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THE IDEA OF THE ABSENCE OF GOD IN SIMONE WEIL

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ABSTRACT

Our purpose in this study is to show that the absence of God in this world, or the non-intervention of God in this world, is the idea par excellence which is at the heart of Simone Weil's thinking about man's situation in this world. To be very specific, our purpose in this study is to understand the significance of Weil's thinking about the idea of the absence of God in the context of thinking with truth at the same time about the affliction of men, the perfection of God, and the link between the two; or, to express the same thing in different terms, our purpose is to understand the significance of Weil's thinking about the idea of the absence of good in the context of thinking with truth at the same time about necessity, necessity's indifference to the good, and how necessity and the good can be reconciled.

What this means, in effect, is that our entire study of Weil is essentially an explication of the relationship that she sees as existing between the question of necessity and Christ's cry of dereliction on the Cross. Not only is Weil's thinking about the idea of the absence of God completely unintelligible apart from a comprehensive understanding of her thinking about necessity, but further, her thinking about necessity is ultimately unintelligible apart from her thinking about Christ's cry of dereliction. More importantly, Christ's cry of dereliction is for Weil the most consummate expression of the absence of God; it expresses the 'absence of God from God', and what this means, as our study will endeavour to show, is that the idea of the absence of God cannot be thought without at the same time thinking the idea of

the presence of God. In other words, the idea of the absence of God cannot be thought without at the same time thinking the idea of incarnation. To attempt to understand what Weil is saying about the idea of incarnation, especially in relationship to her thinking about the question of necessity, is to attempt to understand an aspect of Weil's thought which has neither been dealt with in any detail nor analyzed in any depth. To attempt to understand what Weil is saying in this context is, finally, to attempt to understand what she means in thinking that the absence of God in this world is the reality of God, that this world, in so far as it is entirely empty of God, is God Himself, and finally, that necessity, in so far as it is absolutely other than the good, is the good itself.

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PREFACE

Anyone who has seriously engaged in the study of Simone Weil is well aware of the widely divergent opinions as to who she was and what she was saying. Her writings, virtually all of which were published following her death in 1943, have generated a wealth of secondary literature in which she has been characterized as a philosopher, a social reformer, a syncretist, a Gnostic, a Platonist, an existentialist, a nihilist, a feminist, an anti-feminist, a Christian, an anti-Semite, a mystic, a saint, an atheist, etc., etc. It is too late, of course, to ask 'the real Simone Weil' to stand up and to clarify her position for us. Who, then, in his or her characterization of Weil, is right, and who is wrong? Who then, indeed, in light of such a divergency of opinion, can be said to have understood what Weil has left behind in her writings? She has been glorified and she has been criticized -- but has she been understood?

It would seem to me that all too many of those who have written about Weil have been concerned with little more than singing her praises or descrying her faults, and that this praise as well as this criticism is itself quite often little more than the expression of whether or not a particular writer happens to agree or to disagree with whatever aspect of Weil's life or thought that he or she has chanced to come upon. This is not to suggest, however, that no one has the right to express his or her personal opinion. It is to suggest, rather, that one's personal opinion, whether it takes

the form of praise or of criticism, is of little worth if it is not grounded in an understanding of the one who is being praised or criticized. It is quite frequently the case, in this respect, that those who write about Weil are only secondarily, if at all, concerned with understanding her. We all have the right, or at least we all should have the right, to express our personal opinion, to praise or to criticize, to agree or to disagree, but first of all, and more importantly it seems to me, we have an obligation to understand. It should be realized, however, that this understanding is something that can only be arrived at independently of one's personal opinion. One's agreement or disagreement with what Weil is saying, for example, is entirely irrelevant to the task of understanding her. This point is very clearly stated by a contemporary Christian theologian (Herbert W. Richardson)¹ in the context of explaining how a systematic theologian, like himself, goes about reading, analyzing, and interpreting a work with which he may or may not agree. He says: "As a Protestant who also teaches in a Catholic seminary, I have constantly to deal with books which present Catholic arguments or viewpoints. While I may or may not agree with these views, I must still try to understand them. In a sense, my own agreement or disagreement with these views is irrelevant to the task of understanding them."²

My own study of Weil is concerned, above all else, with understanding her. My concern, more specifically, is with understanding what is certainly one of the most important ideas that she thought about: the idea of the absence of God. This means, at least

in one sense, that my study is not 'critical'; that is to say, it is not my purpose in this study to discuss either my agreement with or my disagreement with Weil. I am only concerned, as I say, with understanding her, with clarifying and illuminating the way in which the major aspects of her thought are inextricably linked to her thinking about the idea of the absence of God. This does not mean, however, that my study is written in complete ignorance of the many other studies that have been written about Weil. I make constant reference to the secondary literature throughout my study, either to support certain arguments that are being made, or to illustrate completely opposite points of view. In this sense, at least, my study of Weil is critical, although it should be noted here, as well, that my agreement with or my disagreement with the viewpoints of other studies on Weil is not necessarily relevant to the task of understanding her. The secondary literature is therefore of minor concern to me in the main text of my study. For the most part, in other words, the task of understanding Weil is one that I carry on independently of the secondary literature. One of the principal reasons why I am writing this Preface, in fact, is because I am not overly concerned with discussing the secondary literature in the main text of my study. It should therefore be of some help to the reader if he or she is made aware of the different kinds of studies that have been written about Weil, and also of where I stand with respect to this literature.

