‘Negative Faith: The Moment of God’s Absence’:

Simone Weil on Affliction

By
Sarwar Ahmed Abdullah

A Thesis Submitted to
Saint Mary’s University, Halifax, Nova Scotia
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts in Theology and Religious Studies.

July, 2014, Halifax, Nova Scotia

Approved: Dr. Paul Bowlby
Supervisor

Approved: Dr. Steven Burns
Examiner

Approved: Dr. Anne-Marie Dalton
Reader

Date: July 23, 2014

Abstract

‘Negative Faith: The Moment of God’s Absence’:

Simone Weil on Affliction

Sarwar Ahmed Abdullah

This thesis focuses on Simone Weil’s philosophical, ethical, and religious perspectives on affliction by clarifying the essential difference between what is necessary and what is good. According to Weil, reality is governed by blind physical and moral necessities. She claims that we experience necessity as constraint and constraint as suffering. But affliction, she claims, is something essentially different; it is not reducible to mere suffering. I will argue that Weil’s conception of affliction can be best understood as a momentarily ‘numinous experience’ of God’s absence or the feeling of the absolute good. *Numinous experience*, according to Rudolf Otto, is a kind of experience which contains a quite specific moment and which remains ineffable. What is ineffable can only be felt. That is, Weil’s investigation of affliction concentrates on the *feeling response* to the absence or silence of God, the feeling which remains where language fails.

***Keywords*:** Weil, Wittgenstein, Kierkegaard, Christianity, negative faith, affliction, necessity, the good, contradiction, ineffability, Absurdity, will, love, and harmony

July 23rd, 2014

Table of Contents

Abstract.....**i**

Acknowledgments……**iv**

Chapter One: Introduction…..……...1

1 Research Question……1

1.2 Why Weil?.....5

1.3 The Enigma of Human Life: Affliction……...18

1.3.1 The Agony of Abandonment……..……..20

1.4 Weil's Philosophical Aim……...25

1.5 Research Design……..27

Chapter Two: On Necessity.....31

2.1 The Domain and Chain of Necessity.....34

2.2 Necessity and the Good…….…....40

2.2.1 Rhees' Concern……40

2.2.2 Weil's Ethical and Religious Perspectives..……45

2.2.3 Further Remarks on Weil's Ethics:

'Chase That Dog Away'……..50

2.3 Weil's Absurdism.……..58

Chapter Three: A Numinous Experience: Affliction …….…...62

3.1 Inarticulate Cry of Pain……...64

3.2 Contemplation or Explanation……....71

3.3 Can Affliction Be Articulated?.....75

3.3.1 Weil's Response……..82

Chapter Four: Conclusion: 'The Back Side of Necessity'…….89

4.1 A Potential Concern……..…….....93

Bibliography…….....95

Acknowledgments

As an undergraduate visiting student, I took a course in philosophy of religion at Dalhousie University with Warren Haiti several years ago. It was in that class that the shrewd, wretched tone of Simone Weil became familiar to my ear for the first time. I should confess that I did not quite understand—or rather appreciate Weil's philosophical, ethical, and religious thought. After pursuing and completing a Master degree in philosophy at Dalhousie University where I wrote my thesis on the early Wittgenstein, I came to appreciate Simone Weil more. However, I should express my thanks to Warren Haiti for introducing me to Simone Weil and Wittgenstein for helping me to find my way out of the labyrinthian thought of Simone Weil.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all those who made it possible for me to complete this thesis. A very special thank you to my thesis supervisor, Paul Bowlby for the patient guidance, encouragement and advice he has provided throughout my last year. It is no overstatement to say that without the consistent support and encouragement of Paul, this thesis would never have been completed. In addition, thanks go to my reader, Steven Burns and my external examiner, Anne-Marie Dalton. I truthfully appreciate their valuable comments, remarks, and suggestions.

This thesis is also the result of all those who gave me different sort of support throughout my time at Saint Mary's. So, I want to thank the faculty members of the Religious Studies, particularly, Anne-Marie Dalton, and David Dean at the Atlantic school of Theology. I also wish to give a very special thank you to Peter Heron, Momoye Sugimman, Julie Morris, and Brian Hotson. Thanks also go to those professors in Philosophy Department at Saint Mary's who supported me during my undergraduate degree. In particular: thank you to John E. MacKinnon, Mark Mercer, Peter Heron, and Shelagh Crooks. Finally, I would also like to thank the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, particularly Shane Costantino and Heather Taylor, for their great support and help whenever needed.

Chapter One: Introduction

> *"The whole planet can suffer no greater torment than a single soul. The Christian faith—as I see it— is a man's refuge in this ultimate torment. Anyone in such torment who has the gift of opening his heart, rather than contracting it, accepts the means of salvation in his heart."*
>
> (Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, p. 46, my Italics)

Simone Weil—a brilliant, Jewish French woman by birth, a strange Catholic, a solitary philosopher by instinct, and a Platonist by soul, lived a very short and impossible life (1909-1943). It should be mentioned that Simone Weil not only suffered from intolerable headaches and self-imposed starvation, which contributed to her death in Ashford, Kent, in 1943, but she also suffered deeply for the useless suffering of the other, and even for that of the oppressor or tormentor.[1]

1. Research Question:

There is perhaps no concept in Simone Weil's work that is of more importance, and yet is more complex and difficult, than *affliction* (malheur). Hence, the question "What is affliction?" is the central concern of this thesis. Since, for Weil, the concept of affliction is closely linked with the concept of *necessity,* (nécessité),[2] one cannot understand what

[1] Section 1.3 elaborates further on the importance of Weil's life and thought.
[2] It should be noticed that, on occasion, Simone Weil capitalizes both terms 'necessity and good' to emphasis. Her main point is to emphasis the terms whenever she felt it was necessary. Regarding the second term, 'good', what is important is to bear in mind that

affliction is unless one understands Weil's account of necessity. This will certainly force us to ask: "What is necessity?" before considering the question of affliction. Hence, the present thesis sets out to clarify Simone Weil's perspectives on both affliction and necessity.

In Weil's view, necessity is blind and mechanical, and so far as Weil is concerned, it holds our mind and will captive. In a way, affliction is an experience of necessity. Affliction is an extreme form of suffering; it is a kind of horror that submerges the whole soul. It is "a sign of the distance between us and God".[3] It "causes God to be absent… more absent than a dead man".[4] Affliction "deprives its victims of their personality and turns them into things".[5] That is to say, affliction forces the afflicted people to adopt thoughts, (e.g., I am nothing), which are logically contradictory. The person to "whom such a thing occurs has no part in the operation. He [or she] quivers like a butterfly pinned alive to a tray".[6]

Moreover, Weil remarks that one is "aware of necessity only as constraint and is aware of constraint as pain"[7] or suffering. But affliction, she claims, is something essentially different from suffering. Although it is inseparable from suffering, it is not reducible to a mere psychological, social, or physical suffering. The two most crucial questions to be considered are: What is affliction? How is affliction different from physical suffering? How affliction is different from suffering is a question to be spelled out later, (p. 64-7).

---

she draws a distinction between relative and absolute good, and I make this distinction absolutely clear in Chapter 2 (Sec. 2.3, particularly, p. 53-5).

[3] Weil, "Some Reflections on the Love of God", p. 155.

[4] Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction", p. 172.

[5] Ibid., p. 175.

[6] Ibid., p. 182.

[7] Ibid., p. 171.

For now, what needs to be mentioned is that affliction is nothing else, but an experience of a blind, pitiless necessity. As Allen and Springsted have pointed out; the conception of necessity reveals "a paradoxical character. At one and the same time, it is that which crushes us and yet allows us life".[8] According to Weil, this paradox, which she believes to be the essential contradiction in human life, appears as affliction in the following way: a person is subject to a blind necessity or force, and craves for the good.[9] This contradiction, Weil states, must be recognized as a fact.[10] In this way, one can say affliction is not only produced by blind, mechanical necessity, but is also its manifestation: blind necessity makes itself manifest through affliction. In brief, affliction is a holding together of two opposed ideas: necessity and good. That is why Simone Weil considers affliction, not suffering, to be: *The great enigma of human life*.[11]

In the present thesis, I propose to explore and to clarify the twofold thesis: (1) that the absence of a meaning, or a *telos*, or God, or the feeling of the absence of the good in the world is the region of necessity, and (2) that the absence of a meaning, or a *telos*, or God, or the feeling of the absence of the good in the world is affliction. The questions which call for consideration are: What is necessity? What is affliction? What is this absence of the meaning, or the good, or God? Responses to each of the above questions are meant to serve as elucidations of those two correlated theses.

To respond to these questions, I have used Simone Weil's works, particularly, her *Notebooks*.[12] However, the task at hand has not been without some difficulties. The

---

[8] Allen and Springsted , *Spirit, Nature, And Community*, p. 33.
[9] Weil, *Oppression and Liberty*, p. 159.
[10] Ibid., p. 173.
[11] Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction", p. 171(emphasis added).
[12] *The Notebooks* (v.1 and v.2) London, 1956 and *First and Last Notebooks*, Oxford, Toronto, 1970.

notebooks present no system of idea and possess no explicit unity. What is needed is that those remarkable notes and letters be unfolded and the connection between them be traced out. Certainly, such an objective cannot be achieved without tireless attempt. In a way, this might be considered as a contribution to the discussions of Weil's works so long as methodology is concerned. I should also mention that since most of what Weil has written resonates with Wittgenstein's philosophical reflections, it would not be possible, at least for me, to think of Simone Weil except in connection with Wittgenstein and to a certain extent Kierkegaard. There are a lot of similarities between the two great spirits, not only in terms of their ways of thinking, but also in terms of their lives— with the exception that Weil was more radical than Wittgenstein in her faith and wrote more about religion than Wittgenstein did. Surely, a philosophical approach (in my case, Wittgensteinian approach) is not the only way to approach an understanding of Weil. However, I have to acknowledge that it was through Wittgenstein that I came to have a better and clearer understanding of Simone Weil.

In terms of the content of this study, I have characterized a certain type of affliction, such as Christ's crucifixion, as a 'numinous experience', a phrase which is used by Rudolf Otto. According Otto, numinous experience contains a quite specific moment and which remains ineffable.[13] Such a momentarily experience is the immediate apprehension of God's presence in the form of absence. This characterization of affliction is what most of Weil's scholars have failed to grasp. For example, although George Grant acknowledges the ineffability of affliction, he does not think affliction, for Weil, is ineffable in the sense that the it is immediate apprehension of God.[14] My elucidation of

[13] Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 5.
[14] Grant, "Excerpts from Graduate Seminar Lectures, 1975-6", p. 835.

Weil's affliction, however, shows that Grant is mistaken in drawing the distinction between affliction and the immediate apprehension of God. Before I elaborate further on our research questions and how we can make sense of Weil's treatment of them, I will point out some important aspects of Weil's life and thought, as well as some concerns that have been expressed by some scholars. This is important because it is virtually impossible to separate Weil's intellectual character from her personal character.

1.2. Why Weil?

George Steiner mentions a Hassidic parable which tells us that God created humans so that humans might tell stories. Steiner mentions that the *telling of stories* is what Claude Lévi-Strauss believes to be the very condition of our being.[15] Thus, I will begin this section by telling a story about Simone Weil in order to bring out some further important aspects of her philosophical, ethical, and religious life and thought.

On Weil, Czeslaw Milosz writes: "France offered a rare gift to the contemporary world in the person of Simone Weil. The appearance of such a writer in the twentieth

[15] Steiner, *Nostalgia for an Absolute*, p. 4-5. The Hassidic parable goes like this:

> When the great Rabbi Israel Baal Shem-Tov saw misfortune threatening the Jews it was his custom to go into a certain part of the forest to meditate. There he would light a fire, say a special prayer, and the miracle would be accomplished and the misfortune averted. Later, when his disciple, the celebrated Magid of Mezritch, had occasion, for the same reason, to intercede with heaven, he would go to the same place in the forest and say: "Master of the Universe, listen! I do not know how to light the fire, but I am still able to say the prayer." And again the miracle would be accomplished. Still later, Rabbi Moshe-Leib of Sasov, in order to save his people once more, would go into the forest and say: "I do not know how to light the fire, I do not know the prayer, but I know the place and this must be sufficient." It was sufficient and the miracle was accomplished.
>
> Then it fell to Rabbi Israel of Rizhyn to overcome misfortune. Sitting in his armchair, his head in his hands, he spoke to God: "I am unable to light the fire and I do not know the prayer; I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is to tell the story, and this must be sufficient." And it was sufficient.

century was against all the rules of probability, yet improbable things do happen".[16] According to her philosophy teacher, Émile Chartier, known as Alain, she is 'the Martian'. Explained later, "she has nothing in common with us".[17] Obviously, we are confronted with someone who may not be *rare*, but is certainly remarkably *brilliant* and *mad*, and who has been considered by many to be one of the greatest religious minds and philosophers, as well as a political and social intellectual and activist. After encountering Simone Weil, Simone de Beauvoir once said: 'I envied a heart able to beat across the world'.[18] She is, George Steiner also remarks, known as "the mad woman",[19] mad in virtually the same way as 'Socrates [had] gone mad'.[20] Weil is not thought to be *mad* because she tried to "live the truth of skepticism",[21] but because she tried to live the truth of certainty through faith. Faith, Weil asserts, is "certainty".[22] Weil, of course, would not be alone in holding such a view; Wittgenstein (like Kierkegaard and others) also wrote once:

> We are in a sort of hell where we can do nothing but dream, roofed in, as it were, and cut off from heaven. But if I am to be REALLY saved, — what I need is certainty — not wisdom, dreams of speculation — and this certainty is faith. And faith is faith in what is needed by my heart, my soul, not my speculative intelligence.[23]

---

[16] Milosz, "The Importance of Simone Weil", p. 85; Milosz won the 1980 Nobel Prize for Literature and translated the selected works of Weil into Polish in 1958.
[17] McLellan, *Utopian Pessimist*, p. 17.
[18] Quoted from Gray's *Simone Weil*, p. 35.
[19] Ibid., p. 171. This is what *DeGaulle*, a symbol of France's resistance to oppression, said about Weil. Also see Fiori's *Simone Weil: An Intellectual Biography*, p. 234.
[20] Steiner, "Sainte Simone – Simone Weil", p. 171.
[21] "Hume pointed out, to try to live the truth of skepticism would be a form of madness", see Jan Zwicky's *Lyric philosophy*, Toronto, 1992, p. 96.
[22] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 138.
[23] Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, p. 33; this is part of a longer passage where Wittgenstein meditates on Jesus' resurrection.

There seems to be also a further reason to call her *mad*. Like Ludwig Wittgenstein, her "type of thinking is not wanted in this present age; [therefore, she has] to swim so strongly against the tide",[24] in Weil's case, against society, including institutional Christianity, which is analogous to Plato's image of the Cave,[25] the great beast— "The Great Beast is always loathsome",[26] and its "end is existence".[27]

According to Weil, the image of the Cave also indicates that "one begins by suffering, mental confusion, groping in the dark, effort that at times appears hopeless"[28] and absurd. The Cave also, Weil elucidates further, "is concerned with finality. All we have are shadowy imitations of good".[29] Then, she writes: "We are chained down in the midst of society. Society is the Cave. The way out is solitude… [and to] learn not to seek finality in the future".[30] That is to say, "[t]he human being can only escape from the collective by raising [themselves] above the personal and entering into the

---

[24] Once Wittgenstein said to his former student and close friend M. O'C. Drury: 'My type of thinking is not wanted in this present age; I have to swim so strongly against the tide'. See (*Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?* By Norman Malcolm, edited with a response by Peter Winch, 1993).

[25]This is the most substantial parts of the allegory of Plato's Cave:

> Imagine human beings living in an underground, cavelike dwelling, with an entrance a long way up, which is both open to the light and as wide as the cave itself. They've been there since childhood, fixed in the same place, with their necks and legs and fettered, able to see only in front of them, because their bonds prevent them from turning their heads around…When one of them was freed and suddenly compelled to stand up, turn his head, walk, and look up toward the light, he'd be pained and dazzled and unable to see the things whose shadows he'd seen before. (*Republic*, book VII, Sec. 514a-514b, 515c).

[26] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 482.

[27] Ibid., p. 620. Weil mentions that "the beast in in the Apocalypse is sister to the great beast in Plato" See Weil's *Oppression and Liberty*, p. 165. She also thought that "[t]he myth of the Cave is only comprehensible when considered in conjunction with that of the Great Beast". See (*The Notebooks* v.2) p. 551.

[28] Ibid., p. 362.

[29] Ibid., p. 551.

[30] Ibid., p. 593, 618.

impersonal…Our personality is the part of us which belongs to error and sin".[31] It is situated in this word which is governed by a blind necessity. Our impersonality, on the other hand, is the part of us which "is situated in the other world".[32] And this 'impersonality' can only be reached by "the practice of a form of attention which is rare in itself and impossible except in solitude".[33]

This practice of a form attention, which is, for Weil, religious, requires what Kierkegaard, in *Fear and Trembling*, calls: '*a teleological suspension of the ethical or the universal*'. Kierkegaard writes: "The story of Abraham contains just such a teleological suspension of the ethical… [Abraham] acts by virtue of the absurd, for it is precisely the absurd that he as the single individual is higher than the universal [the ethical]".[34]

Furthermore, to come out of the cave or to be detached, in another word, means "to cease to make the future our objectives".[35] Weil also argues, seeking *finality* (i.e., overcoming evil or necessity) in the future is "the germ in Hegel, and consequently Marx",[36] as well as nearly all the enlightenment philosophers. Such finality must be attained in the present. Weil writes: "The present does not attain finality. Nor does the future, for it is only what will be present. We do not know this, however. If we apply to the present the point of that desire within us which corresponds to finality, it pierces right through the eternal".[37] Thus, Weil argues, "eternity alone provides the cure".[38] So, the

---

[31] Weil, "Human Personality", p. 320 and p. 318.
[32] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 136.
[33] Weil, "Human Personality", p. 318.
[34] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, p. 56. Kierkegaard is referencing the story of the sacrifice of Isaac by his father, Abraham as God required him. Kierkegaard says, Abraham had faith by virtue of the absurd "for it certainly was absurd that God, who required [Isaac] of him, should in the next moment rescind the requirement"(Ibid., p. 35).
[35] Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p. 20.
[36] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v. 2, p. 616.
[37] Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p. 20.

absolute solitude or the total, spiritual alienation is possible only if one can alienate or uproot themselves from every human being, because, let us recall: "The reality of the world is the result of our attachment. It is the reality of the self which we transfer into things".[39]

Furthermore, the image of the cave, in the metaphysical sense, refers to, one might say, relative "values. We only possess shadowy imitations of good".[40] For Simone Weil, as for Wittgenstein, the Good, in the "ethical or absolute sense",[41] which is not subject to necessity and chance must lie outside the world, outside of the space of facts.[42] That is also why Socrates reminds us: "we should strive to flee from this world as quickly possible",[43] or, as Weil writes, strive "to flee to the next. But the door is shut. [And] to be able to enter in, and not be left on the doorstep [Weil states], one has to cease to be a social being".[44] Therefore, according to Weil, "*accepting* a death common to every human being liberates me from the dream of being a person",[45] being a social being. It is a kind of moral and social death of the "self".

