exercises. It was this which, in many ways, perhaps allowed him to approach reality in an Orphic manner. Indeed, his Orphic tendencies are seen through his poetry, his bird watching⁹² and, interestingly, his witness of duration in the alps.⁹³ I believe we should read these as instances of cosmic consciousness insofar as he no longer sees nature as "rigid, strict, and methodical" (V, p. 200). As such, although one can read Huxley's comment on Bergson being "good poet but a bad scientist" in negative terms, the reality is that Huxley deeply valued Bergson's metaphysical insights. He was far from being a dictator as Harman would put it.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Ibid, Huxley (1923), p. 33

⁹¹ Herring, Emily. "Great Is Darwin and Bergson His Poet: Julian Huxley's Other Evolutionary Synthesis." *Annals of Science*, vol. 75, no. 1, 2018, p. 52, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00033790.2017.1407442>.

⁹² See in particular, Huxley, Julian. "The great crested grebe and the idea of secondary sexual characteristics." *Science*, vol. 36, 1912, pp. 601-02, and Huxley, Julian. "A first account of the courtship habits of the redshank (*Totanus calidris* L.)." *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London*, vol. 84, 1912, pp. 647-56.

⁹³ See, Ibid, *Julian Huxley's other evolutionary synthesis* (2018), p. 45 and Lunn, Arnold. *Oxford Mountaineering Essays*. Arnold, 1912, pp. 37-55.

⁹⁴ Ibid, *Tool-Being* (2002), p. 2.

In his *Memories* Huxley describes, in a positively Hadotian manner, his ‘conversion’ as the “crystallisation” of his ideas, crucially remarking that Bergsonism provided “a clear vision and inspiration which I can truly say remained with me all through my life”.⁹⁵ Bergson profoundly (as it were) altered Huxley’s “vision of the world” (*AP*, p. 3). And, importantly, such comments scattered such as this scattered throughout Huxley’s corpus.⁹⁶ Indeed, in one of his notebooks, he writes that “*Great is Darwin and Bergson his poet*”.⁹⁷ Elsewhere, he writes in his *Evolution* that “it is with this reborn Darwinism, this mutated phoenix risen from the ashes of the pyre kindled by men so unlike as Bateson and Bergson”.⁹⁸ Such comments from the outset may startle if not perplex the reader, indeed, why would a scientist need a poet?

I turn the handle and the story starts:
 Reel after reel is all astronomy,
 Till life, enkindled in a niche of sky,
 Leaps on the stage to play a million parts.
 Life leaves the slime and through all ocean darts;
 She conquers earth, and raises wings to fly;
 Then spirit blooms, and learns how not to die, —
 Nesting beyond the grave in others’ hearts

— I turn the handle: other men like me
 Have made the film: and now I sit and look
 In quiet, privileged like Divinity
 To read the roaring world as in a book.

If this thy past, where shall thy future climb,
 O Spirit, built of Elements and Time!⁹⁹

Figure 4.0 *Evolution: At the Mind’s Cinema*

However, this neglects the importance of the Orphic and the metaphysical outlook it seeks to introduce us to. As such, it is perhaps worth noting the contrasting reactions to Bergson between the two leaders in the *Modern Synthesis* (that is, both Huxley and Ernst Mayr).

⁹⁵ Huxley, Julian. *Memories I*. Allen & Unwin, 1970, p. 71.

⁹⁶ Waters, Kenneth, and Albert V. Helden, editors. *Julian Huxley: Biologist and Statesman of Science*. Texas A&M University Press, 2010.

⁹⁷ Ibid, *Julian Huxley’s other evolutionary synthesis* (2018), p. 50.

⁹⁸ Huxley, Julian. *Evolution: The Modern Synthesis*. MIT Press, 2010, p. 28.

⁹⁹ Huxley, Julian. *The Captive Shrew and Other Poems of a Biologist*. Basil Blackwell, 1932, p. 55

The Orphic, as we have shown, clearly has an aesthetic dimension (which precludes the Promethean). Indeed, as he Mayr notes in his semi-biographical piece, *What makes Biology unique*, Driesch and Bergson were the only books he dragged around “the tropics for two and a half years”.¹⁰⁰ Upon returning, Mayr further recounts that came to the conclusion that “both authors were vitalists, and I had no use for a philosophy based on such an occult force”.¹⁰¹ Some qualifications are in order with regards to Mayr. Unlike Huxley, it is very much possible that Mayr did not fully understand the philosophy of duration, and, in turn, the Orphic sympathies which undergirds Bergson’s *Creative Evolution*. As such, it is very possible that he failed to see the Orphic metaphysical images of ‘*life*’ which the élan sought to provide. Or, Mayr’s own veil could have been “dense and opaque” (L, p. 150), or that Mayr was thoroughly Promethean in his own metaphysical outlook. Nonetheless, this shows that we can indeed choose approach reality in an Orphic manner. Huxley, as I have shown, is proof of this. For Huxley’s Orphic metaphysical outlook cements in many ways how metaphysics must always be conversation with aesthetic considerations. He achieves what Hadot himself calls us to do, namely, to marry the scientific and aesthetic to gain “an authentic knowledge of nature” (V, p. 317). It, writes Hadot, is “an ideal of disinterested knowledge that has no other goal than itself.” (V, p. 188). The link between the two is not accidental. Indeed, as I see it, an Orphic metaphysics (by necessity) must be concerned and moved by questions in aesthetics. Put simply, Bergsonian intuition, by imbuing the metaphysical subject within a clout of disinterestedness, seeks to place the reality before us in the foreground (that is, it is no longer a background concern). Indeed, this is what appears before us in a state of Orphic cosmic consciousness, which, as we see, is thoroughly aesthetic. The natural world, although usually in the background of everyday life, becomes real, true, and good; we, in other words see it as it is. Rather, we are displaced and seek to live in tune with all that is us. We need only consider Hadot’s comments on Bergson’s philosophy in his *Veil of Isis*, namely, that it “ought to lead to a *complete change* in our way of perceiving the world” (V, p. 212). It is this which Bergson, in his Orphic vision of reality, seeks to do in his readers; he wants to convert us. This Orphic vision of reality, writes Paul Atkinson, “eschews utility in terms of the capacity of an object to be acted upon, and in doing so, *opens up* the imagination to an aesthetic way of engaging with the object as phenomenon”.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Mayr, Ernst W. *What Makes Biology Unique?: Considerations on the Autonomy of a Scientific Discipline*. Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 2.

¹⁰¹ Nicholson, Daniel J., and Richard Gawne. “Neither Logical Empiricism nor Vitalism, but Organicism: What the Philosophy of Biology Was.” *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences*, vol. 37, no. 4, 2015, p. 355, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40656-015-0085-7>.

¹⁰² Ibid, *Henri Bergson and Visual Culture* (2020), p. 234.

This, as we have seen, is because aesthetic perception, for Bergson, is necessarily Orphic. It is not something that the Promethean metaphysical subject is truly capable of. Indeed, to support this assertion, we need only consider Bergson's comments in his *Creative Mind*. Here, he implicitly addresses some of Kant's concerns through the artists' innate Orphic perception:

When they look at a thing, they see it for itself, and not for themselves. They do not perceive simply with a view to action; they perceive in order to... They are born *detached*... It is therefore a much more direct vision of reality... because the artist is less intent on utilizing his perception that he perceives a greater number of things (CM, p. 114, *emphasis added*).

Nonetheless, before concluding this sub-section, it is worth noting that, for Bergson, philosophers also attain a "direct vision of reality" by reducing the "practical purpose" of perceptual attention (CM, p. 114). Indeed, the philosopher, so as to attain an Orphic vision of reality, must work towards a particular attitude through the cultivation of an intuitive approach. This contrasts with the artist, who, as we see from above, is detached from the outset. Put another way, the philosopher is necessarily called to be *both* Orphic and Promethean (this is what is implied by intuition). But, unlike the artist, this is done by balancing the excesses of the Promethean tendency in and through the Orphic approach. This is what we see in the example of Huxley, and we, like him can choose to live within this "picture" of reality if we so wished to do so (AP, p. 3). Now, after having gone through much of Bergson's philosophical oeuvre, I now wish to move to his final piece, *Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (hereafter *Two Sources*).

The Intellect as an Egoist Self

Thus far, I've understood the interaction between Orphic and Promethean inclinations within a single subject. In doing so, I have read Bergson as an Orphic metaphysician who can help us to live in harmony with reality. A subject guided by Orphic concerns will strive to balance, if not qualify, their promethean impulses through his intuitional method. As previously said, this is one way to handle the Anthropocene (*albeit*, at the micro scale). Nonetheless, if it was the only account I presented, it would fall short of addressing our collective challenge of lovelessness. To genuinely confront the problem of living within Anthropocene, I propose that humanity must (as a whole) become more Orphic.

To address this, I look at Bergson's final written work, *Two Sources* and introduce his vision of "closed" and "open" morality. In doing so, I draw from Idella Gallagher's account of Bergson's moral philosophy, specifically, her piece, *Morality in Evolution*.¹⁰³ The aim of this is to continue to link him to Hadot's idea of the Promethean and Orphic tendencies. And (as we'll see) Bergson reframes our plight within the Anthropocene in a distinctive and, as shall see, holistic way (that is, he addresses *P2* by reframing *P1*). For Bergson, open morality seeks to uphold a harmonious connection to the natural world through aesthetic cosmic consciousness. In order to understand the species-level tensions between Promethean and Orphic tendencies, I will be to shedding light on the relationship between the biological epistemology he develops in his *Creative Evolution* and his moral philosophy in *Two Sources* (with a focus on his vision of the mystics). In his *Creative Evolution*, Bergson bequeaths to us an evolutionary (or, biological) epistemology. He claims that the intellect is inclined towards immobility (as seen in *Figure 1.0*). Indeed, we necessarily become accustomed to seeing only (A) at the expense of (B). What should be clear by now is that this is symbolic of our Promethean tendencies, which, as shown in the previous subsections, is why the intellect is metaphysically defective: it blocks us from becoming. Bergson criticises our proclivity for modifying the basic contours of reality to suit our own interests. This indifference (according to Bergson) stems from a Promethean need to "tear up" for survival (*CE*, p. 166, 170, 339). After all, this is what (A) in *Figure 1.0* amounts to. The urge of the intellect to manipulate and 'staticises' reality (if we're allowed to make up words) has a moral component (as has been made rather implicitly thus far). Indeed, as I argue, it exemplifies the pinnacle of human morality. "Closed morality" and the closed society are interested. That is, akin to how the intellect operates, it is moved by the demands of action (*CE*, p. 34). As I will explain, this is *distinct* from what Bergson refers to as "open morality" (which I read as being inspired by Orphic concerns).

However, before we proceed, we must first identify and define the terms needed to guide our discussion of his *Two Sources*. According to Bergson, closed morality is a closed and consequently not universal love. However, it is a type of love, but it is a closed, selective, and exclusive kind of love; but it is loveless towards what is not human (*V*, p. 95). In contrast, open morality is an inclusive and universal love. As I argue, this distinction between love allows us to pave the groundwork for balancing our Promethean predisposition in and through the Orphic.

¹⁰³ Gallagher, Idella J. *Morality in Evolution: The Moral Philosophy of Henri Bergson*. 1970. Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1970.

Now, let's proceed to examine the extent of the problem. For Bergson, insofar as it is passed on through evolution, action corresponds to Promethean perception (*TSMR*, p. 224). We live, move, and have our being because of our intelligence (*CE*, p. 34). That is, akin to how the intellect imposes itself and 'staticises' a reality in duration (as seen in *Figure 1.0* in [A]), "matter is made to appear to our thought as an immense piece of cloth in which we can cut out what we will and sew it together again as we please" (*CE*, p. 172). Beyond all else, it desires control. This is echoed through OOO's critique of western metaphysics. For example (and here, we can relate Bergson's concerns to Hadot's comments concerning the "mathematization of nature" [*V*, p. 128]) what emerged within the early modern period were philosophies which affirmed "universal mechanism" (*CE*, p. 345). Such a worldview (which we ought to read as Promethean) sees humans as overlords of nature. Moreover, it sees nature as a machine, or, as Hadot would argue, as "banal and mechanical".¹⁰⁴ And, as such, does not strive to qualify the "egoist self" but seeks to impose its interests on the non-human (*PAH*, p. 86). Indeed, as he writes in *Creative Evolution*:

All the elementary forces of the intellect tend to transform matter into an instrument of action, that is, in the etymological sense of the word, into an organ (*CE*, p. 178).

That is (agreement with Harman) the intellect's Promethean leaning tends to turn everything into a tool for our use. Above all, these tools serve as a mirror of who we are and our interests; it empowers us to shape reality to according to our wishes and desires.

What I wish to suggest is that there is no cosmic consciousness within this picture. Rather, reality becomes recast as a tool (or, machine) for our benefit (*V*, p. 126). Diagrammatically, we can visualize the situation the manner seen in *Figure 5.0*. Here, the circle denoted by the 'human' reflects our areas of concerns and interests. Crucially however, given our 'anthropocentrism' (to borrow from OOO) means that our reading of reality excludes much which is not human from our moral considerations. Indeed, this is what line *A* in *Figure 5.0* represents, namely, the 'screening' of the non-human from our "picture" of the world (*OC*, 30e). Bergson, on the other hand, sees intuition as something that qualifies our Promethean bent (that is, to the intellect). Indeed, as he argues in *Creative Evolution*, intuition "will not extend our empire over nature, it will even go against certain natural aspirations of the intellect". Crucially though, "if it succeeds, it is reality itself" that we grasp and, in turn, can love (*CE*, p. 372).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, *The Selected Writings of Pierre Hadot* (2020), p. 146.

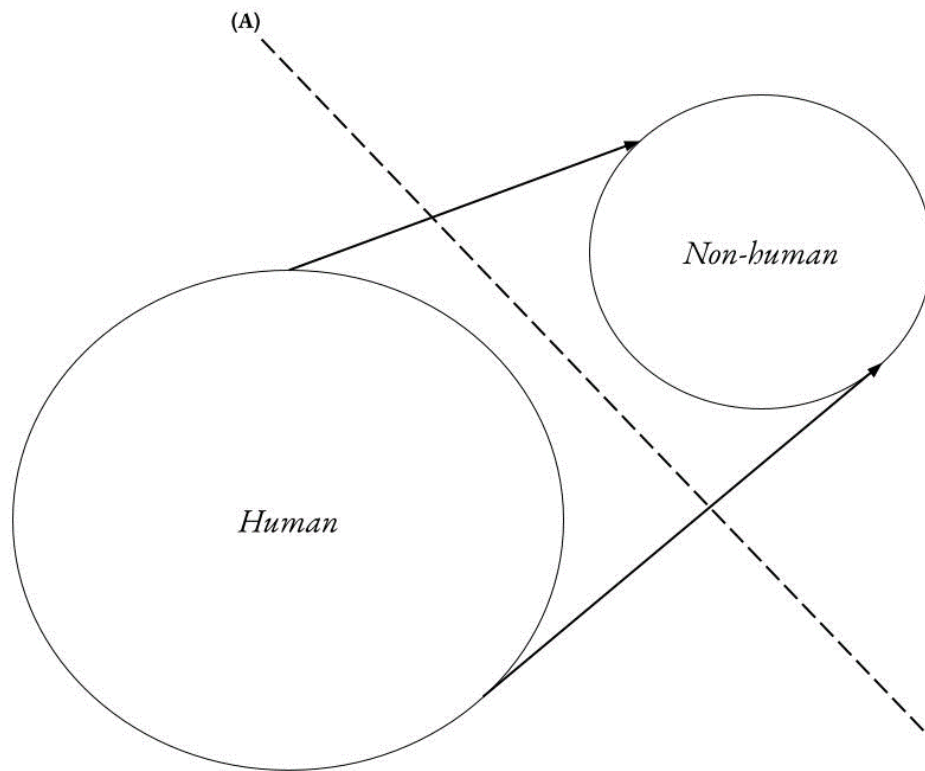


Figure 5.0 *Closed and the Non-human*

Within the Anthropocene, this is the sort of philosophy (understood in a Hadotian sense) which is needed. As a result, I shall concentrate on the main thesis from his *Two Sources*, namely, that of closed and open societies in relation to *P2*, with a specific focus on his vision of the mystics. In doing so, I seek to connect my reading of Bergson with other interpretative works on *Two Sources*, including (of course), the edited collection of pieces in *Bergson, Politics, and Religion*.¹⁰⁵ The goal is to lay forth Bergson's argument, as well as its relevance in providing a diagnosis, but also a prescription that, unlike OOO, is not plagued by anti-human semiophobia.

Open and Closed Societies

Given the nature of the intellect (and, the closed society) an Orphic 'open' morality is the only way to overcome the closed disposition that undergirds the Prometheanism of our species.

¹⁰⁵ Lefebvre, Alexandre, and Melanie Allison White. *Bergson, Politics, and Religion*. Duke University Press, 2012, p. 90.

Indeed, as seen and explained in *Figure 5.0*, only the members of closed societies are subject to moral and social obligations (and, in turn, their benefits). As he writes in his *Two Sources*, “the closed society is that whose members hold together, caring nothing for the rest of humanity, on the alert for attack or defence, bound, in fact, to a perpetual readiness to battle” (*TSMR*, p. 255). Indeed, as Alexandre Lefebvre argues in his *Human Rights as a Way of Life*, the closed society above all “excludes”. In other words, it acts as an egoist on a grand scale (*PAH*, p. 86).¹⁰⁶ Such (as it were), is the social imaginary of the closed society. It is one of duty, one care, and one which seeks to uphold dignity towards what is necessarily human over what is non-human. What I want to emphasise here is that the overarching concern of *Two Sources* revolves around how a society (or, rather, the human species) might become more open. That is (returning to *Figure 5.0*), how might the benefits and privileges of being members of mankind be extended to the non-human? But keep in mind the challenges our species faces.

In relation to *P1*, the intellect (the driving force behind Prometheism) is not contingent. It has (as his *Creative Evolution* argues) been passed down via our evolutionary process. As such, in order to combat our tendency towards closure, our species must transcend itself (*CE*, p. 78). In what follows, I show that “dynamic” morality (and, consequently, open morality) in *Two Sources* shares similarities to the way *Creative Evolution* views intuition: both reintroduce movement. But first, I shall link his idea of “static religion” to the two key conceptual problems we are seeking to address.

According to Bergson, “static religion” and the “closed society” ought to be thought of as negative aspects of intelligence (*TSMR*, p. 22, 168). Indeed, applied here, the closed society is self-centred and strives to uphold humanity; it is moved solely by human concerns (*PAH*, p. 86). In turn, we connect with nature (overall) in a Promethean fashion. Crucially, such societies inhabit forms of life which revolves “at one spot” (*TSMR*, p. 188). In other words, like the intellect, there is no becoming in this “picture”. This is perhaps why mystics are crucial to Bergson’s moral philosophy in his *Two Sources*. Indeed, in a similar manner to his accounts of intuition in both his *Creative Evolution* and *Creative Mind*, the mystics reintroduce movement in our lives. However, in contrast to these earlier works, this movement is done within the context of our moral lives, not our perception.

¹⁰⁶ Lefebvre, Alexandre. *Human Rights As a Way of Life: On Bergson’s Political Philosophy*. Stanford University Press, 2013, pp. 3-70.

They, as it were, reintroduce us into the flow of becoming: to inhabit (B) and not (A) in *Figure 1.0*.¹⁰⁷ It is they who allow us to inhabit ways of life which are better predisposed to coexistence with the non-human within the Anthropocene. This, as I read it, is how Bergson would frame the connection between *P1* and *P2*. Indeed, when we consider Bergson's vision of static religion, his main critique of it centres on the fact that forms of life become entrenched and self-perpetuating. In other words, there is no movement and we become disconnected from becoming. Indeed, we could say (relation to *P1*) both "static religion" and the "closed society" restrict love to mankind and reinforce closure. In doing so, they perpetuate Promethean forms of life. But simultaneously, he sees "open love" as the solution to *P2* as it the mystics who reintroduce us to becoming. Mystics, he writes, "draw us in their wake" (*TSMR*, p. 87). They introduce to us a love into the world which is without preference. Yet, we come to inhabit their ways of life not in and through pressure, but by "appeal" and "aspiration" (*TSMR*, p. 74). In contrast, the closed society, as Bergson understands it, is reinforced and given life by social pressure (*TSMR*, p. 25). This, as he writes, is the source of "social obligation" and "social necessity" which in turn, reinforce our forms of life (*TSMR*, p. 2). Indeed, the "habits of obedience" Bergson speaks of lead to social conformity in our ways of being (*TSMR*, p. 2). This is why collective habits may impose moral obligations on individuals, which in turn may complicate *P2*. Indeed, it explains *P1* by showing how and why Prometheanism is historically engrained within us as a species. This is why, as we see below, Bergson would have many issues with solutions proposed from a Kantian perspective. Love, for Bergson is an emotion, but is unique insofar as it challenges the social pressure and obligations which regulate the closed society. Indeed, Lefebvre sees love as "an emotion with sufficient force to *challenge* pressure".¹⁰⁸ This, as I put to the reader, is what is missing within the respective Kantian theories we treat below, but also in OOO. In terms of the former, as will become clear, a Kantian emphasis on "practical reason is unsuitable because it lacks motivational force".¹⁰⁹ In turn, it fails to address the problem of social pressure that Bergson highlights through *Two Sources*. But similarly, it is also readily applicable to the latter. Indeed, OOO sees us as incapable of love; as well as a futility in being anything other than anthropocentric. To put it another way, those in tune with the *elan* "disclose love" to us, they, as Lefebvre writes, "bring it into the world".¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ What I wish to put to the reader is that in both works, Bergson's overarching aim is to reintroduce movement in the lives of subjects: we see this both at an individual level as we qualify the intellect through intuition as well as the closed tendency through open love. This, as it were, is what it means to occupy (B) in both cases.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, *Human Rights as a Way of Life* (2013), p. 69, *emphasis added*.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, *Human Rights as a Way of Life* (2013), p. 70.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, *Human Rights as a Way of Life* (2013), p. 88.

