Simone Weil’s Notion of Reading for the Love of Others

Kazuaki Yoda
Waseda University, Japan

Introduction
Recently a 20th century French philosopher Simone Weil has been capturing some attention from education scholars. Nel Noddings discussed Weil’s philosophy in one of her book on moral education.² Daniel Liston wrote about her notion of attention in relation to critical pedagogy.³ Peter Roberts applied the notion of attention to higher education reform.⁴ David Lewin discussed education of attention and refers to Weil.⁵ Susan Huddleston Edgerton mentioned her at the end of her response paper to Sharon Todds’ article on listening to others.⁶ Nevertheless, their treatments of Weil’s philosophy are limited and still largely underdeveloped. Some take up only one aspect of her notion of attention such as detachment and self-effacement and draw simplistic implications without acknowledging its complexities. Others quickly locate internal problems or limitation of Weil’s notion of attention, such as its essentially religious nature and its radical orientation toward self-negation, leave her and instead discuss Iris Murdoch who borrows it from Weil. Further and more comprehensive study of Weil has been waited and this paper attempts it through the discussion of Weil’s notion of reading. The notion is directly tied to Weil’s notion of attention and it particularly helps us understand how attention as love of other people becomes possible. Despite its significance to the field, to my knowledge, this notion has never mentioned among educationists. The discussion of this notion of reading allows us a more nuanced understanding of Weil’s attention. It then underpins more comprehensive discussion of how we may nurture attention and love of others, which is of prime interest to education scholars.

¹ This research is supported by The Uehiro Foundation on Ethics and Education.
² See Noddings’ Educating Moral People: A Caring Alternative to Character Education.
The Notion of Reading

The notion of reading appears broadly throughout Weil’s texts. However, one essay thoroughly deals with this notion and it is simply titled “Essay on the Notion of Reading.” Peter Winch counts this essay as one of the most important of Weil’s texts, and scholars such as Eric O. Springsted, Diogenes Allen, and Martin Andic have written about it. Thus, I will rely heavily on this essay in discussing the notion of reading. What reading is and the reason she names the notion “reading” could be understood best by consulting with her examples.

Two women each receive a letter, announcing to each that her son is dead. The first, upon just glancing at the paper, faints, and until her death, her eyes, her mouth, her movements will never again be as they were. The second woman remains the same: her expression, her attitude do not change; she cannot read. . . . It is not the sensation but the meaning which has grabbed hold of the first woman, reaching directly, brutally into her mind, without her participation, as sensations grab hold of us. Everything happens as if the pain resided in the letter and sprang up from it into the reader’s face. As for the sensations themselves, such as the colour of the paper or of the ink, they don’t even appear. What is presented to the sight is the pain itself.

Weil names the notion reading because the example that captures the notion is literally about reading. Unlike “seeing,” which is usually understood as the mere reception of sense data through the eyes, one needs to be literate in order to read. Thus, Weil’s notion of reading assumes that one who reads is already immersed in the system of language. In addition, as in this example of reading bad news, our experience of reading is not procedural—it is not like: we first get a sensation from a series of letters (presumably this alone is what seeing commonly means), understand this meaning, and then are grabbed by them. Weil claims all these steps occur immediately as we read. “If I hate someone, there is not him on one side,

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9 ER, 297-8.

10 Merleau-Ponty has much richer notion of seeing. In his essay titled “Eye and Mind,” he criticizes modern science that is built on the simplistic understanding of seeing that is analogous to a light detecting device and compares it with a painter’s seeing.

11 This resonates with Wittgenstein’s idea of language game and Heidegger’s thrown-ness of being in the world.
my hatred on the other; when he approaches me something hateful approaches me.”¹²
Reading then is thus neither sensation nor interpretation. It is not mere sensation because there is no bare sensation separated from the meaning. It is also different from interpretation because interpretation implies something to be interpreted, given in advance by a bare sensation. Moreover, unlike interpretation that comes from inside (i.e., an interpreter gives/adds meaning to the thing interpreted), meaning, even if not fully, arrives from outside in reading—we receive meaning.¹³

It is not the purpose of this paper to examine this notion in detail by situating it within various theories of knowledge and philosophies of language.¹⁴ This requires a separate study.¹⁵ Since our present concern is how the notion of reading helps us understand Weil’s notion of attention and consequently her understanding of the development of our love of others, I would like to limit the discussion within the following three points that seem most significant.