This Weilian-Platonic view has not passed without some criticism. According to Martin Buber, Weil's thoughts "express a strong and theologically far-reaching negation

---

[38] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v. 2, p. 619.
[39] Weil, *Grave and Grace*, p. 14.
[40] Ibid., p. 51.
[41] Wittgenstein, "Lecture on Ethics", p. 38. Simone Weil sometimes capitalizes the conception of 'good' in an absolute sense of the term, (e.g., *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 404-5), and other times not, (e.g., Ibid., p. 436).
[42] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 139, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 271, and *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 436; also see Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, proposition (§6.41) and Wittgenstein's *Culture and Value*, p. 3.
[43] Weil's own translation, see Weil's "God in Plato", p. 92.
[44] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 466.
[45] Vetö, *The Religious Metaphysics of Simone Weil*, p. 156-7.

of life, leading to the negation of the individual as well as of society as a whole".[46] Buber seems to accuse Weil of being a modern nihilist. Buber's concern seems to be Nietzscheian in essence.[47] There is a remark by Weil which seems to me to be a true, strong response to Buber's charge against her. Weil writes: "I am not the girl who is waiting for her lover, but the tiresome third party who is sitting with two lovers and has got to get up and go away if they are to be really together".[48]

Furthermore, Gustave Thibon, who knew Simone Weil very well, reminds us that Weil's "faith and detachment were expressed in all her actions… [And] her asceticism might seem exaggerated in our century".[49] In certain ways, her thoughts and life echo those of Socrates, Plato, St. Augustine, Kierkegaard, Pascal, and Wittgenstein. Like Augustine, for example, Simone Weil was admonished to return into herself by the Platonic work,[50] and just as the "inward struggle" put Augustine into "great agony",[51] or rather, into "the dark night of agony",[52] so too Simone Weil's thoughts show traces of internal conflicts. John M. Oesterreicher has reported that once he "saw in Simone a tormented and unhappy soul, of absolute sincerity, whose thoughts showed traces of internal conflicts".[53] She was truly living, as Gabriella Fiori has pointed out, "the 'dark night' of the world in her own body".[54] The dark night of the world, as George Grant has

---

[46] Buber, "The Silent Question: On Henri Bergson and Simone Weil", p. 308.
[47] In fact, Nietzsche traces the source of such nihilism back to the Platonic/Judeo-Christian worldview.
[48] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 404.
[49] Thibon, "Introduction" to *Gravity and Grace*, p. ix. Thibon also tells us that every month, "she sent half her ration coupons to the political prisoners" (Ibid., p, x).
[50] Augustine, *Confession*, p. 123.
[51] Ibid., p. 174.
[52] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, P. 468.
[53] Quoted in Fiori, *Simone Weil: An Intellectual Biography*, p. 239. Oesterreicher made this comment after having a long conversation with Simone Weil in New York.
[54] Ibid., p. 242.

realized, is what 'authentic theology' must be studying.—"authentic theology must be a study where one is surrounded by the dark".[55] Also, like Kierkegaard, Pascal, and Wittgenstein, she has found her advantage in standing outside institutional Christianity, even more than Kierkegaard and Pascal did.[56] Ironically, she felt "that it is necessary and ordained that [she] should be alone, a stranger and an exile in relation to every human circle without exception".[57]

But Weil was not motivated by a selfish desire to withdraw from every human context whatsoever, as Leslie Fiedler has pointed out. Quite the opposite:

> She refused to be cut off from anyone, by refusing to identify herself completely with anyone or any cause...The most terrible of crimes is to collaborate in the uprooting of others in an already alienated world; but the greatest of virtues is to uproot oneself for the sake of one's neighbors and of God. [58]

Moreover, Simone Weil, who experienced infinite torment, was certainly and madly seeking infinite help and found refuge solely in the Christian faith. Indubitably, Weil agrees with Wittgenstein that "The Christian religion is only for the [one] who needs infinite help, solely, that is, for the [one] who experiences infinite torment".[59] Yet, and shockingly, Simone Weil reminds us that "[w]e must not weep so as not to be comforted".[60] Indeed, this frightening view of Weil is deep-rooted in her understanding of religion. Religion, she stated once, "in so far as it is a source of consolation is a

---

[55] Quoted in Athanasiadis' *George Grant and the Theology of the Cross*, p. 23.
[56] Allen, *Three Outsiders: Pascal. Kierkegaard. Simone Weil*, p. 97.
[57] Weil, "Letter II: Same Subject", p. 54.
[58] Fiedler, "Introduction" to Weil's *Waiting for God*, p. 6, and p. 7.
[59] Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, p. 46.
[60] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 252.

hindrance to true faith".[61] It is not, then, surprising that "her vision is not comforting",[62] or if it leaves us with a certain sense of moral discomfort and intellectual puzzle. That is also why one might not be surprised if she might even be called: a *masochist*.[63] It is, however, misleading to identify her as a masochist.

In any event, Weil is certainly a genius, a woman whom Albert Camus once described as "the only great spirit of our time",[64] a kind of genius akin to that of "the Saints", T. S. Eliot says (as does Rush Rhees).[65] The sign of "greatness and purity is found on every page of her work",[66] says Thibon. As O'Connor says, there is nothing to stop the eye from gliding over all that cleverness and greatness found on every page of Weil's writings.[67] Evidently, her cleverness and greatness have emerged out of suffering. The suffering in question, Weil remarks in a letter to Joë Bousquet, a French poet, is "located at the very root of my every single thought, without exception".[68] Weil suffered under conditions intensified by her sensibility.[69] As her brother, André Weil, one of the most influential mathematical theorists, tells us that Weil's sensibility had gone 'beyond the limits of the normal'.[70] She was also as fearless as Socrates who believed that philosophy is the practice of dying".[71] Hence, "death", and "not suicide," is what is

---

[61] Ibid., p. 238.
[62] Milosz, "The Importance of Simone Weil", p. 93.
[63] Gray, Simone *Weil*, p. 98.
[64] Quoted from *The Simone Weil Reader*, p. xvii.
[65] See Eliot's "Preface" to *The Need of Roots*, p. viii. Also see Rush Rhees' *Discussions of Simone Weil*, p. 86.
[66] Thibon, "Introduction" to *Gravity and Grace*, P. xix.
[67] O'Connor, *The Habit of Being: Letters*, P. 128.
[68] See: *Simone Weil: Seventy Letters*, p. 141.
[69] Fiedler, "Introduction" to Weil's *Waiting For God*, P. 19.
[70] Quoted in George Steiner's essay "Sainte Simone— Simone Weil", p. 171.
[71] Plato, *Phaedo* (67e), from Plato's *Complete Works*.

required as Weil's conception of de-creation suggests.[72] That is to say, true faith, Weil would say, is the spiritual and moral practice of *de*-creating. This conception of 'de-creation' will be clarified further later (p. 55-6).

Although classifying Weil's thoughts is difficult because "she remains unclassifiable",[73] or it would be virtually "impossible to find any label for her",[74] she has been labeled as: an *Agnostic and Idealist* (Morgan, 2005), *Pessimist* (Vance G. Morgan, 2005, Richard Rees, 1970) —or rather, *Utopian Pessimist* (David McLellan, 1991), *Uncompromising Transcendentalist* (Richard Rees, 1970), and a quite *Heterodox*, even to the point of *Gnosticism* in the popular sense of that term (Springsted 1986).[75] She, like Pascal and Kierkegaard, has also been described as an *Outsider* (Allen, 1983 & Springsted 1986), *Augustinian* (Springsted 1986), *a Negative or Apophatic Theologian*, *Platonist* (George Grant, *Collected Works*, 2009, Louis Dupre 2004) and a sort of *Newtonian, Marxist*, and may be a kind of *Pantheist* (Rush Rhees 1999),[76] or not a *Pantheist* at all (Flannery O'Connor 1988),[77] a sort of *Dualist Metaphysician*(Peter Winch 1989), or a *Pragmatic Idealist* (Richard H. Bell 1993) *Stoicism, Anarchical Individualism, Anti-Semitism, etc.* are some other labels that have been ascribed to Weil,

[72] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p, 258 & *Gravity and Grace*, p. 32-3.
[73] McLellan, *Simone Weil: Utopian Pessimist*, p. 17.
[74] Rees, Richard, "Introduction" to Weil's *On Science, Necessity, and the Love of God*, p. viii.
[75] As McLellan has pointed out, there is no simple answer to the question of how far Weil shared Gnostic beliefs due to the complexity of Gnostic phenomenon. McLellan mentions that Simone Weil was "very enthusiastic about the Cathars" of the Languedoc, the Christian Gnostics. See McLellan's *Simone Weil: Utopian Pessimist*, p. 195.
[76] Rhees writes: "it seems as though her religious views were a development from the Newtonian mechanical view of the world—the material world—and also a development from the Marxist view", *Discussions of Simone Weil*, p. 49.
[77] O'Connor wished to write a novel about Weil; see *The Habit of Being: letters*, p. 105.

Gustave Thibon mentions.[78] And, last but not least, Simone Weil is a *Fideist* (Kai Nielson 1967-89-2005).

Notwithstanding the fact that these labels and terms, at least some of them, might be useful, though some are awkward, I am inclined to agree with Thibon that "in a sense she had all these tendencies; but she herself was something more, something different from them all".[79] In fact, what Wittgenstein says about *the philosopher* might best fit the characteristics of Simone Weil's life and thought: Weil is a kind of a theologian and philosopher, one can say, who is not a "member of any community of ideas. That is what makes [her] into a philosopher"[80] and an honest religious thinker. "An honest religious thinker [Wittgenstein tells us] is like a tightrope walker. He [or she] almost looks as though he [or she] were walking on nothing but air. His [or her] support is the slenderest imaginable. And yet it really is possible to walk on it".[81] Weil has also been mentioned to be "the example of the religious consciousness without a religion"[82] or the example of, in Weil's own terms, "implicit faith",[83] a kind of faith that goes beyond the boundaries of the Church.

Furthermore, Weil did stay outside the Church because, as she thought, "[t]he Church has been a totalitarian Great Beast…The great Beast's end is existence".[84] The Church, she believed, would separate her from ordinary people by a habit.[85] There are so

[78] Thibon, "Introduction to the Original Work", p. 5.
[79] Ibid., p. 5.
[80] Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, § 455.
[81] Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, p. 73.
[82] O'Connor, *The Habit of Being: Letters*, p. 189.
[83] See Weil's "Forms of the Implicit Love of God" in *Waiting for God, Pp.* 137-215.
[84] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 620.
[85] Weil, "Letter I" in *Waiting for God*, p. 48.

many things that are outside it, including, for example, "materialism and atheism".[86] It also because, she thought, the Church is so "patriotic" [87] and *collective*.— "I do not want to be adopted into a circle, to live among people who say "we" and to be part of an "us," to find I am at home in any human *milieu* whatever it may be.[88] Yet, Simone Weil mentions that she is aware that "the Church must inevitably be a social structure; otherwise it would not exist. But in so far as it is a social structure, it belongs to the Prince of this World".[89] In spite of her refusal to enter the Church, Weil, as she states, could not help having a feeling that all the same she was really inside the Church. One can say a great deal on this subject, but one has to limit oneself; I will mention two more factors. First, Weil states that as *water* is indifferent to the objects that fall into it, so *thought* should be indifferent to all ideas without exception.[90] No doubt, the second factor was philosophical difficulties that kept her outside philosophical community as well. In a letter written just a year before her death, Weil wrote: "But I am kept outside the Church by philosophical difficulties which I fear are irreducible"[91] or insurmountable.

Rush Rhees, the noted thinker trained by Wittgenstein, worries and complains that Simone Weil, specifically in her lectures at *Roanne* and especially in her writing about science between 1933 and1934, in Rhees' own words, *mixes up* philosophy and religious meditations and therefore makes it difficult for us to know *how* we ought to look at her writings. Rhees writes:

---

[86] Weil, "Spiritual Autobiography", p. 75. Also see " Her Intellectual Vocation", p. 85
[87] Ibid., p. 53 In this regard, she writes: " I do not want to be adopted into a circle, to live among people who say 'we' and to be part of an 'us' to find I am 'at home'…"(Ibid., p. 54).
[88] Weil, "Letter II" in *Waiting for God*, p. 54.
[89] Ibid., p. 54.
[90] Weil, "Her Intellectual Vocation", p. 85.
[91] Weil, *Simone Weil: Seventy Letters*, (letter 47-New York 1942), p. 155.

> If it were just that Simone Weil wrote in religious meditation and not in philosophy, I should have no complaint. But I feel like complaining that she *mixes up* philosophy and religious meditation, and writes as if she were not even aware that she was doing so. She would tell me this shows how little I understand, and I am sure she would be right…But can someone tell me… *how* I ought to look at her writings?[92]

Rhees mentions that his complaint against Weil's philosophical perspectives on science would not be meant "as derogatory…She was [indeed] an important writer on political philosophy. But her greatness lay in her meditations on moral and religious questions".[93] So, Rhees argues that because Simone Weil mixes up *philosophy of science* and *religious mediations,* she ignores and fails to draw any distinction between *mathematical*, *physical*, and *moral* necessity.[94] That is why, Rhees believes that Weil is not a great philosopher of science though she is a talented philosopher of science and a great political, moral, and religious philosopher. However, Rhees thinks, she might have become a very good philosopher of science if she had devoted herself to it. What Simone Weil wrote on science then is *not* philosophy but religious reflections. That is to say, Weil attempts to speak of science in the language that belongs to religious language.[95] However, it is obvious that Rhees takes no notice of the distinction that Weil draws between physical and moral necessities.[96]

In *The Just Balance,* Peter Winch expresses a similar complaint— that is, Simone Weil mixes up philosophy and religious meditations. Simone Weil, Winch writes, had never discussed the distinction between questions that are philosophical and those that have some other character. But, unlike Rhees, Winch does not suggest that Simone Weil

[92] Rhees, *Discussions of Simone Weil*, p. 86.
[93] Ibid., p. 86.
[94] Ibid., p. 51.
[95] Ibid., p. 85-7.
[96] I will return to Rhees' assessment of Weil view on necessity in Chapter 2 (Sec. 2.2).

should have done this, keeping the distinction between philosophy and religious meditations.[97]

The question whether Weil's remarks on science are philosophical or religious remarks, as first raised by Rhees, seems to be a serious difficulty. Like Rhees and Winch, D. Z. Phillips draws our attention to the same concern; he states that anyone who has tried to study Weil's work seriously "will have experienced the difficulty in distinguishing between her philosophical and religious observations".[98] The difficulty has been described by Phillips in the following way: "Language which may be acceptable as part of a religious meditation, may raise all sorts of difficulties if offered as part of a philosophical analysis".[99]

This difficulty, I think, is grounded and drawn from Wittgenstein's conception of *language-games*. But, first, it should be said, as Rhees seems to ignore, that philosophy of science is *not* one of the natural sciences. Furthermore, if, as Wittgenstein said once: "Philosophy ought really to be written only as a form of poetry",[100] why could it not be written as a form of religious meditations?[101] This does not necessarily mean to ignore where a particular discussion belongs. Indeed, this difficulty needs to be acknowledged, as Winch remarks, in order to be able to determine how precisely a particular discussion is to be understood, and what kinds of criticism it is appropriate to develop in relation to it.[102]

---

[97] Winch, *The Just Balance*, p. 1.
[98] Phillips', "*God and concept-formation in Simone Weil*", p. 77.
[99] Ibid., p. 77.
[100] Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, p. 24.
[101] I even wonder whether Rush Rhees considered, e.g., pre-Socratic philosophers' remarks on science as philosophical or religious reflections.
[102] Winch, *The Just Balance*, p. 1.

1.3 The Enigma of Human Life: Affliction

This section provides a further background to our concerns regarding the problem of affliction, a concept which marks an important shift in Weil's perspectives: a shift from political and social perspectives on suffering (the early Weil thought in terms of oppression) to moral and religious perspectives on suffering (the later Weil thought in terms of affliction).[103]

In her youth, Weil, as political and social philosopher, was intensively concerned with the *oppression* of the working class, who she saw as subject to a blind force: the social mechanism, and looked for a reply in Marxist literature. In her book, *Oppression and Liberty*, Weil writes:

> Now the social mechanism, through its blind functioning, is in process…of destroying all the conditions for the material and moral well-being of the individual, all the conditions for intellectual and cultural development. To gain mastery over this mechanism is for us a matter of life and death…But how are we to master this blind force…? We should look in vain in Marxist literature for a reply to this question.[104]

Although we are primarily concerned with Simone Weil's later thought: her philosophical, moral, and religious solutions, not her political and social solutions, it is important for several reasons, as Springsted mentions, to note that Weil worked in three factories (1934-5), where she encountered the phenomenon she came to call *affliction*, for several reasons. The essential reason, according to Springsted, was "because she was not

[103] Regarding whether there is one or two Simone Weil, I agree with Vetö that: "The works of the last years of Weil's life concentrate essentially on religious subjects, leading many readers to claim the existence of a break between the youthful writings and those of her maturity. But this 'break' is only superficial". See *The Religious Metaphysics of Simone Weil*, p. 7. Peter Winch holds a similar view.

[104] Weil, *Oppression and Liberty*, p. 20. This book has been considered to be one of the "masterpieces of European political philosophy". See George Grant's "Introduction to Simone Weill", p. 795.

satisfied with her [political and social] solutions to oppression",[105] the solutions (whatever they might be) that she was hoping to find in Marxist literature. Therefore, she began to look for a solution outside the Marxist tradition.

It is not our purpose to compare Weil's early solutions to her later ones but to note that, as Lawrence A. Blum and Victor J. Seidler have pointed out, the experience of factory work led Weil to "give up thinking in terms of 'oppression' of working people"[106] and to start thinking in terms of *affliction*. Moreover, it was from within "a reformulated Christianity",[107] primarily, "Greek Christianity",[108] along with Hinduism, and Greek philosophy and literature that Weil discovered a language that could begin to illuminate the truth of affliction as a serious and extreme form of suffering. That is also why in the beginning of this chapter we called her a strange Catholic.

Furthermore, it is evident that the emphasis Simone Weil places on affliction and suffering is the most obvious link between her work and her affliction. In his "Introduction" to his sympathetic reading of Weil, *The Religious Metaphysics of Simone Weil* (1994), Miklos Vetö writes:

> Naturally, Weil's importance resides as much in the witness of her life as in the stunning fragments of her work, and this author would certainly be the last not to admire the fascinating greatness of this life: her unrelenting struggle with violent headaches; her heroic year in the factories; the months she spent working in the fields; the episode of the Spanish Civil War; her preoccupation with the refugee camps; and the tragic consummation of her life in a sanatorium near London. I am persuaded that anyone unaware of the circumstances of her life has no chance to truly understand Weil's thought.[109]

---

[105] Springsted, *Simone Weil and the Suffering of Love*, p. 25.
[106] Lawrence Blum & Victor Seidler, *A True Liberty: Simone Weil and Marxism*, p. 187.
[107] Ibid., p. 187.
[108] Grant, "Introduction to Simone Weil", p. 798.
[109] Vetö, *The Religious Metaphysics of Simone Weil*, p. 1.

Leslie Fiedler makes a similar claim. He writes: "In a profound sense, her life is her chief work, and without some notion of her biography it is impossible to know her total meaning".[110] This is particularly true of Weil's philosophical, moral, and religious reflections on suffering and affliction, as well their interpretations and elucidations, since, as mentioned earlier, the link between her work and her affliction is evident and recognizable. Following Vetö, "I have assumed such familiarity here",[111] and, indeed, without some familiarity with her life story, one may not be able to truly appreciate Weil's "Utopian Pessimism", to use David McClellan's phrase, a kind of "pessimism", Rees defines, that can evoke and stimulate and sustain a humane and realistic fortitude".[112] Whether it is true that Weil is a pessimist, there is still something important about pessimism. It shows, Rush Rhees claims, that "there can be no question of getting rid of evil".[113] That is to say, as Socrates claims in *Theaetetus* 176, "it is impossible that evil should disappear".[114] The following section illustrates why this is impossible.