Their fervor, as Bergson notes, is “the counterpart of social pressure” needed to entrench open love (TSMR, p. 31, 87). Mystics, to borrow from Taylor’s *Language Animal* “introduce new meanings” into the world as well as new ways to interacting with reality through the lives they lived.¹¹¹ Social pressure then, we could say, problematises *P1*, but the counteraction of emotion is how Bergson would frame and respond to *P2*.¹¹²

Now, better grasp and understand Bergson’s thesis regarding our bent towards closure, it might prove fruitful to assess it against prominent Kantian philosophies. This is because Bergson himself discusses the Kantian categorical imperative in *Two Sources*. The categorical imperative (which Kant introduces in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*)¹¹³ in Bergson’s view, applies only to humans. As such, the argument put forward by Korsgaard in her *Fellow Creatures* fails.¹¹⁴ In what follows, we will see why. Because we alone are autonomous beings, we alone (she argues) can ‘legislate’ the value in the world.¹¹⁵ As such, she implores us to consider the moral worth and status of non-humans that are similar to us in nature. Nonetheless, Bergson believes that the intellect and its propensity towards closure hinders such a philosophy. That is (due to the intellect) we only value objects that benefit (or, interest) us. Indeed, what if the social imaginary (such as that of the closed society) reinforces closure as in *P2*? It, in other words, ignores the “picture” of the world citizens may inhabit (OC, 30e). Moreover, there is reason to doubt its normative value within the Anthropocene. Indeed, as Pierfrancesco Biasetti argues in her piece, *From Beauty to Love*, the issue is that Korsgaard “does not allow for annexing into the moral realm the multifaceted concept of the environment”.¹¹⁶ In other words, Biasetti suggests that (if we again relate this to *Figure 5.0*) although Korsgaard would allow us to esteem some non-humans, her approach will still actively exclude others within the Anthropocene. This is inherently because (as we shall see) it ignores Bergson’s framing of *P1*.

¹¹¹ Ibid, *Language Animal* (2016), p. 227

¹¹² Here, the reader may ask, how does the closed society relate to our understanding of Prometheanism? In his *Human Rights as a Way of Life*, Lefebvre (in relation to Bergson’s understanding of pressure) makes a distinction between pressure which seeks to root out ‘internal’ conflicts as well as unify against ‘external’ conflicts. He terms these as ‘the egoist’ and ‘the enemy’. The latter, in terms of moral obligation “provides the necessary discipline to protect society from an external threat”. Recall that Prometheanism often sees nature as hostile, something to be tamed and used for our benefit. In other words, it has its roots in the need for protection. Indeed, the closed society is geared by a “perpetual readiness for battle” (TSMR, p. 1). Seen this way, it goes a long way to understanding how Bergson would frame *P1*. The intellect, to put it another way, is moved by the needs of action, or, in other words, survival (CE, p. 51, 168). See, Ibid, *Human Rights as a Way of Life* (2013), p. 22.

¹¹³ Kant, Immanuel, et al. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals: a German-English edition*. Edited by Jens Timmermann, Translated by Mary J. Gregor, Cambridge University Press, 2011.

¹¹⁴ Korsgaard, Christine. *Fellow Creatures: Our Obligations to the Other Animals*, Oxford University Press, 2018.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, *Fellow Creatures* (2004), p. 95.

¹¹⁶ Biasetti, Pierfrancesco. “From Beauty to Love: A Kantian Way to Environmental Moral Theory?” *Environmental Philosophy*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2015, pp. 143, doi: <https://doi.org/10.5840/envirophil201511927>.

What I wish to suggest is that only an open morality will be genuinely capable of esteeming and valuing the non-human in a manner Korsgaard would have us do. However, although *Two Sources* argues that the open tendency is predominately aimed at all humanity it can go beyond it (moreover if it didn't, it would still be a closed morality). Indeed (by his own admission) it can go even further. This because its love "is not dependent on its content" (*TSMR*, p. 30). In other words (as Lefebvre writes) it is a "picture love without any exclusion at all".¹¹⁷ A humanity whose love is animated by open concerns, Bergson writes, "may extend to animals, to plants, to all nature" (*TSMR*, p. 30). As such, because open love has no centre, we (as it were) rise from "anthropological and egoistical point of view" and come to take on "the perspective of the cosmos and nature" (*PAH*, p. 95). But this comes about through intuition and not intelligence (*TSMR*, pp. 200-201). Indeed, it is perhaps what undergirds Gallagher's comment in her piece *Morality in Evolution* that we (as a species) are "incomplete" but, through intuition we are able to "transcend" our "present condition".¹¹⁸ This is because the harmony of the Orphic (and, in turn, cosmic consciousness) is something which a survival and intellect-oriented Promethean cannot achieve (*CE*, p. 14). Korsgaard dismisses this (as do the majority of Kantians). The legislator in her philosophy may be well be compelled by either "closed" or "open" considerations (of course, more likely 'closed'). If the former moves them, they will want to increase our control over nature (as Descartes and his Promethean successors exhorts us to do) (*CE*, p. 343). The latter, though, won't; they can solve *P2*. Only intuitive people (that is, the mystics) are capable of making this leap. And it is for this very reason that the mystics in *Two Sources* drive Bergson's vision of a "dynamic" morality and his solution to *P2* (*TSMR*, p. 258). Indeed, as Lefebvre argues, Bergson notes "down facts that do not fit the mould of the closed society" adding that his approach is empirical insofar that he "records occasions in which love is not exclusive".¹¹⁹ Mystics accomplish this in a twofold manner. *First*, they free themselves from the social pressure which regulates and enforces the closed society (*TSMR*, p. 87). This means that the situation in *Figure 5.0* simply doesn't apply to them. Moreover, sees mystics as being driven by what he calls the 'élan vital', or the "vital impetus" (*TSMR*, p. 223). He claims that it is an intense feeling that (in the absence of social pressure) propels intuitive individuals. It is an emotion (he claims) that is reserved for "privileged individuals" (*TSMR*, p. 257). *Second*, (due to the élan) open morality opens up morality beyond the bounds of humanity precisely because these mystics, Bergson argues, "impart it" (that is, the élan) "to all humanity".

¹¹⁷ Ibid, *Human Rights as a Way of Life* (2013), p. 91.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, *Morality in Evolution* (1970), p. 52.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, *Human Rights as a Way of Life* (2013), p. 87.

Indeed, the open tendency entrenches moral cosmopolitanism into our moral concerns through an “intensification of innate sympathy” in and through imitation of these mystics (*TSMR*, p. 223). It is for this reason that he sees open morality as nothing less than a “mystical society” that can be non-anthropocentric in its moral concerns (*TSMR*, p. 75).¹²⁰ The significance of mystics in Bergson’s philosophical oeuvre is therefore crucial. They are the ones that transform morality from a closed to an open and Orphic form. But, who for Bergson, are these mystics? For him, it is the saints of Christianity and the person of Christ Himself (*TSMR*, p. 216, 228). They are the ones who, as Bergson puts it, “broke the dam”, allowing us to be more than just Prometheans (*TSMR*, p. 216). In doing so, they introduce us into a new “picture” of the world and a new way of seeing and interacting within it (*OC*, 43e). In relation to *P1*, Bergson looks for instances where we have been Orphic. Indeed, as Alfaro Altamirano puts it in her recent work, the *Belief of Intuition*, what undergirds Bergson’s vision of these great spiritual is that through imitation “it fosters the development of one’s individual personality”.¹²¹ That is, they persuade us (to borrow from Wittgenstein) to live out the Orphic in and through imitation (*TSMR*, p. 90). This picture, as it were (in a crucial Bergsonian manner) is of a *different kind* to the world of the closed soul. Indeed, those who are attuned with the élan alone challenge our closed inherited backgrounds (*OC*, 15a). Without them, there would be no chance for humanity to transcend the Promethean inside the Anthropocene. In doing so, they introduce movement back into the moral life (that is, the contrast between A and B in *Figure 1.0*). In turn, they allow us to ground a morality predicated on something other than “self-preservation” (*TSMR*, p. 43). Indeed, although Plato saw participation in the Whole as a privilege reserved for “chosen souls” but Bergson’s mystics *democratise* these emotions and experiences (*TSMR*, p. 256). That is, we can all be ‘philosophers’ (*AP*, p. 3). In turn, individual humans can become bearers of the élan. Bergson asserts that mysticism results in nothing less than the transcendence of the human species and ultimately triumphs over evolutionary morality:

The great mystic is to be conceived as an individual being, capable of *transcending* the limitations imposed on the species by its material nature, thus continuing and extending the divine action (*TSMR*, p. 209, *emphasis added*).

But what exactly are these limitations? It is our inability to be intuitive beings, and (equally) beings animated by open love. Human freedom is founded on our ability to do both.

¹²⁰ Again, see my comments on Bergson’s focus on “all humanity” in relation to the nature of the open tendency.

¹²¹ Altamirano, Adriana A. *The Belief in Intuition Individuality and Authority in Henri Bergson and Max Scheler*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021, p. 121.

This is the gift that mystics have bequeathed to us as a species. By accepting an Orphic open morality (and therefore solve *P2*) we may very well be agents of love in the Anthropocene. This is what he means when, at the end of *Two Sources*, he says we don't realize that we have freedom (and control) over our fate. We have "only to make the extra effort" (*TSMR*, p. 306). But it is more than this once we consider the historical bent to *P1*. Indeed, Bergson would point out to us that the Orphic is a live possibility given the very existence of the open tendency in the past. We, as it were, can undergo the "process of opening" from being closed to open souls (*TSMR*, p. 55). What can we infer from this then? *First*, perhaps Bergson would first and foremost see the Anthropocene as but a logical consequence of both the intellect and the closed society. Both, as it were, mould reality to our interests. *Second*, he would suggest we actually have the resources to address these deficiencies through his response to *P2* (that is, intuition and open love). This is what is missing within Harman's metaphysical picture, not only the choice to be better but perhaps, the fact that we have achieved this in the past (*AP*, p. 3). Indeed, as I argue, intuition in many ways seeks to *qualify* the human dictatorship within philosophy which Harman laments against without imposing an anti-humanism.¹²² By pointing out that the open tendency presupposes a logocentric morality (that is, one which bridges the human and non-human in *Figure 5.0*), we can further highlight the value of Bergsonism within the Anthropocene.

This gives us credence to consider Allen Wood's modification of Kant's moral theory in his paper *Kant on Duties Regarding Nonrational Nature* alongside our reading of *Two Sources*. Here, Wood seeks to address Kant's speciesism by seeking to read him as a 'logocentric' thinker. He asserts that setting aside his "personification principle" enables us to value beings with "fragmented" rationality, which, of course, includes the vast majority of sentient beings (if not all of them).¹²³ In light of this, Wood's strategy is preferable to Korsgaard's (that is, with regards to Biasatti's comments). His Kantian 'logocentric' cosmopolitanism (by including much of what Korsgaard would exclude) sees us as the "preservers and guarantors" of nature.¹²⁴ For Bergson, does this address *P2*? I don't think so. Indeed, we can perhaps qualify Wood's position through Bergson's *implicit* critique of Durkheim in *Two Sources*, or, as Lefebvre calls it, the "picture of morality" which undergirds it.¹²⁵ Bergson's issue with this is perhaps twofold. *First*, (as noted previously), he believes that the categorical imperative only pertains to human beings.

¹²² Ibid, *Tool-Being* (2002), p. 2.

¹²³ Ibid, *Kant on Duties Regarding Nonrational Nature* (1998), p. 195, 198.

¹²⁴ Ibid, *Kant on Duties Regarding Nonrational Nature* (1998), p. 204.

¹²⁵ But, instead of expanding love from the family to country and to mankind, the elimination of the personification principle attempts to extend morality even further, namely, to all of life, see, Ibid, *Lefebvre* (2013), p. 3.

Indeed, the extension of morality that Wood envisages frames the problem in terms of differences in degree and not of kind. This is what undergirds his comment in *Two Sources* that “never shall we pass from the closed society to the open society... by any mere broadening out” (TSMR, p. 256). Indeed, a closed soul (by definition) will not respect (or, love) beings with “fragmented” rationality.¹²⁶ In contrast, this is what the open soul can achieve; its love, as Bergson argues, “may extend to animals, to plants, to all nature” (TSMR, p. 30). *Second*, for Bergson, biology is the foundation of everything. Indeed, “all morality” he argues is “in essence biological” (TSMR, p. 91). This is the fundamental error of framing the problem as a difference in degree and not one of kind. In turn, Wood’s vision of a logocentric morality (insofar as he frames *P2* as a problem of degrees and not of kind) cannot be achieved by any “mere broadening out” (TSMR, p. 256). What I wish to suggest is that the difficulty with the Kantian perspective (that is, both Korsgaard and Woods’ accounts) is that both remain confined within the limits of intellect as well as the social pressure which enforce the closed society.. Humanity is, in a sense, bound to intelligence (or, an interested morality). What is required is an ontological leap beyond the human, or, more precisely, a qualification of our species’ Promethean predilections. Kantian moral theory, as Lefebvre writes, “over privileges reason at the expense of emotion”.¹²⁷ This is precisely why it lacks the “motivational power” to counteract our Promethean predilections. Emotion alone, Bergson makes clear, is able to address our propensity to closure. They, that is the mystics, “communicate to us something of their fervour, and draw us in their wake” (TSMR, p. 50, 88). What we see here then is that both Korsgaard and Wood’s respective philosophies fail to address the social pressure which gives life to the closed society. In turn, they confine us to (A) in *Figure 1.0*.

Notwithstanding, it is important to note that for Bergson, humanity (in a sense) will always be both Promethean and Orphic. This is something which we also see in Lefebvre’s reading of Bergson’s *Two Sources*, namely, that we are “composite all the way down”.¹²⁸ That is, while mystics introduce us (through imitation) into a new “picture” of the world, for Bergson, even if we choose to do so, we remain neither fully closed nor fully open (OC, 43e). And this is not necessarily a bad thing (contra OOO). Indeed, as he writes, there is a “great obstacle” preventing “the creation of a divine humanity”:

¹²⁶ This goes to show how pivotal the cosmic consciousness afforded by the open soul is for Bergson. Without them, we would be trapped within pure intelligence. This is perhaps why in *Two sources*, the open soul is a “whisper of an echo” within most of us (TSMR, p. 203).

¹²⁷ Ibid, *Human Rights as a Way of Life* (2013), p. 50

¹²⁸ Ibid, *Human Rights as a Way of Life* (2013), p. 137.

Man has to earn his bread with the sweat of his brow; in other words, humanity is an animal species, and, as such, subject to the law which governs the animal world and condemns the living to batten upon the living. Since he has to contend for his food both with nature and with his own kind, he necessarily expends his energies procuring it; his intelligence is designed for the very object of supplying him with weapons and tools, with a view to that struggle and that toil. *How* then, in these conditions, could humanity turn heavenwards an attention which is essentially concentrated on earth? (TSMR, p. 224, *emphasis added*).

Let's analyse this passage near the ending of *Two Sources* in greater detail. Bergson clearly believes in the vocation of a "divine humanity". However, he simultaneously sees obstacles in our path to achieving this (TSMR, p. 224). Indeed, far from degrading intelligence and its epistemic deficiencies, Bergson prizes its survival orientation within our "struggle" and "toil" here below. Indeed, intellect (insofar as it is Promethean) is moved by a love for humanity. This is also how Hadot describes Prometheanism, and, also how the Prometheus myth itself has been interpreted (V, p. 98). Indeed, we were gifted fire to help us live in the fallen world below. As such, while mystics (and, with it, the open tendency) call us to divinity, Bergson's philosophy still gives credence to human needs and concerns. In relation to P2, we (after all) are not mystics. Indeed, mysticism within most of us is but "a whisper of an echo". Those who are not mystics still have to "earn" their bread (TSMR, p. 203, 224). What this means is that love (understood as a composite phenomenon) is not "like oil and water". Rather, as Lefebvre argues, "they form a solution, all the while remaining different in kind".¹²⁹ This is perhaps what is underplayed by Michael Bennett in his original piece, *Bergson's Environmental Aesthetics* (which has been very influential in my reading of Bergson's *Two Sources*).¹³⁰ Indeed, Bennett reads Bergson's vision of open and closed societies almost in an either/or manner and very much sidesteps the composite nature of this theory. It is this which undergirds his rather "monist" reading of the "open morality" of the mystics throughout his piece.¹³¹ That is, although he seeks to move beyond "a kind of straightforward dualism", in many ways, he actually doesn't.¹³² While preserving the "autonomous thing-in-itself" (as Harman implores us to do) might sound like a good thing, as Bergson points out, it might all the while be impractical.¹³³

¹²⁹ Ibid, *Human Rights as a Way of Life* (2013), p. 124.

¹³⁰ Bennett, Michael James. "Bergson's Environmental Aesthetic." *Environmental Philosophy*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2012, pp. 67–94, <https://doi.org/10.5840/envirophil20129220>.

¹³¹ Ibid, *Bergson's Environmental Aesthetic* (2012), p. 68, 82, 92.

¹³² Ibid, *Bergson's Environmental Aesthetic* (2012), p. 87.

¹³³ Ibid, *Art and Objects* (2019), p. 4.

However, this is what undergirds Richard Vernon's reading of *Two Sources* in his essay, *Bergson and Political Theory*.¹³⁴ Indeed, in it, draws connections between Bergson's understanding of composites and Saint Augustine's vision of the "Two Cities" described in *The City of God* (specifically, *Books XI–XXII*). For Vernon, Bergson sees an "intermingling" between our open and closed natures when we embark on a life of philosophy (*AP*, p. 3).¹³⁵ What is perhaps most intriguing however is that Hadot describes philosophy as a way of life in almost identical terms:

The normal, natural state of men should be wisdom... For such a man, daily life, as it is organised and lived by other men, must necessarily appear abnormal, like a state of madness, unconsciousness, and ignorance of reality... And it is precisely in this daily life that he must seek to attain that way of life which is utterly foreign to the everyday world... *This conflict can never be totally resolved* (*WL*, p. 58, *emphasis added*).

Bergson contends that we can transcend the metaphysics produced by a survival-oriented intellect, albeit only partially. Although we can be logocentric beings, we will always live (as composite beings) within two "pictures" of the world (*OC*, 43e). Indeed, as Hadot writes, we remain "inseparable" from the everyday Promethean vision of reality precisely because of our human needs (*PAH*, p. 179). He acknowledges this as much when he suggests that the two orientations are "often found united in the same person" (*V*, p. 97). In Bergson's case, we after all (despite his vision of a "divine humanity") are not gods, instead, we are an "animal species" (*TSMR*, p. 224). This, as I see it, is how Bergson would respond to Sharpe call for a "sustainable balance" between the Promethean and the Orphic.¹³⁶ However, is this necessarily a bad thing? I think not. Is this really a dictatorship of the human? Again, I think not. Indeed, unlike OOO, Bergson avoids the anthropocentric rhetoric. In doing so, he reframes the issue within the purviews of the closed tendency and a rampant Prometheanism. Indeed, we can perhaps visualise Bergson's 'composite' solution in the manner seen in *Figure 6.0*. Here (as in *Figure 5.0*), the circle denoted by the human is representative of our interests and concerns. However, notice the subtle difference between this and the previous diagram, namely, that it also encompasses part of the non-human. In other words, Bergson's composite solution calls us to be both closed and open; this is what it means to occupy point *A* in the diagram. It is (as Deleuze would argue in his *Bergsonism*) a clear example of a false problem (or a badly stated problem at that).

¹³⁴ Lefebvre, Alexandre, and Nils F. Schott. "Bergson and Political Theory." *Interpreting Bergson*, Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 155–71, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108367455.010>.

¹³⁵ Ibid, *Bergson and Political Theory* (2019), p. 159.

¹³⁶ Hadot, Pierre. *The Selected Writings of Pierre Hadot: Philosophy As Practice*, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2020, p. 20.