(1) Reading and Attention

The first point is that reading concerns our perspective and by improving our manner of reading we may nurture attention and love of others with which Weil equates justice and forgiveness.¹⁶ “What we call the world are the meanings we read.”¹⁷ Weil thinks that “reality” is what we read from a perspective, and without proper training we are inclined to read from a self-centered perspective. Weil writes, for example:

A beloved being who disappoints me. I wrote to him. It is impossible that he should not reply by saying what I have said to myself in his name. Men owe us what we imagine they will give us. We must forgive them this debt. To accept the fact that they are other than the creatures of our imagination . . . I also am other than what I imagine myself to be. To know this is forgiveness.¹⁸

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¹² ER, 299.
¹³ Ibid., 301. Given these points, we may think about the relationship between Weil’s reading and the notion of translation.
¹⁴ For a more comprehensive study of reading, see Diogenes Allen’s essay “The Concept of Reading and the ‘Book of Nature.’”
¹⁵ As Martin Andic mentions, Wittgenstein’s account of reading in Philosophical Investigations, relating Weil’s notion of reading to Wittgenstein’s account, might be a useful way to situate it in the scholarship of philosophy. See Andic’s essay “Discernment and Imagination.”
¹⁶ Diogenes Allen summarizes: “We usually read from a perspective. The meanings we receive are not false. Given a perspective, what we read is indeed what out to be read from that perspective’ (see “Concept of Reading,” 99).
¹⁷ ER, 298.
We see others from our egocentric perspective and hope them to be as we imagine them to be. We would feel saddened, angry or disappointed when our expectations are betrayed. We are naturally inclined to take this perspective, and Weil calls the binding force as gravity.

“Gravity. Generally what we expect of others depends on the effect of gravity upon ourselves; what we receive from them depends on the effect of gravity upon them. Sometimes (by chance) the two coincide, often they do not.” Reading untrained, our reading is ruled by gravity and we impose on others what we want to read in them. We do not allow them to be as they are; we do not receive others’ reality as they are. For example, we tend to read a bank-teller as someone or something that is interchangeable with an ATM machine. Meanwhile, he reads us only as customers whom he needs only for a living. It is very common that we see and judge a person by his or her nationality, race, gender, age group, profession, social class, etc. even when that person secretly cries not to be seen that way.

We need to stop reading from the self-centered perspective and allow others to be as they are. Weil calls this as forgiveness and justice. Unlike our common use of the word, forgiveness is not about pardoning someone for an action that harmed us. It is forgiving the very existence of other people: freeing them from our judgments and appreciating their value. It thus carries a special meaning that is independent of the philosophical discussion of the concept of forgiveness. Weil relates this specific sense of forgiveness to justice. As she writes:

One reads, but also one is read by others. Interpositions of such readings. To force somebody to read himself as you read him (slavery). To force others to read you as you read yourself (conquest). . . . Justice. To be continually ready to admit that another person is something other than what we read when he is there (or when we think about him). Or rather: to read in him also (and continually) that he is certainly something other than what we read—perhaps something altogether different. . . . Every being silently clamours to be read otherwise. Not to be deaf to such cries.

We naturally impose our reading on each other. Weil thinks it is unjust to do so and believe that one’s own reading is the only true reading, rejecting others. Justice is to be open to other possible readings, stop reading only from a self-centered perspective and find balance.

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19 GG, 45.
20 I took this example from Anthony Weston’s “A Practical Companion to Ethics.” See chapter 5.
21 This does not mean Weil always understands forgiveness in this sense. For instance, when she talks about forgiveness in her discussion of revenge, it means a usual sense of forgiveness. It seems that, for Weil, forgiveness has a broader sense just as love and justice do.
22 Simone Weil, The Notebooks of Simone Weil, trans. Arthur Wills (London: Routledge, 2004), 43. This will henceforward be abbreviated as N. See also GG, 188.
between one’s reading with others’. In discussing justice and love of others, Weil puts priority on their receptive aspect so much as to claim that it alone constitutes them.