1.3.1 The Agony of Abandonment

Therefore, this world in which we live, Weil standing against Gottfried Leibniz, is not the best possible world.[115] — "God has created a world which is not the best possible, but which contains the whole range of good and evil.[116] Doesn't this, the existence of evil

---

[110] Fiedler, "Introduction" to *Waiting for God*, p. 12.
[111] Ibid., p. 1.
[112] Rees, Richard, "Introduction" to *First and Last Notebooks*, p. viii.
[113] Rhees, Rush, *Discussions of Simone Weil*, p. 169.
[114] Simone Weil's translation. See Weil's "God in Plato", p. 92.
[115] The problem of evil occupied Leibniz more than any other philosophical problems. For example, see his well-known book *Theodicy*. However, Leibniz considered the actual world to be the best of all possible worlds.
[116] Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p. 79.

and suffering, pose a serious challenge to belief in the existence of a perfect and powerful God? Although this, (i.e., theodicy), is not the problem with which I am concerned, it is extremely important to mention that, for Weil, "[b]ecause he is the creator, God is not all-powerful".[117] He, "here below cannot be anything else but absolutely powerless".[118] Creation, however, Weil proclaims, is "an abandonment" or "abdication";[119] it is "affliction".[120] Christ (also Job) suffered abandonment by God. Moreover, Weil claims that this world in which we are is the world of "necessity and not purpose";[121] we are, according Weil, "in a state of misery".[122] Thus, as Springsted has put it, "we are already in a state of affliction—totally abandoned and in darkness".[123] Hence, it is reasonable to say, as David Cayley has put it, affliction is "the sign of our abandonment".[124] It is, as Athanasiadis has observed, nothing less than "the total loss of what makes us human in the world";[125] therefore, it is true to think with Wittgenstein and say: *to feel lost is the ultimate torment*.[126]

In *The Love of God and Affliction,* Simone Weil reminds us that the great enigma of human life is not suffering but affliction. Thus, it is affliction, not what is so-called the problem of evil, (Why is there so much suffering?), with which this thesis is concerned. One may wonder whether one has to suffer, as Weil did, or "recreate Weil's suffering in

---

[117] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks,* p. 120.
[118] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 542.
[119] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 103 & p. 120.
[120] Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction", p. 194.
[121] Ibid., p. 197.
[122] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 268.
[123] Springsted, *Simone Weil and the Suffering of Love*, p. 34.
[124] Cayley, *Enlightened by Love: The Thought of Simone Weil*, (CBC Audio), transcript, p. 23.
[125] Athanasiadis, *George Gran and the Theology of the Cross*, p. 66.
[126] Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, p. 45-46 (emphasis added).

our own life",[127] to understand and appreciate what Weil, specifically, wrote on *affliction*. Eric Springsted argues that such an imitation is unnecessary.[128] All we have to do, Springsted, following Vetö, claims, is "to take seriously the fact that [her] vision was gained by suffering and that its truth cannot be divorced from suffering".[129] In a certain sense, Springsted is right, because, let us recall: "It is wrong to desire affliction…; and moreover it is the essence of affliction that it is suffered unwillingly".[130] Therefore, even if, per impossible, we could imitate affliction, we should not desire to recreate it in our own life to appreciate what Simone Weil wrote. However, the question, which is crucial and will be discussed later in Chapter Three, (p. 75-82), and which Springsted ignores, is *whether one can know and understand what affliction is without going through it*. This is certainly related to Weil's proclamation of the ineffability of affliction.

Bearing this question in mind, my general suggestion regarding Simone Weil's writings is to 'look through' not 'at' them; the only way to discern the thought is by re-thinking them in our own mind.[131] That is to say, her works, as Richard Bell has pointed out, should "serve as mirrors for us to see our own thinking, especially with all its deformities".[132] I also suggest that we should read Simon Weil in a contra modern fashion—that is, her later reflections should be read as a reinvigoration of ancient approaches, specifically Plato. In Plato's allegory of the cave, Weil writes: "The sun in

---

[127] Springsted, *Simone Weil & The Suffering of Love*, p. 12.
[128] Ibid., p. 12.
[129] Ibid., p. 12.
[130] Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction", p. 184.
[131] This distinction plays a major role in Collingwood's philosophy. According to him, only by "looking through" one can get into an inner side consisting of processes of thought of all non-natural phenomena. Collingwood calls this idea of "looking through" "re-enactment"—rethinking and reconstructing something in the context of one's own knowledge. See: Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 213-217.
[132] Bell, "Introduction…" to *Simone Weil's Philosophy of Culture,* p. 13. Bell draws this suggestion from a note Wittgenstein makes in *Culture and Value*.

Plato being the good, darkness represents affliction in the myth of the cave".[133] However, Weil returns to ancient tradition, particularly, to the Socratic-Platonic tradition, for a fundamental reason lying behind her world-view: "When a man [a human] introduces a new thought into philosophy it can hardly be anything except a new accent upon some thought which is not only eternal by right but ancient in fact".[134] Thus it must not be a surprise to say Weil seems to concerns herself with a traditional, eternal, yet elapsed, question. Here, it is worthwhile to pay attention to how Erik Fromm spoke to this issue:

> [Humans]— of all ages and cultures—[are] confronted with the solution of one and the same question: the question of how to overcome separateness, how to achieve union , how to transcend one's own individual life…The question is the same for primitive man living in caves…the roman soldier, the medieval monk , the Japanese samurai, the modern clerk and factory hand. The question is the same, for it springs from the same ground: the human situation, the conditions of human existence. The answer varies. The question can be answered by animal worship, by human sacrifice or military conquest, by indulgence in luxury, by ascetic renunciation, by obsessional work, by artistic creation, by the love of God, and by the love of [humans]. While there are many answers…as soon as one ignores smaller differences…one discovers that there is only a limited number of answers…The history of religion and philosophy is the history of these answers.[135]

This separateness, in Weil's sense, is an infinite gap or distance between blind *necessity* and the *good*[136] or "its equivalent, that between justice and force",[137] or, in other words, "between reality and the good",[138] the absolute or the 'supernatural good',[139] a good, as Athanasiadis has put it, "which is the hidden desire deep in our souls".[140] We, Weil claims, are just "a point in this distance. Space, time, and the mechanism that governs

---

[133] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 242.
[134] Weil, "Scientism: a Review", in *On Science, Necessity, and the Love of God*, p. 70.
[135] Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, p. 9-10.
[136] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 363 (my Italics).
[137] Weil, *Oppression and Liberty*, p. 174.
[138] Ibid., p. 160.
[139] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 410.
[140] Athanasiadis, *George Gran and the Theology of the Cross*, p. 65.

matter are the distance. Everything that we call evil is only this mechanism".[141] What brings us into this distance is a blind necessity, as she writes: "Only blind necessity can throw [humans] to the extreme point of distance, close to the Cross".[142] Yet, for those "who love, separation, although painful, is a good".[143] Weil regards the Cross as a paradigm of affliction, as a universal human experience. Hence, she says: "The Cross [or affliction] is this point of intersection"[144] between necessity and the good.

More importantly, Weil identifies this distance, the infinite distance between necessity and the good, as "the fundamental contradiction":[145] *The essential contradiction in human life.* Hence, the fundamental contradiction, which is equivalent to the notion of condition of existence, is "the sole link between good and necessity".[146] Moreover, it is in affliction that one is more likely to experience this distance or separateness. In other words, one of the keys by which Simone Weil unlocked her understanding of the contradiction is the experience of affliction which is, as Vetö has observed, located as an "obstacle at the intersection of…the good and necessity".[147] It seems to be obvious that Simone Weil is concerned with the tension in the separateness and connectedness of necessity and the good. This, according to Thibon, is her "metaphysical explanation of abandonment".[148]

Indeed, Weil's claim, the proclamation of the contradiction between necessity and the good, is not novel; it has been building up for centuries. Even as far as back, as Weil

---

[141] Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction", p. 177.
[142] Ibid., p. 176.
[143] Ibid., p. 177.
[144] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 433.
[145] Weil, *Oppression and Liberty*, p. 165.
[146] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 266.
[147] Vetö, *The Religious Metaphysics of Simone Weil*, p. 70.
[148] Thibon, *Simone Weil: A Fellowship in Love*, p. 210.

herself states, to Plato, there is the sense that "an infinite distance separates the good from necessity".[149] Thus, the deepest need is the need to overcome this separateness; and the question is: What is Weil's response? This is the question which I am hoping to make clear through this study.

1.4 Weil's Philosophical Aim

Moreover, for Weil, affliction is something essentially different from suffering; it is something specific, irreducible.[150] Affliction, Weil writes, is "impossible to compare with anything else, just as nothing can convey the idea of sound to the deaf and dumb".[151] It shows an insoluble contradiction which our mind tries to overcome and is unable to.[152] Therefore, Weil would say: "The proper method of philosophy consists in clearly conceiving the insoluble problems in all their insolubility and then in simply contemplating them, fixedly and tirelessly…without any hope, patiently waiting".[153] In some other places, Simone Weil wrote that the proper or correct method would really be nothing, but attaining *clarity*. That is to say, in Weil's own terms, "[t]he intelligence is not called upon to discover anything, but merely to clear the ground".[154] This is precisely what Wittgenstein also thought to be the correct method of philosophy.

> What we are destroying is nothing but houses of cards and we are clearing up the ground of language on which they stand.[155]

Also:

---

[149] Weil, *Oppression and Liberty*, p. 174.
[150] Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction", p. 170.
[151] Ibid., p. 172.
[152] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 386, 387.
[153] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 335.
[154] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 491.
[155] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §118.

> Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything. — Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain.[156]

For Weil too, the intelligence, not only has nothing to explain, but even nothing to discover. The idea of wanting to explain affliction is perhaps wrong. Thus, our main task is to strive for *clarification* and *contemplation*, rather than for *explanation* or any answer, since the question of affliction, as Weil argues, is the question to which there is essentially *no* answer or explanation.[157] In this way, what affliction cries out for is a *pure* or *unmixed attention* and contemplation, rather than an explanation.

Finally, it should be admitted that Weil's reflections on affliction, is quite a novel idea. It is one of the concepts which are most important to Weil and is the most common feature of human life. Again, the primary objective of this thesis is to clarify what Weil means by *necessity* and *affliction*. This thesis also attempts to clarify what Weil means by the ineffability of affliction, and, more importantly, to elucidate why she finds consolation to be a hindrance to true faith. I also suggest that, for Simone Weil, affliction is not an intellectual problem. Therefore, following Wittgenstein, "what has to be overcome is not a difficulty of the intellect, but of the will".[158] That is, what has to be overcome, in order that we understand Weil, is: *the willing subject who resists consent to necessity and affliction.* According to Weil, "[t]he resistance to be overcome in order to be carried toward the beautiful [or the good] is perhaps a test of authenticity".[159]

---

[156] Ibid., §126.
[157] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 82-3.
[158] Wittgenstein, "Philosophy", p. 161.
[159] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 356. For Weil, the beautiful and the good are essentially one.

1.5 Research Design

I will discuss Weil reflections on suffering, affliction, and necessity in the language that belongs to philosophical, moral, political, and religious landscape, for, as Springsted (as well as McLellan) has pointed out, *affliction*, for Weil, is a moral and religious problem.[160] Like Eric Springsted, I also believe that "a psychological reductionism will not do these writings justice any more than it would do justice to the works of Augustine, Kierkegaard or Dostoevsky".[161] Nor does a sociological or physical reductionism help us to understand what Weil essentially means by affliction, although the social factor, as Weil says, is essential amongst all its parts, physiological and physical.[162]

Reductionism appearing in a variety forms,[163] is the dominant modern approach striving for a total *explanation*. Certainly, this craving is something that Weil rejects. She saw explanation as a hindrance to truth. Thus, no form of reductionism seems to be adequate to the task at hand for Weil as well as for us.

This thesis not only clarifies Weil's, primarily, later, non-systematic, and often unclear, thought, but it also argues that affliction cannot be understood apart from her conception of necessity. The concept of necessity and affliction are, in fact, closely linked in Weil's writings. We experience necessity as affliction. The idea is that affliction

---

[160] Springsted, *Simone Weil and the Suffering of Love,* p. 35; also see McLellan's *Simone Weil: Utopian Pessimist,* p. 30.
[161] Springsted, *Simone Weil and the Suffering of Love,* p. 7.
[162] Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction", p. 171.
[163] According to Huston Smith, "reductionists, who being primarily interested in something other than religion, reduce religion to a manifestation or expression of this or that other entity: social reality (Durkheim), class struggle (Marx), ontogenetic development (Freud)… [On the other hand] Phenomenologists believe in religion's autonomy… Kant located the irreducibility of religious in the moral imperative, Schleiermacher in man's feeling of absolute dependence, Rudolf Otto in his sense of the numinous"; See the introduction to the revised edition to *The Transcendent Unity of Religion,* p. xxi.

cannot be separated from necessity, gravity, or force and vice versa. Therefore, the key themes in our investigations of the enigma of human life, i.e., of the affliction, will also include necessity. I am forced by my guiding questions, 'What is necessity?' 'What is affliction?' 'What is this absence of the meaning, or the good, or God?' to divide this thesis into two more chapters, apart from the concluding chapter.

In Chapter 2, I will explore and clarifies the thesis that the absence of a meaning, or God, or the feeling of the absence of the good in the world is the region of necessity. I will begin this chapter (Sec. 2.1) by throwing light on the conception of necessity and argue that Weil's identification of necessity, as a mathematical and blind mechanical necessity is the key to understanding of affliction, a momentarily experience of God's absence or of the good which lies beyond the region of necessity. The main point of this section is to show that reality is a blind necessity, and things have causes and not purposes. The problem is whether necessity can calm someone who is in pain—Why am I being hurt? I will consider this problem as a metaphysical, ethical, or religious difficulty, the difficulty of failing to stop asking for purposes, or the difficulty of failing to prevent oneself from asking the same question—*Why*? This will allow us to view Weil's ethical and religious perspectives in sections: (2.2.2 and 2.2.3). It will help us to understand the essential difference between necessity, which the foundation of the empirical reality, and the good, which is the foundation of the transcendental reality. Once the essential difference between necessity and the good is clarified, Weil thesis, that the absence of a meaning, or God, or the good in the world is the region of necessity, will become more lucid and comprehensible. Finally, (2.3), since Weil's account of necessity suggests that there is no answer to a teleological question, (Why am I being hurt?), I will clarify

whether Simone Weil is an absurdist. The point to consider Weil's absurdism is to recapture her religious and ethical perspectives through Kierkegaard.

It should be noticed that before moving on to the last two sections, (2.2.2 and 2.2.3), I will reconsider the term necessity, (Sec. 2.1.1), through examining Rush Rhees' and Peter Winch' criticism of Weil's identification of necessity, mainly, for the purpose of further clarification. Unlike Rhees and Winch, I will argue that Simone Weil maintains more than one notion of necessity. Rhees' and Winch's criticism is important to be considered since, as we mentioned, Weil's conception of necessity is the key term to understanding of affliction.

Chapter 3 reconsiders the same issue, the essential differences between necessity and the good, but from a slightly different direction, through affliction. In other words, in Chapter 3, I will explore and clarify the thesis, that the absence of a meaning, or God, or the feeling of the absence of the good in the world, is affliction. In this chapter, I will address and answer four major questions: What is affliction is? Can affliction be known and explained? Can affliction be articulated? Is there a possibility of expressing it?

In Sec. 3.1, I will clarify Weil's conception of affliction and characterizes it as a quite specific moment of 'a numinous experience', a kind of momentarily experience which remains ineffable. I will also argue that affliction can only be known by negation. That is, what affliction is not—affliction is not suffering. This will led me to the second question (Sec. 3.2). Here, I explain, by providing some reasons, why Weil refuses any form of explanation and consolation for suffering, or rather affliction. Answers to the first two questions will drive me to Sec. 3.2, where I expand on Weil's claim of the ineffability or inarticulateness of affliction. The final question in guiding us in the final section (3.2.1) will allow us to put forward a Weilian response for expressing what is

apparently inexpressible in affliction. I conclude this chapter by claiming that what is ineffable or inexpressible, God, or the good, can be communicated and expressed by means of indirect expressions, by means of a simile. The final Chapter sums up the thesis and proposes a potential concern: Should one not call Weil: an anti-historical, or a non-historical, or an essentialist? For now, we need to leave this question out and ask what necessity is.

Chapter Two: On Necessity*

Understanding the nature of *necessity* and the *good* is crucial for understanding Weil's account of affliction, for they are correlated. Neither can be grasped fully without the other. Together, they illuminate what she means by affliction. Suffering, grief, torment, and misfortune, inflicted by blind necessity, characterize human life. A person who falls into affliction, Weil claims, is like a 'workman who gets caught up in a machine', a machine that is ruled by 'necessity' which she calls: 'a blind mechanism'. The afflicted person, Weil states, is 'no longer a [human] but a torn and bloody rag on the teeth of a cogwheel'.[164] He or she who is wounded and afflicted in this way at the hands of a blind force is "inert and lifeless. He [or she] goes unnoticed, or nearly unnoticed, by those who pass him [or her] by".[165] In such a scenario, the cry of the afflicted person is always "inaudible: 'Why am I being hurt?'",[166] a question to which there is no answer.[167] This picture is an illustration of what necessity, as a blind force, is. This picture can be restated in the following way: *The absence of a meaning, God, or the good in the world is the region of necessity*. This is the thesis with which this chapter is concerned.

What necessity is in the work of Simone Weil is no easy question in the sense that Weil has never drawn a sharp distinction between different senses of necessity. For example, she does not appear to explain how moral necessity is different from physical necessity. For that reason, she has been criticized by, primarily, some Wittgensteinian

---

* It should be reminded that Simone Weil occasionally capitalizes "necessity" for the purpose of emphasising on the term.

[164] Weil, "Human Personality" p. 331 & "The Love of God and Affliction", p. 175.

[165] Athanasiadis, *George Grant and the Theology of the Cross*, p. 91.

[166] Weil, "Human Personality" p. 329.

[167] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 82-3.

scholars such as Rush Rhees and Peter Winch. Since having a clear understanding of Weil's notion of necessity is crucial for understanding her notion of affliction, we cannot overlook Rhees' and Winch's criticism. Based upon her understanding of necessity, Weil might also be called absurdist.[168]

According to Weil, affliction reveals the essential contradiction in the human condition: *the infinite distance between necessity and the good*. Weil writes: "The necessity contained in this contradiction represents the whole of Necessity [*sic*] in a nutshell".[169] However, according to Weil, 'we are subject to necessity, and crave for the good, and/or we are subject to force, and crave for justice'.[170] Above all, it is this contradiction Weil most concerns herself with and views as puzzling. That is why "[t]he blind necessity which constrains us, and which is revealed in geometry, appears to us as a thing to overcome".[171] To overcome the blind necessity is to overcome the distance or gap between necessity and the good since, for Weil, I believe, these two themes are intrinsically interconnected.

Weil's views on this fundamentally 'metaphysical problem' largely depend on her understanding of how the essence of necessity is different from that of the good. In fact, she continually asks and comes back to this question.[172] Therefore, shedding light upon what Weil means by necessity and how its essence is different from that of the good should help us to reach a deeper understanding of affliction. Before I spell out her account of necessity and make it clear by referring to Wittgenstein, it should be

---

[168] I will return to Rhee's concern in Sec. 2.2.1(p. 40-44). I will also return to our concern with Weil's absurdism on (p. 58-61).
[169] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 331. Like the conception of 'the good', the conception of 'necessity' has sometimes been capitalized in the English translations of Weil's works.
[170] Weil, "Classical Science and After", p. 21.
[171] Ibid., p. 21.
[172] For example see *The Notebooks*, v.2. P. 400, 410, 434, 480, 492.

acknowledged that, as Steven Burns has observed, "[t]he necessity which Weil insists" is not "the determinist or deductive-explanation thesis any more than it is the indeterminist or contingent thesis".[173] Arguably, I believe, this is true of Weil, but since this topic of determinism against free will is beyond the scope of this thesis, I will leave the issue at that.

However, the purpose of this chapter is to clarify the thesis that the absence of a meaning, God, or the good in the world is the region of necessity by clarifying the difference between what is necessity and what is good. I will argue that Weil's identification of a blind, mechanical necessity is the key to understanding affliction, an experience of the good which lies beyond the region of necessity. In Sec. 2.1, I will throw light on Weil's conception of necessity and demonstrate the importance and role of necessity as the major key in Weil philosophical, ethical, and religious approach to understanding affliction. In order to clarify Weil's conception of necessity further, I will consider a serious criticism raised by Rush Rhees and Peter Winch against Weil in Sec. 2.2.1. Against Rhees' and Winch's criticism, I will argue in this section that Simone Weil holds more than one notion of necessity. In other words, there are different senses of necessity present in Weil's thought. To understand Weil's insistence on the essential difference between necessity and the good, we need to consider her ethical and religious views. This is the main objective of the following two sections (2.2.2 and 2.2.3). Finally, since, for Weil, reality is the sole necessity, lack any purpose, then, as I discuss in Sec.2.3, in what sense Weil might be characterized as an absurdist if she is at all. However, let us begin this chapter by spelling out what necessity is.