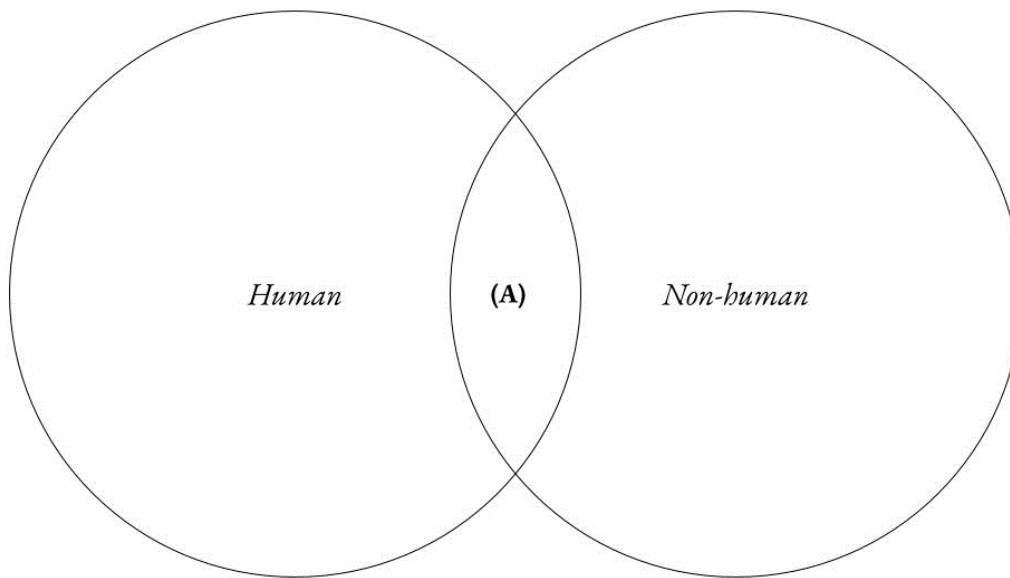


Figure 6.0: Bergson's Composite Solution¹³⁷

Indeed, recall the purpose of Hadot's *Veil of Isis*. Although it is intended to be descriptive, it also aimed to be prescriptive. In it, it becomes clear Hadot sought to present the Orphic as a means of qualifying our dominant Prometheanism (which, on its own is not an evil in and of itself). In a word, he sought to bridge the two through a reconciliation. Indeed, the Orphic is seen as the means of rescuing "our relation to nature, and nature itself" which (due to our Promethean bent) is "in danger" (*V*, p. 98). This is done not so much as to eliminate Prometheanism, but rather to qualify it. Bergson, nonetheless, asserts that the only way for humans to transcend the restrictions placed on us by the intellect (and, in turn, Prometheanism) is through mysticism. To do so is to live a life of philosophy, which Bergson sees as a "participation in the divine" (*TSMR*, p. 252). Albeit, if we choose to embark on this path, we still remain composite beings. But still, Bergson himself remained optimistic (after all, "the vital impulse is optimistic") (*TSMR*, p. 130). This optimism is all the stranger given the context that surrounds *Two Sources* as a work. It is important to note that the work was written on the eve of the Second World War.

¹³⁷ Similar remarks can be made to what was said in relation to *Figure 1.0*. Indeed, it could be said that *Figure 6.0* overly spatializes Bergson's ideas and, in doing so, removes the qualities of multiplicity and endurance. Nonetheless, it seeks to communicate the Bergsonian idea of composites that undergirds point (A).

And, as Lefebvre notes, Bergson “has the ravages of the Great War behind him” as well as “the explicit anticipation of the Atomic Age ahead of him”.¹³⁸ However, consider his very vision of us as composite beings:

Humanity is asked to place itself at a certain level, higher than that of animal society...
But not so high as an assembly of gods, where everything would partake of the creative
impetus (*TSMR*, p. 74).

This is why we needn't be fatalistic within the Anthropocene.

Bergson as a Philosopher

We saw that for Bergson, the human intellect inhibits us from truly grasping the flux and change of reality, and, as his antidote, Bergson prescribes the effort of intuition in order to see the reality of becoming. Hadot describes his attraction to Bergson and Bergsonism precisely in these terms. Indeed, for him, Bergsonism is less a system, but rather, a method “for transforming our perception of the world” (*WL*, p. 272). According to Hadot, the fundamental goal of Bergsonism is to modify our everyday orientation or way of life. In his *Creative Evolution*, he seeks to ground a metaphysics which helps us to be attune to the creativity, flux, and change that surrounds us. Similarly, in *Two Sources*, he grounds for us the possibility of transcendence, to be something other than Prometheans. Through his prising of intuition, we see glimpses of the possibility of the Orphic attitude. Indeed, as Pete Gunter notes, in his bibliography on Bergson, *Bergsonism* presents us with “a metaphysical vision on a grand scale”.¹³⁹ This, to be sure, can be readily applied to *Two Sources* insofar that he presents to us his distinction between closed and open societies. Within the Orphic, or, in open love, we move from a from perception of the world ‘for ourselves’, to perception of the world ‘for itself’. This, as Hadot writes:

Is in fact a conversion: a radical rupture with regard to the state of unconsciousness in which man normally lives... Aesthetic and philosophical perceptions of the world are only possible by means of a complete transformation of our relationship to the world: we have to perceive it *for itself*, and no longer *for ourselves* (*WL*, p. 254, *emphasis added*).

¹³⁸ Ibid, *Human Rights as a Way of Life* (2012), p. 85.

¹³⁹ Gunter, P. *Henri Bergson: A Bibliography*. Philosophy Documentation Centre, Bowling Green University, 1974, p. 4.

For Bergson, philosophy is supposed to bring us joy (*CM*, p. 106). And joy for him, is perhaps what occurs within an Orphic cosmic consciousness. We see the world as it is. Likewise, Vladimir Jankélévitch (akin to Hadot) argues in his *Henri Bergson*, philosophy is “a serious act and a complete conversion of the whole person, a conversion that implies an overturning of all our habits, all our associations, all our reflexes”.¹⁴⁰ Intuition is rarely used and underdeveloped, but it is there. The mind, as Bergson writes, in his *Creative Mind*, “must do itself violence” adding that “to philosophise means to reverse the normal direction of the workings of thought” (*CM*, p. 160). Going beyond intelligence means re-entering the creative flow of duration. Although the Orphic is a possibility within us, it is, as Bergson writes, still a “whisper of an echo” (*TSMR*, p. 203). Indeed, with regards to *P1*, the natural state of mankind is thoroughly egoist and Promethean (*PAH*, p. 86). Yet, when becoming a Bergsonian, the philosopher seeks to transcend (or, qualify) the Promethean in and through the Orphic. They, as it were, begin to live within a new “picture” of the world (*OC*, 43e). We become predisposed to universal love. Indeed, this is Bergson’s calling for us; to take an ontological leap onto a higher plane (*TSMR*, p. 252). What we see here is that far from leaving the human subject as something undesired in his philosophy, he calls us to be more through his reframing of *P2*. As he argues in *Two Sources*, there may be a “mystic dormant within us, merely waiting for an occasion to awake” (*TSMR*, p. 90). This is the inheritance bequeathed to us by the mystics.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter was created with two goals in mind. Initially, my desire was to read the Promethean and Orphic within a single subject (i.e., the biological epistemology in his *Creative Evolution*). Following this, I sought to connect the Promethean and Orphic heuristic to Bergson’s portrayal of closed and open societies. In doing so, I highlighted the role of mystics in his *Two Sources*. Bergsonism’s promise is tied to both of these objectives in that it allows us to steer clear of OOO’s sophist thus-vs-them framing of the problem. According to Bergson, this line of argument goes nowhere. The aim of this was to better grasp Bergson’s reading and solutions to *P1* and *P2*. On the one hand, there is the clash between open and closed inclinations, as well as the tension between our propensity for the intellect and the possibility of intuition. The struggle here is between the Promethean necessity to prioritize our human necessities and the Orphic emphasis on love.

¹⁴⁰ Jankélévitch, Vladimir, et al. *Henri Bergson*. Duke University Press, 2015, p. 239, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822375333>.

SIMONE WEIL'S ATTENTIVE ORPHIC PHILOSOPHY

“The capacity to give one’s attention to a sufferer is a very rare and difficult thing; it is almost a miracle; it is a miracle” (*WFG*, p. 69)

The Who and Why of Simone Weil

It’s hard to picture anyone not being disoriented by Simone Weil’s writings.. Her writings transport the reader into the life of a person whose desire for knowledge was matched by an understanding of the complexities of human existence. What guides my reading of her thought is a distinctive Platonism that pervades her philosophy. Indeed, Plato (in his *Republic*) describes a group of people who have lived their entire lives in a cave (R, 514a-520a). Prisoners only perceive shadows, or warped representations of reality. The philosopher, on the other hand, escapes the cave and comes to see that the shadows are not actually real. This is something Weil offers us. She (as it were) stepped out of the Cave and, possibly out of duty, returned. This I argue, is how we should both approach and interpret her work. Indeed (in contrast to Bergson) she offers us a fresh Orphic philosophy that is Platonic in spirit. She therefore sees and approaches *P1* and *P2* differently.

In this chapter I argue that Weil, in contrast to Bergson, provides us with a *passive* (albeit) active subject. Indeed, in contrast to intuition, which, as we have seen, is an effortful spiritual exercise, Weil sees attention as a “*negative effort*” (*WFG*, p. 66, *emphasis added*). She wants us to stand still patiently waiting before the object. Despite this difference, attention (like intuition) heightens our aesthetic experience and knowledge of our surroundings; it enables us to zero in on the intricacies of each object, imagine, and, most importantly, be in a state of awe and wonder of the world around us (*V*, p. 91).¹⁴¹ Throughout this chapter, I seek to use Weil and put her in conversation with Morton. In particular, I position Weil against Morton in an effort to query his vision of hyperobjects. In doing so, I argue that beauty is missing from the OOO picture of the world. As such, the purpose of this chapter is to highlight her aesthetics and her wider philosophy with a specific focus on her vision of force (a concept we discuss below).

This chapter deals more with questions concerning aesthetics in OOO (in contrast, the Bergson chapter dealt more with metaphysical issues).

¹⁴¹ I discuss attention as a concept below and relate it to Hadot’s vision of cosmic consciousness in sub-section, ‘Simone Weil’s Meta-philosophy’. Attention allows us as agents to achieve an aesthetic attentiveness in a manner synonymous to the notion of unveiling suggested by Heraclitus and in turn, Hadot.

In doing so, I examine her seminal piece *The Iliad, or, the Poem of Force* (as well as other essays in the collection, *Intimations of Christianity Among the Greeks*) her unfinished play, *Venice Saved*, her political manifesto, *The Need for Roots* as well as her *Notebooks*. Moreover, I bring her in conversation with Pierre Hadot and Henri Bergson so as to illuminate points of agreement and disagreement between them so as to highlight our choice as subjects (*AP*, p. 3).

Force and Prometheanism

Force is central to Weil's philosophical oeuvre, and (as I argue) it finds its fullest expression in her piece, *The Iliad, or, the Poem of Force*. In her earlier piece *Oppression and Liberty* what we see is that ideas on force were originally developed in reference to industrial relations and politics.¹⁴² Nonetheless, her involvement in the Spanish Civil War (1936) and World War Two (1939-1943) further shaped her musings on the concept. Her essay is an analysis of Homer's *Iliad* and marks the "spiritual turn" in her thought.¹⁴³ The *Iliad* is set in the last weeks of the ten-year Trojan War and tells the epic tale of the demi-god Achilles. The work is typically read as a piece which seeks to recount the heroic exploits of the war through a poetic medium. Most interpreters (such as Michelle Kundmueller) highlight the significance of 'kleos' and heroism (that is, κλέος, 'glory' and 'fame') in the piece.¹⁴⁴ But, as Marie Meaney argues in her piece, *Weil's Apologetic Use of Literature* notes, for Weil, "neither Achilles, nor his wrath, nor the confrontation between Hector and Achilles is at the centre of the epic".¹⁴⁵ Indeed, the first line of Weil's essay is startling:

The True Hero, the real subject, the core of the Iliad, is force. That which is wielded by men rules over them, and before it man's flesh cringes. The human soul never ceases to be modified by its encounter with force, swept on, *blinded* by that which it believes itself able to handle, bowed beneath the power of that which it suffers... throughout the ages, there at the heart of every human testament, find here its most beautiful, *most pure of mirrors*. (*I*, p. 24, *emphasis added*).

¹⁴² Crucially, this period marks the more radical and Marxist period of Weil's intellectual development, a period which we ought to contrast with her post-conversion period, see, Weil, Simone. *Oppression and Liberty*. Taylor and Francis, 2013, doi: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203167632>.

¹⁴³ Hammer, Dean, and Michael Kicey. "Simone Weil's Iliad: The Power of Words." *The Review of Politics*, vol. 72, no. 1, 2010, p. 80, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670509990970>

¹⁴⁴ Kundmueller, Michelle M. *Homer's Hero: Human Excellence in the Iliad and the Odyssey*. State University of New York Press, 2019.

¹⁴⁵ Meaney, Marie Cabaud. *Simone Weil's Apologetic Use of Literature Her Christological Interpretations of Ancient Greek Texts*. Oxford University Press, 2007. p. 122

Indeed, force guides her reading of the *Iliad*. In particular, she zeros in on the manner in which force affects a being's essence or soul; above all, it leads to being's mutilation. What I wish to suggest is that Weil reads the *Iliad* as almost anti-war in its outlook, and, in doing so "implicitly overturns" usual interpretations of the work.¹⁴⁶ In what follows, I shall be discussing Weil's view and understanding of force so as to better illuminate her overall philosophical oeuvre. Force, she writes, is that which "makes a *thing* of anybody who comes under its sway" (*I*, p. 24). That is, force reduces objects into "mere matter" (*I*, p. 44). All we touch is reduced to dust; it causes the object in question to disintegrate into oblivion. Achilles torturing and mistreating Hector's corpse is the most vivid example of the effects of force in the *Iliad*. We witness this when he drags his body behind his chariot for twelve days. Indeed, Achilles treats Hector's dead body as if it were a toy at this point. It is akin to Bergson's vision of the intellect, which, as we saw with *Two Sources*, has a moral component. Indeed, it can be judged to be immoral because it degrades beings (i.e., all objects) by transforming them into puppets for our use and enjoyment. In doing so, as proponents of OOO would stress, we fail to give ontological weight to the Other before us. Force lies at the epicentre of *human* history (this, as I see it, relates to *P1*). This gives us credence to read the Anthropocene as just another iteration of our species' drama with and proclivity to force. Crucially, she sees the *Iliad* as the "most pure of mirrors" (*I*, p. 24). We ought to interpret this remark in a Shakespearean manner. Indeed, recall Hamlet's remark "to hold as 'Twere, the mirror up to nature". The *Iliad*, as Weil reads it, seeks to reflect and show us what is real in our lives and in our world. In doing so, it seeks to expose our "dreams" (in this case, our sovereignty in our exercise of force) and show us "reality" (namely, that we are not sovereign) (*VS*, p. 74). The piece calls us as readers respond and reflect on our exercise of force in our everyday lives. We, as it were, are meant to see ourselves within the *Iliad*, in its story, and its characters. Dean Hammer and Michael Kicey would concur with these remarks. As they write in their piece, *Simone Weil's Iliad*, the "mirror does not invite us to stare admiringly at our own beauty but *disorients* by exposing the illusion of power".¹⁴⁷ Weil argues that suffering is a natural by-product of our use of force insofar that it turns all (that is, those who both employ and receive it) to into soulless beings. This is why Jane Doering in her piece, the *Spectre of Self-Perpetuating Force* describes force as a "self-perpetuating mechanism".¹⁴⁸ Doering's interpretation of Weil is underpinned by her reading that force morphs individuals who encounter it.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, *Simone Weil's Apologetic Use of Literature Her Christological Interpretations of Ancient Greek Texts* (2007), p. 121.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, *Simone Weil's Iliad: The Power of Words* (2010), p. 93.

¹⁴⁸ Doering, Jane E. *Simone Weil and the Specter of Self-Perpetuating Force*. University of Notre Dame Press, 2010, p. 2

Indeed, they become beings who then channel and redirect it towards others. As a result, force is relational and is also importantly circular. In other words (in contrast to the intellect) it is not engrained into the fibre of our being. We are able to better discern ground Doering's understanding of force through an analysis of Hector's death in the *Iliad*. Indeed, commenting on this passage, Weil writes that Hector "understood that the weapon will not turn from him", and, although Hector still "breathes", Achilles sees him as "only matter" (*I*, p. 26). Take note the dichotomy between the two. Indeed, although Achilles sees Hector as lifeless matter (or, a mere thing) it is clear that Homer is aiming to communicate to us as readers that Hector is not only still breathing but also is "still thinking". In other words, he is still *alive* (*I*, p. 26). What we see here is that whenever we employ force, we (in a Hadotian sense) are "darkened by unconsciousness" (*V*, p. 123). Moreover, Achilles both during and even after the act seems to be oblivious to what he has done:

*Motionless Achilles considered. The other drew near,
seized
By desire to touch his knees. He wished in his heart
To escape evil death, and black destiny
With one arm he encircled those knees to implore him,
With the other he kept hold of his bright lance.
(I, p. 26).*

In doing so, he ignores the frail, weak, and defenceless "begging words" of the soon to be deceased Hector. This for Weil is what occurs after one encounters force, they are reduced to a mere thing. Recall how Hadot describes Prometheism, that, above all, it desires control (*V*, p. 95). Weil sees force similarly and argues that our "intoxication" results in us being "drowned" in it. In turn, we become "blind" to the object before us (*I*, p. 42). Indeed, even after Hector "spoke", his words fall on deaf ears before Achilles. What we see here is that Achilles is inattentive and unmoved by the plight of the Other before him. He lives within a "picture" of the world clouded by force (*OC*, 43e). It is for this reason that it is no accident that Homer repeatedly uses the line "he spoke" throughout the *Iliad* (*I*, p. 26, 28, 36, 37, 47). In his use of it, Homer is seeking to illustrate the 'blinding' that occurs in our use of force.

What we see here is that words become “powerless” before those who use force. Indeed, Achilles is shown to us as readers to be “deaf and dumb” to Hector’s cries before “plunging” his sword into him (I, p. 44, 24):

*Thus spoke the brilliant son of Priam
With suppliant words. He hears an inflexible reply ...
He spoke; and the other’s knees and heart failed him ...
With both hands outstretched. Achilles unsheathes
his sharp sword,
Struck to the breastbone, along the throat, and then
the two-edged sword
Plunges home its full length. The other, face down upon
the ground,
Lay inert, his dark blood flowed drenching the earth.
(I, p. 24).*

Those who exercise force, as Weil writes, become a “scourge of nature” (I, p. 44). And, like a ‘slave’ they too become a thing. This is the reason why Weil reads the *Iliad* as a tragedy; for her, it dramatizes our belief that we can control and wield force. Despite his divinity, we even see the demi-god Achilles submit to force. He can be seen “weeping” over the loss of his mother and his inability to save Patroclus:

*... But Achilles,
Weeping, sat down at a distance far from his companions,
Beside the whitening waves, his eyes fixed upon
the boundless sea.
(I, p. 32).*

What we see here is that while all characters in the *Iliad* (at one stage, or another) bask in ‘glory’, the play also seeks to communicate how fleeting these moments are.

Even here, we see Achilles distancing himself from his companions (which, as it were, is very much synonymous with his “weeping” earlier in the piece) (*I*, p. 24). As hinted at before, the Anthropocene can and ought to be read as a period which reinforces our misconceptions about the nature of force. Indeed, despite our ability to refashion the world around us as *engineers* for our purposes, we appear to have lost our capacity to exercise control (*V*, p. 126). For OOO, to believe otherwise only shows how “deaf and dumb” we are (*I*, p. 44). Indeed, if the demi-god Achilles himself failed to control and command force (as evidenced by his “weeping”) how can we possibly aspire to do so? (*I*, p. 32). To reinforce this point (in what could be her essay’s most stunning claim) Weil writes, that “the victors and the vanquished are brothers in the same misfortune” (*I*, p. 39). Indeed, despite his divinity, Achilles falls victim to force after being humiliated by Agamemnon (*I*, p. 32). This is a moment of self-realisation on his part and results in feelings of helplessness. As Weil writes:

“They go beyond the measure of their strength, inevitably so, because they do not know its limit. Thus, they are delivered up helpless before chance, and things no longer obey them.” (*I*, p. 35).

We see this clearly in the person of Agamemnon, who, after humiliating Achilles (and asserts rather arrogantly that “I have more power than you”) also falls victim to force. Homer even depicts him as “weeping” later on like Achilles (*I*, p. 32). What I wish to suggest is that this resonates well with our plight within the Anthropocene. Indeed, in and through hyperobjects, we are witnessing a process in which humanity (who sees everything as a mere object) comes to eventually turn into an object. Things, as it were, no longer obey us (*I*, p. 35). To borrow from Harman, the belief that *we* (in our use of force) are “ontologically special” has been unended within the Anthropocene.¹⁴⁹ Weil perhaps wouldn’t at all be surprised by our predicament commenting that this “is the nature of force” adding that “its power to transform man into a thing is double and it cuts both ways” (*I*, pp. 44-45, *emphasis added*). This is why D.K Levy in his piece, *What is la force in Simone Weil’s Iliad?* suggests that Weil’s essay ought to be read “as a corrective to misunderstandings of force as something that can be possessed”.¹⁵⁰ Indeed, this is the reasoning behind Morton’s metaphysics of hyperobjects after all: within the Anthropocene, human beings are bound together with objects and can never be truly independent of them.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, *Graham Harman on Art and Ecology* (2016).

¹⁵⁰ Levy, D. K. “What Is La Force in Simone Weil’s Iliad?” *Philosophical Investigations*, vol. 43, no. 1-2, 2020, p. 19, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/phn.12257>.

In other words, control (and, in turn, the subject-object distinction itself) is a sophistry of epic proportions. Force, as it were “cuts both ways” and cannot be possessed (*I*, p. 45). In a similar fashion, as OOO argues, within the Anthropocene, it challenges our tendency within metaphysical inquiry to readily distinguish between subject and object (*I*, p. 31).