Weil thinks we need to learn how to read better. Changing how we read and fighting against the natural inclination toward self-centered perspective, one becomes capable of practicing attention, which for Weil is the touchstone of loving others. She even claims that nurturing attention is the central (if not sole) aim of education. 23

(2) Non-reading is Not Possible

The second point I would like to note on the notion of reading is that Weil thinks it is impossible not to read. This point is important because her notion of attention is often found problematic by reason that she recommends us to be completely detached from the self and suggest the possibility of absolute pure reading or reading from nowhere. In fact, we find passages that indicate as if Weil were suggesting so. She writes:

The reality of the world is made up for us of our attachment. It is the reality of the ‘I’, which is transferred by us into material objects. It is in no sense external reality. The latter only becomes discernible through total detachment. Should but a thread remain, there is still attachment. 24

She claims that reality is independent of our perspective and different from the “reality” seen from a self-centered perspective. It thus seems as if she was advocating a “view from nowhere.” In another passage describing attention, Weil writes: “the soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive into itself the being it is looking at, just as he is, in all his truth.” 25 Moreover, she often claims attention to be the vision of the “naked” truth. 26 All of these descriptions seem to imply that Weil is thinking of the possibility of “non-reading.” 27

Interpreting Weil along this ideal of non-reading, it is claimed too simplistically that one should purify our reading and achieve non-reading. For instance, in discussing Weil’s notion of attention Liston urges the need to silence our internal noises created by our thoughts, desires, and emotions as if we can be completely free from them. 28

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23 Simone Weil, “Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God,” in Waiting for God, trans. Emma Craufurd (New York: Putnum, 1951). The text will be henceforth abbreviated as WG.

24 N, 318. Also see GG, 59. There, the passage continues, “Attachment is a manufacture of illusions and whoever wants reality ought to be detached” (GG, 59).

25 WG, 115.

26 Ibid., 112. See N, 120. There she claims that true renunciation of the self requires achieving spiritual nakedness by renouncing spiritual goods as well as material goods.

27 N, 42, 63.

28 Liston, “Critical Pedagogy.”
captures Weil’s notion of attention as “self-effacement.” But important questions are left as Edgerton herself asks at the end of her article: “Is it possible to approach that level of non-projection to the other . . . without such melting away of the self? Is it possible at all? What are the boundaries?”29 Weil’s language around the notion of attention does sound as if it suggests such radical detachment and self-effacement.

Nevertheless, it is too simplistic to say “Quite the inner voice of desires and emotions of the self. Then we can listen and love the other!” The idea of the view from nowhere is impossible and it should be problematized if Weil were actually heading toward that direction. Studying the notion of reading, we actually see that Weil is neither pressing us to be free from any perspective nor believing the possibility of non-reading. She writes, “As for not reading at all—it’s impossible; one cannot look at a text printed in a language one knows, appropriately placed, and read nothing.”30 The statement confirms the basic point about reading that it is neither sensation nor interpretation. Further, what is more important here is that Weil clearly says non-reading is impossible. In reading it is impossible not to receive any meaning. Reading is always loaded with a meaning because it is always from a perspective. Weil does not believe the possibility of non-reading and she does not seek pure sensation devoid of a meaning or a perspective-less vision. Indeed, as I will discuss soon, what Weil actually suggests is not non-reading, but superposition of multiple readings.

(3) Immediacy and Physicality

The third point is that a reading is necessarily and immediately tied to certain responses (visible or not) and in that sense an action is a spontaneous result of a reading. Weil’s attention is primarily a receptive notion because how we respond in this world depends on how we read. Weil writes:

I believe what I read, my judgments are what I read, I act according to what I read, how could I do otherwise? If I read the possibility of winning honour in a noise, I run towards the noise; if I read danger and nothing else, I run far from the noise. In both cases, the necessity of acting in this way, even if I feel some reluctance, forces itself on me in an obvious and direct way, like the noise, and along with the noise; I read the necessity in the noise.31

Our response to a situation (including our action) is an immediate result of our reading. Action is inseparable from our reading. We should notice that Weil’s picture of action is quite

29 Edgerton, “Learning to Listen and Listening to Learn.”
30 ER, 298.
31 Ibid., 300.
different from a typical process we casually picture in mind: (1) we receive stimuli and other information, (2) our minds process the information, consult with our knowledge, and make a decision utilizing our thinking, (3) we then act by our will. Weil’s picture does not have such steps. There is only a continuum; it is one stroke: we “read and act.”