[173] Burns, "Virtue and Necessity", p. 271. This topic of determinism and free will is beyond the scope of this thesis.

2.1 The Domain and Chain of Necessity

Throwing light on Weil's philosophical conception of necessity and showing the key role of necessity as the basis for understanding affliction is the primary objective of this section.

According to Simone Weil, this sensible world in which we live has no other reality than that of necessity.[174] Hence, the reality of this world is necessity; it is the act or realization of necessity. In a word, necessity is reality or vice versa. Everything that exists *within* or *beneath* the world is subjected to necessity or the related term, "gravity".[175] Weil also remarks that "the matter which constitutes the world is a tissue of blind necessity".[176] The reality of matter, Weil asserts, "lies in necessity, but we can only conceive of necessity by laying down clearly defined conditions, that is to say in mathematics".[177] Therefore, Weil states: "Mathematical necessity is certainly genuine necessity".[178] It is genuine in the sense that it is impersonal, "No points of view", [179] "No 'I' in numbers".[180] It tells us what must necessarily be, e.g., 2+2 must necessarily be 4. Thus, it is indifferent to one's beliefs and desires. Mathematical necessity is also genuine in the sense that "I cannot visualize a relation between e and π".[181] It should also be mentioned that, at least in some cases, Weil uses 'mathematical necessity' as an

[174] Weil, "Draft of a Statement of Human Obligations", p. 221.
[175] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 143 & *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 4 92.
[176] Weil, "Classical Science and After" p. 12.
[177] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 509.
[178] Ibid., p. 513.
[179] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 191.
[180] Ibid., p. 193.
[181] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 526.

analogy.[182] That is to say, as she claims, "[w]e are better able to seize upon the fact of Divine Providence in mathematics",[183] mathematical objects are formless.

Moreover, mathematical necessity forms the basis of reality. That is, this mathematical necessity is "the substance of the world"[184] or reality; it is "a solid reality".[185] Nevertheless, it is not "tangible"; it can only be felt "in the form of blows".[186] In other words, "we can be aware of necessity as constraint and constraint as a pain".[187] Moreover, "necessity", like "good", Weil asserts, "come to us from outside".[188] That is to say it is independent of one's beliefs and desires.

Weil also states that necessity is the "supreme criterion of logic".[189] Thus, it must be regarded "as being that which imposes conditions",[190] or "an order of conditions".[191] Weil also seems to suggest that the notion of *possibility* is inherent in necessity. Necessity, she writes, is "made up of conditions, therefore of possibilities";[192] it "leaves room for 'ifs'".[193] Things are linked together, or combined with one another, in innumerable ways, by necessity.[194] Therefore, according to Weil,

> What must necessarily be, that is precisely what is.
> What is impossible, that is precisely what is.[195]

---

[182] The role of analogy in Weil's thought is discussed further on (p. 48-50).
[183] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 526.
[184] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 80 & p. 92.
[185] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 410.
[186] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 88 & p. 92.
[187] Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction", p. 171.
[188] Weil, Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 515.
[189] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 124.
[190] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 217.
[191] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 480.
[192] Ibid., p. 482.
[193] Ibid., p. 410.
[194] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 303, 302.
[195] Ibid., p. 172.

In short, "[t]hings *must* be so…, and, precisely, they are so".[196] In *The Notebooks, v.2*, Weil considers Beaumarchais' question "Why these things and not others?" Like Wittgenstein, Weil could say: 'In the word, things fit into one another like the links of a chain and stand in a determinate relation to one another'.[197]

Furthermore, Weil writes: "[n]ecessity can only be perfectly conceived when the relations appear as perfectly immaterial",[198] as mathematical relations.— "Two things linked together by Necessity [*sic*]".[199] So, it is clear that "necessity appears to her above all as mathematical. That is, as a network of immaterial relations".[200] According to Weil, as Grant has pointed out, those pure, immaterial, or mathematical relations are "the essence of everything that is".[201]

Moreover, in her *Lectures on Philosophy*, Weil states that "necessity is prior to experience. Necessary connections are the conditions of experiences; they give to it the form without which experience would only be a mass of sensations".[202] In other words, without necessity, the world would be a chaos. This also explains why Weil makes such a strong statement: "Only necessity is an object of knowledge".[203]

Furthermore, this Weilian idea of necessity, as the links of a chain, is related to a teleological question as well: Is there any purpose in the way things are? It seems to be obvious that Weil denies that there is any— that is to say, things that are linked together by necessity lack purpose. In her essay, "Forms of the Implicit

---

[196] Ibid., p.173.
[197] Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, § 2.03 & § 2.031.
[198] Weil, *The Need for Roots*, p. 284.
[199] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 303.
[200] Grant, "Excerpts from Graduate Seminar Lectures, 1975-6", p. 821.
[201] Ibid., p. 821.
[202] Weil, *Lectures on Philosophy*, p. 113.
[203] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 143.

Love of God", Weil explains this more clearly by writing: "The question of Beaumarchais: "Why these things rather than others?" never has any answer, because the world is devoid of finality. The absence of finality is the region of necessity. Things have causes and not ends".[204] In other words, the absence of a purpose or a *telos*, as well of meaning, in the world is the region of necessity. According to Weil, to ask 'why these things rather than others?' is, by analogy, the same as to ask:"[W]hy such and such a word in poem is in such and such a place"? Argued further: "[I]f there is any answer, either the poem is not of the highest order or else the reader has understood nothing of it". The only legitimate answer can be given is that "the word is there because it is suitable that it should be. The proof of this suitability is that it is there and that the poem is beautiful. The poem is beautiful, that is to say the reader does not wish it other than it is"[205] and full stop. "The beautiful is that which we cannot wish to change".[206] Weil is aware that "[t]he difficulty here is to stop",[207] to stop oneself from asking or searching for explanation or any proof. Now, one may wonder how this notion of 'beauty' is connected to our discussion of necessity.

According to Weil, "[b]eauty is necessity".[208] That is, beauty is also rooted in necessity. For Weil, "beauty and reality are identical".[209] The beautiful in nature, Weil reminds us, is "a union of the sensible impression and of the sense of necessity. Things must be like that (in the first place), and, precisely, they are like

[204] Weil, "Forms of the Implicit Love of God", p. 176-7.
[205] Ibid., p. 176.
[206] Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p. 65.
[207] Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, §314.
[208] Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p. 148.
[209] Ibid., p. 64.

that". [210] This union, for Weil, is "Pythagorean harmony".[211] Therefore, as Athanasiadis has stated, we can say:

> While the world appears to be ruled by brutal necessity or force, there is also another side to it, another way of looking at it. The world is also beautiful. Beauty is an incarnation of divine love in the world. Weil has no hesitation equating beauty with the *Logos* incarnate in the world. Here, biblical conceptions of love and Platonic conceptions of beauty come together. Beauty is that which draws our love…Beauty draws us out of ourselves and inspires us to look beyond ourselves, in love.[212]

The attitude of looking, "the mere turning of the head toward God",[213] beyond ourselves, according to Weil, is "the attitude which corresponds with the beautiful".[214] It is also important to notice that, for Weil, "It is impossible to penetrate the good without penetrating the beautiful".[215] Like the supernatural good, what is beautiful can only be desired.

Furthermore, someone may say that Weil's claim, 'Things must be like that, and, precisely, they are like that', requires an ontological proof.

In Weil's view, "[o]ntological proof is mysterious because it doesn't address itself to the intelligence, but to love".[216] In other words, it is 'related to "love and not to affirmation and denial".[217] The role of "the intelligence—that part of us which affirms and denies and formulates opinions—is merely to submit. All that I

---

[210] Ibid., p. 148.
[211] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 92.
[212] Athanasiadis, *George Grant and the Theology of the Cross*, p. 89.
[213] Fiedler, "Introduction" to *Waiting for God,* p. 36. Weil also speaks of 'the attitude of waiting'. See (p. 52-3 and p. 88).
[214] Weil, *Gravity and Grace,* p. 150. I will return to this attitude in the final section of the upcoming chapter.
[215] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 72.
[216] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 375.
[217] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 242.

conceive of as true is less true than those things of which I cannot conceive the truth, but which I love".[218] Love is a *negative* virtue. It is also to be exercised, not to be thought. Love is the recognition and acceptance of a necessity in the world. To say love is a negative virtue is to say what we love is *not* God or good. Yet, according to Weil, the only way to love God is by negation, by loving what is *not* God or good. That is, the only way to love God is to love necessity, to consent to necessity regardless of its kinds: ugly (suffering and affliction) and beauty (nature).

But why do we still ask or search for a proof? Because suffering, the ugly face of necessity, Weil states, induces a feeling of horror in which there is nothing to love and therefore prevent us from seeing what is mysterious and beautiful. But, the word is not mysterious because we have not yet found a legitimate answer or explanation, but that its mysteriousness is its very essence. Weil reminds us: "The notion of mystery is legitimate when the most logical and most rigorous use of the intelligence leads to an impasse, to a contradiction which is inescapable in this sense".[219] Yet, and remarkably, Simone Weil would state that such a mystery, when severed from all reason, is no longer a mystery but an absurdity.[220]

In short, in this section, I have spelled out Weil's ontological understanding of reality through her philosophical understanding of necessity. I have argued that reality is governed by a blind, mechanical necessity. I have also demonstrated that necessity, as the links of a chain, is related to a teleological question: What is the purpose(s) behind the way things are in the world? The answer, which was given by Weil, is that things have causes and not ends. But this answer, though it is an

[218] Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p. 130.
[219] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 131.
[220] Ibid., p. 110.

accurate one, does not satisfy someone who is in affliction. Hence, I pointed to a difficulty of preventing oneself from asking the same question constantly—*Why*? This question or difficulty can be characterized as a metaphysical, or ethical, or religious difficulty. The upcoming sections will investigate this further.

2.2 Necessity and the Good*

The main objective of this section is to clarify some significant, yet odd, aspects of Weil's ethics which are inseparable from those of her religious views. The main reason for considering Weil's ethical view is to clarify the essential differences between necessity and the good. I should also mention that because Weil's ethical approach echoes Wittgenstein's voice in some important ways, I will refer to Wittgenstein for the purpose of making Weil's ethical and religious suggestions more explicit. Nevertheless, I begin this section by Rhee's and Winch's concern regarding Weil's conception of necessity.

2.2.1 Rhees' Concern

As mentioned in the opening paragraph of this chapter, understanding the nature of necessity and the good is crucial for understanding Weil's account of affliction, for they are all correlated. Even so, both Rush Rhees and Peter Winch have found Weil's account of necessity to be problematic and confusing. If this is true, then Weil's account of affliction must also be confusing. Therefore, it is important to assess this concern.

* It should be reminded that Weil sometimes capitalizes the term of 'good'. However, for our purpose, what is important is to bear in mind the distinction between relative good and absolute good as I will make it clear in this chapter (p. 53-4).

This is a challenging criticism yet extremely useful in order to clarify further Weil's conception of necessity. Although it is a fair criticism, it can be avoided, not by ignoring it, but by asking why Weil speaks as if there were only *a single* necessity. Some remarks appearing in Weil's works appear to show different senses of necessity and provide a persuasive justification for why Weil seems to speak of different forms of necessity in nearly the same manner.

Both Rhees and Winch make a comparison between Weil's account of necessity and that of the early Wittgenstein based upon Wittgenstein's proclamation of the exclusiveness of logical necessity: the *only* necessity that exists is *logical* necessity.[221] Rhees, for instance, says: Weil writes as though necessity were one thing: 'mechanical necessity'; she seems to be speaking as Wittgenstein did in the *Tractatus* when he said "there is only logical necessity".[222] Winch has made a similar comparison. He writes: "There are however some very striking analogies between the ways in which they [both Wittgenstein and Weil] conceive necessity".[223] Moreover, Rhees' and Winch's main objective of the comparison, surprisingly, is to criticize Weil's account of necessity. I say 'surprisingly', here, since they criticize Weil but not Wittgenstein, and they seem to resist recognizing a different, though undeveloped, sense of necessity that can be found in Weil's works such as: mathematical, physical, social, political, and moral.

For example, Rhees claims that if we look at Weil's conception and analysis of 'necessity' from a philosophical point of view, it seems to be confusing. Rhees argues

[221] Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, §6.375 (emphasis added).
[222] Rhees, *Discussions of Simone Weil*, p. 63.
[223] Winch, *The Just Balance*, p. 61. Also see Winch's Introduction to Weil's *Lectures on Philosophy*, p. 14.

that the "refusal to recognise a different sense of the word 'necessity' is confusing".[224] That is to say, Weil, Rhees claims, ignores, or rather refuses to recognize a fundamental difference between mathematical, physical, and moral necessity.[225] Likewise, Winch remarks that Simone Weil tended much more so in her later writings, to speak of the whole natural order as subject to *a single* necessity. In speaking this way, Winch believes that "[Weil] tended, rather like Spinoza, to confuse the senses of 'necessity' which apply to the natural laws established within science, with the fundamentally different sense of 'necessity' connected with ideas like 'fate'".[226]

I will speak to both Winch's and Rhees' concerns together since they express and confirm virtually the same concern.

First, it is crucial to note that, according to Weil, only part of a human being is subject to necessity. She writes: "The part of [a human] which is in this world is the part which is in bondage to necessity and subject to the misery of need".[227] The eternal part of human, Weil argues, is not subject to "the pitiless necessity of matter and the cruelty of the devil".[228] This certainly suggests the difference between natural phenomena and, for instance, moral or metaphysical phenomena. Moreover, Rhees himself, for example, earlier (in the same lecture) quotes Weil when she says, "'moral phenomena …are not subject to physical necessity, but they are subject to necessity'".[229] This necessity, according to Weil, is a moral form of necessity.

---

[224] Rhees, *Discussions of Simone Weil*, p. 64.
[225] Ibid., p. 51, 58.
[226] Winch, "Introduction" to Weil's *Lectures on Philosophy*, p. 17.
[227] Weil, "Draft of a Statement of Human Obligations (1943)", p. 221.
[228] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 103.
[229] Rhees, *Discussions of Simone Weil*, p.48; Weil also writes: "(Necessary things which are other than mathematical necessity, and yet related thereto)". See (*The Notebooks*, v.2), p. 362.

> The wretchedness of our condition subjects human nature to a moral form of gravity that is constantly pulling downwards, towards evil, towards a total submission to force.[230]

Therefore, it is this form of gravity (a moral), which forces one to lose half his or her soul.[231]

However, the above two claims together obviously imply a distinction, a different sense of the term "necessity", though it might still be vague. But it is not clear why Rhees ignores this obvious distinction that Weil draws between moral and non-moral phenomena. Rhees (as well as Winch) could, however, have said that Weil had not clarified what she meant by moral necessity, rather than saying Weil has failed to recognize different sense of necessity. It seems to me that there is a family of conception of necessity: moral, political, social, historical, et cetera.

Second, for Weil, what is important, as she asserts, is *the recognition of a necessity in all facts*, including human facts, regardless of kind. She writes: "All concrete knowledge of facts, including human facts, is the recognition of a necessity in them, either a mathematical necessity or something analogous".[232] Nonetheless, Weil still speaks of moral, social, and political, and natural phenomena as though they all were the same and all subject to mathematical necessity. This is true and that is why her conception of necessity could be confusing and therefore misleading in the ways illustrated by the critiques of Rhees and Winch.

What needs to be made clear is that despite the fact that Simone Weil finds the recognition of a necessity in all facts to be essential, her investigation of

---

[230] Weil, *Oppressions and Liberty*, p. 166-7.
[231] Ibid., p. 167.
[232] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 88.

necessity does not consist in grasping *one* comprehensive essence of the term. The main reason Weil insists on the conception of necessity is, as she would say, "to bring to light that which lies outside its range":[233] the absolute good which is, according to her, hidden from us and is more real.[234] What is real for us, Weil states, is "what we are unable to deny and yet which escapes our grasp".[235] It is evident that Weil sees necessity as the key to understanding and justifying the authority the absolute good has over us.

To summarise this section, unlike Rush Rhees and Peter Winch, I have argued that there is more than *a single* necessity in Weil's thought. Indeed, Weil maintains a family of conceptions about necessity. Apart from physical, for a lack of a better term, a non-physical necessity such as moral, political, social, and spiritual necessities are also essential to Weil's thought and play a crucial role in shaping her metaphysical and moral, as well her political and social thought.[236] However, what is most important to bear in mind is that Weil's aim in investigating necessity is to bring to light that which lies outside its domain.

At the end of Sec. 2.1, I pointed to a difficulty of stopping oneself from asking the why-question. It was mentioned that this difficulty can be characterized as a metaphysical, or ethical, or religious difficulty, and this is what we will investigate further in sections (2.2.2 and 2.2.3).

---

[233] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 595.
[234] Ibid., p. 363.
[235] Ibid., p. 526.
[236] Weil's essay on "The *Iliad*" to which Steven Burns draws my attention is a good example of a non-physical necessity, political, moral and social necessity.

2.2.2 Weil's Ethical and Religious Perspectives

Weil's ethical and religious views are inseparable. As mentioned earlier, (p. 40), the main reason for considering Weil's ethical view is to clarify the essential differences between necessity and the good. Otherwise, having a clear understanding of Weil's views on of affliction would be impossible.

According to Weil, it is not our body alone that is thus subject to a blind mechanical necessity, but all our thoughts as well.[237] She writes: "All men are subject to gravity [i.e., necessity], in spite of the fact that, in the case of certain sages or saints, we hear tales, whether true or not, of levitation or of walking upon water".[238] That is to say, everything in the world takes place exclusively in accordance with the domain of necessity, the blind mechanical chain of necessity. Yet, we desire and crave for the good: "the longing for an absolute good, a longing which is always there and is never appeased by any object in this world".[239] Therefore, our very being, Weil writes, "consists in straining towards the good. That is why we believe there is a unity between necessity and the good",[240] a unity or harmony between 'what must necessarily be' and 'the sense of necessity', a Pythagorean harmony which is beautiful and has value only in the domain of the transcendent: the *Mystical.* As mentioned earlier, looking at the world as beautiful is another way of looking at it. But now, we need to return to the ugly side of the world to highlight the differences between this side of necessity and the good.

The world that is governed by blind or mechanical necessity, according to Simone Weil, is a world that is abandoned by God, leaving human beings to the bitterness of

[237] Weil, *Oppression and Liberty*, p. 159.
[238] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 129.
[239] Weil, "Draft for a Statement of Human Obligation", p. 219.
[240] Weil, *Oppression and Liberty*, p. 159.

necessity and force. She writes: "God…lets Necessity distribute [sufferings] in accordance with its own proper mechanism. Otherwise he would not be withdrawn from creation".[241] That is to say, necessity "represents an order without an author".[242] Hence, God's abandonment is built into, as well revealed by, the structure of necessity, the mathematical structure of the world. Since everything in the world takes place solely in accordance with its own proper mechanism, it follows that the realm of necessity is independent of God. This also explains what Weil meant by 'God is powerless': the refutation of God's intervention in the world.[243] In other words, the realm of necessity, which Weil insists upon and lays before us, indicates God's absence (i.e., the absence of the good): his withdrawal from the world, something that traditional Christianity seemed to ignore.

Before we progress any further, it is worthwhile to compare Weil's idea of the indifference of mathematical, mechanical necessity to whatever is the good (whatever is higher), to Wittgenstein's account of logical necessity in the *Tractatus*. There is a clear affinity between them. They seem to be making a similar, if not the same, point. The comparison should help us to gain a better grasp of what Weil means by necessity as opposed to what is higher, the good or God. Wittgenstein writes:

> *How* things are in the world is a matter of complete indifference for what is higher. God does not revel himself *in* the world.[244]

---

[241] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 403.
[242] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 241.
[243] This also might be considered as a promising solution to the problem of evil—theodicy.
[244] Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, §6.432. Obviously, for Wittgenstein what is higher is what is good or divine, as he writes: "What is good is also divine." See *Culture and Value*, p. 3.