To further complicate things, the attentive reader may have noticed that Weil treats force anthropocentrically within the *Iliad* (that is, it is relational within the context of human relationships). Nonetheless, the concept does not necessarily have to be applied in such a narrow manner.¹⁵¹ After all (and, perhaps Weil would concur with these sentiments) if force is the driving force of human history, this gives us credence to read the Anthropocene through the lens of force. In turn, we are readily able to theorise force within the domain of environmental philosophy. What undergirds these comments (when one considers the interconnection between human history and force) is the urgent need to consider the non-human Other in our interactions and ethical frameworks. Failure to do so really amounts to dismissing the effects of force on the non-human Other. This, as I put forward to the reader, is how Weil would frame both the conceptual problems. In relation to *P1*, because force drives human history, she would see the Anthropocene as but another period rife with force. Because force is relational, for all intents and purposes, the Other needn't be human. Of course, one might object here and suggest that force applied to humans is *qualitatively* different to force applied to the non-human. Notwithstanding, there are two crucial problems with such a view. *First*, such an assertion fails to appreciate the intricacies of the non-human Other. As Weil herself argues, every being “cries out silently to be read differently” (*GG*, p. 135). This, as I see it, is a call to be attentive to the individuality of all Others. Indeed, in a similar manner to Weil, the Danish philosopher Knud Løgstrup, in his *Ethical Demand* makes a similar argument. For Løgstrup, precisely because we are “entangled” in the lives of Others, “care” as well as “mercy” are crucial. This is due to the power we have over the wellbeing of an Other and in turn, the responsibility we have over how we conduct ourselves (in this case, force).¹⁵² Indeed, as he writes, in our actions, we “determine if the life of the other flourishes or not”.¹⁵³ *Second*, although there is undoubtedly some element of truth to the objection, what connects the two objects (that is, both the human and the non-human) is that the user of force is for Weil necessarily egocentric.

¹⁵¹ Similar comments were made with regards to “all humanity” in Bergson’s *Two Sources* (*TSMR*, p. 30)

¹⁵² Løgstrup, K. E. *The Ethical Demand*. University of Notre Dame Press, 1997.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, *The Ethical Demand* (1997), p. 16.

As she makes clear in her essay on the *Iliad*, the source of force is our interested orientation, an orientation which seeks to elevate the subject at the expense of the Other. The end result, as we see within the *Iliad*, is that all invariably become objectified by force users. In other words, similar to my first comment, the ‘type’ of object is not of concern. For Weil, force is but a failure of inattentiveness and therefore we are readily able to apply it to environmental problems. Both these considerations problematise *P1*: force not only drives human history, but also pervades our ways of being. In turn, when one considers *P2*, Weil would problematise our efforts to address force (as well as our Promethean bent).¹⁵⁴ Below, I seek to better put Weil and OOO in conversation so as to illuminate points of differences and ground Weil’s possible response to the two conceptual problems.

What I wish to suggest first and foremost is that proponents of OOO would agree with Weil’s vision of force. Like them, Weil calls into doubt the notion that we have perfect control (which is akin to Morton’s vision of hyperobjects). As a result, the Promethean promise of control, as Weil would put it, is a delusion. Force users, as implied by Morton’s concept of hyperobjects, invariably become objects. We, as it were, are of the “same species” as the objects we seek (and continue to desire) to manipulate through force (*I*, p. 34). We mistakenly assume they command the force, but in fact, we have become “slaves” to it. In a word, our fate may be Hector’s fate, whose blood, as Homer notes, comes to drench the earth (*I*, p. 24). Recall Hadot’s subtle comments (or, perhaps, warning) in *Veil of Isis*. As he writes, “we may be threatened by our own technical progress” and risk “unleashing unforeseeable consequences” (*V*, pp. 141, 317). Indeed, this for OOO is why the subject-object distinction must be rejected. It, after all is underpinned by a vision of control; or, for Weil, force. With regards to *P1*, it is important to keep in mind though, that force does not signal the futility of ethics in Weil’s thought. Force can be restrained by and with the help of roots, love, and attention. It requires, as she writes, a “divine generosity” (*I*, p. 44). This is what for Weil the Orphic (in relation to *P2*) offers. She implores us to see reality from the transcendental perspective of the Logos; that is, to venture out of the cave. Indeed, with the sole exception of Patroclus, who, as Homer muses “he knew how to be tender toward all” virtually nobody in the *Iliad* is capable of forsaking force (*I*, p. 44). We are, nevertheless, capable of more. Indeed, “moments of grace” appear throughout the *Iliad* (*I*, p. 48).

¹⁵⁴ This is why when we first framed these conceptual problems, I noted that although distinct, they are in fact interconnected: history (that is, *P1*) propels and engrains specific forms and ways of life (namely, *P2*). Indeed, this was the same with Bergson; the intellect is not contingent, and, like force, shapes how we see and interact with reality. This is why, with regards to *P2*, Bergson would have us turn to intuition and the open tendency itself.

Recall again that, as Doering stresses, force is relational and therefore (in contrast to Bergson's vision of the intellect) contingent. As such, Weil's remedy for our Promethean is the Orphic. Indeed, as Weil argues:

The resulting whole would be a dismal monotony were there not, sprinkled here and there, *luminous* moments, brief and divine moments in the souls of men. In such moments the soul which *awakes* (*I*, p. 46, *emphasis added*).

In this sense, it becomes clear that the “mirror” that is the *Iliad* is double; yes, it portrays the drama of force, but it also communicates to us hope (*I*, p. 24). We see it in Hector's affection for Andromache and Astyanax and Patroclus and Achilles' loyalty to one another. The most dramatic example is the encounter between Priam and Achilles (who, as Weil reads, are *both* victims of force). Indeed, Priam confronts Achilles, the man who murdered his son. These are all instances of “divine generosity” between would be objects and would be subjects (*I*, p. 44). In what follows, I seek to explicate force (and, how it may be restrained) as the guiding *leitmotif* of her works and thought so as to illuminate her possible response to the stated conceptual problems. However, before I embark on doing this, it is worth considering what exactly Weil meant by ‘philosophy’ (that is, her metaphilosophy). In doing so, I seek to better ground and relate her thought to Hadot's distinction between the Promethean and the Orphic in his *Veil of Isis*. Indeed, her framing of the two outlooks is one which is Platonic in spirit. The aim of this is to connect my reading of Weil with Doering and Eric O. Springsted's edited collection of essays, *The Christian Platonism of Simone Weil*.¹⁵⁵ The aim of this is to properly introduce Weil's philosophy of attention to Hadot's vision of cosmic consciousness.

Simone Weil's Meta-philosophy

In his edited compilation of Weil's works, *Gravity and Grace*, Gustave Thibbon (the man Weil gifted her *Notebooks* to before embarking to New York) writes that Weil “speaks as a mystic and *not* as a metaphysician” (*GG*, p. xxxiii, *emphasis added*).¹⁵⁶ To the academic philosopher, such a remark (while perhaps not Thibbon's goal) relegates Weil's ‘philosophy’ to the disciplinary spheres of theology and religious studies.

¹⁵⁵ Doering, E. Jane., and Eric O. Springsted. *The Christian Platonism of Simone Weil*. University of Notre Dame Press, 2004.

¹⁵⁶ Of course, there are issues with *Gravity and Grace*, i.e., the work is selective with certain aspects of Weil's thought, namely, those parts deemed to be more ‘Catholic’. Therefore I have also sought to make extensive use of Weil's notebooks to complement (if not qualify) my reading of *Gravity and Grace*.

In fact, Thibbon makes a distinction between the ‘philosophical’ and ‘religious’ aspects of Weil’s ideas in his piece, *Simone Weil as We Knew Her*.¹⁵⁷ This is something she would have questioned. Indeed, for her, Plato was a “mystic”, the “heir to a tradition of mysticism wherein all of Greece was bathed” (*I*, p. 74). She goes so far as to suggest that, since Plato, “there hasn’t been such a thing as a philosopher” (*NR*, p. 254). Such assertions are connected to Weil’s metaphilosophical convictions and her unique proposal to the problem of cosmic consciousness within the Anthropocene. She (like Plato) believes in a transcendent reality beyond this world. This reality, as she writes in her *Draft for a Statement on Human Obligations* is “the unique source of all the good that can exist in the world”.¹⁵⁸ Only humans are capable of striving for the Good; we are liminal beings capable of traversing the distance between the two realities (*AP*, p. 3). She believes that everyone can do this. Going back to Thibbon’s comments, this would suggest that Weil isn’t actually a philosopher and that trying to read her as one is (at best) an act of charity. However, there are arguments against this. Indeed (as Simone Pétrement recounts in her biography of Weil’s life) Weil’s education was in philosophy.¹⁵⁹ Indeed, as Miklos Vetö notes in his *Metaphysics of Simone Weil* she (that is, Weil) read, interpreted, and reflected on Plato, Kant, and Descartes “unceasingly”.¹⁶⁰ In many ways, she would qualify as a ‘fox’ (to again borrow from Isaiah Berlin). This I believe gives us credence to examine the very nature of both her philosophy and her Platonism.

As Terence Sweeney suggests in his piece, *Keeping Company with the Gods*, Platonism ought to be interpreted as a mystical philosophy.¹⁶¹ This is evident throughout Plato’s work. For instance, in his *Phaedrus*, he suggests that we are drawn towards the transcendental Forms in and through Beauty and become transfigured by our contact with the Good:

Anything divine is good, wise, virtuous, and so on, and so these qualities are the best source of nourishment and growth for the soul’s wings, but badness and evil and so on cause them to shrink and perish (*P*, 246d–e).

Indeed, in relation Plato’s comment on “nourishment and growth”, for Weil, “beauty is the sensible image of good” (*NBS*, p. 246). For her, beauty assists us in our lives in philosophy; that is, to transcend the egoist self (*PAH*, p. 36).

¹⁵⁷ See, Gustave Thibon, and Joseph-Marie Perrin. *Simone Weil as We Knew Her*. Taylor and Francis, 2004, doi: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203666609>.

¹⁵⁸ Weil, Simone, and Siân. Miles. *Simone Weil, an Anthology*. Virago, 1986, p. 222.

¹⁵⁹ See, Pétrement, Simone. *Simone Weil: A Life*, Pantheon Books, 1976, p. 52, 77.

¹⁶⁰ This is why all three are crucial to interpret Weil’s philosophy, see, Vetö, Miklós. *The Religious Metaphysics of Simone Weil*. State University of New York Press, 1994, p. 34

¹⁶¹ Sweeney, Terence. “Keeping Company with the Gods: Plato on Prayer and the Journey to the Divine.” *Heythrop Journal*, vol. 62, no. 2, 2021, pp. 243–56, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/heyj.13415>.

Weil presents us with “picture” of the world reminiscent to what Hadot sees as a “theological physics” (*V*, p. 39). Indeed, the Platonist sees philosophy as a “speculative and contemplative effort” insofar as they aim to raise their “thought up to the perspective of the Whole” and liberate themselves “from the illusions of individuality” (*V*, p. 97). Platonism calls one to suppress their emotions as well as give up their sense of self in order to commune with the Logos (*V*, p. 95). Indeed, in her *Notebooks*, she describes “Orphic love” not only as “the ordering principle” of the world, but crucially the “principle of harmony” (*NBS*, p. 240). What this suggests is that the goal of her Orphic philosophy is essentially to live in tune and in harmony with the Logos in and through a “science of contemplation” (*NBS*, p. 319). Notwithstanding (returning to Weil’s ‘Platonism’) it would be inappropriate to characterise Weil as a ‘conventional’ Platonist. To put it simply, Weil’s Platonism is not otherworldly; she holds that material reality should not be neglected (*OC*, 30e).¹⁶² This, of course, differs from Plato’s reasoning that the world we live in is an illusion and that only the transcendent Forms have being (*P*, 247c). In doing so, she inverts (as Patrick Patterson and Lawrence E. Schmidt argue in their piece *The Christian Materialism of Simone Weil*) the conventional Platonic conception of Being.¹⁶³ Indeed, for Weil, even though God is transcendent and hence not physically present in material reality, the subject can engage and communicate with God that metaxu (that is, the ‘between’ and ‘middle ground, or, in Greek μετὰξυ). Again, here she again borrows from Plato, the most concrete instance of which being seen in the *Symposium* (which she briefly analyses in her essay, *The Symposium of Plato*) (*I*, pp. 124-126). Eros (or love argues Diotima) is an intermediary between what is mortal and immortal (that is, between man and God) (*J*, 202e). Drawing on this, she sees our “temporal” existence “as a bridge” (*GG*, p. 147). In other words, she believes that there are bridges between our temporal world and reality’s transcendent horizons. It is what both divides us from God and connects us to Him. Indeed, consider this passage in her *Gravity and Grace*:

Two prisoners whose cells adjoin communicate with each other by knocking on the wall. The wall is the thing which separates them, but it is also their means of communication. It is the same with us and God. Every separation is a link (*GG*, p. 145).

¹⁶² Plato, in contrast to Weil, asserts that material reality is composed of shadows and reflections of the Forms.

¹⁶³ Ibid, *The Christian Platonism of Simone Weil* (2004), pp. 77-93.

That is, although our temporality separates us from transcendent reality, she argues that the “essence” of temporality (or, “created things”) is to be an “intermediary leading to God” (GG, p. 145). It is, as she puts it, “the distance” between us the good, it acts as the connector between what is seen and what is not (GG, p. 105). Because of this, she refers to reality as a “closed door”; a “barrier”, however, as she adds that “it is the way through” (GG, p. 145). In doing so, to borrow from Hadot, we come to inhabit the “perspective of the cosmos and nature” (PAH, p. 95). In other words, we see everything from the perspective of the Logos. Crucial to this is becoming an attentive epistemic and ethical agent:

“Attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty and ready to be penetrated by the object. It means holding in our minds, within reach of this thought, but on a lower level and not in contact with it, the diverse knowledge we have acquired which we are forced to make use of. Our thought should be in relation to all particular and already formulated thoughts as a man on a mountain who, as he looks forward, sees also below him, without actually looking at them, a great many forests and plains. Above all our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object which is to penetrate it” (WFG, p. 67).

There is quite a bit in this statement, so let’s unpack it. Indeed, from it, we are able to better understand the nature of attention and its relation to cosmic consciousness. *First*, attention restrains force first and foremost by “suspending our thought”. The aim of this is address force’s egotistical and in turn, interested bent. In doing so, we not only come to be better attuned to the metaxus around us, but also the objects around us by becoming more disinterested beings (I, p. 26, 28, 36, 37, 47). *Second*, it also clarifies the specific nature of Weil’s vision of cosmic consciousness. Indeed, it is exemplified by her vision of the “man on a mountain”. Here, in contrast to otherworldly forms of Platonism, Weil’s vision of a “man on the mountain” sees what is “below him” and comes to see “a great many forests and plains” (WFG, p. 67). This is what it means to in essence undertake the path of ascent towards the Logos: we come to see, know, and become attentive towards all that is around us. Indeed, first and foremost, being an attentive being means not only to restrain from acts of force, but also to engage in acts of love. This is precisely because the sort of love we become predisposed to through attention is necessarily Other-centred; we see the Other before us not for ourselves (as we do in force) but become thoroughly entangled with their needs and welfare.

This, as it were, is the aim of an “apprenticeship in attention”; and seeing and with engaging metaxus are but the first steps of this journey. Diagrammatically, we can visualise metaxu in *Figure 7.0*. Here, although our world and God are distinct realities, Weil suggests that there are points of contact between they become tangential to one another (that is, point *A*). These points, as it were, allow the Good to descend and become part of our temporal reality:

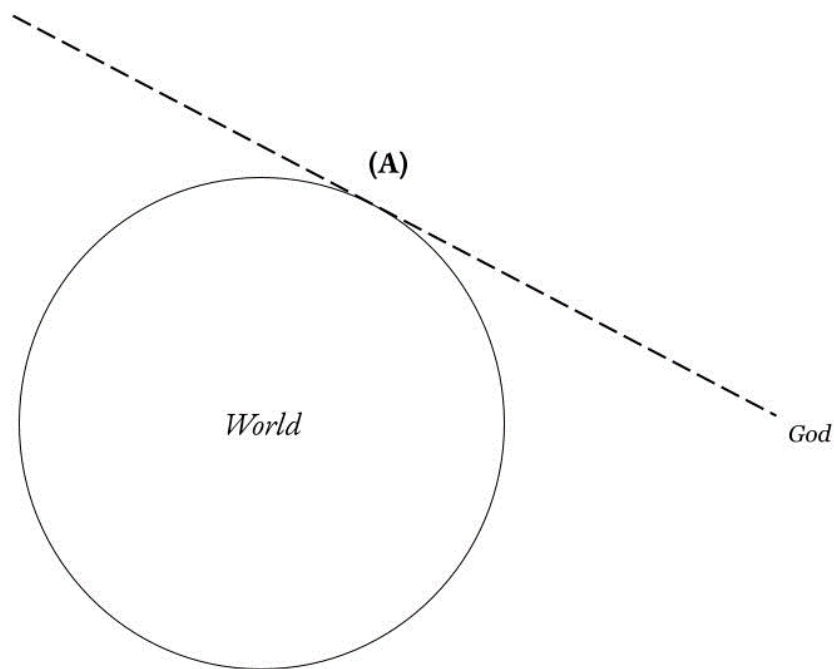


Figure 7.0 God and the World

However, in her *Draft for a Statement on Human Obligations* she suggests that only “those whose attention and love are turned towards that reality are the sole *intermediary* through which good can descend from there and come among men”.¹⁶⁴ Take note of the word intermediary in both of these passages. Weil frequently uses the terms intermediary and metaxu interchangeably, and, as I see it, can (or should) be read synonymously.

¹⁶⁴ This is perhaps what distinguishes Bergson and Weil. For Bergson, only mystics can fully tap into the élan. Indeed, for Bergson, we are composite all the way down (i.e., both Promethean and Orphic). Mystics are perhaps the closest to being Orphic, however, for most of us, there is but a “whisper of an echo” of the Orphic (*TSMR*, p. 203). But, for Weil, the life of philosophy seeks to undo our Prometheanism, to relinquish (as Hadot would argue) the “egoist self” (*PAH*, p. 86), see, *Ibid*, *Miles* (1986), p. 222.

Notwithstanding “any human being” (as she writes in her *Spiritual Autobiography*), “can penetrate to the kingdom of truth reserved for genius, if only he longs for truth and perpetually concentrates all his attention upon its attainment” (*WFG*, p. 26). It is in this manner in which we come to take a “view from above” (*WL*, pp. 238-250). This, as we shall see, is how she approaches *P2*; to inhabit an attentive form of life. What I wish to suggest is that metaxu assists us in expanding and developing our capacity for attention and, as a result, experiencing and being moulded by transcendent truth. In doing so, we come to achieve cosmic consciousness, to, as it were, be “the man on the mountain” (*WFG*, p. 67).

Now, the attentive reader may ask, why (or, better yet how) does a philosophy which prizes a transcendental Logos (as in Weil) allow us to live out more environmental ways and forms of life. To answer this, we need to understand the very nature of metaxu in her thought and its relationship to attention. Weil’s more philosophical comments about the nature of metaxu is most clearly expressed in her essay *Forms of the Implicit Love of God*. What are some of her specific examples? She cites beauty, neighbourly love, and religious ceremonies as examples of metaxu (*WFG*, pp. 89-155). They all lure or orient man to the transcendent and draw us outside of ourselves. Weil contends that this kind of love (or, *way of life*) necessitates a certain amount of self-denial, which in turn qualifies our propensity for force. She highlights (in an Orphic manner) that embracing the beauty of the world (or, as she sometimes terms it, ‘the order of the world’) demands giving up “our *imaginary* position as the centre” (*WFG*, p. 108, *emphasis added*).

Perceiving yourself as the centre of all things, in her view, is the polar opposite of love.¹⁶⁵ It is what we see when Achilles kills Hector and is the plight experienced by those in the Cave. Or, when applied to our context, it is representative of our Prometheanism (*I*, p. 32).¹⁶⁶ Indeed, we *blind* ourselves to the “great many forests and plains” (*WFG*, p. 67). Weil’s purpose is to undo this inside ourselves and she, like Lane, muses the following question, namely “what would it mean for our conceptions of our cities and ourselves if we were to dare to leave the cave?”¹⁶⁷ Perhaps this is why, in the midst of the Anthropocene, Platonism remains a viable alternative; a plausible “picture” of the world, one which we can inhabit by becoming more attentive agents (*OC*, 30e). However, before we proceed, I see it as apt to discuss the differences in which the Promethean and the Orphic correlate (or, be read) in both Weil and Bergson’s philosophies.

¹⁶⁵ Although both Weil and Bergson talk about a decentering of the self, for Bergson, it is in relation to becoming; however, a de-centering towards the divine (which is what Weil is advocating) is very different.

¹⁶⁶ Of course, for Bergson, science and intellect reach one half of the absolute; they are epistemically adequate. The Promethean, in other words, is not for Bergson the kind illusion that both Weil and Plato describe it as.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, *Eco-Republic* (2012), p. 4.

I see this effort not only as clarificatory but will also deepen the thesis' engagement with Hadot's reading of both the Promethean and Orphic in his *Veil of Isis*. In doing so (as we shall see) it will deepen our understanding of the role of metaxu in Weil's thought.

The 'Promethean' in Weil and Bergson

What I seek to do here is use Hadot's distinctive meta-philosophy to interpret Weil. For her, the Promethean subject is egotistical; and the purpose of the Orphic is to completely de-centre ourselves. Recall how Hadot describes the state of cosmic consciousness, namely, that it involves "seeing things as they are, not from an anthropological and egotistical point of view, but from the perspective of the cosmos and nature" (*PAH*, p. 95). Although for Bergson, the Promethean bent (expressed in and through the intellect) is instrumentalist, I believe we are able to link it with Weil's view of egoism. For Weil, instrumentalism amounts to egocentrism. Indeed, when we view objects and reality instrumentally, we see objects only insofar as they serve us and are beneficial to us. This is our state when we're within the grip of force; we kill the object before us and seek to bend it to our deepest desires. In a word, we ignore its autonomy, and, in turn, its very being: it becomes mere matter (*I*, p. 24).