Behind this difference of the picture lies Weil’s emphasis on the involvement of physical component in our reading. This issue requires a separate study, but it is relevant and meaningful to discuss it even briefly. In the casual picture, mind-body dualism is implied: our body is responsible for receiving stimuli, our mind processes them, makes a decision, and then our will pushes us to take an action creating movements of our body. In this picture, the focus is naturally given to our mind because body’s role is unimportant—it is like a mind’s tool. Meanwhile, in Weil’s picture, we read and respond with our entire being. Weil highlights body’s involvement in reading and writes that “the body plays a part in all apprenticeships” and that “every apprenticeship is learning to read in a certain way.”

She, then, compares the learning of reading with an apprenticeship in manual labor: “As one has to learn to read or to practice a trade [hand work], so one must learn to feel in all things, first and almost solely, the obedience of the universe to God. It is really an apprenticeship. Like every apprenticeship, it requires time and effort.” It is significant that Weil uses the sensual verb “feel.” This apprenticeship has to be physical. Not only does it require training that involves our body, but what we acquire from apprenticeship is physical: it is a change in how we feel (read).

Reading thus has physical component and it is immediately tied to a response. Our action is more of a result of our reading than our will. We give too much credit to our will. It has only limited role in the conduct of our action. We cannot control our action so well by our will. For instance, one’s will tell one should help a homeless on a street out of love, but one cannot do so because one physically feels a danger or physiologically feels disgust and steps away spontaneously before one thinks about what should be done. Such experience is quite common. We know by experience that our will is not that powerful as we often seem to assume casually. One’s will/mind says X, but one’s body does not follow. What we can do is to train our manner of reading beforehand so that our reading at a moment spontaneously leads to a right action. We act virtuously only when we read well, and such an action is always a spontaneous result of reading. This is another important reason why Weil’s notion of attention is primarily receptive. The role of physical component thus cannot be dismissed, which includes elements such as sensations, desires, emotions, and habits.

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32 WG, 132, and ER, 301, respectively.
33 WG, 131.
Reading Better

Thus we have seen that Weil thinks love of others (justice and forgiveness) is available by changing how we read. One needs to fight against the natural inclination to read from the self-centered perspective. This, however, does not mean one needs to acquire an innocent reading or to stop reading altogether. One needs to learn to read better and improve. What we want to inquire, then, is what is a “better” reading and how we may improve our reading.

A better reading is a superposition of multiple readings. Weil scholars often cite a crucial passage in discussing the notion of reading, and it is particularly important for understanding the superposition of multiple readings.34 “Supposed readings: we should read necessity behind sensation, order behind necessity, and God behind order.”35 Three levels of readings are suggested here: (1) reading necessity behind sensation, (2) reading order behind necessity, and (3) reading God behind order.36 Let me explain them by using Weil’s example of the sailor.37

For the sailor, the experienced captain, whose ship has in a sense become like an extension of his body, the ship is a tool for reading the storm, and he reads quite differently than the passenger. Where the passenger reads chaos, unlimited danger, fear, the captain reads necessities, limited dangers, the means of escape from the storm, a duty to act courageously and honourably.38

When a storm hits, the passengers are overwhelmed by the violent forces of nature. Their reading is limited; they only read necessity behind sensation. They are terrified by the rocking of the ship and the howls of the wind. They find the storm evil and resent their suffering without being able to see how such a natural phenomenon happens as a result of the manifestation of physical laws and order. They complain: “I can’t believe this is happening to me!,” “What did I do to deserve this?,” “Why me?” Some may start blaming the sailors for not satisfying their job. Others may run for a lifeboat and push others away seeing them as mere blockades.

The captain can read the storm differently. He feels the rock and hears the howls just as the passengers do, but he is not overwhelmed by them. He reads order behind necessity

34 For example, one can find the passage referenced in the essays by Diogenes Allen, Martin Andic, and Eric O. Springsted that I already noted.
35 N, 267 (see also GG, 190).
36 Some may point that there is another level implicit: reading merely by sensation below the three levels. As I pointed earlier in this paper, however, reading is different from mere sensation.
37 Allen also takes up the example of the captain and discusses levels of reading (see “The Concept of Reading,”100.)
38 ER, 301-2.
that allows him to stop complaining the situation, carefully observe what is happening around him and within him, and to start acting properly. Like a physicist, he read order behind the movement of the ship on the stormy water. He can therefore analyze the situation, measure the real danger it poses to the ship, then determine what should be done to avoid a shipwreck. Further, the captain understands that the order of nature makes no exceptions for anyone. No one is singled out for suffering (or blessing). He understands the overwhelmed condition of the passengers, tries to calm down and lead them to behave properly. Moreover, even if he finds the storm is unavoidably fatal, he accepts with calm and equanimity what will happen to him and his passengers. He understands the limitations of human existence. If he is able to read on the third level, which I touch only slightly for the reason I mention right below, he sees this limitation as God’s love. He reads God in the storm. God allowed the existence of human suffering out of his love.