For Weil too, how things are in the world is a matter of complete indifference for what is higher, God. Weil claims: "God has only been able to create by hiding himself",[245] by withdrawing from the world.

But, Weil's view of necessity still appears to be problematic — or rather, inconsistent. On the one hand, she seems to claim that necessity is independent of the will of God: necessity works in accordance with its own proper mechanism, or as she writes: "The will of God is not the cause of any single occurrence".[246] On the other hand, she states that "God willed necessity as a blind mechanism".[247] Apparently, there is a tension between those two claims; they are inconsistent or contradictory. In this regard, Rush Rhees criticizes Simone Weil for speaking of the world in relation to the will of God. He seems to find speaking of the will of God to be problematic. Plato, he argues, turned to myth in his dialogue in order to avoid trying to do what Simone Weil is trying to do here.[248]

Rhees does not explicitly explain why it is problematic to speak of the world in relation to the will of God. Nonetheless, he seems to be concerned about arising apparent contradictions of certain kinds. For example, the following two Weilian remarks—'The will of God is not the cause of any single occurrence' and 'With God all things are possible', contradict each other. Certainly, Weil herself was well aware of what seems to have made Rhees uncomfortable.

[245] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 230.
[246] Ibid., p. 313.
[247] Weil, "The love of God and Affliction", p. 175.
[248] Rhees, *Discussions of Simone Weil*, p. 45.

In Weil's view, however, "[w]hat is contradictory for natural reason is not so for supernatural reason, but the latter can only use the language of the former".[249] She also thinks that certain types of contradiction must be recognized as a fact.

Weil writes:

> A contradiction can only become fact by a miracle.
> 'With God all things are possible' is, in itself, a meaningless phrase; it means simply that 'all things are possible', which is a thought absolutely void of content. The real meaning is: in the domain of the transcendent contradictories are possible.[250]

Therefore, the meaning of certain facts appearing to our reason or intelligence as a contradiction lies in the domain of the transcendent. This Weilian view of contradiction is also connected her view of mystery. Certain types of contradiction are thought to be part of the mysteries of the faith. The mysteries of the faith, Weil argues, "when severed from all reason, are no longer mysteries but absurdities".[251] Hence, it is absurd or illogical to say 'God is powerless and yet with God all things are possible'. In other words, Weil calls for the recognition of a contradiction in such remarks, and argues that those remarks are not meaningless because they are false, but because they appear to our intelligence or reason as absurdities.

Furthermore, Weil writes: "The world is necessarily such that we are able to conceive everything that is purest by analogy".[252] Hence, to understand why Weil's idea of necessity can be confusing, we need to pay attention to the role of a simile,

[249] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 109.
[250] Ibid., p. 269.
[251] Ibid., p. 110.
[252] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 73.

or rather *analogical thinking* "as if" in Weil's works.[253] What sometimes cannot be expressed directly can be expressed indirectly, (See Chapter 3, Sec. 3.4. p. 82-8). For example, her account of necessity forces her to see afflicted people as if they were things. What we obtain by analogy, Weil argues, is "essentially hypotheses; they are not true, but they are necessary if we are to have knowledge of nature [including human nature]…A hypothesis is a good one if it enables us to think clearly"[254] and be able to perceive (returning to her view on the correct philosophical method) the insoluble problems in all their insolubility.

Weil claims that affliction or misfortune can turn its victim into a thing, [255] or into a 'matter' which she considered to be a 'model' for us.[256] In comparing an afflicted person to a thing, Weil tries to points out something crucial: *a logical contradiction*. We are like natural objects and yet are different. That is also why she finds political and moral necessities to be analogous to physical necessity. An example given by Weil in her remarkable essay on Homer's *Iliad*, "The *Iliad* or the Poem of Force", must clarify this contradiction to us in a more precise way.

According to Weil, in the *Iliad* 'force' is "that ***x*** that turns anybody who is subjected to it into a thing", while he or she is still "alive".[257] That is to say, "[a] man stands disarmed and naked with a weapon pointing at him; this person becomes a corpse

[253] "The 'philosophy of as if' itself [as Wittgenstein has pointed out] rests wholly on shifting… between simile and reality." See (*Zettel)* § 261.
[254] Weil, *Lectures on Philosophy*, p. 122 and 123.
[255] Weil, "The love of God and Affliction", p. 175.
[256] Ibid., p. 178.
[257] Weil, "The *Iliad* or the Poem of Force", in *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, p. 185.

before anybody or anything touches him. Just a minute ago, he was thinking, acting, hoping".[258]

But we are not just mere objects, since the impersonal part of us will remain untouched by necessity, or a blind force. We can also recapture this contradiction, as Weil has put it in one of her fragmentary proposition in (1943) in this way: The essential contradiction in the human condition is that [a human] is subject to force, and craves for justice. He [or she] is subject to necessity, and craves for the good".[259] This craving for justice and/or for the good resides in the impersonal part of human beings.—"Everything which is impersonal in [human beings] is sacred"[260] and is not subject to necessity. However, the proposition "a human is a thing" is a logical contradiction, self-contradictory, but in affliction is true per se. Thus, Weil's point of the metaphor 'a thing, matter, or corpse' is meant to throw light on what she thinks to be the essential contradiction in human life. There is, however, a further, and deeper, ethical and religious point to be brought out of Weil's idea of that within the region of necessity human beings are analogous to natural objects, things. This is what we discuss in the next section.

2.2.3 Further Remarks on Weil's Ethics: 'Chase That Dog Away'

We will refer to Wittgenstein's view on ethics in his *Lecture on Ethics* so that we can illuminate Weil's proclamation of necessity and her account of ethics and religion more clearly. In this section, I will clarify two profoundly different senses of *good*, (relative

[258] Ibid., p. 185.
[259] Weil, *Oppression and Liberty*, p. 159.
[260] Weil, "Human Personality", p. 317.

and absolute), which is also important for our understanding of Weil's account of moral necessity. In order to clarify these two senses of *good*, I want begin with the following two remarks by Simone Weil:

> There is no difference between throwing a stone to get rid of a troublesome dog and saying to a slave: 'Chase that dog away.'[261]

Also:

> When a man turns away from God [or the good] he simply gives himself up to the law of [moral] gravity. He then believes that he is deciding and choosing, but he is only a thing, a falling stone.[262]

The following remark by Wittgenstein illustrates Weil's main point in the two quotations:

> If for instance in our world-book we read the description of a murder with all its details, physical and psychological, the mere description of these facts will contain nothing which we could call an ethical proposition. The murderer will be on exactly the same level as any other event, for instance the falling of a stone. Certainly the reading of this description might cause us pain or rage or any other emotion…, but there will simply be facts, facts, and facts but no ethics.[263]

This Wittgensteinian view elucidates what Weil means by insisting that within this world, there is only necessity, necessity, and necessity, and why she finds the recognition of a necessity in all facts to be essential.

Moreover, according to Weil, necessity is the reality of this world and is 'the sole foundation of facts', not of ethics (i.e., the good): "Just as the reality of this world is the sole foundations of facts, so that other reality is the sole foundation of good".[264] The other reality, as it has repeatedly been stated, is the transcendental reality. Thus, this

[261] Weil, "Forms of the Implicit Love of God", p. 142.
[262] Weil, "The love of God and Affliction", p. 177.
[263] Wittgenstein, " Lecture on Ethics", p. 39-40.
[264] Weil, "Draft for a Statement of Human Obligations", p. 219.

world contains nothing which we could call ethical; it must be devoid of good or justice. To be absolutely just and good, one must suffer injustice and evil as, for example, Christ and Socrates did. And that is why Weil finds the absolute good and extreme suffering or affliction to be *impossible*. In other words, to suffer simply means to be nothing. But, it is logically impossible and contradictory to say: I am nothing.

> I am nothing. Impossible! It is in this sense that extreme suffering is impossible. It forces the soul to adopt thoughts which are logically contradictory.[265]

However, this feeling of impossibility, Weil says, is "the feeling of the void",[266] the feeling of the absence of the good or God—"The void is God",[267] or the feeling of the essential silence: '*My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?*'(Matthew 27:46). Thus, "to be just, one must be naked and dead—without imagination",[268] without filling up the void. That is to say, "[w]e should set aside the beliefs which fill up voids"[269] and *wait patiently.* But, why is Weil so concerned with imagination? Because, she writes,

> [humans] exercise their imaginations in order to stop up the holes[voids] through which grace might pass, and for this purpose, and at the cost of a lie, they make for themselves idols, that is to say, relative forms of good conceived as being totally unrelated forms of good.[270]

Nonetheless, this impossibility, though it is absurd, Weil remarks, is "the gate leading to the supernatural. All we can do is to knock on it. It is another who opens".[271] Patience is what "transmutes time into eternity".[272] As Heidegger also said once, we cannot bring the

---

[265] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 244.
[266] Ibid., p. 146 and p. 153.
[267] Ibid., p. 82.
[268] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 411.
[269] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 149.
[270] Ibid., p. 145.
[271] Weil, *The Notebooks,* v.2, p. 412-3.
[272] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks,* p. 101.

absent god forth by thinking; at best, we can awaken a readiness to wait.[273] This waiting, for Weil, is the foundation of spirituality: "Waiting patiently in expectation is the foundation of the spiritual life".[274] Earlier (p. 38), I stated that the attitude of looking beyond ourselves, according to Weil, is 'the attitude which corresponds with the beautiful. In this way, it is also reasonable to say that the attitude of 'waiting patiently in expectation' is the attitude which corresponds with the spiritual life.

Moreover, the earlier quote from Wittgenstein, 'there will simply be facts, facts, and facts but no ethics', also and precisely summarizes the whole philosophical, ethical, and religious view of Simone Weil. This is certainly the conclusion which Weil draws to show how the essence of necessity is different from that of the good. Within the realm of necessity, 'the murderer will be on exactly the same level as the falling of a stone', or throwing a stone to get rid of a troublesome dog will be on exactly the same level as saying to a slave: 'Chase that dog away'. A slave or an afflicted person is equal to a falling stone from the point view of necessity.

Yet, Weil (also Wittgenstein) argues, "the domain of reality extends infinitely beyond that of facts".[275] So, beyond the domain of facts, as mentioned earlier, lies another reality which she believes to be the sole foundation of good, the absolute or the supernatural good. But it is important to call to mind and not be confused that

> [t]here are two forms of good, of the same denomination, but radically different from each other: one which is the opposite of evil, and one which is the absolute—the absolute which cannot be anything but the good. The absolute has no opposite. The relative is not the opposite of the absolute…What we want is the absolute good. What is within our reach is the good which is correlated to evil. We mistakenly take it for what we want, like

[273] Heidegger, "'Only a God Can Save us': The Spiegel Interview (1966)" in *Heidegger: The Man and the Thinker*, p. 57.
[274] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 99.
[275] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 249.

> the prince who sets about making love to the maid instead of the mistress. The mistake is due the clothes. It is the social element which sheds the colour of the absolute over the relative.[276]

Like Wittgenstein, Weil draws our attention to a different sense of goodness. The absolute good passing into what is within our reach is subjected to necessity or moral gravity.[277] Thus, we must be aware of the distinction between shadowy good and the good in order to have a clear view of Weil's account of ethics and faith.

Weil teaches us that "[t]he word 'Good' has not the same meaning when used as a term of the correlation Good-Evil".[278] Used in this way, in a relative sense, as a term of the correlation Good-Evil, the word 'good', she says, "represents the means".[279] Following a Wittgenstein example, "if I say this is the *right* road I mean that it's the right road relative to a certain goal".[280] Thus, it is not this "good" that lies beyond the range of necessities or facts. The good which completely lies outside the domain of necessity or facts, Weil claims, is "transcendental"[281] or, as mentioned earlier, the absolute or the supernatural, and has "no properties at all, except the fact of being good".[282] This is, according to Wittgenstein too, "the ethical or absolute" sense of the word 'Good': "Now let us see what we could possibly mean by the expression "*the* absolutely right road." I think it would be the road which everybody on seeing it would, *with logical necessity*, have to go, or be ashamed for not going",[283] "being ashamed of [his or her] nakedness".[284]

---

[276] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 592.
[277] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 88.
[278] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 405.
[279] Ibid., p. 493.
[280] Wittgenstein, "Lecture on Ethics", p. 38.
[281] Weil, *Oppression and Liberty*, p. 157 & *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 436.
[282] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 545.
[283] Wittgenstein, "Lecture on Ethics", p. 40; what Wittgenstein calls *a logical necessity*, Simone Weil might call *a spiritual necessity*.

According to Weil, the different means some have of hiding themselves are means that fall under what is the so-called relative morality: the right road relative to a certain goal. But, Weil continues, "Others seek anxiously, desperately, a road by which to escape from the sphere of relative moralities"[285] and to, as Kierkegaard says, "pursue hiddenness".[286]

Furthermore, for Weil, not only does the absolute good lie outside the range of facts and necessities, but also "outside the range of the will".[287] This reality which is the sole foundation of the absolute good, in Wittgenstein's words, is what is mystical and makes itself manifest.[288] As Gustav Thibon has pointed out,

> [s]uch mysticism had nothing in common with those religious speculations divorced from any personal commitment which are all too frequently the only testimony of intellectuals who apply themselves to the things of God. She [also Wittgenstein] actually experienced in its heart-breaking reality the distance between 'knowing' and 'knowing with all one's soul', and one of the objects of her life was to abolish that distance.[289]

Both Weil and Wittgenstein have attempted to abolish the distance between the necessary and the good. According to Weil, "[a]n attempt to bridge the distance between the necessary and the good… was the great discovery made by the Greeks".[290] This attempt is nothing but attention. It requires that the "human creature may de-create itself", [291] and de-creation, in a certain sense, means to love or consent to necessity and affliction. It

---

[284] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 271.
[285] Weil, *Oppression and Liberty*, p. 157.
[286] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, p. 85.
[287] Ibid., p. 436. Also see: *The First and Last Notebooks*, p. 262.
[288] Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, §6.522.
[289] Thibon, "Introduction" to *Gravity and Grace*, p. ix.
[290] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 363.
[291] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 258.

also suggests a total detachment. In this way, Weil thinks, "[a]ll suffering which does not detach us is wasted suffering".[292]

Additionally, decreation is "to make something created pass into the uncreated".[293] In a slightly different context, de-creation means, as mentioned in Chapter One, to liberate oneself from the dream of being a person, a willing subject, or the dream of the power to say 'I'.—"I think; therefore, I am". Hence, 'I' is what we have to destroy, and, according to Weil, only extreme affliction can rob us of the power to say 'I'.[294] That is why Weil finds affliction (or the Cross) as a point of intersection between the necessary and the good.[295] Not only does affliction create the feeling of the absence of the good, but it creates the feeling of the presence of the good as well, and this is what, according to Weil, the Cross symbolizes at the same time: a feeling of a separation and union.[296] But, can the absolute good be known?

In Weil's view, "we don't actually know what the good is…and nothing that we visualize to ourselves, nothing that we think of is the good".[297] Although we are unable to deny the reality of the good, it escapes our grasp.[298]

Then, if the absolute good is what is hidden, or if the absolutely right road, the absolute good, is what is unknown, then the question, as Weil herself asks, is: "How are we to find it?"[299] In other words, how are we to find the absolute good?

---

[292] Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p. 15.
[293] Ibid., p. 32.
[294] Ibid., p. 26.
[295] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 433.
[296] Ibid., p. 578.
[297] Ibid., p. 491.
[298] Ibid., p. 526.
[299] Ibid., p. 548.

It is obvious, Weil would say, that "[w]e cannot look for it outside this world".[300] It can only appear "in the form of absence".[301] Weil writes,

> The true road [i.e., the absolute good or value] exists. But it is open only to those who, recognizing themselves to be incapable of finding it, give up looking for it, and yet do not cease to desire it to the exclusion of everything else. To these it is given to feed on a good which, being situated outside this world, is not subject to any social influences whatever.[302]

Can this claim "the absolute good or value exists" be verified? Weil would say: "Our spiritual things are of value, but only physical things have a verifiable existence. Therefore, the value of the former can only be verified as an illumination projected on to the latter".[303] So, the absolute or the supernatural good can be verified only as a light to which we are attracted. Yet, we are still caught inside the physical world. By analogy:

> We are like flies caught inside a bottle, attracted to the light and unable to go towards it.
>
> Nevertheless, it is better to remain stuck inside the bottle throughout the whole of time than to turn away from the light for a single moment… [The bottle can only be destroyed by an affliction.[304]

Earlier, Weil taught us that 'nothing that we visualize to ourselves is the good'. Logically, it seems to follow that we must not visualize the good. The following argument apparently suggests this and explains why:

> [w]e are better able to seize upon the fact of Divine Providence [or say the good] in mathematics than in the sensible world. For I can imagine an apple-tree in blossom placed in this valley by God as a bunch of violets placed by my father. Whereas I cannot visualize a relation between $\boldsymbol{e}$ and $\boldsymbol{\pi}$ in such a manner.[305]

---

[300] Ibid., p. 434 .
[301] Ibid., p. 419 & *First and Last Notebooks,* p. 242.
[302] Weil, *Oppression and Liberty,* p. 157.
[303] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks,* p. 147.
[304] Ibid., p. 292.
[305] Weil, *The Notebooks,* v.2, p. 526. This argument also explains why Weil considered mathematical necessity to be the only genuine necessity.

Nonetheless, we visualize the fact of Divine Providence or the good in the sensible world, for unless it is expressed in the sensible world, it has no existence. This will be discussed further in Chapter 3 (Sec.3.4).

To sum up, I have suggested that, for Weil, necessity, (whether it is beautiful or ugly and brutal) is the mathematical key to understanding the authority that the absolute good has over us. We are left with an earlier concern regarding Weil's absurdism. The question whether Simone Weil's thought is a presentation of absurdism is important. It enables us to recapture her ethical and religious views, but from a different angle, a Kierkegaardian angle.

2.3 Weil's Absurdism

Simone Weil claims that another manifestation of the reality as a necessity lies in the absurd and insoluble contradictions.[306] Contradiction, as Wittgenstein reminds us, must be regarded, "not as a catastrophe, but as a wall indicating that we can't go on here".[307] In other words, contradiction needs must be regarded as "the terminus of human thought".[308] However, the question is: Is Weil an absurdist?

In a sense, Weil's thought is a presentation of a form of absurdism, but what Weil presents, certainly, is not absurdism in Samuel Beckett's sense. For Weil, the world is mathematical, not irrational as Beckett pictures it in *Waiting for Godot*. The point of this section is to explain that Weil's absurdism can be better understood in Kierkegaard's sense: *having faith by virtue of the absurd*.

---

[306] Weil, "Draft for a Statement of Human Obligations", p. 219.
[307] Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, § 678.
[308] Weil, "Draft for a Statement of Human Obligations", p. 219.

Both Kierkegaard's and Weil's ethical and religious ideas intersect, specifically with regard to their perspectives on faith. According to both Weil and Kierkegaard, faith is a paradox or contradiction: the infinite distance between moral necessity, (moral good), and supernatural good, between the empirical reality and the transcendental reality. One of the keys by which Simone Weil unlocked her understanding of this contradiction is the experience of affliction. But, the key by which Kierkegaard unlocks his understanding of this contradiction is the experience of extreme anxiety.

Weil considers Christ's faith as universal paradigm of affliction, whereas Kierkegaard considers Abraham's faith as a universal paradigm of an extreme anxiety. Weil's and Kierkegaard's examinations of these two cases are to show that having faith by virtue of absurd or contradiction is the true sense of faith.

As far as Kierkegaard is concerned: "[Abraham] had faith by virtue of the absurd for human calculation was out of question, and it certainly was absurd that God, who required [Isaac] of him, should in the next moment rescind the requirement".[309] Kierkegaard writes:

> The ethical expression for what Abraham did is that he meant to murder Isaac; the religious expression is that he meant to sacrifice Isaac—but precisely in this contradiction is the anxiety that can make a person sleepless… Abraham "is kept in a state of sleeplessness, for he is constantly being tested […], and at every moment there is the possibility of his returning penitently to the universal [or the ethical]…Abraham remains silent—but he *cannot* speak. Therein lies the distress and anxiety…Moreover, by speaking thus, he would have turned away from the paradox [contradiction].[310]

[309] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, p. 35. Calculation is the primary principle of Utilitarianism, known as "a theory" in normative ethics, and Rational Choice Theory and/or Game Theory as well.
[310] Ibid., p. 30, 78, 113, and 118 .