These (as I see it) are the similarities which can be made between the two thinkers yet, we are able to draw some crucial distinctions between them too. Unlike Weil, Bergson is *not* a transcendent thinker. For him, God is bound up within nature, time, and, in turn, duration. When it comes to the reality of God, there is no dualism. Weil is dualistic and, therefore, their notion of the Orphic will be different (indeed, we can infer this diagrammatically in terms of the differences between *Figures 6.0* and *7.0*). For Bergson, we remain composite subjects; always Promethean, but still having the possibility of being Orphic. We are anchored within the intellect. Indeed, the possibility of us being intuitive subjects is always reliant on the powers of the intellect. In turn, they both frame and respond to *P2* differently. While it is crucial to acknowledge that Weil, has no philosophy of nature in the way Bergson does she did analyse the Prometheus myth in two essays separate essays: first, *Zeus and Prometheus* and second, *Prometheus*. We turn to them now. Like Hadot, Weil sees Prometheanism as animated by a "love of mankind" remarking in her *Notebooks* that he "came to scatter a fire upon the earth" (*NB*, p. 73, 110). Specifically, in her essay *Prometheus* she above all describes it as a "gift" allowing us to secure a "foundation" in the world through "fire", "knowledge of the order of the world" and "numbers" (*I*, pp. 67-70).

What we can infer from this is that Weil reads positive elements in Prometheanism but, she (again like Hadot) also sees negatives. Indeed, she remarks that although Prometheus “freed men from the fear of death” he did so by filling us “with blind hopes” (*I*, p. 68). Anthony O’Hear in his piece, *Transcendence, Creation, and Incarnation* perfectly describes the tension Weil seeks to communicate in her reading of the myth in the following manner. Prometheus, O’Hear writes, gave us:

“Not just fire, but also number, the arts of architecture, husbandry, sailing, medicine, metallurgy and above all mind, reason, language and number... self-consciousness itself and all that follows from it”.¹⁶⁸

Here, it is clear there are positives to Prometheanism. Like Hadot, she argues that it paved the road for “technology and civilization” (*V*, p. 95). However, as O’Hear continues, these “gifts” elevate us “above the primaeval oneness of nature”. This, by itself is not necessarily a bad thing, however, it:

Leads to the centring on ourselves (*original sin*), and the need to decentre if we are to live in any sort of balance with our fellows and with the universe.¹⁶⁹

What we are able to infer from this is that Weil reads our Promethean dilemma almost identically to Hadot in his *Veil of Isis*. And, moreover, O’Hear’s reading of Weil’s two essays allows to further frame her understanding of the two conceptual problems. Indeed, in relation to *P1*, she above all sees it as a misused (or abused) gift (which is dramatized through the *Iliad*). This is perhaps what undergirds her comment in *Prometheus* that he “loved men too well” (*I*, p. 67). But, with regards to *P2*, she also sees a need restrain our use of force (which ought to be read as a consequence or exacerbation of these “gifts”). Indeed, by decentring ourselves through attention, to occupy the space of the “man on a mountain” we are better able to properly use these gifts (*WFG*, p. 67).¹⁷⁰ This is because attention (when understood as a spiritual exercise) is akin to intuition: it seeks to know reality in a disinterested manner and reserve the situation in *Figure 5.0*. This is because it seeks to know and be drawn into the objects around them. It achieves, like intuition, a sympathy, and, in turn, the possibility for a rich aesthetic experience on the part of the subject (*CE*, p. 372).

¹⁶⁸ O’Hear, Anthony. *Transcendence, Creation, and Incarnation: from Philosophy to Religion*. Routledge, 2020, p. 141.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, *Transcendence, Incarnation and Creation* (2020), p. 142, *emphasis added*.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, *Transcendence, Incarnation and Creation* (2020), p. 142.

Crucially, the aim of the Orphic in Bergson is to connect the metaphysical subject to durations outside themselves. Intuition decentres the subject and illuminates their perception to durations beyond (or, outside) themselves. Something similar occurs in Weil through attention. A decentring occurs, but (unlike intuition) it is a *passive* one. In attention, the subject waits for the inner call of the objects around them. This is why Weil (like Bergson) seeks to qualify our Prometheanism insofar that its worse aspects involve a voluntarism in and through force.

What guides my reading of her thought is my claim is that Simone Weil's philosophy can be employed as a spiritual exercise that opens up the world to God; and in turn, to be the "man on a mountain" (*WFG*, p. 67). This is what it means to properly use Prometheus' "gift" to us (*I*, p. 67). In doing so, I interpret her thought in a manner analogous to how Ryan G. Duns SJ, in his piece, *Spiritual Exercises for a Secular Age* reads and interprets William Desmond's metaphysics.¹⁷¹ Indeed, he contends, spiritual exercises alter our perception of reality by orienting us to recognise God's presence within the world. As such (while she has no philosophy of nature like Bergson) her philosophy is undergirded by the transcendental Logos from whose perspective we must see reality in order to truly love it. In doing so, by occupying point *A* in *Figure 7.0*, we (as Charles Taylor puts it in his *Secular Age*) "re-enchant" the world.¹⁷² We no longer see it as "banal and mechanical".¹⁷³ My hope here is that we, too, can be like Weil; that we, too, may see, touch, and act in the world in the manner that she did. As such, we now turn to Weil's vision of beauty.

Beauty as a Metaxu

Beauty encourages reflection as well as a giving rather than receiving ethic. Weil urges us to refrain from utilising, dissecting, and utilising the things around us for our own gain. Natural beauty is getting harder to come by, so we must find new ways to foster an appreciation for it if we are to preserve and treasure it. Weil describes aesthetic experience as disinterested interest, similar to Kant, but she disagrees with him in that she argues the Platonic foundation of this experience reorients the soul to contemplation of the Good. I seek to put the two in conversation with one another to attempt to clarify the distinctions between them and *Venice Saved* (her unfinished play) to guide the discussion.

¹⁷¹ This, as I see it, is similar to how Ansell-Pearson and Lefebvre have interpreted Bergson's philosophy. see, Duns, Ryan G., and William Desmond. *Spiritual Exercises for a Secular Age: Desmond and the Quest for God*. University of Notre Dame Press, 2020.

¹⁷² Ibid, *A Secular Age* (2007), p. 32.

¹⁷³ Ibid, *The Selected Writings of Pierre Hadot* (2020), p. 146.

Now, unlike Kant, she does not (in a Platonic fashion) distinguish between the beautiful and the true (GG, p. 12). This is critical. Beauty not only increases our awareness of what is beautiful, but it also helps us realise what is pure, good, and true. It helps to build cosmic consciousness by aligning our thoughts and actions with the Logos (NBS, p. 450). Beauty de-centres the self by teaching the soul to safeguard and preserve the autonomy of the Other. These ideas are dramatized and depicted in *Venice Saved*, her unfinished play. In fact, upon witnessing its beauty, Jaffier (the play's protagonist) comes to tell the Venetian authorities about the plan to sack the city. His soul "awakens" upon experiencing such beauty (I, p. 42). Indeed, consider the contrast Weil seeks to highlight in the following scene:

Jaffier: I see this city, so beautiful and powerful and peaceful, and I think that in one night we, a few unknown men, will become its masters. And I think I must be dreaming.

Renaud: Yes, we are dreaming. Men of action and enterprise are dreamers; they prefer the dream to reality. But they use arms to make others dream their dreams. The victor lives his dream; the vanquished lives another's dream (VS, p. 74).

In what follows, I wish to focus on Renaud here before returning to Jaffier. We see Renaud make similar remarks in what Weil herself intended to be a "long speech" delivered with "great enthusiasm" in *Act One* of *Venice Saved*. Indeed, he exclaims to his fellow conspirators that they are "going to make history" and relish in "glory" (VS, 61). Commenting on this theme, Doering remarks that it is "human nature to admire the powerful and to want to share in collective glory".¹⁷⁴

What I wish to suggest is that this is remarkably similar to most of the characters in Homer's *Iliad*. But what is of interest here is perhaps the parallels which can be drawn between this passage and Wittgenstein's picture of a young earther in *On Certainty*. Indeed, it is clear that Jaffier and Renaud, as it were, *live* in the same world, however, they live with different "pictures" within it (OC, 43e). The picture of force, as Weil sees it, is that of a "dream". However, what makes Jaffier unique (in contrast that is to Renaud who sees himself as a "dreamer") is that he prefers reality to the dream. Indeed, this is because he sees the reality of Venice as "so beautiful" (VS, p. 74). In doing so (like Homer's *Iliad*) she makes force central in her play.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, *Specter of Self-Perpetuating Force* (2010), p. 90.

Indeed, recall again Wittgenstein's assertion (as well as our comments on it) in his *Tractatus*, namely that, "the world of the happy man is a *different* one from that of the unhappy man" (T, 6.43, *emphasis added*). Applied here, it becomes evident that Jaffier and Renaud, although both see Venice (and, occupy the same space) nevertheless see, experience, and treat Venice differently. Renaud (and the rest of the conspirators in *Venice Saved* for that matter) are very similar to Plato's description of the cave dwellers; they are blind to the "forests and plains" before them, in this case, Venice (WFG, p. 67). Indeed, as he writes in *The Republic*, they (that is, the cave dwellers) are "fixed in the same place" and, as Plato writes rhetorically, "do you suppose that these prisoners *see* anything of themselves and one another besides the shadows that the fire casts on the wall in front of them?" (R, 514-515a). And, of course, the answer is no. The reader may ask, what does the allegory mean with regards to *Venice Saved*? Take note of Plato's subtle emphasis on perception here, namely, that the vision of the dwellers is one-dimensional. For him, it lacks depth, and, in the case of *Venice Saved*, it is clouded by force.

Consider Weil's own comments on the margins following Renaud's speech. Here (on the margins of the play) she remarks that Renaud's world is one of "joy, pride, intoxication in action and in power". Because of this, he doesn't show a "shadow of concern" for Venice (VS, p. 62). What is interesting, is that she describes force in almost identical terms in her essay on the *Iliad*. Venice (like Hector) becomes a mere "thing" (I, p. 24). Yet, Jaffier is unable to carry out the schemes of his conspiratorial group because of his desire to preserve Venice's beauty. What I wish to suggest is that Weil sees beauty as both a stimulant as well as a means of overcoming force (similar to Julian Huxley's comments on Bergsonism). This is why our "pictures" of the world are significant; and, with regards to Weil's thought, aesthetic considerations have ethical implications (OC, 43e). Indeed, Jaffier remarks that:

No man could ever make something as beautiful as Venice. *Only God*. The greatest thing a man can do, the thing that brings him closest to God, is to preserve the marvels that exist, given that he cannot create them (VS, p. 82, *emphasis added*).

This I believe allows us to link our analysis of *Venice Saved* with our understanding of metaxu. Recall her remark that "the essence of created things is to be intermediaries" (GG, p. 145). Indeed, what becomes apparent here is that Venice (and its beauty) becomes an intermediary pointing Jaffier to God and reality's transcendent horizons and feels compelled to care for the "great many forests and plains" below him (WFG, p. 67). It, (as it were) is point *A* in *Figure 7.0*.

As such, given the role of beauty as a metaxu in the play, we shouldn't be all that surprised by the Secretary remark to Jaffier, "my child, who would have thought that a city would be defended by its beauty!" (*VS*, p. 83). In fact, Jaffier exhibits in the first two acts a willingness to confront those who employ force as well as a distinctive calmness as he reflects and contemplates Venice's beauty. What we see here is that beauty is a gateway to God and aids in our ability to shake off the ego's false divinity (*GG*, p. 34). Indeed, when admiring beauty, we "experience the reality of the Word" (*NBS*, p. 440). People who come into touch with it are disoriented. Indeed, after experiencing Venice's beauty, Jaffier comes to see "clearly" what he has to do (*VS*, p. 88). What we see here then (as J.P Little argues in his piece, *Society as Mediator*) is not a "mere aestheticism".¹⁷⁵ Rather, he comes to forsake his inherited picture of the world (*OC*, 15a). This I argue is perhaps Weil's solution to the two conceptual problems. Seeing the depth of Venice's beauty and vulnerability inspires a fervent desire to preserve it. Indeed, as Weil writes in her notes for *Venice Saved*, "reality enters into him" precisely because Jaffier "has paid attention" (*VS*, p. 53). Consider again Jaffier's earlier conversation with his fellow co-conspirator (*VS*, p. 82). There is a constant conflict between reality and illusion throughout the play. Indeed, after marvelling in Venice's beauty and majesty, Jaffier decides to tell the Venetians about the scheme (*VS*, p. 83). He, as it were, ventures out of the cave and no longer prefers "the dream to reality" (*VS*, p. 74). Beauty awakens us from our "world of unreality and dreams" (*WFG*, p. 108). In the presence of beauty, Jaffier becomes conscious of that which is not himself. He, to borrow from Hadot, experiences a "radical rupture" in his normal "state of unconsciousness" (*WL*, p. 253). What are we to deduce from this? First and foremost, it becomes apparent that the Orphic transforms our perception. Indeed, it is this what undergirds the dichotomy between Jaffier and Renaud. But it is more than this; it is also why Jaffier comes to abandon his use of force. Indeed, as Yoon Sook Cha writes, in his piece, *Decreation and the Ethical Bind* "the play hinges upon the exercise of force yet ends with the preservation of Venice".¹⁷⁶ Venice's beauty challenges the "self-perpetuating" cycle of force that could have destroyed it. This is because beauty (in relation to *Figure 7.0*) is a "snare" to Jaffier's soul (*I*, p. 3). It also queries Kant's account of the 'aesthetic' precisely because it lacks this Platonic dimension. More specifically, Kant holds that beauty is what we 'read' into the world (that is, through judgement). In other words, beauty is not something that is intrinsic to the object it itself; it is, to borrow from Platonic language, a transcendental (*CJ*, §1-22).

¹⁷⁵ Little, J. P. "Society as Mediator in Simone Weil's 'Venise Sauvée.'" *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 65, no. 2, 1970, p. 303, doi: <https://doi.org/10.2307/3723532>.

¹⁷⁶ Yoon Sook Cha. *Decreation and the Ethical Bind: Simone Weil and the Claim of the Other*. Fordham University Press, 2017, p. 66, doi: <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1xhr5hr>.

As such, for a Kantian, it cannot and does not act as a metaxu (WFG, p. 118).¹⁷⁷ What we see here then is a point of divergence between Hadot and Weil: while Hadot argues that Kant's aesthetics helps preserve cosmic consciousness, Weil struggles with Kant's aesthetics precisely because she sees beauty as something that beckons us into the realm of the divine. Indeed, she would qualify Hadot's remark that Kant sought to "preserve the cosmic dimension which is essential to human existence" (AP, p. 349). This is because (as she writes in her essay, *Forms of the Implicit Love of God*) beauty "involves the love of all the truly precious things" adding that "truly precious things are those forming ladders reaching toward the beauty of the world, openings onto it" (WFG, pp. 125-126). God, in a sense, plants beauty in the world so that we can come to know Him. This is reminiscent to the argument put forward by Plato in his *Phaedrus*:

The madness of a man who, on seeing beauty here on earth, and being reminded of true beauty, becomes winged, and fluttering with *eagerness to fly upwards* (P, 249d, *emphasis added*).

What undergirds a Platonic understanding of beauty then is that seeks to orient us as agents to the Good. It is this which underpins his remark that beauty makes us desire to "fly upwards" (P, 249d). The Promethean vision (as we have seen) is an impediment of this experience; and, importantly, it is what blinds Renaud and the other conspirators within the play (VS, p. 74). What I wish to suggest to the reader is that this is particularly relevant to the Anthropocene given that we generally view the world through a Promethean lens (and, therefore, relate to it primarily in and through force). It is a voluntarism whereby we impose our will and desires on the world instead of being attentive towards it. Nonetheless, the Orphic has the ability to alter our sense of self as subjects, to as it were, be like the "man on a mountain" (WFG, p. 67). Such is the power of beauty; it has the ability to challenge our Promethean "vision of the world" (AP, 3). Moreover, it is because of her vision of beauty that Weil is exempt from the common ecological criticisms levelled against Platonism (as is Lane in her *Eco-Republic*). Indeed, as Val Plumwood argues in her piece, *Plato and the Philosophy of Death*, the typical Platonist has no interest in the earth beneath his feet.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ This is not to say that there are similarities between Platonic and Kantian notions of beauty, i.e., both seek to cultivate disinterestedness. Nonetheless, there are differences, see, McMahon, Jennifer A. "The significance of Plato's notions of beauty and pleasure in the philosophy of Kant." *Greek Research in Australia: Proceedings of the Sixth Biennial International Conference of Greek Studies 2005*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2007, pp. 27-34, and, Ramos, Santiago. "Plato and Kant on Beauty and Desire." *Epoché*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2019, pp. 1-26, doi: <https://doi.org/10.5840/epoche20191010142>.

¹⁷⁸ Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. Routledge, 1993, pp. 69-103.

For her, Plato endorses an anti-ecological dualism which is underpinned by a mystical and overly other-worldly metaphysics; Platonists, as Plumwood argue, seek to release us from any worries concerning this-worldly entanglements. Weil's interpretation of Plato, however, is original (as we saw in *Figure 7.0*). This is because the experience of beauty connects us, or (in an ethical sense) binds us to reality. Indeed, Elaine Scarry in her piece *On Beauty and Being Just* makes this argument too. For her, beauty assists us in becoming more ethical agents.¹⁷⁹ Interestingly, she draws on Weil to make her case. Before beauty, as Scarry writes:

It is not that we cease to stand at the centre of the world, for we never stood there. It is that we cease to stand even at the centre of our own world. We willingly cede our ground to the thing that stands before us.¹⁸⁰

Scarry highlights a couple important issues here. *First*, beauty reminds us that we are not the centre of all things (in fact) believing so is not only delusory, but also potentially immoral. In a way, the attentive subject relinquishes their sovereignty and creates space for what is not themselves. In doing so, we achieve the “balance” through a decentring that O’Hear sees as proper use of our “gifts”.¹⁸¹ This is precisely because the aesthetic allows us to experience reality within the Orphic domain. This is what it means to be a “man on a mountain” (*WFG*, p. 67). What I suggest here is that, for Weil, Prometheism and the recognition of beauty within objects is incompatible; they are like oil and water. *Second*, beauty excites our attention and in turn prevents a distorted and Promethean conception of reality. This is why Weil writes that for “the Greeks, the science of nature was itself an art” (*NB*, p. 27). What I wish to suggest is that Weil offer us a fascinating diagnosis of the Anthropocene: it is the result of a lack of connection, of humility, and of respect for what is beyond ourselves. Indeed, as she writes, in her essay, *Divine Love in Creation* (like Renaud) “we are not sensitive to the beauty of the world because a screen comes between it and ourselves” (*I*, p. 103). The reader ought to take note of the ‘we’ in this remark. Indeed, for Weil this is our shared universal condition. But what is this screen? *First*, what does she mean by it? And *second*, how does attention solve it? To answer this question goes a long way to illustrating how Weil seeks to answer *P2*. Indeed, we can perhaps discern her view of how to approach *P2* in her essay, the *Great Beast*. Here, she builds on Plato’s treatment of the metaphor in the *Republic* (*R*, 493a) with a particular stress on the social and collective.

¹⁷⁹ Scarry, Elaine. *On Beauty and Being Just*. Princeton University Press, 2013, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400847358>.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, *On Beauty and Being Just* (2013), p. 112.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, *Transcendence, Creation and Incarnation* (2020), p. 142.

In doing so, she reflects on the events of her times through a stress on “the power of the social element” (GG, p. 167). Indeed, we should take note of the sub-title of the piece, the *Some Reflections on the Origins of Hitlerism*. What I wish to suggest is that (unlike Bergson) she would approach P2 individualistically (that is, the conceptual problem of how on the whole we as a species can become more Orphic). Indeed, she dreaded the rash, mindless force intoxicated crowd. Or, to borrow from Plato, the “passions and pleasures of the mass of the common people” (R, 493d). We see this dramatized through the invading Spaniards in *Venice Saved*. Nonetheless, we also see her solution to this problem. Indeed, Jaffier (as it were) tames the *Great Beast* in the play. What this suggests is that Weil would expect the vast sway of humanity (like the Spaniards) to be trapped within Prometheanism. After all, as Plato himself muses, “philosophy” (if understood in the Hadotian sense) “is impossible among common people” (R, 494a). Nonetheless, there are those (in this case, the Orphic) who individually can address P2.

A further comparison here can again be made with Bergson. For Bergson, the intellect blocks us from seeing and living within the durations beyond us. It cuts, solidifies, and sees on that which is static. The aim of intuition (as a spiritual exercise) is to connect us to durations which are foreclosed to us by our being bound up with the intellect. Like Bergson, for Weil, the screen is representative of force and all of its ills; the pride, ego, and self-centredness of those bound to the *Great Beast*. Indeed (drawing on Weil) Iris Murdoch in her *Sovereignty of Good* argues that “in the moral life the enemy is the big fat ego”.¹⁸² That is (like the intellect) we become accustomed to seeing and interacting with reality only insofar that it serves our interests. That is, akin to the Bergson’s critique of the intellect, instead of seeing the world as it exists in itself, we impose our own interests and desires on it. The goal of attention (like intuition) is to be drawn into the objects around us, but in a different way. While intuition requires *effort*, Weil’s attention is *passive* (it is, after all, a “negative effort” (WFG, p. 66). In turn, the subject becomes contemplative and seeks to know reality in a passive manner: to let the object speak for itself. The subject, while in a state of attention, seeks to perceive reality as it is, rather than for themselves. In other words, it seeks to achieve what OOO does: to give objects greater ontological weight, and, in turn, to preserve them.