In discussing today’s secular education, it is perhaps unreasonable to suggest the third level of reading, i.e. reading God and accepting anything in the world as His love. In the following, I leave aside this level of reading and continue to elucidate what a better reading is. I argue that it is still very meaningful to discuss the second level of reading, which is tied to justice and love of others.

Coming back to the first level of reading, i.e., reading necessity behind sensation, one reads only from a self-centered perspective. One sees people and things in the world only in terms of the good and evil they bring to him. This is what people do by natural inclination and Weil claims that we need to realize it and fight against this tendency in order to practice attention and love others.

In the second level of reading, i.e., reading the order behind necessity, we are aware of the fact that each one of us reads. First, one must realize that by necessity “I” read from a self-centered perspective. “To read, and read at the same time one’s own reading, the notion of reading, the mechanical or quasi-mechanical necessity for that particular reading.” As one reads, one should also read ones own reading. It involves awareness of the fact that one is reading and it is naturally inclined to be from the self-centered perspective. In the same way, one notices that other people may read from their own perspective. “A centre from which may be seen the different possible readings—and their relationship—and our own only as one among them.” It is indispensable to notice that “my” reading is one of many other readings,

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39 It seems to me that modern physicists—being able to read on the second level—may not be able to accept what order (necessity) brings to them with this kind of stoic calm. In that sense, there may be sub-divisions within the second level of reading.
40 N, 42.
41 Ibid., 47.
all of which are deficient and “incorrect” because one’s reading is bounded by a self-centered perspective.

The second level of reading, then, does not reject the prior level of readings. It allows the existence of them. In fact, it is consisted by superposition of multiple readings. This point is crucial because we can easily misunderstand Weil rejecting the lower level of readings that are readings by natural inclination, i.e. gravity. Weil actually thinks that the second level of reading is available after one realizes one’s reading is one of many possible readings and thus it allows and pardons the existence of the first level of readings from diverse perspectives. Weil writes, “That which distinguishes higher states from lower ones is the co-existence in the higher states of several superposed planes.” This quotation comes from Weil’s notebooks and is an independent block for which we find no context. I cannot tell what “state” she is talking about, but I take this passage to involve perspective and reading, as illustrated in the image of the man on the mountaintop below. This image appears in Weil’s explanation of the notion of attention and it allows us to picture how the higher level of reading involves the lower readings.

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.

In this passage, Weil explains that attention consists of detachment and she uses the image of the man on the mountaintop to describe it more vividly. The point is that the perspective of a man on a mountaintop does not exclude the views of the forests and plains he saw when he walked through them nor does it remove the lower perspectives he had taken before reaching the mountaintop. Detachment does not indicate a complete cut-off from the views we have acquired, but it does place them on their proper (lower) level. To be able to read on a higher level, one needs to superpose readings on the lower level.

Justice becomes available on the second level of reading. As we saw earlier in this paper, justice requires us to stop reading only from a self-centered perspective, to be open to

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42 I took the word “incorrect” from Andie’s essay (see page 126 of Simone Weil’s Philosophy of Culture).
43 GG, 101.
44 WG, 111-2.
other possible readings, and try to find balance between one’s reading with others’. We do not need to reject the value of first level of readings altogether. Instead, we may admit others’ readings as equally acceptable as our own, superpose them, and find a point of balance between different readings. “To regard one’s own reading and that of another person as equivalent (like the perspectives).”45 Considering one’s reading with others’ as equivalent does not mean all readings are equal in value. As we saw above, there are levels in readings and there is no doubt it implies value judgment. What Weil means by this statement is that (1) so far as one’s reading is on the first level, it is equal with others’ reading in the sense both are on the same level, and more importantly (2) the fact that each one of us reads is a worthy thing even if some readings are not well trained.46

**Balance as Detached Superposition**

Further clarification of what the balance of different readings means requires more comprehensive discussion of Weil’s justice, which is beyond the scope of this paper.47 However, I believe it is a job of this paper to clarify how terms such as detachment and self-effacement can be understood within the discussion of the notion of reading so far. Emphasizing the superposition of multiple readings and acceptance of them, this paper may seem to undermine or even dismiss crucial aspects of Weil’s notion of attention captured by terms such as detachment and self-effacement. Providing a brief sketch of how the balance of different readings is achieved, I intend to elucidate that detachment is indeed a prerequisite for balance. Terms such as detachment and self-effacement, that are said to characterize Weil’s notion of attention too quickly, are better understood as we inquire how we may find balance between one’s reading with others’ and hence superpose multiple readings.