That is to say, by speaking, he would have turned away from faith or the absolute or God, and, as Weil said, mentioned earlier, (p. 51), 'a man turns away from God he simply gives himself up to the law of moral gravity', in Kierkegaard's sense, he simply gives himself up to the universal. It is only by faith, Kierkegaard claims, that "one achieves any resemblance to Abraham",[311] in Weil's case, to Christ.

Furthermore, like Kierkegaard, Weil criticizes the Hegelian and the Marxian approach, mentioned in the introduction, (p. 8): seeking finality in the future is 'the germ in Hegel, as well as in Marx'. According to Kierkegaard, Abraham, the knight of faith, who stands in absolute relation to the absolute good, performs a teleological suspension of the ethical (or the universal) when he decides to sacrifice Isaac. From the ethical point of view, according to Kierkegaard, Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his own son was an unethical act, for willing to murder your own son, whom you love more than yourself, is an unethical. But Abraham acts out of his faith; he "transgressed the ethical altogether and had a higher [*telos*] outside it",[312] the absolute good. It is in this Kierkegaardian sense that Simone Weil can be characterized as an absurdist.

To sum up, in this chapter, I have addressed and investigated the thesis that the absence of a meaning, God, or the good in the world is the region of necessity by clarifying the difference between necessity and the good. I have demonstrated that necessity can be considered as the foundation of the empirical reality, whereas the good can be considered as the foundation of the transcendental reality. In doing so, I found Wittgenstein's conception of a logical necessity and ethics to be profoundly supportive of this approach. Moreover, I have insisted on the idea that Weil's identification of a blind

[311] Ibid., p. 31.
[312] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, p. 59.

mechanical necessity, which forces its victims, (the afflicted people) to constantly ask Why?, is crucial for understanding her conception of affliction, an experience of the absence of a reply, the good, or God. Finally, I argued that Weil's sense of *absurdism* can be well understood in Kierkegaard's, rather than Beckett's, sense.

Despite all the similarities between Weil and Wittgenstein and Weil and Kierkegaard, what distinguishes Weil from them is her extraordinary emphasis on affliction— Affliction is necessity. That is to say: "The absence of good, or rather the feeling of its absence, is affliction".[313] This theme is what we will be pursuing in the upcoming chapter.

[313] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 242.

Chapter Three: A Numinous Experience: Affliction

> *"Affliction causes God to be absent for a time, more absent than a dead man, more absent that light in the utter darkness of a cell. A kind of horror submerges the whole soul."*
> (Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction, p.172)

In the introductory chapter, I proposed to explore and to clarify two correlated theses: (1) that the absence of a meaning, God, or the feeling of the absence of the good in the world is the region of necessity, and (2) the absence of a meaning, God, or the feeling of the absence of the good in the world is affliction. In the preceding chapter, I have addressed the first thesis by clarifying Weil's ontology (her account of mathematical necessity) and ethics and religion (her account of the good), as well the essential difference between them. In this chapter, I address the second thesis: the absence of a meaning, God, or the feeling of the absence of the good in the world is, is affliction. In other words, I reconsider the very same relation between necessity and the good, but from a different direction, *affliction*: the great enigma of human life.

Therefore, it must be noted that the feeling of the absence of the good, the god's absence, the withdrawal of God, the feeling of being abandoned, the presence of a blind necessity, running against our limit and realizing that we are not free are all different ways or modes of experiencing affliction. They all show something deep about human reality, that we are being held captive by a pitilessly blind necessity. That is, reality is necessity or affliction, and affliction, the *irreducible* part of suffering, comes upon us

"against our will".[314] In other words, affliction is "designed to arrest the will, just as an absurdity arrests the intelligence, or absence, non-existence, arrests love".[315] Thus, in affliction, it is *the human will* which has above all been held captive by a pitiless necessity or blind force.

Thus, it is beyond any doubt that affliction plays a significant role in Weil's writings, particularly in clarifying the relation between her ontological and ethical/religious views, i.e., the relation between empirical reality and the transcendental. Yet, recognizing 'affliction' as a significant term appears to be an odd statement, since, according to Weil, affliction has no significance and its insignificance is the very essence of its reality.[316] Weil also claims that one can never know what affliction is unless one is constrained by experience, and yet those who have been constrained by an experience of affliction can say nothing about it, for affliction by nature, according to Weil, is "inarticulate",[317] inexpressible or ineffable.

In this chapter, I address four major questions: What is affliction? Or can affliction be known? Can affliction be explained? Can affliction be articulated? Is there a possibility of expressing it? In Sec. 3.1, I will explain Weil's conception of affliction. I will mostly place my attention on a certain, extreme form of affliction which causes God to be absent for a time and which remains ineffable. I will also claim that affliction can be known only by negation, what affliction is *not*. Affliction is not suffering. This will led me to the second question in Sec. 3.2. Here, I elucidate why Weil stands against any form of explanation and consolation for affliction. Answers to the first two questions will also

[314] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v. 2, p. 433.
[315] Ibid., p. 415.
[316] Ibid., p. 484.
[317] Weil, "Human personality", p. 327.

led me to why Weil thinks affliction cannot be articulated (Sec.3.3). The final question (Sec. 3.4), will allow me to put forward a Weilian suggestion for expressing what is apparently ineffable or inexpressible in affliction.

3.1 Inarticulate Cry of Pain

In an essay, "Human Personality", Simone Weil states: "When affliction is seen vaguely from a distance, either physical or mental, so that it can be confused with simple suffering".[318] Thus, the objective of this section is to explain what affliction is by clarifying what affliction is *not*. It is not suffering. I will also argue that a certain form of affliction must be understood, in Otto's terms, as 'a numinous experience', a kind of experience which contains a quite specific moment and which remains ineffable.[319]

By suffering, Weil means something idiosyncratic and extraordinary: *Malheur*, a kind of term, she says, "without its equivalent in other languages".[320] But that is not what keeps us from understanding it. What impedes our understanding of affliction is that affliction by nature is inarticulate (Sec. 3.2). Yet, the term has been translated as *affliction.* What is *not* affliction?

Affliction is neither a mere suffering nor "a punishment"[321] nor "a divine educational method".[322] It is something "specific and impossible to compare with

[318] Weil, "Human personality", p. 332.
[319] Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 5.
[320] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 3.
[321] Ibid., p. 3.
[322] Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction", p. 181.

anything else";[323] it is a mystery. Nonetheless, we must still strive to clarify affliction by asking: What is it that so specific about affliction?

Weil sees affliction as a distinct form of suffering containing both reducible and irreducible elements: the non-physical and the physical, the expressible and the inexpressible elements. If suffering can be articulated and explained, it is its reducible character. If it cannot, it is its irreducible character. Hence, affliction cannot be reduced to mere physical suffering or, in Rhees' terms, "brought lower".[324] In other words, Weil uses the term 'affliction' to denote the irreducible essence of suffering, that part of suffering which is inherently inarticulate and ineffable and beyond even any proper and defined ethical and religious characterization. It cannot be conceptualized. It is an experience of a distance, a void, or the silence of God. What I suggested earlier that affliction is better understood if it is thought of as a numinous experience, a kind of experience which contains a quite specific moment and which remains ineffable.[325] It should also be noted that an experience of affliction is perfectly *sui generis*, and it would be a grave mistake to reduce it to a mere expression of social, psychological, or physical reality. However, there is an interesting question here: In what sense is an experience of affliction ineffable or inarticulate?

Weil remarks that affliction is not a physical pain, and yet there is no affliction without it. Affliction which is not bound up with physical (also psychological and social) pain is "artificial, imaginary" and can be eliminated. In other words, without a mark of physical pain, our thought can turn itself away in any direction: towards imaginary good. A pain, on the other hand, which is merely physical, is of very little value and can leave

[323] Ibid., p. 172.
[324] Rhees, *Discussions of Simone Weil*, p. 174.
[325] Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 5.

no mark on the soul, e.g., a momentary headache.[326] Moreover, as Rhees has stated, "[p]eople think of human suffering as a mistake… [, and think] [w]ith the progress of medicine (and of genetics and other sciences) suffering can practically be stamped out".[327] Obviously, this view is based on the misunderstandings of suffering and affliction, reducing affliction to a mere physical pain. But, by human suffering, Weil means human affliction. This explains why she preferred to use the term affliction and distinguished it from a mere physical pain or suffering.

Therefore, affliction, though inseparable from a physical pain or suffering, is essentially different— essentially idiosyncratic and irreducible. The irreducible element of suffering is bound up with a religious and ethical question concerning the, use, purpose, significance of suffering—or rather, with the ultimate meaning of life. But, following Wittgenstein, it must be admitted that: "Ethics [and religion] so far as it springs from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolute valuable, can be no science".[328] It seems to be reasonable to say, then, that "even when all *possible* scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched. Of course, there are then no questions left, and this itself is the answer".[329] Thus, "[w]hat we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence".[330]

The reducible parts of suffering might well be explained in terms of casual explanation. Let us recall Weil's earlier remark: "Things have causes and not ends".[331]

---

[326] Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction", p. 170.
[327] Rhees, *Discussions of Simone Weil*, p. 175.
[328] Wittgenstein, "Lectures on Ethics", p. 44.
[329] Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, § 6.52.
[330] Ibid., § 7.
[331] Weil, "Forms of the Implicit Love of God", p. 176-7.

For example, human crime is the cause of most affliction.[332] On the other hand, the irreducible part of suffering is connected with the meaning of suffering which lies outside the region of necessity or the world. Accordingly, it will remain, Weil might say, as a religious mystery. This mystery or rather "[t]he mysteries of the faith cannot be either affirmed or denied",[333] because they do not address themselves to intelligence, but to love.[334] Love means consent, to consent to necessity. In other words, love, as mentioned earlier (p. 39), means the recognition and acceptance of necessity regardless of whether it is beautiful or brutal and ugly.

What will remain as mystery in affliction is the meaning standing behind it. In other words, the presence of the meaning of affliction showing itself in the form of absence is what is mysterious about affliction. Let us restate the main thesis of this chapter: Affliction is an experience of a harsh, blind necessity. In certain extreme cases, affliction is a numinous experience of the absence of a meaning, or a *telos*, or God, or the feeling of the absence of the good in the world. This still needs to be clarified further in order to be able to grasp what Weil means by affliction.

Above all, Weil characterizes affliction as "an uprooting of life".[335] In other words, "[t]here is no real affliction unless the event which has gripped and uprooted a life attacks it, directly or indirectly, in all its parts, social, psychological, and physical. The social factor is essential".[336] Why is the social factor so essential? Weil's answer in *The*

[332] Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction", p. 176.
[333] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 239.
[334] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 375.
[335] Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction", p. 171.
[336] Ibid., p. 171.

Need for Roots is: "To be rooted [in a tradition] is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul".[337]

In Weil's view, affliction, as an experience of a blind necessity, "deprives its victims of their personality and turns them into things. It is indifferent".[338] That is to say, "a blind mechanism… produces indiscriminately and impartially just or unjust results".[339] Hence, the inexorable necessity or force is completely indifferent to just (and innocent) and unjust (and guilty) people equally. For example, Weil writes, affliction constrained a just man, Christ (also Job), 'to cry out against God' and 'to seek consolation from man and 'to believe he was forsaken by the Father'.[340] It must be said, as Cayley has observed, "[t]he degrading character of Christ's crucifixion is often obscured by the glorious significance Christians attach to this event, but, for Weil, degradation was its essence. Taken out of the city, abandoned by his followers, hung on a cross, he believed, according to two gospels, that even God had forsaken him. He was absolutely alone"[341] and was ruthlessly uprooted from life.

According to Weil, the key point is that affliction, as much as necessity, invites the insoluble question: Why? In other words, 'affliction produces the absence of God, and yet, it constrains a person to cry out or ask continually 'Why?',[342] "inwardly crying 'Make it stop, I can bear no more'",[343] 'Why am I being hurt?'[344] What we cry out for is an explanation, or rather and more precisely, the meaning or purpose of suffering. Is

[337] Weil, *The Need for Roots*, p. 43.
[338] Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction", p. 175.
[339] Weil, *The Need for Roots*, p. 243.
[340] Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction", p. 172.
[341] Cayley, "Enlightened by Love: The Thought of Simone Weil", p. 24.
[342] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 82. The 'why-question' Weil reminds us, resounds throughout the whole of the *Iliad.* See (*The Notebooks*, v.1), p. 229.
[343] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 219 & 234.
[344] Weil, Human Responsibility", p. 315.

there any purpose to suffering? To that question, Weil stated, there is essentially no reply.[345] Why there is suffering never has any answer, as the world is devoid of finality. In other words, the absence of finality, purpose, meaning, the good, or God, is the region of necessity. Thus, to ask 'Why am I being hurt? is, by analogy, the same as to ask: 'Why these things rather than others?' The only legitimate response to such a question is it is reality.—Reality is *necessity*. The feeling of our wretchedness is the feeling of reality and it is truly real, not something that we create.[346]

Certainly, Weil writes: "We have to say like Ivan Karamazov that nothing can make up for a single tear from a single child, and yet to accept all tears and the nameless horrors which are beyond tears… We have to accept the fact that they exist simply because they do exist".[347] Hence, to fail to recognize that reality is necessity is to accept and acknowledge that reality as necessity, as Cayley states, is "the hallmark of affliction".[348]

If God lets necessity make everything subject to its pitilessness and impartiality, and if necessity is affliction, then, as Grant asks, "Is necessity to be charged to God?... a charge against God when [necessity] appears to us as affliction".[349] According to Weil, "we should accuse God for every human affliction. Just as God replies with silence, so we should reply with silence".[350] That is, "[t]he silence of God compels us to an inward silence".[351] For Weil, as for nearly all mystics, this is a unique feeling-response, and the way to touch the silence of God can be pursued only by means of 'inward silence'. Weil

[345] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 83.
[346] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 411.
[347] Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p. 80.
[348] Cayley, "Enlightened by Love: The Thought of Simone Weil", p. 24.
[349] Grant, "Excerpt from Graduate Seminar Lectures, 1975-6", p. 821.
[350] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 95.
[351] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 282.

writes, "when we cry out for an answer and it is not given to us—it is then that we touch the silence of God"[352] or the absence of a meaning or the good, or the void. Following Otto, I have called this: *numinous experience* which Otto characterized as an ineffable experience of the 'holy', in Weil's cases, an ineffable experience of God's absence, the essential silence.

To conclude, I began this section by clarifying what affliction is *not* in order to mark out Weil's account of affliction. Affliction, for example, is not a mere physical suffering or punishment. Indeed, as argued, suffering contains two parts: the reducible, the psychological, social, and physical part, and the irreducible, the transcendental, mysterious meaning of part. Drawing on Otto's account of a numinous experience', I have argued that a certain type of affliction could be well understood as a numinous experience, a kind of momentary experience of the absence of God or good. This characterization of affliction also suggests that not everyone experiences affliction though everyone may experience some form of suffering in life. For Weil, the paradigm of affliction resonates in Christ's crucifixion.

However, when an afflicted person cries out, "Why am I being hurt?", he or she seeks, not only a physical, but primarily an intellectual or theoretical consolation. In other words, the afflicted person is yearning for an answer or an explanation. The question is whether one should seek consolation. Grappling with this issue, seeking an intellectual consolation, is the core aim of the following section. Also, we need to know whether Weil regards 'consolation' as a form of explanation.

[352]Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p. 112.

3.2 Contemplation or Explanation

In this section, I elucidate why Weil stands against any form of natural explanation and/or consolation as a solution to affliction. What does affliction ask for? This will help Weil's response to this question.

As stated in the introduction (p. 11), Simone Weil strongly rejects consolation. She writes that the afflicted person must not weep so as not to be comforted. Surely, we must wonder *why*. The reason is, according to Weil, because consolation is a hindrance to true faith. This also explains why she thought that insofar as religion is 'a source of consolation, it is a hindrance to true faith'. Then, it is rational to say that affliction can take the afflicted person's attention away from truth (whatever truth might be). Let us recall Plato's Allegory of the Cave: Human beings are chained down in the cave so that they cannot move and can only see before them, being prevented by the chains from turning round their heads. That is to say, people in affliction are often prevented from looking in a different direction, to accept, consent, or love and contemplate on their affliction. But, we must also realize that to help them to look in a different direction is a difficult undertaking, since, as Wittgenstein would say, they resist our attempts to turn them away from where they think the right direction must be.[353] And that is why Simone Weil believes that what affliction demands can be counted, not upon ordinary people, but only upon those of the very highest genius, such as Aeschylus and Homer, the poet of the *Iliad*.[354]

However, the right direction or solution is contemplation rather than consolation. She writes: "We have got to contemplate…affliction in all its bitterness and without

[353] Gasking and Jackson, Wittgenstein, p. 52.
[354] Weil, "Human Personality", p. 329.

consolation".[355] In this regard, George Grant claimed once: "Philosophy is the… critical form of the contemplative life. Thus, it is inseparable from faith".[356] Earlier we asked whether Weil regards 'consolation' as a form of explanation, too.

Weil states: "to explain suffering is to console it. Therefore it must not be explained".[357] Given what has been argued thus far, it follows that the role of intelligence is not to seek consolation or explanation, but contemplation. Contemplation is analogous to "the aesthetic criterion".[358] In aesthetics, for example, "[t]he poem teaches us to contemplate thoughts instead of changing it".[359] Moreover, the contemplation of an afflicted person, according to Weil, is "supernatural compassion",[360] and supernatural compassion "implies acceptance, since one voluntarily causes one's own being to descend into some unhappy being".[361] We can also say, supernatural compassion implies love, since to accept a person in affliction means to love the person in affliction. That is 'one voluntarily causes one's own being to descend into some unhappy being', the afflicted person. Furthermore, it has repeatedly claimed that affliction is necessity, and necessity is everything that is not God. Hence, to love some unhappy being is to love necessity by negation, necessity is *not* God—recall: God is not the cause of my suffering and He is powerless. We called this attempt *a negative* love (p. 38-9): All that I conceive of as true is less true than those things of which I cannot conceive the truth, but which I love. It can

---

[355] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 352.
[356] Quoted from Athanasiadis' *George Grant and the Theology of the Cross*, p. 85.
[357] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 229.
[358] Ibid., p. 260.
[359] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 42. This line of thought regarding what poetry teaches us can also be seen in the right light by contrast with and against those of Marx. Marx, for example, thought that the task of philosophers is to change the world rather than to understand it which Weil's analogy of poetry obviously rejects.
[360] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 281.
[361] Ibid., p. 285.

also be characterized as an indirect attempt to grasp what cannot be explained (Ch. 3. Sec. 3.2.1). This is also connected with Weil's 'negative approach', in her own terms, *negative faith*: 'To believe that we can grasp only what lies within the domain of necessity' (see the Conclusion).

Therefore, consolation (and/or explanation) in affliction "draws us away from love and truth". [362] It draws us away from the silence of God. It prevents us from acknowledging and accepting "the existence of affliction by considering it as a distance",[363] a distance between necessity and God or the good. To accept the existence of affliction is to acknowledge that we are nothing, but a point in this distance. That is why "we must never seek consolation [or explanation or justification] for pain".[364] Weil seems to view explanation as a sin. That is to say, what one may experience in affliction is a void (one can hear no answer but silence). An explanation is an attempt to escape from suffering by filling such a void. It is an attempt to give an answer to which there is no answer, and this is what we mean by an explanation is sin. — "What makes man capable of sin is the void; all sins are attempts to fill voids".[365] Moreover, an explanation is a way of resisting to accept 'the no-reply' answer to affliction. This should also lead us to understand why Weil finds even religious or spiritual consolation to be apparently a hindrance to truth. Hence, Weil would argue, we must only "seek for knowledge in suffering"[366] by means of contemplation and attention.