What we see here is that Bergson and Weil, while being French Spiritualists, offer different diagnoses and in turn solutions in the Anthropocene as seen in *Figure 8.0*. The Orphic, in contrast to the Promethean, provides for the possibility of aesthetic realism. Indeed, as Weil writes,

¹⁸² Murdoch, Iris. *The Sovereignty of Good*. Routledge, 2014, p. 51.

we “should be penetrated by the object,” adding that “our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object which it is to penetrate it” (WFG, p. 67). In doing so, the subject breaks down the wall separating it from the object by suspending their thoughts. The attentive mind (to use Bergson’s language) is “detached” (CM, p. 114). In fact, in the act of waiting, we become aware how beautiful everything is; and, most importantly, seek to restrain our use of force. We, as it were, become “conscious of living in the cosmos” and desire to live “in harmony” with it (V, pp. 91-98). This is what it means to be “a man on a mountain”; we become conscious of what is “below” us (WFG, p. 67). In other words, this happens when we observe something without trying to make use of it, figure out how it works, or satisfy any desires or cravings. It is what undergirds Weil comment that, “the attitude of looking and waiting is the attitude which corresponds with the beautiful” (WFG, p. 150). What I wish to put forward to the reader is that this perfectly captures our predicament within the Anthropocene. Indeed, in contrast to Bergson’s composite solution to P2, Weil sees a dichotomy between the Orphic and Promethean:

Man’s great affliction, which begins with infancy and accompanies him till death, is that looking, and eating are two different operations (GG, p. 100).

Looking is Orphic, and the subject is attentive; they become “penetrated by the object” (WFG, p. 67). Eating is Promethean in the sense that we see all things through the prism of our own ambitions and aspirations. Indeed, we see this struggle dramatized in *Venice Saved*. As Christopher Thomas argues in his piece, *Pity, Beauty, Friendship*, Jaffier steers clear of the temptation to “eat” Venice after embracing its splendour, majesty, and beauty.¹⁸³ We begin to see this shift in the second scene of *Act Two* in the play. Here, we see him questioning himself and his intentions after Pierre (a fellow conspirator) talks about “possessing” Venice and becoming its “master”. Indeed, as Jaffier ponders, “Yes, all this beauty will be mine, *how* can I even imagine it?” (VS, p. 67, *emphasis added*). Although this is (for all intents and purposes) a rhetorical question, it is clear that Jaffier is contemplating here; we gain an insight into his internal struggle. Indeed, we see him contemplating the inherent contradictions within Pierre’s assertion; how can one “possess” and “master” beauty? Such comments clearly trouble and disturb Jaffier: he no longer saw Venice as something that had to be plundered and looted for his personal gain. Drawing on *Phaedrus*.

¹⁸³ Thomas, Christopher. “Simone Weil’s *Venice Saved*: Pity, Beauty, Friendship.” *Bloomsbury French Thought Articles*, 2022, doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350930353.002>

Weil clearly sees this as a state of “Platonic love”; one where to look is to eat (*NB*, p. 52). We observe a similar dialogue between Jaffier and Renaud in the climax of *Act Two* in *Scene Seventeen*. Indeed, as Renaud says to Jaffier: “What is it? You’re looking at me but don’t seem to be hearing me. Is something wrong? Is something troubling you?” (*VS*, p. 87).

	<i>Problem</i>	<i>Approach</i>	<i>Solution</i>
<i>Bergson</i>	Intelligence	Duration	Intuition & Open Love
<i>Weil</i>	Force	Metaxu	Attention & Beauty
<i>OOO</i>	Anthropocentrism	Noumena	Flat Ontology

Figure 8.0: *Bergson, Weil, and OOO*

What we see here is Jaffier beginning to free himself from the Promethean social imaginary of his fellow conspirators (*OC*, 43e). This again illustrates the dichotomy that Weil seeks to draw between the “dream” of force and the “reality” which Jaffier seeks to preserve (*VS*, p. 74). Indeed, Renaud (and the other conspirators) merely want to “eat” Venice. In contrast, Jaffier wants to “look” at it (*WFG*, p. 64). This serves to highlight the aesthetic dimension of attention. It is, as I argue, an instance of the “divine generosity” we need within the Anthropocene in order to address *P2* (*I*, p. 44). Indeed, like Bergson’s philosophy, attention (like intuition) strives to comprehend, perceive, and be in harmony with reality. Weil wants us to become more in touch with reality, to be stirred and shaped by it; she wants us to break free of the screen. Crucially, beauty is not a marker of our hegemony.

It teaches us to acknowledge that we are not the metaphysical centre of the cosmos. The aim of the following sub-section is to better discuss and interrogate Morton's vision of hyperobjects by putting him in conversation with Kant. This shall be the focus of this and the sub-section which deals with her text, the *Need for Roots* (where, instead of the sublime), I use Weil to ground beauty as an alternative.

Hyperobjects and the Sublime

Aesthetics (as well as perception) shapes how we see, interact, and relate to the world around us in an ethical manner. Hadot sees aesthetics similarly way (*WL*, p. 208). What is at issue is that some aestheticians (such as Emily Brady, for example) have recently advocated for a sublime aesthetics within the Anthropocene. As she argues in her piece, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, a sublime aesthetics highlights the vastness of the cosmos and (most importantly) our finitude.¹⁸⁴ What is intriguing however is that Morton sees hyperobjects in almost identical terms (and, as such, it *ought* to be read as a sublime aesthetic). However, as I shall argue, this metaphysical "picture" of reality may hinder our ability to engage with the problem on a local level and problematise any solution to *P2* (*OC*, 43e). It, in other words, may foster impair attention and does little (or nothing at all) to restrain our capacity for force.

As with his moral philosophy (that is, his *Second Critique* and *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*), in the presence of sublimity, Kant seeks to ground our autonomy as rational beings. In doing so, he seeks to preserve our agency through noumena. Indeed, as he writes in his *Critique of Judgment*:

Bold, overhanging, as it were threatening cliffs, thunderclouds piled up the vault of heaven... But provided our own position is secure, their aspect is all the more attractive for its fearfulness... They raise the forces of the soul above the height of vulgar commonplace (*CJ*, §28, 261),

Consider instances of the mathematical sublime (*CJ*, §25). Here, although the subject experiences awe, this stems from reason's ability to comprehend that which is beyond human scale. This is also the case with the dynamical sublime (*CJ*, §28). Although it causes anxiety at first, through reason, it also grounds our supremacy within nature.¹⁸⁵ That is, we are phenomenally nothing and noumenally everything in the presence of sublimity (*CJ*, §28, 261-264).

¹⁸⁴ Brady, Emily. *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy: Aesthetics, Ethics, and Nature*. Cambridge University Press, 2013.

¹⁸⁵ It is here where Morton disagrees with Kant's account.

Here, one may reason that this may lead to a less anthropocentric ethic by instilling a sense of cosmic consciousness. However, our “superiority” which Kant seeks to ground through noumena might be problematic (*CJ*, §28, 264). Indeed, as Jeffrey L. Bilbro reasons in his paper, *Sublime Failure*, when confronted by the spectacle of a starry night sky (as in his *Critique of Practical Reason*)¹⁸⁶ persons may feel pressed to act in accordance with the moral law just as much as they may come to value security and comfort above all else.¹⁸⁷ In turn (given the latter) our ability to be “preservers and guarantors” of nature is made or is seen to be problematic within a dangerous and hostile “picture” of the world.¹⁸⁸ The reader may be asking at this point, why is this all significant? Here, it is important to recall what Hadot notes early on in his *Veil of Isis*:

If man feels nature to be an enemy, hostile and jealous... there will then be opposition... Man will seek, through technology, to affirm his power, domination, and rights over nature (*V*, p. 92).

What Hadot is suggesting here is that a sublime “picture” of the world may in fact inspire Prometheanism (*OC*, 43e). Indeed, it’s crucial to keep in mind that force (and Prometheanism) are protective mechanisms insofar as they are relational. As such, a sublime aesthetics may propagate force. As such, with regards to Morton, recall that for Kant, we are phenomenally nothing but noumenally everything before the sublime *iff* “we find ourselves in safety” (*CJ*, §28, 261). It is this which (as Bryon Williston argues in *Sublime Anthropocene*) allows us to escape from moral defeatism in the presence of sublime objects.¹⁸⁹ However, this is something that a flat ontology lacks; for Morton we are “enmeshed” with hyperobjects. Our “position” as it were, is not secure. Indeed, the sublime only “raises” us up and grounds our superiority over nature when observed at a distance (*CJ*, §28, 261). What I wish to suggest is that Morton’s conception of hyperobjects is startlingly similar to Kant’s vision of the sublime.¹⁹⁰ What is absent is that mankind is not a noumenal being; rather, we are one object among many. In other words, we are not (to borrow from Harman) “ontologically special”.¹⁹¹ The issue with this however is that there is nothing to guard us against sublimity. Consider Morton’s comment in his *Ecology without Nature*:

¹⁸⁶ Kant, Immanuel. *Kant: Critique of Practical Reason*. Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 133, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511809576>.

¹⁸⁷ Bilbro, Jeffrey L. “Sublime Failure: Why We’d Better Start Seeing Our World as Beautiful.” *South Atlantic Review*, vol. 80, no. 1-2, 2015, p. 136.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, *Kant on Duties Regarding Nonrational Nature* (1998), p. 204.

¹⁸⁹ Williston, Byron. “The Sublime Anthropocene.” *Environmental Philosophy*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2016, p. 168, doi: <https://doi.org/10.5840/envirophil201610338>.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, *Hyperobjects* (2013), p. 1.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, *Graham Harman on Art and Ecology* (2016).

Nature is... animals, trees, the weather... the bioregion, the ecosystem. It is both the set and the contents of the set. It is the world and the entities in that world. It appears like a *ghost* at the never-arriving end of an infinite series: crabs, waves, lightning, rabbits, silicon... Nature.¹⁹²

Within this ‘picture’ of an “infinite series” what is problematic is that it has the potential to lead to or, even inspire Prometheanism.¹⁹³ If hyperobjects manifest “like a ghost”, it may inspire the need for security and protection (*V*, p. 92).¹⁹⁴ After all, this is how Weil herself read the Prometheus myth. He, she notes, “freed men from the fear of death” (*I*, p. 67). Here, we need only consider comments made by some upon reading his *Hyperobjects*. One in particular was “scared” and “terrified”; “every sip from a straw is another murder” adding that “you can count the dead turtles, or whatever, as you sip”.¹⁹⁵ Indeed, another commentator ends his piece with the following sarcastic remark, “don’t let that” (that is, hyperobjects) “spoil your morning coffee”.¹⁹⁶ As such, while Morton contends that a hyperobjects-oriented aesthetic best represents our predicament within the Anthropocene, it has an unforeseen effect of rendering us helpless within it. In turn, this may complicate our efforts to address *P2*. Indeed, as Jeffrey L. Bilbro further argues “the only difference between Kant’s sublime and Morton’s aesthetics, is that the ecological subject is no longer separate from the vast, formless object”.¹⁹⁷ Although it, from the outset, may instil a cosmic consciousness of reality in us, it can also cause us to stumble in lethargy and complacency (*AP*, p. 349). In other words, it may perpetuate the very moral defeatism that Kant sought to avoid. Indeed, this “picture” of the world is incomprehensible and sees us as being incapable of action. Adding to this, Morton also saddles us with an aesthetic that paints reality as ugly and unlovable; we learn to interpret it as something we should be cautious towards (*V*, p. 92). Perhaps the following normative question emerges from this: *how* can we navigate the tightrope between humility (which is something Brady acknowledges is absent in Kant)¹⁹⁸ and moral defeatism (which is what OOO delivers)? The solution I want to leave to the reader is beauty (after all, she like Bergson did not philosophise fatalistically).

¹⁹² Morton, Timothy. *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*. Harvard University Press, 2009, p. 18.

¹⁹³ And this too is interesting insofar that by seeking to collapse the subject-object distinction characteristic of Kantianism, the result is the same (if not worse).

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, *Ecology Without Nature* (2009), p. 18.

¹⁹⁵ Meis, Morgan. “Timothy Morton’s Hyper-Pandemic.” *The New Yorker*, 8 June 2021, www.newyorker.com/culture/persons-of-interest/timothy-mortons-hyper-pandemic.

¹⁹⁶ Nazaryan, Alexander. “You’re Only Human. That’s the Problem.” *Newsweek*, 2 Jan. 2014, www.newsweek.com/2014/01/03/youre-only-human-thats-problem-245006.html.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, *Sublime Failure* (2015), p. 151.

¹⁹⁸ Brady, Emily. “Reassessing Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature in the Kantian Sublime.” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2012, p. 104, doi: <https://doi.org/10.5406/jaesteduc.46.1.0091>.

Weil would have us shrink the world and increase our capacity for attentiveness; we don't become a "man on a mountain" overnight (*WFG*, p. 67). However, our ability to develop attention is hindered by our preoccupation with hyperobjects. Instead, we are distracted by what we cannot control (in a Hadotian sense), and we lose control of our sense of place. Given the centrality I have given to aesthetics in my reading of Weil's thought, I highlight its significance to her vision of science. In doing so, I put Weil in conversation with Bergson. The aim of this is to discuss the significance Weil gives to humility in her thought.

Science and Humility

Weil's view of science is an under-appreciated area of her philosophical oeuvre. Indeed, it has garnered little attention in the literature. Throughout this sub-section I connect my reading of Weil's aesthetics (through her understanding of Prometheism) with Vance Morgan's work on her philosophy of science in his *Weaving the World* and Aviad Heifetz's recent piece, *None Enters Here Unless He is a Geometer*.¹⁹⁹ This is done so as to not only grasp Weil's Orphic vision of science but also to map it onto Hadot's account in his *Veil of Isis*, and, in turn, ground Weil's understanding of *P1* (that is, the *historical* framing of the problem).

In a metaphysical sense, Weil sees mathematics as a metaxu and a means through which we can become more attentive agents. She claims, however, that it has become overly procedural as a discipline. This for her has come at the expense of contemplation. Indeed, as a result of this, our mathematical techniques of modelling nature have gradually come to be seen as nature itself. Weil, like Hadot, chronicles a story and, also like him, she stresses *contingency*.²⁰⁰ She, however, builds on Hadot's reading by focusing on the introduction of algebraic techniques and tracing out its implications. Indeed (above all) what we see in contemporary science are representational 'explanations' (which we discuss in due course). It is significant to point out that Weil's understanding of force has its origins (alongside *Oppression and Liberty*) in her study of Descartes, specifically, her senior thesis, *Science, Perception, and Descartes*.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ See, Morgan, Vance G. *Weaving the World: Simone Weil on Science, Mathematics, and Love*. University of Notre Dame Press, 2005 and Heifetz, Aviad. 'None Enters Here Unless He is a Geometer': Simone Weil on the Immorality of Algebra. *Axiomathes*, vol. 32, no. 3, 2022, pp. 1129–1145, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10516-022-09628-0>.

²⁰⁰ This is of course in contrast to Bergson who, through his vision of our evolutionary intellect, does not see our Promethean bent as contingent.

²⁰¹ Weil, Simone. "Science and Perception in Descartes." *Formative Writings*, Routledge, 2010, pp. 27–75, doi: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203092514-5>.

Weil contends that Cartesian science's mathematical techniques (particularly its introduction of geometric and algebraic coordinates) have allowed us to "reconstruct" the natural world as a "simple machine" (*NB*, p. 7). This ought (in relation to her essay, *Prometheus*) to be understood as a consequence of Prometheus' "gifts" to humankind (*I*, p. 67). Indeed, with regards to her view on algebra, she writes that the "Descartes' venture has turned out badly" (*SL*, p. 3). This is further elaborated in her *Notebooks* where she writes that :

The mathematician lives in a universe apart... The relation between sign and thing signified no longer exists; the play of interchange between signs develops of itself and for itself. And further, this phenomenon duplicates itself. Because the increasing complication demands signs of signs (*NB*, p. 31).

For her, the Cartesian venture is one of force, through signs the thing signified no longer exists; it becomes a mere thing which we can manipulate according to our wishes (*I*, p. 24). This is what undergirds her comment that "the mathematician lives" in a totally foreign universe to the objects it seeks to represent (*NB*, p. 31). In contrast, through measurement and balance, geometry instils in us a sense of 'equilibrium' what it means to be in a state of balance (*NB*, p. 9).²⁰² Yet, 'ambition' and 'excess' are what undergird algebraic methods. It is above all what we see in the passage above. Here, Weil is drawing again drawing a dichotomy between "reality" and "dreams" (*VS*, p. 74). Signs, as it were, "screen" our experience of reality and make it out to be overly malleable to our interests. Indeed, as she writes elsewhere, algebra fails to furnish "obedience" precisely because it is not a "pure science" (*NB*, p. 80).²⁰³ She even goes so far as to call algebra one of the "monsters" of contemporary civilisation (*GG*, p. 152). This is because, in relation to her philosophy of attention, it fosters an attitude of "eating" as opposed to "looking" (*WFG*, p. 64). For this reason, the primary goal for ancient practitioners was purity; it was one of 'looking'; a state of "eternal beatitude" (*NB*, p. 637). In doing so, they sought (more than anything else) to achieve an "equilibrium between man and the world" (*NB*, p. 9). One contemplated the inner workings of reality in order to live more harmoniously within it. In other words, within this "picture" of the world, mathematics served both an epistemic and ethical purpose (*OC*, 43e).

²⁰² This is not to say that, in relation to *PI*, that Weil herself addressed issues directly related to the Anthropocene. Rather, it is more the case that her thought has resources to both anticipate it (in particular, through her vision of force) and to respond to it.

²⁰³ What we see here then is that the Promethean and Orphic not only mark distinct forms of life but also distinct social epistemologies. That is, they embody not only distinct ethical and perceptual frames through which we can grasp and inhabit the world, but also distinct ways in which we come to *know* it as well. Indeed, we saw this in Bergson as well within the context of his vision of the intellect and intuitive forms of knowledge.

It does so by helping to instil within us a sense of humility (which is absent in the Kantian picture as Emily Brady herself acknowledges).²⁰⁴ This is because Weil sees mathematics as “an intermediary” (NB, p. 85). Beauty, in other words, serves a transcendental function; it is an incarnation of something Platonic and eternal. Weil, unlike Bergson, is far from being a nominalist (indeed, this is what undergirds Bergson’s vision of [A] in *Figure 1.0*). Weil believes that mathematics (in a disinterested manner) moves us to “look” in both awe and wonder (WFG, p. 64). Indeed, like Plato, Weil sees it as critical to the education of the philosopher (R, 521c-531c). We, like Jaffier come to see clearly (VS, p. 88). For instance, this is what undergirds her remark in her *Notebooks* that “the object of science is the exploration of beauty” (NB, p. 71). But what does she mean exactly by this? I suggest that we ought to read these remarks as iterations of the Orphic in Weil’s thought. Indeed, it becomes clear that Weil was (as Hadot would put it) “inspired by respect in the face of mystery and disinterestedness” (V, p. 91). Within this “picture” there is, she writes, “a bond between beauty and science” in ancient Greece (NB, p. 8). Of course, an overwhelming number of people do not find mathematics (or science, for that matter) exciting or awe-inspiring. Weil was conscious of this, having grown up with her brother (the renowned mathematician André Weil).²⁰⁵ Indeed, her essay, *Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies Towards the Love of God* explores this dilemma. What becomes clear within this piece is that the basic goal of education is to facilitate what Mario Von de Ruhr describes as an *Apprenticeship in Attention* (GG, p. 141).²⁰⁶ This (as it were) is a life of philosophy; it is not supposed to be easy (WL, p. 275). One has to focus on what is difficult and avoid what is simple and easy; one does not come to vantage point of the “man on a mountain” overnight (WFG, p. 67). Poignantly, for us, she provides an example from mathematics (which many, she acknowledges, find difficult). This is because “a genuine effort of the attention wasted” insofar that “all spiritual light lightens the mind” (WFG, p. 62). Angelo Caranfa’s argues in his piece *The Aesthetic and the Spiritual Attitude in Learning*, we must “be attentive to our educational failures if we are to develop the faculty of attention”.²⁰⁷ In doing so, we begin to cultivate “the virtue of humility” (WFG, p. 64). This serves as the basis for her critique of modern Promethean science. Indeed, as she writes, contemporary science seeks to express “in algebraical terms the regularities of nature” for our use (NB, p. 27).

²⁰⁴ Ibid, *Reassessing Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature in the Kantian Sublime* (2012), p. 104.

²⁰⁵ Weil, Sylvie. “My Father André Weil.” *Notices of the American Mathematical Society*, vol. 65, no. 1, 2018, pp. 54–57, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1090/noti1607>.

²⁰⁶ Von der Ruhr, Mario. *Simone Weil: An Apprenticeship in Attention*. Continuum, 2006.

²⁰⁷ Caranfa, Angelo. “The Aesthetic and the Spiritual Attitude in Learning: Lessons from Simone Weil.” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2010, p. 67, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jae.0.0085>.