In order to find balance between one’s reading and others’, first one needs to realize the condition of one’s own reading. Noticing the fact that one is reading on the first level involves awareness of the components of one’s reading. It is impossible to name all the components here. To mention some, we know from experience how things such as self-pride, various desires and emotions, past experience (biographical element), beliefs and thoughts, physical conditions, linguistic habits (how we use words), etc. affect how we read.48 Noticing how these components play behind our readings is indispensable in order to read and accept others’ reading. It is a prerequisite for the second level of reading. I am not suggesting

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45 N, 39.
46 Again, she does not negate the value of lower levels of reading.
47 To note briefly, Weil thinks justice is manifest in the existence of others’ consent. (See her essay “Are we Struggling for Justice” and Peter Winch’ Simone Weil: “The Just Balance.”) Consent is achieved by balancing one’s reading with others’.
48 This urge for the analysis of one’s own reading is equivalent to old Socratic teaching: “know thyself.”
complete demystification of one’s reading. It is perhaps impossible. All I mean instead is that the more one becomes aware of the condition of our readings, the less our readings will be affected by such components.

For instance, once one notices that his use of the word “baby-killing” is affecting his unfair reading of his friend who is choosing abortion, it will stop doing so because that awareness gives him a new perspective on his own reading. He will start to examine what exactly an abortion means in her particular case. He becomes open to her and pardoning her from his original reading. He is better positioned in finding the balance being able to accept the value of the fact that she also reads. It might be that her reading is thoroughly self-centered and thus he finds it unacceptable. This “unacceptable,” however, does not mean he rejects the value of her reading altogether. Instead, he accepts it but gives a proper value to it. As it was discussed earlier, superposition of multiple readings (i.e. balancing) is not simple addition of diverse readings without any value judgment. It does not advocate the attitude of mere admission of diverse perspectives crediting them equal value; it requires us trying to find the balance between them. This involves evaluation. The crucial point, however, is that evaluation or judgment comes only after acceptance and hence it demands openness to the reality of the other. Superposition involves some degree of detachment from the components that secures such openness. In the example above, it may be that her reading is quite understandable and he might be able to imagine himself being in her position and choosing the same potion (i.e. abortion in this example). This possibility is available only if he stays open to her reading.

Thus awareness of one’s own reading dissolves some of its components and this changes how one reads. (Again I admit my exposition is far from comprehensive). It opens up for the possibility of justice as balance. Detachment or self-effacement does not have to mean negating and deleting all such components and ultimately one’s own existence. It is what happens as our awareness increases of the condition of our readings. It is not something we should directly aim at; it is what we wait for.

Conclusion

The discussion of the notion of reading thus is crucial for more refined understanding of Weil’s notion of attention. Unlike typical interpretation of Weil’s attention that simplistically suggests the need of detachment and negation of the self, it clarified that Weil,

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49 I borrow this example of how one’s use of the word affects his/her reading from Anthony Weston’s book already referenced above. Weil herself is quite aware of how the use of words affects how we read (see and respond to) the reality. See particularly her essay titled “The Power of Words” collected in The Simone Weil Reader edited by George A. Panichas.

50 As most readers of Simone Weil must notice, she often explains her notion of attention as the attitude of waiting.
instead of non-reading such detachment suggests, proposes superposition of multiple readings and balance between one’s reading and others’. Superposition allows us to go beyond a self-centered perspective and leads us to a comprehensive and the higher level of reading where justice and forgiveness manifest. Learning to read better in this way is equivalent to nurturing attention and love of others. The discussion of the paper is far from comprehensive on how we may learn to read better or how we may superpose multiple readings. I believe, however, it set up a basis for further reflection of the question how attention can be learned. More comprehensive study of Weil’s notion of reading and her whole philosophy is due to gain the fuller picture of her not so small contribution to education studies.

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