Finally, the attempt to explain suffering, Weil would say, is certainly wrong, and, like Wittgenstein, she would say: "the explanation isn't what satisfies us here at

[362] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 424.
[363] Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction", p. 174.
[364] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 237.
[365] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 160.
[366] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 216.

all...explanation [for example] will be of little help to someone, say, who is upset because of love.—It will not calm him".[367] Therefore, no explanation can make up for a single tear from a child and no explanation will satisfy or calm us. Here, following Wittgenstein, "one must only correctly piece together what one *knows*, without adding anything…one can only *describe* and say: this is what human life is like".[368] As Weil mentions in a letter to Gustave Thibon, the perfect description would be "to write as we translate. When we translate a text written in a foreign language, we do not seek to add anything to it".[369] Perhaps J. M. Perrin is right in noting that Simone Weil "does not provide us with a solution but a question: not a reply, but an appeal; not a conclusion, but a need", [370] the need for the good. According to Weil, "[t]he absolute good lies wholly in this need. But we are unable to go and lay hold of it therein".[371] All we are able to do is to go on wanting to love the good. Thus, the only choice given to us is to desire it or not to desire it. Even if we are able to desire it, we will still not be freed from the bitterness of mechanical or blind necessity. But, Weil states, a "new necessity is added to it, a necessity constituted by the laws pertaining to supernatural things".[372] This new necessity is what she calls: *a spiritual necessity*.

To sum up, first, we should allow ourselves to recall that in certain cases, affliction turns its victims into a thing while they are still alive and causes God to be absent. During this absence, what an afflicted person yearns for is consolation and explanation. This solution is what Weil rejects, as I have explained in this section. She

---

[367] Wittgenstein, "Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough", p. 121.
[368] Ibid., p. 62 and p. 63.
[369] See Thibon's "Introduction" to *Gravity and Grace*, p. xi.
[370] Perrin, "Simone Weil in Her Religious Search", p. 17.
[371] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 491.
[372] Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction", p. 178.

offers us contemplation and love as an accurate solution. To seek consolation and explanation for pain or suffering is to escape from truth and love. True knowledge, according to Weil, lie in affliction. We must seek knowledge in suffering.

However, we might still be puzzled by another interesting Weilian idea of the inarticulateness of affliction. Should we then not speak about affliction? This should be the primary concern of the upcoming section.

3.3 Can Affliction Be Articulated?

In the preceding section, I have characterized affliction as 'a numinous experience', an experience which contains a quite specific moment, God's absence, and which also remains ineffable. Clarifying this idea is the primarily concern of this section. According to Simone Weil, affliction cannot be articulated, for affliction by nature is inarticulate or ineffable. The question is in what sense affliction is ineffable. Admittedly, the ineffability of affliction should enable us to realize and understand how affliction is different from suffering and why it also cannot be reduced to a mere physical, psychological, or social suffering. I will begin this section by examining Grant's answer to this question.

George Grant states: "[Simone Weil] does not say affliction is ineffable in the sense that the immediate apprehension of God is, but it is very difficult to describe, and indescribable to anyone who has had no contact with it",[373] This is not only a misleading interpretation of what Weil means by affliction, and why affliction cannot be articulated, but it is also an erroneous one. Here, Grant fails to see the distinction between suffering and affliction. Ostensibly, Grant is accurate about one point; Weil does confirm that

[373] Grant, "Excerpts from Graduate Seminar Lectures, 1975-6", p. 835.

"those who have never had contact with affliction in its true sense can have no idea what it is, even though they might have known much suffering".[374] At the same time, however, Grant appears to be ignoring the fact that, for Weil, an experience of affliction is an immediate apprehension of God in the form of an absence; it is an experience of hearing the silence of God. In affliction, Weil remarks, we touch the silence or absence of God when we learn to hear and understand the language of silence.[375] What can be learned from silence? Certainly, Weil would say, all we can learn is inward silence.— "Just as God replies with silence, so we should reply with silence".[376] However, Weil's proclamation of God's absence, by analogy, more absent than a dead person, is an immediate apprehension of God in the form of being dead or absent. This is the only genuine moment where one can apprehend a true God, God as absent or as the hidden God. In all other cases, Weil might say, what we comprehend as God is *not* God, for to conceive a visualized or an imagined God as God, for Weil, is wrong. In this way, one of the purposes of imagination is to fill the void, God's absence.[377] This also shows the importance, peculiarity, and depth of Weil's philosophical and theological notion of affliction in relation to God. In brief, one makes a grave mistake, as Grant does, if one separates contact with affliction from contact with God. In other words, for Weil, affliction is not ineffable in the sense for which as Grant has argued. Furthermore, to comprehend the ineffability claim of affliction, we need to understand how Simone Weil has viewed language in relation to what is ineffable, God's absence, or the absolute good.

[374] Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction", p. 172.
[375] Ibid., p. 175.
[376] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 95.
[377] See *Gravity and Grace*, p. 16-8.

Like Wittgenstein, she draws our attention to the limits of language. Language can express only what is within the world. What appears to us, at least in some cases, in affliction is hidden, or absent, or lies beyond the limit of language. We can also say that language can express only what can be imagined or visualized. But, for Weil, God cannot be imagined or visualized; therefore, God cannot be expressed or articulated. Let us address and develop this line of thought below and further in the next Section (3.2.1).

Simone Weil states that a mind enclosed in language is imprisoned and can possess only opinions; it is language, Weil asserts, that always formulates opinions.[378] And Weil remarks that those who are unaware of being held captive live in error and might prefer to blind themselves to the fact. On the other hand, those who are aware of being held captive by language and yet hate to live in error will have to suffer tremendously.[379] Then, Weil states that "it is the same barrier [i.e., language] which keeps us from understanding affliction".[380]

Furthermore, in affliction, we experience captivity in a brutal sense and seek freedom but are subject to a blind necessity. So, one who is subject to it "quivers like a butterfly pinned alive to a tray"[381] or "like flies [a fly] caught inside a bottle, attracted to the light and unable to go towards it. What Weil draws to our attention is a contradiction which our mind tries to overcome yet is unable to. The essential contradiction is this: we are subject to a blind mechanical necessity and/or force; yet, we yearn for the good and justice. Hence, affliction, as a numinous experience, reveals this contradiction or paradox. Weil writes:

---

[378] Weil, "Human Personality", p. 330-331.
[379] Ibid., p. 331.
[380] Ibid., p. 331.
[381] Weil, "The Love of Affliction and God", p. 182.

> A contradiction can only become fact by a miracle.
> 'With God all things are possible' is, in itself, a meaningless phrase; it means simply that 'all things are possible', which is a thought absolutely void of content. The real meaning is: in the domain of the transcendent contradictories are possible.[382]

In other words, "What is contradictory [or paradoxical] for natural reason is not so for supernatural reason, but the latter can only use the language of the former".[383] What does this mean? Here Wittgenstein helps too. He writes: It is a paradox that an experience, e.g., the experience of seeing the world as a miracle should seem to have supernatural value or meaning.[384] To say the latter can only use natural language is to say that once we use natural language to express what is higher, supernatural, or what lies beyond the world, it appears as a paradox because, as Wittgenstein remarks, "Our words used as we use them in science, are vessels capable only of containing and conveying…*natural* meaning and sense".[385] Thus, whatever lies beyond the limits of language contradicts itself as soon as it is to be placed in (and expressed by) natural language. In this way, it continues to lack cohesion and remains in contradiction with itself. There is a further argument, which is still related to language, to be addressed below.

Weil claims that the thought of affliction is not of "a discursive kind";[386] it cannot be known through reason, because affliction, according Weil, is contradiction and, therefore, can only be *felt* as being something impossible.[387] She writes: "Human life is impossible [or contradictory]. But affliction alone causes this to be felt".[388] In

[382] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 269.
[383] Ibid., p. 109.
[384] Wittgenstein, "Lecture on Ethics", p. 43.
[385] Ibid., p. 40.
[386] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 483.
[387] Ibid., p. 386.
[388] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 311.

other words, in affliction, we experience reality as necessity and realize that we are chained down by necessity as mere material things, yet, we seek freedom—that is, we try to overcome the contradiction. But this cannot be known by reason; it can only be felt. More precisely, this *feeling* is the feeling, in Rudolf Otto's terms, which remains where the *concept* [or language] fails.[389] According to Weil, this feeling, which is irreducible, is religious. It is the feeling of the void, God's absence, or the feeling of distance. "To feel this distance means a spiritual quartering, it means fructification".[390]

But then, how could what appears to us in affliction be conceived or apprehended? Weil replies: "Since the highest is beyond the reach of thought, in order to conceive it we must conceive it *through* that which is within the scope of thought".[391] To clarify further, the following remark on the notion of 'mystery' will be of great help. Weil writes:

> The notion of mystery is legitimate when the most logical and most rigorous use of the intelligence leads to an impasse, to a contradiction which is inescapable in this sense: that the suppression of one term makes the other term meaningless…Then, like a lever, the notion of mystery carries thought beyond the impasse, to the other side of the unopenable door, beyond the domain of the intelligence and above it. But to arrive beyond the domain of the intelligence one must have travelled all through it, to the end, and by a path traced with unimpeachable rigour. Otherwise, one is not beyond it but on this side of it.[392]

By the notion of 'mystery' or the metaphor of 'a lever', Weil means attention: "The lever…is the attention or prayer".[393] Hence, it is attention that enables one to go beyond

[389] Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, see the Forward.
[390] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 400.
[391] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 62.
[392] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 131.
[393] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 218.

the impasse, the contradiction, or the domain of the intelligence, and that is why Weil considers *attention* to be a mysterious, religious notion.

> Attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty, and ready to be penetrated by the object…above all our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but to be ready to receive in its naked truth the object that is to penetrate it.[394]

The object—whatever the object it might be, must be received *through* necessity. In other words, "Good that is impossible"[395] must be conceived *through* possibility—"We have to accomplish the possible in order to… be able to grasp the absurdity and impossibility of pure good".[396]

Moreover, affliction, as the experience of the absurdity and impossibility of pure good "brings about the transmutation of the will to love".[397] That is to say, affliction comes upon us, as mentioned earlier, 'against our will' and can turn *the will* into *love*. Surely, the willing-subject resists this transmutation. Thus, as Wittgenstein reminded us (p. 26), what has to be overcome is a difficulty of the will, the willing subject who resists to consent to necessity and affliction.

Moreover, love is presupposed by attention. Attention or rather, "[a] bsolutely unmixed attention…is the same thing as prayer. It presupposes faith and love".[398] It cures our faults. Thus, we should be able to "cure our faults by attention and not by will".[399] Attention is "bound up with…consent",[400] or love. Love as well as attention, "teaches

---

[394] Weil, "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God", p. 111-112.
[395] Weil, The *Notebooks*, v.2, p. 413.
[396] Ibid., p. 417.
[397] Ibid., p. 410.
[398] Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p. 117.
[399] Ibid., p. 116.
[400] Ibid., p. 118.

one to believe in an *external* reality… [, and] places the center outside oneself".[401] It teaches one to believe in the transcendental reality.

According to Weil, "[t]here is no entry into the transcendent until the human faculties—intelligence, will, human love—have come up against a limit".[402] Affliction is an experience of this limit. Affliction teaches us that "there is a limit, and that one will not pass beyond it without supernatural aid",[403] or supernatural love. Furthermore, according to Weil, when we run up against the limit, we are left with only one choice: either to consent to it or not. For Weil, we must consent to it, and yet "[s]uch consent is love. The face of this love, which is turned toward a thinking person, is the love of our neighbor; the face turned toward matter is love of the order of the world [or love of necessity], or love of the beauty of the world which is the same thing".[404] Weil considers the root of love to be humility.[405] She writes: "Humility consists in the knowledge that one is nothing in so far as one is a human being".[406] Regardless of whether love is orientated towards a thinking person or the good, or God, Weil mentions that "it is only necessary to know that love is an orientation and not a state of the soul".[407]

To consent or to love is not without any difficulty. The most difficult thing is to go on loving in the void during affliction, an experience of God's absence. Simone Weil writes:

> During this absence [God's absence] there is nothing to love. What is terrible is that if, in this darkness where there is nothing to love, the soul ceases to love, God's absence becomes final. The soul has to go on loving in the void,

[401] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 198.
[402] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 336.
[403] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p.136.
[404] Weil, "Forms of the Implicit Love of God", p. 160.
[405] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 97.
[406] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 275.
[407] Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction", p. 183.

> or at least to go on wanting to love…Then one day, God will come to show himself to this soul and to reveal the beauty of the world to it, as in the case of Job. But if the soul stops to loving it falls, even in this life, into something which is almost equivalent to hell.[408]

In summary, I have spelled out Weil's proclamation of the ineffability of affliction by beginning with repudiating Grant's interpretation of the proclamation. Grant argues affliction is not ineffable in the sense as an immediate comprehension of God is. I have demonstrated that Weil's conception of affliction, as a numinous experience of God's absence, does not allow for such a distinction, at least in some cases, e.g., the story of Job, or Chris's crucifixion. In short, Grant is misguided in his separation of contact with affliction from contact with God. I have also suggested that through Weil's view of language, we can have a better way of understanding why Weil thought affliction cannot be articulated. The idea that language is limited was offered as Weil's essential arguments for the inarticulateness nature of affliction. I have also argued that, for Weil, affliction cannot be known through reason, but feeling, the feeling, as Otto teaches us, which remains where reason, concept, or language, fails. But does that mean we should then not dare to speak about affliction? The following last section will provide Weil's response to this question.

3.4 Weil's Response

In the preceding section, I have elucidated Weil's claim that affliction, as a numinous experience of what is hidden and esoteric, cannot be articulated. This claim apparently suggests that we should not speak about affliction. Although this seems to be a

[408] Ibid., p. 173.

reasonable suggestion, this is not what one needs to infer from such a claim. The question, then, is: "What would Simone Weil suggest as a possible response to thoughts which are inexpressible?" Responding to this question is the primary point of this section and will bring us to the end of this study.

In respond to whether we should not dare to speak about affliction, Weil suggests that there is a possibility of indirect expression to communicate with what is hidden from us, the absolute good or God. She writes:

> The link which attaches the human being to the reality outside the world is, like the reality itself, beyond the reach of human faculties. The respect that it inspires us as soon as it is recognized cannot be expressed to it. This respect cannot, in this world, find any form of direct expression. But unless it is expressed it has no existence. There is a possibility of indirect expression for it.[409]

There is another reality outside the world of necessity which Weil calls 'transcendental reality', the reality of the good or God as hidden and esoteric. The hiddenness is the essence of this reality and can only be experienced and felt in affliction. Weil writes: "Corresponding to this reality, at the centre of the human heart, is the longing for an absolute good, a longing which is always there and is never appeased by any object in this world".[410] Even though the transcendental reality is beyond the reach of human faculties, Weill claims, the human being has the power of turning their "attention and love" towards it, and the only condition for exercising this power is "consent",[411] to consent to necessity or to accepting reality as necessity. Thus, the link which attaches the human being to the reality outside the world is attention and love, and the sole condition for exercising love and attention is consent. Thus, the religious and ethical aspects of love and attention, Weil

[409] Weil, "Draft for a Statement of Human Obligation", p. 221.
[410] Ibid., p. 219.
[411] Ibid., p. 219.

asserts, is like 'the lever' (see p. 79): It can carry thought beyond the impasse of propositional or factual language and the domain of the necessity, to the other side of the world, the transcendental world.

What is most important is Weil's insistence that the notion of the absolute good or God, which (and who) lies beyond the sphere of necessity and the boundaries of language, can only be commutated by means of indirect expression. Along these lines, religious and ethical terms[412] must be considered as means of indirect expressions of the longing for the absolute good or God. Certainly, religious and ethical terms, as Wittgenstein states, can be regarded as similes:

> all religious terms seem…to be used as similes or allegorically. For when we speak of God and that he sees everything and when we kneel to pray to Him all our terms and actions seem to be parts of a great and elaborate allegory which represents Him as a human being of great power whose grace we try to win…Thus in ethical and religious language we seem constantly to be using similes.[413]

So, it must be rigorous to suggest that we resort to similes in order to express thoughts which are inexpressible or ineffable, or to carry us beyond the impasse direct expressions and the domain of the necessity. But, should we include from this suggestion that, e.g., religious similes enable us to understand clearly what cannot be understood by means of direct expressions?

First, we need to recall (p. 56): nothing that we visualize to ourselves is the good or God. That is, the longing for an absolute good is never appeased by any object in this world. Yet, unless it is visualized or expressed it has no existence. For example, representing God that we visualize to ourselves as a human being is not God. Yet, unless

[412] In Section 2.2.2, I made it clear that Weil's ethical and religious views are inseparable.
[413] Wittgenstein, "Lecture on Ethics", p. 42. For Wittgenstein, aesthetics and ethics are the one.

God is visualized or expressed metaphorically, e.g., as a human being, God has no existence. But, this does not necessary mean that a simile or a metaphor gives us a clearer view of what is beyond the reach of human faculties. In fact, any form of indirect expression can be regarded as a hallmark of the limits of human understanding. Should we, then, not call this attempt: a hopeless attempt? Weil states:

> A man whose mind feels that it is captive would prefer to blind himself to the fact. But if he hates falsehood, he will not do so; and in that case he has to suffer a lot. He will beat his head against the wall until he faints. He will come to again and look with terror at the wall, until one day he begins afresh to beat his head against it, and once again he will faint. And so on endlessly and without hope.[414]

This suggests that although it might be hopeless, we must keep trying to communicate with what lies beyond the reach of human understanding. Like Wittgenstein, one can say:

> My whole tendency and I believe the tendency of all [humans] who ever tried…to write or talk Ethics and Religion was to run against the boundaries of language. This running against the walls of our cage is perfectly, absolutely hopeless.[415]

This running against the walls of our cage, the boundaries of language, is absolutely hopeless and absurd. It is also hopeless because, as Weil might say, nothing that we visualize to ourselves represents what is hidden. We exercise our imaginations in order to stop up the impossibility of representing of what is hidden or absent although it still escapes our attempt to be grasped, imagined, or visualized. Thus, we should also allow ourselves to recall an earlier remark ,(p. 57) the absolute good is ‘open only to those who, recognizing themselves to be incapable of finding it, give up looking for it,

[414] Weil, “Human Personality”, p. 331.
[415] Wittgenstein, “Lecture on Ethics”, p. 44.

and yet do not cease to desire it to the exclusion of everything else'. This is not an expression of any form of skepticism. In contrast, according to Weil, the absolute good is open only to those who 'live the truth of certainty through faith' (p. 6).

Moreover, I argue that certain forms of indirect expressions, in Jan Zwicky's terms, 'serious ineffability claims', must be considered as an expression of this desire or longing. Zwicky writes:

> By 'serious ineffability claims' I mean ones in which people really appear to be driving at something—they're not just being flip, or witty, or feeling frustrated by the complexity of some situation. What would have to be the case for such ineffability claims to be true? The question is difficult because we are immediately confronted by an empirical puzzle that cannot be easily dismissed: often, we make a serious ineffability claim but then don't fall silent. We keep trying to communicate, or articulately wishing that we could. The *desire to* communicate is still manifestly present. The ineffability claim itself can be an expression of this desire.[416]

Concisely, an indirect expression is the expression of the longing for an absolute good or God. We keep trying to communicate with what can only be commutated by means of indirect expressions endlessly and without hope. Such an attempt, however, Weil claims requires such a mind that has reached the point where it already dwells in truth:

> The mind which has learned to grasp thoughts which are inexpressible because of the number of relations they combine, although they are more rigorous and clearer than anything that can be expressed in the most precise language, such a mind has reached the point where it already dwells in truth. It possesses certainty and unclouded faith…it has come to the end of its intelligence.[417]

In addition, as K. Wright-Bushman has pointed out, "[b]oth the religious aspect of attention and Weil's ethics connect clearly to her understanding of how the poet

---

[416] Zwicky, "What Is Ineffable?" in *International Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, p. 198.
[417] Weil, "Human Personality", p. 331.

writes".[418] It follows that poetry, or rather aesthetical expressions, must be considered as another possibility for expressing thought that are inexpressible. For example, poetry, Weil remarks, means "passing through words into silence".[419] This bear a resemblance to what was mentioned earlier: to arrive beyond the domain of the intelligence, i.e., arriving at silence, one must have travelled all through it. For Weil, poetry and music are important because, as she writes, poetry teaches us "to contemplate thoughts instead of changing them".[420]

Undoubtedly, Weil is not alone in providing poetic expressions as a possibility of indirect expression of ineffability. Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger (also others) have also put forward a similar suggestion. For example, Heidegger, whose suggestion comes so close to that of Weil, writes:

> The only possibility available to us is that by thinking and poetizing we prepare a readiness for the appearance of a god or for the absence of a god…At best we can awaken a readiness to wait.[421]

Waiting in expectation, as mentioned in the preceding chapter, (p. 52-3), is the foundation of the spiritual life. Then, "one day, God will come to show himself to this soul and to reveal the beauty of the world to it, as in the case of Job".[422] Certainly, as Wittgenstein remarked once: "'You can't hear God speak to someone else, you can hear him only if you are being addressed'.—This is a grammatical remark",[423] not an empirical remark.