This is because “technical science” she argues, “places force and civilisation on the same side” (NBS, p. 270). Here, we are able to draw parallels to what Hadot sees as the “mathematisation of nature” in and through algebra (V, p. 128). Both argue that we prize utility over truth. Indeed, Prometheism desires knowledge of reality in order to further our own interests (V, p. 123). Or, in other words, a science predicated on “eating” (GG, p. 100). She even claims in her *Need for Roots* that such Promethean ideals of science “offers nothing to men’s minds except brute force” (NR, p. 291). Weil believes that since the rise of Cartesianism, we have become accustomed to viewing and understanding the world through the lens of force. It is for this reason that, for her, the “Descartes’ venture has turned out badly” (SL, p. 3). What I wish to suggest is that beauty is “missing” from the Promethean picture of reality (NB, p. 7). We, like Renaud, live within an unreality of “dreams” (VS, p. 74). What we can infer from this is that for Weil, beauty and force are fundamentally incompatible; much like the dynamics of “looking” and “eating” (GG, p. 77). So, what is the answer? Weil argues that science must become more meditative, and, in turn, more Orphic and disinterested. This is what undergirds her interesting solution, namely, that “religion and science” should “become reconciled” (NR, p. 258). According to Weil, this was the Orphic method which undergirded Greek visions of science. It aided the subject’s apprenticeship in attention (GG, p. 141). Here, we are perhaps able to draw some connections between Bergson and Weil concerning the role of religion in their respective philosophies. Indeed, as she writes in her *Need for Roots*:

Contact with the beauty of Christianity, presented simply as a beautiful thing to be savoured, would imperceptibly *imbue* the mass of the population with spirituality (NR, p. 93, *emphasis added*).

That is, it reorients the masses, or as would Bergson put it, it directs our attention “heavenward” (TSMR, p. 224). Religion awakens us or cultivates in us a predisposition towards beauty (WFG, pp. 126-142). This is what undergirds Oriol Quintana’s comparison of Weil with George Orwell in his piece, *The Politics of Rootedness*.²⁰⁸ In turn, we come to preserve and respect what is not us and acknowledge our limits. We, in a word, learn to “look” and not “eat” (GG, p. 77). This, of course is akin to Bergson’s argument in *Two Sources*. For Bergson, mystics (and, perhaps religion itself) helps instil in us the open tendency, which, in their absence, would only be a “whisper of an echo” within us (TSMR, p. 203).

²⁰⁸ Bourgault, Sophie, and Julie Daigle. “The Politics of Rootedness: On Simone Weil and George Orwell.” *Simone Weil, Beyond Ideology?*, Springer, 2020, pp. 103–21, doi: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-48401-9_6.

That is, although for Weil religion helps us to see the world in an Orphic manner (and, for Bergson, religion helps instil within us a sense of the Orphic), what unites both is that religion helps us inhabit an Orphic picture of the world (*OC*, 43e). What we see here is that scientific enquiry was a spiritual exercise for the Greeks. It taught and helped instil in them a sense of humility and awe by bringing them into contact with the world. It is why the Greeks dwelled “closer to the gods” and why it is critical they (in relation to the two conceptual problems) to grasp the “oracle” they have handed to us (*SL*, p. 124). In contrast (to relate the discussion to the negative aspects of her reading of the Prometheus myth) modern approaches (as Joseph Cosgrove argues in his *Spiritual Critique of Modern Science*) have allowed us to “personalise” nature according to our wishes and desires.²⁰⁹ Weil argues that the appeal of such an Orphic approach lies in the fact that it drastically decentres us while simultaneously allowing us to know and engage with reality in an Orphic way. There is no “dictatorship” in her vision of reality.²¹⁰ We are no longer “self-enclosed”.²¹¹ Given we have considered Weil’s Orphic vision of science in depth; we are now in a position to put Bergson and Weil in conversation with one another. Obedience for Weil is also what is missing within Bergson’s vision of the intellect. For her, the intellect imposes its own patterns (or, in a word, force) onto the world. It is this what underpins both Bergson and Weil’s critiques of Descartes. We see this in Bergson’s comment that what is needed is a philosophy which “will not extend our empire over nature” (*CE*, p. 343). And, interestingly (as we have seen) Weil makes similar comments when she muses that “Descartes’ venture has turned out badly” (*SL*, p. 3). What we see here is that both see a need for “balance” (as O’Hear suggests) through the Orphic.²¹² Indeed, what is of significance is that Weil doesn’t accept (or rather rejects) Bergson’s durational ontology as well. This is perhaps what undergirds their different visions of science (and, therefore, the choices before us below in *Figure 9.0*) (*AP*, p. 3). Weil believed in a creator God, one who ushers in necessity and order within the cosmos. In contrast, Bergson’s God is an immanent one, and is certainly not a creator (for him, we are). Nonetheless, what is crucial to stress here is that both offer us alternatives to the dominant Promethean “picture” of the world in and through their respective Orphic visions for science (*OC*, 30e).

²⁰⁹ Cosgrove, Joseph K. “Simone Weil’s *Spiritual Critique of Modern Science*: An Historical-Critical Assessment.”. *Zygon*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2008, p. 367, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9744.2008.00921.x>.

²¹⁰ Ibid, *Tool-Being* (2002), p. 2.

²¹¹ Ibid, *The Speculative Turn* (2011), p. 3.

²¹² Ibid, *Transcendence, Creation and Incarnation* (2020), p. 142.

	<i>Approach</i>	<i>Epistemology</i>	<i>Ethics</i>
<i>Contemporary Science</i>	Theoretical	Scientific Method	Instrumentalism
<i>Weil</i>	Contemplative	Aesthetic	Humility
<i>Bergson</i>	Duration	Intuition	Open

Figure 9.0: *Bergson, Weil, and Contemporary Science*

Moreover, as we have seen, Prometheanism for Bergson can touch one half of reality; intuition (namely, that which for Bergson can holistically know reality), is after all dependent on the intellect as a faculty. Weil would have qualifications with this insofar that for her, Prometheanism (as shown in her essay *Prometheus*) is full of tensions. Of course, while Bergson's vision of a world in duration is not necessarily one of force, we must remember Weil's view of geometry. For her, geometry teaches us the importance of equilibrium (or, in other words) encourages us as subjects to live in harmony and proportion with the objects around us. What would perhaps worry her about Bergsonism is that it may predispose man to "excess", and, as such, disrupt God's order of necessity in an unintended way. This is perhaps what undergirds Weil's (rather uncharitable) comment in her *Need for Roots* that Bergsonism akin to a "pink pill" (NR, p. 248). Notwithstanding, such comments are actually quite Platonic. Indeed, Plato after all banishes poetry from the "just city" in *the Republic* precisely because it is not imitative (R, 605c-607a). His views on the matter (I believe) are best described by Elizabeth Belfiore in her piece, *Plato's Greatest Accusation against Poetry*.²¹³

²¹³ Belfiore, Elizabeth. "Plato's Greatest Accusation Against Poetry." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1983, pp. 39–62, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00455091.1983.10715862>.

This is crucial because reality (understood in terms of obedience) teaches us how to be attentive agents. Indeed, for Weil, Bergsonism may instil within us non-rational emotions which may be ungovernable and potentially dangerous when understood within the purview of force. We see this in her comment that “the *élan vital* so dear to Bergson, is but a lie; only death is true” (NR, p. 246). As Weil would argue, there is no room for obedience in Bergsonism precisely Bergson does not see mathematics as a *metaxu*, *or*, as a reflection of beauty. Rather, it is premised on the rigid intellect, blinding us from the creativity undergirding the cosmos. In turn, they therefore have different visions of cosmic consciousness and therefore address *P1* and *P2* differently (AP, p. 3).

Force and Roots

In what follows, I seek to draw a connection between Weil’s reading of force in *Iliad* with perhaps her most famous work, *The Need for Roots*. I do so by putting the text in conversation with her play, *Venice Saved*. The rationale for this is to ground the political significance of Weil’s aesthetics. *Need for Roots* was composed in the early months of 1943. Interestingly (and this is perhaps why the piece is of interest to us given our predicament) the *Need for Roots* began as a report for the Free French Resistance movement on the possibilities for *rejuvenating* France once the Germans were forced out. In what follows, I shall be making the argument that the work is perhaps not diagnostic, but we also garner some possible solutions to *P2*. What I wish to put forward to the reader is that attention coupled with rootedness can fully ground love. They do so by both qualifying and regulating the use of force. As a result, for the duration of this subsection, I shall consider both in relation to one another.

What has undergirded my reading of Weil’s thought is that our Promethean tendency and proclivity to force are both the causes and drivers of our current environmental issues. Weil’s stance towards metaphysical reality (as indicated by her critique of contemporary science) sets her apart from OOO. Indeed, as perhaps Weil would suggest, uprootedness in the world that we regard as home is what drives to the destruction of the natural world. Here, we can best understand rootedness as having a sense of being belonging in the world as well as a feeling of contentment and ‘homeness’ more generally. Its opposite (that is, uprootedness) can be taken to be the *inverse* of these qualities. As I argue, Morton’s conception of hyperobjects falls short, notably, in providing us roots. In fact, as we’ve already seen, his vision of hyperobjects might promote Prometheanism (which, in turn, would lead to the use of force).

Weil offers an Orphic alternative, much like Bergson. However, instead of seeing it as a struggle over our open and closed tendencies, she reframes the problem by seeing the need to restrain force in and through roots, beauty, and attention. Indeed, as she writes:

To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul...A human being has roots by virtue of his real, active, and natural participation in the life of a community which preserves in living shape certain particular treasures of the past and certain particular expectations of the future (NR, p. 40).

At first glance, this is reminiscent of the closed society which Bergson both describes and lauded against in his *Two Sources*. Indeed, the closed society is clearly rooted in the manner in which Weil describes; it nourishes and feeds the soul.²¹⁴ However, it is important to remember that they both have distinct diagnoses to the Anthropocene. For Bergson, it is an intellect that turns all that is living into a tool for human uses. In turn, he presents us with a vision for a more intuitive human species; a “divine humanity” as a remedy (TSMR, p. 224). Weil contends that roots are critical for human flourishing. In other words, an intense feeling of attachment to the places we call home is important. Here, it’s critical to keep in mind (with regards to both the conceptual problems) the circumstances in which Weil wrote *Need for Roots*, namely, the Second World War. She sought to diagnose the struggle going on around her in it, and, of course, she saw uprootedness as the primary cause. Consider her comment that:

For people who are really uprooted there remain only *two* possible sorts of behaviour either to fall into a spiritual lethargy resembling death...Or to hurl themselves into some form of activity necessarily designed to uproot, often by the most violent methods (NR, p. 47, *emphasis added*).

For Weil, uprootedness in the second form is what she saw in Europe. The nation of Germany was uprooted, its pride stricken from its loss in the First World of War and the Treaty of Versailles. In turn, in and through force, Germany sought to uproot other nations around them in order to regain the honour and prestige she lost (NR, pp. 47-48). For Weil, this may be what is occurring within the Anthropocene. However, I wish to suggest that perhaps the more accurate diagnosis is the *former*; that of spiritual lethargy. Weil does not go onto elaborate much on what she means by “spiritual lethargy”, but we can intuit (from the experience of France) that she sees it as a form of complacency (NR, p. 47).

²¹⁴ In turn, it is crucial to recall Bergson’s vision of the closed society, namely, that it isn’t evil in and of itself (there are many social goods derived from it). Indeed, the closed society may indirectly care for those that are Other to us; and thus, a need to impel us to preserve what is around us, the places we call home.

Indeed, we can point to some notable passages in the piece where it becomes clear she saw her nation of France as an exemplar case. As she writes, “the sudden collapse of France in June 1940, which surprised everyone all over the world, simply showed to what extent the country was uprooted” (NR, p. 49). Similarly, T.S Eliot in the preface of *Need for Roots* makes similar remarks, “she was also a patriot who saw clearly, as this book shows, the faults and the spiritual weakness of contemporary France” (NR, p. x). Both remarks support an understanding of spiritual lethargy as a form of complacency. This spiritual weakness, or (as she herself terms) the “disease of uprootedness” was on full display given the Battle of France lasted for just over a month (NR, p. 50). Indeed, she muses, why preserve what you perceive to be your enemy? (NR, p. 49). When applied to the Anthropocene, it is clear that we *know* that we are harming the Earth. But perhaps (much like the French people of Weil’s day) we are simply unconcerned and unmoved by such matters. We, as it were, are clearly “deaf and dumb” (I, p. 44). If she were alive today, Weil would perhaps highlight our loss of connection or attachment to the world around us. Indeed, a loss of attachment is the consequence of our irresponsible and Promethean bent for force, it is a life of “dreams” (VS, p. 74). Indeed, as Weil writes, “whoever is uprooted himself uproots others” (NR, p. 48). To break the cycle of force, as Doering poignantly argues, is rather difficult.²¹⁵ Why preserve what you will inevitably discard? Why preserve that which you don’t have a connection with? This is the logic of the Promethean tendency and the uprootedness that we saw on the part of the invading Spaniards in *Venice Saved*. Similarly, as noted in the previous sub-section, a sublime “picture” of the world does nothing to resolve this; rather instead of encouraging compassion and care for the things around us, it fosters only force (OC, 43e). What this suggests is that it is only through finding joy in and cultivating a connection with one’s own home that can one develop love and compassion for reality. Indeed, the inverse of the former remark is true as well, “whoever is rooted himself doesn’t uproot others” (NR, p. 48). What I wish to put forward to the reader is that this is why beauty is important. Indeed, it is what undergirds Nancy Perkins Spyke reading of Weil in her piece, *The Instrumental Value of Beauty in the Pursuit of Justice*. Here, she argues that Weil’s highlights “the importance of beauty in helping us become rooted”. That is, it “awakens” us from spiritual lethargy in and through metaxu (I, p. 24).²¹⁶ Beauty compels us to care for and preserve what we care about; just as we saw on the part of Jaffier who felt compelled “to *preserve* the marvels that exist” (VS, p. 82, *emphasis added*).

²¹⁵ Ibid, *Specter of Self-Perpetuating Force* (2010), p. 2.

²¹⁶ Spyke, Nancy Perkins. “The Instrumental Value of Beauty in the Pursuit of Justice.” *University of San Francisco Law Review*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2006, p. 456.

As a result, reality and objects are no longer regarded as “mere matter” (*I*, p. 26). Instead, we are moved to preserve them in love and care; that is, like Jaffier, we see the contradictions inherent within “mastering” and “possessing” them (*VS*, p. 67). Only the attentive subject can be rooted in reality in and through the Orphic, only they can “clearly” see (*VS*, p. 88). The uprooted Promethean, on the other hand, resorts to force; they ‘see’ purely for their own sake; there are, as it were, no “great many forests and plains” (*WFG*, p. 67). Care and respect necessitate connection. This is the undergirding dynamic of beauty; beauty moves us away from ourselves and towards reality. In doing so, the subject seeks to preserve the object’s autonomy. Beauty, as Weil writes in her essay *Human Personality*, “feeds only that part of the soul that *gazes*” and assists us in acquiring “the faculty of pure and disinterested attention”.²¹⁷ This is what Weil’s Orphic philosophy delivers, and it is something that OOO lacks: it sees force and nothing else. In and through beauty, we resist (unlike Achilles) the tendency to turn everything we touch into a lifeless corpse (*I*, p. 24). Furthermore, the “picture” it paints of the world is not a beautiful one (*OC*, 43e). Indeed, it makes no sense to preserve, care for, and become rooted in a world which we see a need to protect ourselves from (*V*, p. 92). Rather, the picture it offers us is rather Hobbesian; one that is solitary, nasty, and cruel.²¹⁸ What we see here is that (with regards to *P2*) Weil’s philosophy seeks to facilitate the local as *loci* of rootedness (in contrast that is to Morton’s aesthetic of hyperobjects). Indeed, the sublime sees us as uprooted subjects, subjects forced to survive in an unfamiliar, chaotic, and dangerous world (*V*, p. 92). It does not give roots the same way that beauty does. Indeed, as Roger Scruton aptly puts in his rather underappreciated work, *Green Philosophy*:

Human beings, in their *settled condition*, are animated by *oikophilia*: the love of the oikos... We must vest our love and desire in things to which we assign an intrinsic, rather than an instrumental, value, so that the pursuit of means can come to rest, for us, in a place of ends. That is what we mean by settlement: putting the oikos back in the oikonomia.²¹⁹

Again, we observe an implicit distinction between the Promethean and the Orphic, and, in turn, a dichotomy between lovelessness and love. The rooted subject chooses not to engage in force; they exist, as Scruton describes, in a settled condition.

²¹⁷ Ibid, *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, p. 92.

²¹⁸ Hobbes, Thomas, et al. *Leviathan*. Penguin Books, 1985.

²¹⁹ Scruton, Roger. *How to Think Seriously About the Planet: The Case for an Environmental Conservatism*. Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 227.

The Orphic (unlike the Promethean) is not susceptible to coercion and also refrains from instrumental reasoning. Returning again to Scruton, we again see how the Orphic grounds love and respect in the following passage as well:

Oikophilia originates in our need for nurture and safety, but it spreads out across our surroundings in more mysterious and less self-serving ways. It is a call to responsibility, and a rebuke to calculation. It tells us to love, and not to use; to respect, and not to exploit. It invites us to look on things in our ‘homescape’ as we look on persons, not as means only, but as *ends in themselves*.²²⁰

Take note of Scruton’s comment on the origins of oikophilia, namely, it comes from “our need for nurture and safety”.²²¹ Although the Promethean sees nature as something we ought to protect and guard ourselves from, beauty encourages the “act of preserving” (*GG*, p. 77). And, it does so by seeking communion with nature within the context of harmony and peace (*V*, p. 91, 98). This is because (as Scruton argues) we come to see what is around has as ends in themselves; not as “mere matter” (*I*, p. 26). In this way, the Orphic reverses the logic of force and leads us to view reality as an end in and of itself. Morton sees and describes a similar need within the Anthropocene. Indeed, he argues in his *Dark Ecology* that we need to cultivate a “spirituality of care”.²²² However, in contrast to his stress on sublimity, Weil and Scruton suggest that we ought to cultivate beauty in the communities in which we live. In doing so, both *reframe* the problem of the Anthropocene; and call us to shrink our worlds. That is, in a Hadotian sense, we come to focus on that we can control. Such an approach disrupts (as Malcolm Budd argues in his *Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature*) the “everyday sense of the importance of the self”. But it does so through intimacy, not fear.²²³ In fact (as we’ve seen) obsessing with the sublimity of hyperobjects can be harmful; it makes our predicament at best fatalistic.²²⁴ Because of this, we shouldn’t undervalue the significance of highlighting local beauty and therefore prioritise agency in the places we both know and love. Rootedness makes the subject feel at home and inspires them to take time to enjoy and care for their surroundings.

²²⁰ Ibid, *Green Philosophy* (2012), p. 253, *emphasis added*.

²²¹ Ibid, *Green Philosophy* (2012), p. 253, *emphasis added*.

²²² Morton, Timothy. *Dark Ecology: for a Logic of Future Coexistence*. Columbia University Press, 2016, p. 161.

²²³ Budd, Malcolm. *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature*. Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 85, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/0199259658.001.0001>.

²²⁴ It is here important to stress that Bergson’s cosmic consciousness also isn’t debilitating for him, we remain composite all the way down. Indeed, although he laments our need for fixed and stable points, he doesn’t vilify it, rather, what undergirds such comments is his wish for us to experience the joy of the Orphic (*CM*, p. 106).

It is for this reason why Scruton reads Weil as a quintessential “conservative” thinker in his piece *Conservatism*. Indeed, in reference to her piece, *Need for Roots*, Scruton suggest that she sought to address “the spiritual condition of our civilisation”.²²⁵

Returning to our focus on a local aesthetic, Monika Favara-Kurkowski in her piece, *Reclaiming Time Aesthetically* argues that gardening can be a “philosophically charged spiritual exercise” precisely because it heightens the aesthetic dimensions of our experience.²²⁶ This, as it were, may come to be the first step in coming to be like a “man on a mountain” (*WFG*, p. 67). We Indeed, in a Hadotian sense, it reshapes our desires beyond a narrow Prometheanism; we come to “look” and no longer “eat” and consume the objects around us (*WFG*, p. 64). Similarly, in attention, we come to stop seeing the things around us as mere objects and begin to recognise them as things that need our care and respect. That is (unlike Achilles) we come to see them as alive, as “still breathing”, we, as it were, become more attune to hearing their “begging words” (*I*, p. 24). This is exactly what we see in the person of Jaffier, who, as Weil stresses “paid attention” and comes to “clearly” see what he has to do (*VS*, p. 53, 88). What undergirds my thoughts on these matters is that people are predisposed to care about the environments in which they live, work, and interact; or, in a word, are rooted in. in turn, maintaining, stewarding, and loving the places we call home is preferable solution to *P2* as opposed to worrying and disturbing us with a “picture” of hyperobjects (*OC*, 43e). What we see here is perhaps a shift in her pessimism towards political communities that we saw in her essay, the *Great Beast* (which we briefly analysed previously). Indeed, we see this exemplified in her comment that “rootedness lies in something other than the social” (*GG*, p. 169). When applied to *Venice Saved*, she would diagnose their predicament as a consequence of a lack of roots. They (unlike us) “hurl themselves into some form of activity necessarily designed to uproot” (*NR*, p. 47). In doing so, she would encourage us to view, discuss, and address environmental issues through the lens of beauty in and through a stress on humility. And, like Jaffier, we ought to be attentive, contemplative, and spurred to action. Instead of portraying our world as terrible, puzzling, or beyond our grasp as Morton might, she highlights the need for humility, caution, and care.

Notwithstanding (before we move on) what is interesting that Morton himself seems to have a similar view of beauty.