---

[418] Wright-Bushman, K. "A Poetics of Consenting Attention: Simone Weil's Prayer and the Poetry of Denise Levertov", p. 375.
[419] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.1, p. 120.
[420] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 42.
[421] Heidegger, "'Only a God Can Save us': The Spiegel Interview (1966)" in *Heidegger: The Man and the Thinker*, p. 57.
[422] Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction", p. 172.
[423] Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, §717.

Finally, in order to clarify the thesis that the absence of a meaning, God, or the feeling of the absence of the good in the world is affliction, I have identified a certain type of affliction as a numinous experience of God's absence and argued such an experience cannot be known through reasoning, but feeling. I have also argued that affliction different from a mere physical suffering cannot be either explained or articulated, for affliction is intrinsically inarticulate. Nonetheless, I have proposed religious, ethical, and aesthetical expressions as possibilities of expressing thoughts which are inexpressible, inarticulate, or ineffable.

Chapter Four: Conclusion: 'The Back Side of Necessity'

My purposes in this chapter are: to restate the primary thesis with which this study is concerned, to point out the difficulties I found to be crucial, to give a summary of the two main chapters (2 and 3), and finally, to propose a potential concern for further study.

This study examined Simone Weil's philosophical, ethical, and religious conceptions of affliction and necessity. I have argued that affliction and necessity are inseparable. In other words, I argued that neither can be grasped fully without the other, and together, they illuminate what Weil means by affliction, a concept without which understanding her later philosophical, political, ethical, and religious thought would be impossible.

I presented affliction and beauty as two different aspects of necessity. However, I have, primarily, placed my attention on the afflicted side of necessity. According to Weil, affliction, not a mere physical, psychological, or social suffering, is the great enigma of human life. It is the hallmark of the indispensable contradiction or paradox in the human life: An afflicted person is subject to a blindly brutal necessity and, yet, yearning for the good or justice which lies beyond the region of necessity, and which can only be known by negation—what is *not* good. In Weil's view, faith, or rather negative faith, as I have argued, is nothing, but this contradiction or paradox.

More precisely, this study constructed, clarified, and examined Weil's twofold thesis: (1) that the absence of a meaning, or God, or the feeling of the absence of the good in the world is the region of necessity, and (2), that the absence of a meaning, or God, or the feeling of the absence of the good in the world is affliction. The questions by which

the twofold thesis was approached are: What is necessity? What is affliction? What is this absence of the meaning, or the good, or God? Responses to each of the above questions were meant to serve as elucidations of those two correlated theses.

I first addressed a difficulty I found to be most critical: proposing a single coherent unity. *The Notebooks* of Simone Weil, on which this study is largely dependent, present no system of ideas and possess no clear unity. Therefore, misconnections, confusions, misunderstandings, and misinterpretations were virtually impossible to be avoided. As a result of a two years tireless attempt with the help of Wittgenstein (also Kierkegaard), I was able to trace out the connections between those remarkable notes and overcome this difficulty. The question and degree of success was left out for my thesis committee and the reader. In the first chapter, I have also addressed some important aspects of Weil's life and thought, mainly, though those scholars who are well aware of the importance of Simone Weil, a remarkably brilliant, a genius spirit, and mad. Through my reading of the secondary sources, I have pointed out to another difficulty, the difficulty of classifying Weil's thought. As I have briefly stated, although Simone Weil remains unclassifiable, she has been classified and labeled in many different ways. Those labels, often contradicting one another, shows the controversiality of Weil's thought. In this regard, I have argued that Weil is a kind of a theologian and philosopher, who is not a member of any community of ideas.

Chapter 2 examined the thesis (1) that the absence of a meaning, or God, or the feeling of the absence of the good in the world is the region of necessity. In the first section, I have laid out Weil's conceptual, ontological investigation of the world by investigating her conception of necessity. The world is necessity. That is, everything in the world is governed by a mechanical necessity or a blind force. Thus, reality is the sole

necessity showing itself, primarily, in two different forms: suffering or affliction and beauty. It was argued that there is no answer to the question 'why these things rather than others?' The only answer to the question, 'why are things beautiful or ugly and brutal (e.g., affliction)' is: necessity. That is, reality is necessity. The difficulty is that such an answer, at least in some cases, does not appear to be satisfactory. The answer does not satisfy the questioner, for what the questioner cries out for is a metaphysical, ethical, or religious explanation, meaning, or purpose. In other words, this difficulty of stopping oneself from asking the why-question is a metaphysical, ethical, and religious difficulty.

Moreover, I have argued that, for Weil, the recognition of necessity in all facts, including human facts, regardless of kinds, whether a mathematical necessity or something analogous, is what is crucial. The key point about Weil insistence on the recognition of necessity is to disclose that which lies outside its range, the good or God. In other words, Weil investigates the question of the good or God by investigating what necessity is, or what the good or God is *not*. Thus, it is in this sense that Weil's religious method should be described as a negative. *Negative faith*: To believe that we can grasp only what lies within the domain of necessity; to believe that what we cannot grasp or lies beyond our grasp is hidden and yet more real; finally, to believe that what we grasp from our own perspective is deceptive.[424]

I have also argued that Weil's ontological account of necessity—reality is necessity and lacks meaning, is a presentation of a form of absurdism, but in Kierkegaard's sense: having faith by virtue of the absurd or contradiction.

[424] *Weil, The Notebooks,* v.1, p. 220.

Chapter 3, reconsidered the same very points were made in the preceding chapter by examining the thesis (2) that the absence of a meaning, or God, or the feeling of the absence of the good in the world is affliction—affliction is necessity.

I have argued that affliction, as a distinct form of suffering, contains both reducible and irreducible elements: the non-physical and the physical, the expressible and the inexpressible elements. Although affliction is inseparable from suffering, it is different and something specific. I argued that Weil's conception of affliction can be beset understood as a momentarily numinous experience of God's absence or the absolute good. Numinous experience, according to Otto, is a kind of experience which contains a quite specific moment and which remains ineffable. That is also why it cannot be explained and articulated. I have also tried to show that what shows itself to us in affliction can only be felt. That is to say, Weil's investigation of affliction concentrates on the feeling response to the absence or silence of God, the feeling which remains where the concept or language fails. Nonetheless, religious, ethical, and aesthetical expressions specifically, poetic and musical expressions, are suggested as a possibility of indirect expression for grasping what is inarticulate in affliction. In other words, the notion of the absolute good or God, which (and who) lies beyond the region of necessity and the boundaries of language, can only be commutated by means of indirect expressions.

Finally, Just as the primary point of Weil's investigation of necessity is to disclose that which lies outside its range, the good or God, so too the primary point of her investigation of affliction, as Robert Chenavier has observed, is to show that affliction is more likely capable of 'unveiling the back side of necessity', the good, God, or the transcendental reality. And that is why we have been insisting that affliction is the most illuminating key to understanding the authority that the absolute good, lying in the back

and dark side of necessity, can have over us—we are subject to a blind necessity or force and yet yearning for the good or justice.

4.1 A Potential Concern

In his "Introduction" to Weil's *Lectures on Philosophy,* Peter Winch mentions that there is a difficulty in placing "her work firmly within any currently living tradition of thinking. [But Winch also reminds us that] (The disintegration of contemporary culture which is partly responsible for this was of course one of the great themes to which Simone Weil addressed herself)".[425] Thus, to place Weil's position in a historical context, one, as mentioned earlier, needs to read Weil in a contra modern fashion, surely as a reinvigoration of Platonism, as well Christianity. It should also be mentioned, as George Grant remarks, that Weil criticizes "the very root of intellectual modernity which after all came from the enlightenment which had made that intellectual tradition":[426] *the utopian progressivity myth of enlightenment and Hegel and Marx*. In a way, the most general characteristics of modern approaches can be described as historical paths to redemption.—even Weil has, to some extent, categorized Christianity as a historical approach, since, Weil states, it has also tried to discover "harmony in history".[427] That is why we argue that Weil's place lies in her rejection of modern thought trying to seek finality in the future. Should one not then call Weil: *an anti-historical*, or *a non-historical*, or *an essentialist?*

[425] Winch "Introduction" to Weil's *Lectures on Philosophy*, p. 2.
[426] Grant, "Some Comments on Simone Weil and the Neurotic and Alienated", p. 781.
[427] Weil, *The Notebooks*, v.2, p. 616.

Richard Rorty writes, "traditional philosophy [is] an attempt to escape from history—an attempt to find nonhistorical condition of any possible historical development".[428] Apparently, Weil's approach is described as a nonhistorical or may be an anti-historical. To speak to this concern in a fairly profound way is not an essay task since in our contemporary intellectual culture, essentialism, anti-historicism, or non-historicism, though they are ambiguous terms, are widely either misunderstood or rejected. This concern, as far as I am aware, has not been raised and discussed by Weilian scholars. Therefore, this should be taken as a serious concern and needs to be carried out as the basis for another study.

[428] *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 9. Rorty continues here by saying "From this perspective, the common message of [later] Wittgenstein… is a historical one".

Bibliography (I): Secondary Sources

Allen, Diogenes. *Three Outsiders: Pascal, Kierkegaard, Simone Weil*. Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1983.

Allen, Diogenes & Springsted, Eric. *Spirit, Nature, and Community: Issues in the Thought of Simone Weil.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.

Athanasiadis, Harris. *George Grant and the Theology of the Cross: The Christian Foundations of His Thought*. Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2001.

Augustine, Saint. *Confession*. Translated by: Henry Chadwick. Oxford University Press, 2008.

Bell, Richard H. "Introduction: Divine Humanity: Simone Weil's Philosophy of Culture" in *Simone Weil's Philosophy of Culture*: Reading toward a divine humanity. Edited by: Richard H. Bell. Cambridge, England; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1993. Pp.1-22.

Blum, Lawrence A. & Victor J. Seidler. *A Truer Liberty: Simone Weil and Marxism*. New York: Routledge, 1989.

Buber, Martin. "The Silent Question: On Henri Bergson and Simone Weil" in *The Writings of Martin Buber*. Edited by: Will Herberg. New York: New American Library, 1977, Pp. 306-13.

Burns, Steven. "Virtue and Necessity" Laval théologique et philosophique, vol. 32, n° 3, 1976. p. 261-275.

Cabaud, Jacques. *Simone Weil: A Fellowship in Love*. London: Harvill Press, 1964.

Cayley, David. "Enlightened by Love: The Thought of Simone Weil". Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC Audio) Toronto, 2002, Transcript.

Chenavier, Robert "Simone Weil: Completing Platonism through a Consistent Materialism" in *The Christian Platonism of Simone Weil*. Edited by E. Jane Doering and Eric O. Springsted. Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004. Pp. 61-76.

Collingwood, R.G. *The Idea of History*, Revised Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Dilman, Ilham. *Free Will: An Historical and Philosophical Introduction*. London: Routledge, 1999.

Fiedler, "Introduction" to *Waiting for God*. Translated by Emma Craufurd. New York: Harper & Row, 1973. Pp. 3-39.

Fiori, Gabriella. *Simone Weil: An Intellectual Biography*. Translated by: Joseph R. Berrigan. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989.

Fromm, Erich. *The Art of Loving*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1989.

Grant, George. "Introduction to Simone Weil" in *Collected Works of George Grant*, v.4 (1970-1988). Edited by: Arthur Davis and Peter Emberley. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000. Pp. 786-804.

_____."Some Comments on Simone Weil and the Neurotic and Alienated" in *Collected Works of George Grant*, v.4 (1970-1988). Edited by: Arthur Davis and Peter Emberley. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000. Pp. 781-5.

_____. "Excerpts from Graduate Seminar Lectures, 1975-6" in *Collected Works of George Grant*, v.4 (1970-1988). Edited by: Arthur Davis and Peter Emberley. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000. Pp. 815-850.

Gasking, D.A.T. and A.C. Jackson. "Wittgenstein as a Teacher" in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Man and His Philosophy*. Edited by: K.T. Fann. New York: Dell publishing, 1967 .Pp. 49-55.

Gray, Francine du Plessix. *Simone Weil*. New York: Viking, 2001.

Heidegger, Martin "'Only a God Can Save us': The Spiegel Interview (1966)" in *Heidegger: The Man and the Thinker*. Edited by Thomas Sheehan. Chicago: Precedent, 1981.

Kierkegaard, Soren. *Fear and Trembling*, *Repetition: Kierkegaard's Writings*, VI. Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983.

McLellan, David. *Utopian Pessimist: the Life and Thought of Simone Weil*. New York: Poseidon Press, 1990.

Milosz, Czesław. "The Importance of Simone Weil" in *Emperor of the Earth: Modes of Eccentric Vision*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977. Pp.85-98.

O'Connor, Flannery. *The Habit of Being: Letters*. Edited and with an introduction by: Sally Fitzgerald. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1988.

Phillips, D. Z. “God and concept-formation in Simone Weil” in *Simone Weil's Philosophy of Culture: Reading toward a divine humanity*. Edited by: Richard H. Bell. Cambridge, England; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1993. Pp.77-92.

Plato, “The Republic, Book VII” in *Plato: Complete Works.* Edited by John M. Cooper. Associated editor, D. S. Hutchinson. Indianapolis/ Cambridge, Hackett Publishing Company, 1997. Pp. 1132-1155.

Rees, Richard. “Introduction” to *First and Last Notebooks*. Translated by: Richard Rees. London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1970, Pp. vii-xiv.

Rhees, Rush, *Discussions of Simone Weil*. Edited by: D. Z Phillips and assisted by Mario von der Ruhr. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999.

Springsted, Eric O. *Simone Weil and the Suffering of Love*. Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1986.

_____ *Christus Mediator: Platonic Mediation in the Thought of Simone Weil*. Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983.

Thibon, Gustave. “Introduction” to *Gravity and Grace*. Translated by: Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr. London; New York: Routledge, 2002. Pp. vii-xl.

_____. “Introduction to the Original Work” in *Simone Weil As We Knew Her*. Joseph-Marie Perrin and Gustave Thibon. Translated by Emma Craufurd. London; New York: Routledge, 2003, Pp. 1-10

Rees, Richard. “Introduction” to *On Science, Necessity, and the Love of God*. Translated, and Edited by: Richard Rees. London: Oxford University Press, 1968. Pp. vii-ix.

Perrin, Joseph-Marie. “Forward” to *Simone Weil As We Knew Her* (Part 2). J.M. Perrin and G. Thibon. Translated by Emma Craufurd. London; New York: Routledge, 2003. Pp. 13-17.

Steiner, George. *Nostalgia for the Absolute*. Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1974.

_____. “Sainte Simone – Simone Weil” in *No Passion Spent: Essays 1978-1995*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.

Winch, Peter. *Simone Weil: The Just Balance*. Cambridge, England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

_____. “Introduction” to *Simone Weil: Lectures on Philosophy*. Translated by: Hugh Price. Cambridge, England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978. Pp. 1-23.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. _____. *Tractatus Logico- Philosophicus*, Trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness. London: New York: Routledge, 2007.

_____.“Lecture on Ethics,” in *Philosophical Occasions*. Edited by James C. Klagge and Alfred Nordmann. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993. Pp. 37-44.

_____.“Philosophy” in *Philosophical Occasions*. Edited by James C. Klagge and Alfred Nordmann. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993. Pp. 161- 193.

_____.“Remarks on Frazer’s Golden Bough” in *Philosophical Occasions*. Edited by James C. Klagge and Alfred Nordmann. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993, Pp.118-155.

_____. *Zettel*, Edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright. Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe.

_____.*Culture and Value*, edited by G.H. von Wright, in collaboration with Heikki Nyman; translated by Peter Winch, Oxford: Blackwell, 1980.

_____. *Philosophical Investigations*. Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell.1963.

Wright-Bushman, K. "A Poetics of Consenting Attention: Simone Weil's Prayer and the Poetry of Denise Levertov." Christianity and Literature. 62.3 (2013). Pp. 369-394.

Vetö, Miklós. *The Religious Metaphysics of Simone Weil*. Translated by Joan Dargan. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.

Zwicky, Jan. *Lyric Philosophy*. Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1992

_____. “What Is Ineffable?” in *International Studies in the Philosophy of Science*. Vol. 26, No 2, June 2012, Pp. 197-217.

Bibliography (II): BY SIMONE WEIL

_____. *The Notebooks of Simone Weil* (V.1). Translated by: Arthur Wills. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956.

_____ *The Notebooks of Simone Weil* (V.2). Translated by: Arthur Wills. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956.

_____. *Oppression and Liberty*. Translated by: Arthur Wills and John Petrie. London, Routledge and Paul, 1958.

_____.*The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties Towards Mankind*. Translated by: Arthur Wills. Routledge & Paul, 1952.

_____. *First and Last Notebooks*. Translated by: Richard Rees. London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.

_____.*Lectures on Philosophy*. Translated by: Hugh Price. Cambridge, England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978.

_____. *Gravity and Grace*. Translated by: Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr. London; New York: Routledge, 2002.

_____. *Letter to a Priest*. Translated by: A. F. Wills. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953.

_____. *Seventy Letters*. London, New York, Oxford University Press, 1965.

_____."The *Iliad* or the Poem of the Force" In *Simone Weil: An Anthology*. Edited and Introduced by Siân Miles. London: Virago, 1986. Pp. 182-

_____. "Human Personality" in *The Simone Weil Reader.* Edited by: George A. Panichas. New York: McKay, 1977. Pp. 313-339.

_____."Draft of a Statement of Human Obligations" in *Selected Essays 1934-43.* Translated by Richard Rees. London: Oxford University Press, 1962. Pp.219-227.

_____."Letter II: Same Subject" in *Waiting for God*. Translated by: Emma Craufurd New York: Harper & Row, 1973. Pp. 52-7.

_____."Spiritual Autobiography" In *Waiting for God.* Translated by: Emma Craufurd New York: Harper & Row, 1973. Pp. 61-83.

_____."Her Intellectual Vocation" In *Waiting for God.* Translated by: Emma Craufurd. New York: Harper & Row, 1973. Pp. 84-7.

_____."God in Plato" In *Waiting for God.* Translated by: Emma Craufurd. New York: Harper & Row, 1973. Pp. 89-137.

_____. "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God" in *Waiting for God*. Translated by: Emma Craufurd. New York: Harper & Row, 1973. Pp. 105-116.

_____."Forms of the Implicit Love of God" in *Waiting for God.* Translated by: Emma Craufurd. New York: Harper & Row, 1973. Pp. 137-215.

_____."Scientism: a Review" in *On Science, Necessity, and the Love of God: Essays Collected*. Translated, and Edited by: Richard Rees. London: Oxford University Press, 1968. Pp. 65-70.

_____."Classical Science and After" in *On Science, Necessity, and the Love of God: Essays Collected.* Translated, and Edited by: Richard Rees. London: Oxford University Press, 1968. Pp. 3-43.

_____. "Some Reflections on the Love of God" in *On Science, Necessity, and the Love of God: Essays Collected*. Translated, and Edited by: Richard Rees. London: Oxford University Press, 1968. Pp. 153-159.

_____."The Love of God and Affliction" in *On Science, Necessity, and the Love of God: Essays Collected*. Translated, and Edited by: Richard Rees. London: Oxford University Press, 1968. Pp. 170-198.