²²⁵ Scruton, Roger. *Conservatism*. Profile Books, 2017, p. 159

²²⁶ Monika Favara-Kurkowski. “Reclaiming Time Aesthetically: Hadot, Spiritual Exercises and Gardening.” *Eidos. A Journal for Philosophy of Culture*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2021, pp. 7–21, doi: <https://doi.org/10.14394/eidos.jpc.2021.0014>.

Indeed, in his *Being Ecological*, he argues that “beauty is death”, and that it is “a reminder that things are fragile, because when one thing envelopes another thing, that other thing might be overwhelmed or destroyed”.²²⁷ This is perhaps what Jaffier himself came to recognise when he experienced the beauty of Venice and felt compelled to preserve it. However, instead of going down this route, he disempowers us by arguing that our actions “must be massive and collective” to respond to the Anthropocene.²²⁸ As such, he “misreads” our moral predicament in a manner that moves us into spiritual lethargy (GG, pp. 134-136).

Attention and Force

After having established beauty as a metaxu, I seek to ground neighbourly love as another contribution Weil can make to our plight within the Anthropocene. Her moral philosophy (meta-ethically understood) seeks to ground the importance of the Other in the moral life. As I argue, the Anthropocene forces us to reconsider who our neighbours are. My aim is to better ground my reading of the *Iliad* (and her play *Venice Saved*) by considering her philosophy of attention in relation to the problem of the Other. In doing so, I highlight the real ways in which it may be utilised in the service of improving moral life of the subject within the Anthropocene. Indeed, in her *Gravity and Grace* she notes that “we have to try to cure our faults by attention and not by will” (GG, p. 116). This comment ought to be read in relation to Kant’s moral philosophy. As such, in what follows, I shall contrast Weil’s approach with Kant’s in an attempt to analyse the deeper meaning of this assertion.

In environmental ethics, love is a concept that is frequently overlooked. This is perhaps why Biasetti in her piece, *From Beauty to Love* argues that attempting to develop an environmentally oriented Kantian moral theory “is like trying to get blood out of a stone”.²²⁹ We see similar comments in Christina Hoff’s piece, *Kant’s Invidious Humanism*.²³⁰ In it, Hoff argues that because Kant reasons that “animals are not self-conscious” they are “merely as a means to an end” (that is, our end).²³¹ What I wish to suggest is that meta-ethical accounts which rest in reason are problematic within the Anthropocene insofar as they separate the subject from reality. Indeed (within this picture) the concept of recognition is absent.

²²⁷ Ibid, *Being Ecological* (2019), p. 81.

²²⁸ Ibid, *Being Ecological* (2019), p. xlii

²²⁹ Ibid, *Beauty to Love* (2015), p. 139.

²³⁰ Hoff, Christina. “Kant’s Invidious Humanism”. *Environmental Ethics*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1983, pp. 63-70.

²³¹ Ibid, *Kant’s Invidious Humanism* (1983), p. 65.

For Weil, a Kantian would never ask, “what are you going through?” (*WFG*, p. 69). When applied to the non-human Other, emphasis should be on *how* we approach them rather than developing accounts which seek to outline the sort faculties non-humans must have for them to be considered as worthy of ethical concern (as in Korsgaard and Wood). Indeed, as she writes, “every being cries out silently to be read differently” and we need only to be attentive to these cries (*GG*, p. 135). What undergirds these remarks is that perception shapes how we treat them. Within the purview of the ego (as Murdoch would put it) we project our interests onto what is not us.²³² The results have undoubtedly been devastating (as with Bergson’s understanding of the intellect in with regards to *A* in *Figure 1.0* as well as *Figure 5.0*). Recall Achilles’ killing of Hector in Homer’s *Iliad*. As we saw, Hector is “still breathing” and is also “still thinking”. But, to Achilles, he is “simply matter” and is also oblivious to Hector’s “begging words” (*I*, p. 24). This is why Weil is explicit about the dangers of force. Indeed, as she reasons in her *Gravity and Grace*, “there is no trace of the ‘I’ in the act of preserving” adding that the “‘I’ leaves its mark on the world as it destroys” (*GG*, p. 77). Insofar that we actively construct and mould reality to suit our purposes, force is similar to Bergson’s conception of the intellect. Indeed, to build on Silvia Caprioglio Panizza’s argument in her *Ethics of Attention*, our use of the word “pets” for instance (ontologically speaking) is driven by our desires.²³³ We see them not so much as living things, rather, as furry friends who exist for our pleasure and utility. In relation to *P2*, this is clearly an attitude of “eating” for we ignore their autonomy as an Other. Indeed, in this case, cows are not autonomous beings in and of themselves, rather, for us, they are meat. What I wish to suggest is that attention teaches us to “look” (*GG*, p. 100). It helps (as Hadot stresses) to transcend the egoist self (*PAH*, p. 86).

Diagrammatically, we can visualise attention in the manner seen in *Figure 10.0*. Here, we approach the object but do not overwhelm it. In doing so, we meet it where it is and respect its autonomy. Recall that for Bergson in the act of intuition we are “transported” into the object “by sympathy” (*CE*, p. 372). It is crucial to understand the similarity (and differences) between the two spiritual exercises within the domain of ethics. While both seek to achieve a “sympathy” between the subject and the objects around them, the aim of intuition is to immerse the subject “within the object” (*CE*, p. 194). In contrast, Weil calls us to know but also preserve the autonomy of the object.

²³² Ibid, *Sovereignty of Good* (2014), p. 51.

²³³ Caprioglio Panizza, Silvia. *Ethics of Attention: Engaging the Real with Iris Murdoch and Simone Weil*. Routledge, 2022, p, 136, doi: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003164852>.

In doing so, it approaches the object *passively* (this is meaning of point *A* below). This is necessarily because attention entails “denying oneself”, and, in turn, our bent for force (*WFG*, p. 85, 98). In doing so (like Bergson) she calls us to “renounce” our “most cherished” habits and does so through a “spirituality of care” (*CE*, p. 372).²³⁴

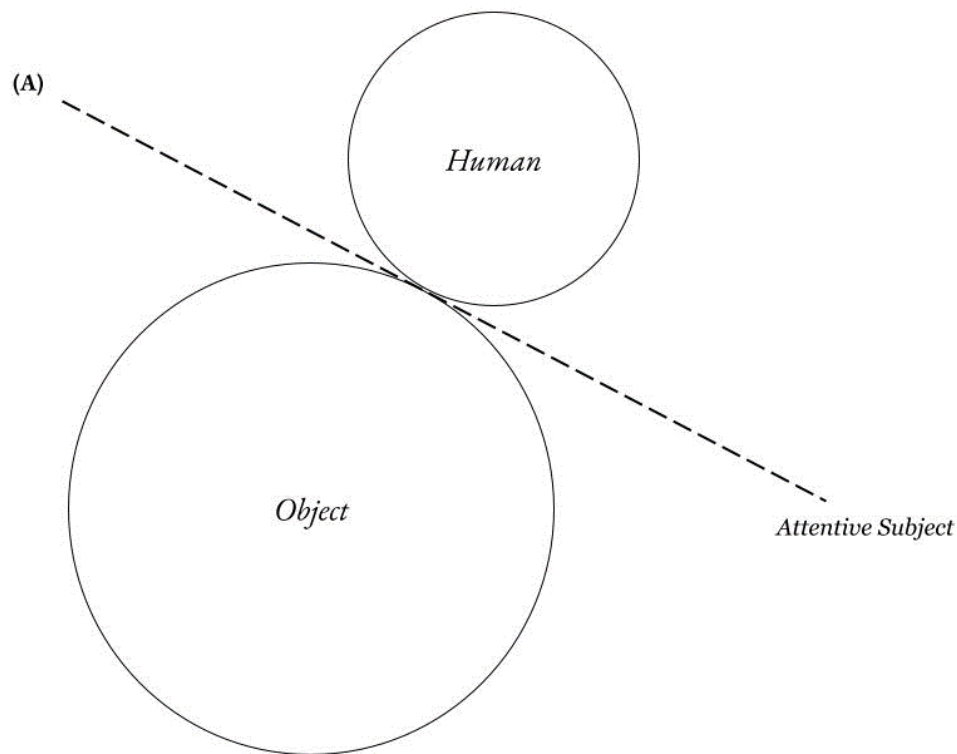


Figure 10.0: Attention and Autonomy

It is what we see on the part of Jaffier in *Venice Saved* as well as Patroclus in Homer’s *Iliad*. Indeed, as we saw in the case of the former, he had come to see “clearly” what he had to do precisely because, as Weil argues, he “paid attention” (*VS*, p. 53, 88). This above all is an act of preserving for he comes to occupy point *A* in relation to Venice (*GG*, p. 77). Morton would sympathize with many of Weil’s remarks here, particularly, her vision of force, but he takes it to the extremes. It is what underpins his ethic of “strange strangers” in his *Ecological Thought*. Like all OOO, he seeks above all the preservation of the thing-in-itself over and against the distortionary human.²³⁵

²³⁴ Morton, Timothy. *Dark Ecology: for a Logic of Future Coexistence*. Columbia University Press, 2016, p. 161.

²³⁵ Ibid, Morton (2010), p. 38.

Indeed, the Other is depicted as a being who cannot be fully known and seen. It is an ethic where (as David Bentley Hart argues in his *Beauty of the Infinite*) the ‘Other’ “cannot in any way actually appear”.²³⁶ This (as should be noted) was also what undergirded my reading of Bergson in an effort to qualify Harman’s arguments. For both Harman and Morton, although the intent of this is to protect the autonomy of the object, what I wish to suggest is that they offer no remedy for force other than inaction. There is nothing in this ethic to prevent Achilles from hauling and abusing Hector’s dead body who is “mere matter” to him (*I*, p. 24). What we see here is that such an ethic leaves the Other both unknowable and, in turn, unlovable. It therefore fails to address *P2*. Indeed, it is reminiscent to the situation in *Figure 5.0* precisely because no sympathy and intimacy is possible (*CE*, p. 372). In turn, to borrow from Hadot, we remain egoist selves (*PAH*, p. 86). The problem with this meta-ethical position is that insofar that it hinders (by imposing limits) our ability to know the Other, it also undermines our ability to exercise agency. In contrast, by reframing the problem of the Other by seeking to qualify our Promethean bent in and through attention what Weil is in fact doing is seeking to draw a connection between perception and ethics. This, in particular is what we saw in *Venice Saved* through the dichotomy she sought to draw between “reality” and “dreams”. Indeed, Renaud (like Achilles in the *Iliad*) is clearly intoxicated by force and relishes in glory and “power” (*VS*, p. 74). Both are blind and oblivious to what is before them, and, subsequently, Achilles slays Hector just as Renaud ignores Venice’s beauty. But, unlike OOO, Weil argues that we can come to see the Other by “displacing” attention away from ourselves (*WL*, p. 253). This is what undergirds Weil’s reading of the Parable of the Good Samaritan in her essay, *Forms of the Implicit Love of God*. Indeed, the Good Samaritan above all desires “the existence of the other” and (like intuition) is transported “into him by sympathy” (*WFG*, p. 97). Again, this is what it means to occupy point *A* in *Figure 10.0*. It is perhaps for this reason that indirect approaches (such as that offered by Toby Svoboda in his *Duties Regarding Nature*) will fall short.²³⁷ This approach, Svoboda writes, “prescribes kindness toward animals and aesthetic appreciation of flora as *optional* but nonetheless effective ways to strengthen one’s virtuous dispositions and hence fulfill one’s duty to increase her own moral perfection”.²³⁸ The main thing which worries the Kantian about animal cruelty is precisely how it will affect us. Or, to put it another way, animal abuse (in a meta-ethical sense) is not wrong. The Other is only “only matter” (*I*, p. 24).

²³⁶ Hart, David B. *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth*. Eerdmans, 2004, p. 77.

²³⁷ Svoboda, Toby. *Duties Regarding Nature: A Kantian Environmental Ethic*. Routledge, 2015, doi: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315713588>.

²³⁸ Ibid, *Duties Regarding Nature* (2012), p. 161.

This raises serious concerns for Weil. *First*, attention is absent within this ethical theory. *Second*, it sees us as the metaphysical centre of reality. In a word, it is still human centred precisely because the nonhuman is not an end in itself in its own right (as in *Figure 5.0*). Indeed, it is merely “optional”, we needn’t occupy point *A* in *Figure 10.0*.²³⁹ This gives us credence to ask the following question, namely, are they really “looking”? Or, is this an instance of ‘restrained’ “eating”? (*GG*, p. 100). Given that it may restrain force (and, therefore, Promethean “violence”), Weil would perhaps suggest that there needs to be more weight given to perception in Svoboda’s account. The Other is still viewed as tools for one’s utility. It, in other words, is still thoroughly interested in promoting our wellbeing (*V*, p. 91). Why is this significant? Again, while an indirect approach may restrain force, we only have to ask the following questions to see its deficiencies. *First*, would Achilles truly see Hector and his pain? *Second*, would Renaud (as well as the other conspirators) still not relish in power and glory? What this suggests is that (like Bergson), Weil sees the need for disinterestedness within the Anthropocene. This is the essential distinction between the Promethean and Orphic perspectives of reality and is perhaps what unites Bergson and Weil as Orphic philosophers. An ethics predicated on disinterest seeks to preserve the autonomy of the Other; and this is perhaps what Svoboda account lacks. Indeed, in order to truly understand the world around them and live in peace within it; their scope of vision must go beyond the human.

Recall Hadot’s vision of cosmic consciousness, namely, that we come to see our “individual existence within the immense current of the cosmos” (*WL*, p. 273). That is, we come to view everything, not from an anthropological and egoistical point of view, but the perspective of the cosmos and nature (*PAH*, p. 94). In fact, the attentive subject (far from being passive) calls them to action; or, as Weil calls it, an “inactive action” (*GG*, p. 45). We see this in the life Weil herself lived as well as Jaffier in *Venice Saved*; the Other becomes the forefront of ethical consideration. Through attention, one is no longer anthropocentric in their moral concerns. Rather, we become ethically entangled with our surroundings. This, for her, is the promise of the Orphic and the moral realism it provides us. This is her solution to *P2*. It allows us to achieve the “divine generosity” needed to resist force (*I*, p. 44). Indeed, Weil’s vision of love is animated by similar concerns as those with open souls which Bergson himself envisages in his *Two Sources*.

²³⁹ Ibid, *Duties Regarding Nature* (2012), p. 161.

Concluding Remarks

The aim of this chapter was to grasp Weil's 'Platonic' reading and solutions to *P1* and *P2* so as to compare and contrast it to Bergson's. What we saw was that, for Weil, the basic truth of our predicament is that it is the outcome of a loss of attachment and respect for beauty. It is this which results in force and our disease of uprootedness (*NR*, p. 50). Our moral and spiritual health are inextricably linked to the world in which we live. This is why using our "gift" correctly in love and humility is crucial (*I*, p. 67). For Weil, moral and spiritual renewal, as well as stronger attachment to the places we call home are the first steps towards addressing our predicament within the Anthropocene. These (as I read them) are instances of "divine generosity" which qualify both force and our Promethean relationship to reality and address *P2* (*I*, p. 44).

GENERAL CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

“Besides scientific truth, we will thus have to allow for an aesthetic truth, which provides an authentic knowledge of nature” (*V*, p. 317).

General Aims and Final Musings

The dissertation has sought to provide a dialogue between the Promethean and Orphic tendencies so as to provide a diagnosis of the Anthropocene as well as a prescription. This was done with the aim of engaging proponents of OOO and their advocacy of a flat ontology within the Anthropocene. As was articulated, in seeking to do so, their philosophy is poorer as a result of it. They critique our lovelessness but offer us no path towards love. Indeed, a flat ontology robs us of our ability to love. What we see from this is that the diagnosis, and, in turn, the prescription offered by OOO are faulty. Indeed, Hadot’s vision of the Promethean and the Orphic (as Byron Williston argues in his *Sublime Anthropocene*) describes “two crucial aspects of what it means to be human in a world that is mostly nonhuman, and it has never been more important to find a way of living with both of them”.²⁴⁰ This, for me, is the diagnosis I provide, and also the prescription I offer and has also framed my understanding of *P1* and *P2*. In the Promethean, we see reality for ourselves, yet, in the Orphic, we see reality as it is and seek to better live in tune with it.

In interpreting Henri Bergson, and Simone Weil, I present them as promising Orphic philosophers who aim to imbue us, as subjects, with a love which allows us to better live in step with what Hadot terms as the “whole”. What we have seen however is that their Orphic visions are *distinct*. Indeed, they are distinct in a manner reminiscent to Kotva’s historiographical split in her seminal work, *Effort and Grace* between Ignatian ‘effort’ (Bergson) and Augustinian ‘passivity’ (Weil) within French Spiritualism.²⁴¹ Indeed, the aim of the dissertation after all was to provide us with choice within the Anthropocene insofar as the life of philosophy is, as Hadot argues, “voluntary” (*AP*, p. 3).

²⁴⁰ Ibid, *Sublime Anthropocene* (2016), p. 171.

²⁴¹ Kotva, Simone. *Effort and Grace: on the Spiritual Exercise of Philosophy*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2020, doi: <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350113671>.

Future Work

As should be clear, or, rather made *implicit* throughout the dissertation, is that I see there to be a crucial link between metaphysics, aesthetics, and ethics (or, perception and ethics).

To know objects is to be drawn and touched by them, and, in turn, to love reality. This is what is seen within the Orphic tendency. With regards to Bergson, the only work which deals with Bergson's aesthetics is Paul Atkinson, albeit his focus is on the arts. A philosophical project which might be worth exploring is one which attempts to discern a philosophy of beauty (in the broadest sense of the term) in and through a Bergsonian lens. Indeed, if for Bergson philosophy is supposed to bring us joy, an inquiry into what I see to be his metaphysical aesthetics would bring him into conversation with not only Kant, but even Plato. A conversation between all three would be intriguing insofar that metaphysics is crucial to all their respective philosophies. Indeed, a Bergsonian aesthetics would be the anti-thesis of Plato; it seeks to instil joy.

In relation to Weil, a conversation between her, Kant and Wittgenstein would also be worthwhile. The only treatment I have come across would be Peter Winch's comparison between Wittgenstein and Weil in his *Just Balance*.²⁴² However, it is not a systematic comparison and, as such, there is room for deeper engagement between the three philosophies. More work is also to be done with regards to Weil singularly. Indeed, in order to properly focus on Weil's moral philosophy (as well as her aesthetics), it was necessary to underplay (if not, not address) other areas. These included her stress on affliction and necessity throughout her thought. Returning again to aesthetics, although I stressed the respective differences between the Platonic and Kantian views of beauty, there is room to also consider their similarities. In doing so, we might better be able to trace and understand the history of aesthetics in philosophy and give it a more prominent place within the discipline as a whole.

There is perhaps further work to be done with Hadot and his meta-philosophy and its relation to aesthetics. Indeed, his *Veil of Isis* sought to chart Prometheanism and the Orphic throughout the history of philosophy. This, as I read it, may be of interest insofar as it allows us to map out the relationship and perhaps, a possible reconciliation or mediation between the claims of science and our aesthetic experience of the world (and, perhaps even with theology and science). Indeed, charting the need to mediate this relationship was perhaps foundational (if not made implicitly) throughout the dissertation. Such a project of course would not only be a work in the history of philosophy, but it also has a strong conceptual bent.

²⁴² Winch, Peter. *Simone Weil: "the Just Balance."* Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Indeed, such an endeavour would complement the thinking of philosophers who ‘don’ so called ‘*liberal naturalism*’.²⁴³ This, of course, would see the need to marry and mediate both “pictures” of the world and not see the two as a needless either/or.

Lastly, more work may be fruitful on the place of ‘transcendence’ as a concept in both moral philosophy and the philosophy of religion. Indeed, it is essentially what has undergirded my readings of both Bergson and Weil (as well as Hadot’s meta-philosophy). Although, there has been little work in this area, the most interesting of which is perhaps the dialogue that takes place between Charles Taylor and Martha Nussbaum. In particular, we see Nussbaum perhaps qualifying transcendence as a ‘good’ in the moral life in her essay *Transcending Humanity* (which we find in her *Love’s Knowledge*) as well as her earlier piece the *Fragility of Goodness*.²⁴⁴ In contrast, we see Taylor defending it (or, more specifically, the idea of theosis) in his *Sources of the Self* and more recently, his *Secular Age*.²⁴⁵ However, the debate between them (as far as I can tell) was not particularly conclusive and is perhaps something which I would be keen to explore.

Concluding Remarks

What I have sought to achieve throughout this dissertation is to yes, provide and articulate two Orphic philosophies within the Anthropocene. But, more importantly, to stress our capacity for agency through these existential options. It is this which is absent within flat ontologies. Does the Anthropocene mean we have to abandon some of our core traditional assumptions in philosophy? Not at all as I say. Indeed, through both Bergson and Weil, I have sought to articulate a richer approach than what is seen within flat ontologies. It is through our capacity to be Orphic practitioners (and not Prometheans) that we are able to be beings imbued by love within the Anthropocene. I shall finish this dissertation with the following remark: love, not lovelessness, is what is needed most in the age of the Anthropolos.

²⁴³ *The Routledge Handbook of Liberal Naturalism*. Edited by Mario De Caro and David Macarthur, Routledge, 2022.

²⁴⁴ See, Nussbaum, Martha C. “Transcending Humanity.” *Love’s Knowledge*, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 1992, and, Nussbaum, Martha Craven. *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press, 2009.

²⁴⁵ Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Harvard University Press, 1992.

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