The essential purpose in my writing of this Preface, conse-

quently, is to review the secondary literature. This, however, is not the only purpose that underlies the writing of this Preface. It is also necessary that the reader be made aware of the nature of Weil's own writings, that much of her authorship consists, for example, of fragments and unfinished essays, and that many of her writings were not meant for publication. It is necessary as well, in this context, that the reader be made aware of the method that I employ in dealing with these writings. More importantly, I think, it is necessary that the reader understands why I have written my study of Weil in the way that I have; that is to say, it is important to understand why my study of Weil is not 'critical', why, that is, I am not concerned with whether I agree or disagree with what she is saying, and consequently why I am concerned only with what she 'means'. The reason, in turn, why I am concerned only with what Weil means is directly linked to her understanding of what philosophy is, and therefore it is necessary that the reader also understands what she means by 'doing philosophy'. It is necessary, finally, that the reader be made aware of what I understand my own contribution to the study of Weil to consist of, that he understands, in effect, how I distinguish between my presentation of and my interpretation of Weil's thought, for I have made no effort, either in the main text of my study or in the footnotes, to distinguish between what Weil says and what I add to or infer from what she says. It is thus my concern in the Preface, to reiterate, that the reader be made aware of the nature of Weil's own writings and of the method I employ in dealing with these writings; that he

be made aware of the different kinds of studies that have been written about Weil, and of where I stand with respect to this literature; that he understands why my study is concerned only with understanding Weil, and therefore that he understands what Weil means by 'doing philosophy'; and, finally, that he be made aware of what I understand my own contribution to the study of Weil to consist of, and therefore that he understands how I distinguish between my presentation of and my interpretation of Weil's thought.

To begin, therefore, with Weil's own writings, we should note that virtually everything she wrote, and certainly everything of importance, has been published posthumously in one of seventeen volumes of her work. One further volume (Leçons de philosophie), which consists of the lecture notes on philosophy that were preserved by one of Weil's students, Anne Reynaud-Guérithault, is usually included among the primary sources of Weil's work as well. What we have, in the end, is a diverse collection of material that includes both finished and unfinished essays, fragments and notes from Weil's personal diaries or notebooks (Cahiers), personal correspondence, poems, an unfinished play, and one full length book (L'Enracinement: Prélude à une déclaration des devoirs envers l'être humain). It is obvious that Weil did not mean for all of these writings to be published, especially not in the form in which we now have them. Be that as it may, we are extremely fortunate to have all of her writings, both the writings that were meant for publication as well as the unfinished writings and the fragments. It is in the fragments, in

fact, that one encounters every important idea that Weil was to struggle with, and where one discovers the underlying principles which informed every aspect of her thought. The Cahiers, for example, are comparable in their style and in their depth of insight to Pascal's Pensées. If one were to ignore the part of Weil's authorship that is in any way incomplete or unfinished, one would be ignoring the richest source that we have of her thought.

Apart from some of the poems that Weil wrote in her childhood, the writings that we have can be dated from 1929 until the year of her death in 1943. And there is only one significant change of focus worth mentioning, I think, in the entire fourteen year span of these writings. This change, which dates from the time of Weil's first of three 'mystical experiences' in 1938,³ is constituted by the presence of Christ in her life and in her thought. There is no breach of continuity, however, between the earlier and the later writings. Weil was concerned from the very beginning until the very end of her life with the same questions. She was concerned with the workers' condition, with social oppression, with what the conditions of oppression were, how they arose, and how they could be alleviated. Her concern for these questions was both practical and theoretical; she wanted to understand not only why and how men were reduced to states of extreme suffering, but also what could be done to prevent this suffering. And all of these questions, in the final analysis, can be reduced to one specific question for Weil: how is it possible to think of God as being perfect when men have always and everywhere

been afflicted? Weil is entirely consistent throughout all of her writings in addressing herself in one way or another to this question. The only difference between her earlier and her later writings is that in the later writings she is attempting to understand this question in terms of Christ.

My own study of Weil is specifically concerned with Weil's attempt to understand this question in terms of Christ. In this respect I am concerned more with Weil's later writings than with her earlier writings, although I never hesitate to support or to clarify my arguments by reference to the earlier writings, especially in relation to my discussion of the question of necessity. The reader should note, as well, that I use the standard abbreviations for Weil's works throughout my study (except in the Preface). These abbreviations and the editions of Weil's works that have been consulted are listed under the fourth footnote of the Introduction. I give the full title of Weil's works in the Preface in order to familiarize the reader with the major texts that will be referred to throughout my study. As for secondary literature, complete bibliographical details are given in the footnotes (except in the Preface). In the Preface, because I will constantly be referring to and making lists of secondary literature, I have simply given the name of the author, the title, the name of the journal (if applicable), and the date of publication. This, I believe, will facilitate the reading of the text. Full bibliographical information is given, of course, in the Bibliography itself. As for the footnotes

throughout the text, the reader should be aware that I have tried to be as comprehensive as possible in supporting my arguments with reference to Weil's own writings. This means that I will very frequently list every place in Weil's writings where she discusses a particular idea, and in this sense the footnotes can be said to serve as an index. These references to Weil's writings are customarily introduced by the word 'see', while the number of the footnote in the text is customarily placed after a direct quotation from Weil or at the end of that section in the text where I have completed my discussion of a particular idea or theme. I will use other footnotes, of course, to further explain certain points that have been made in the text, and in these instances I may refer either to Weil or to the secondary sources. It is the secondary literature, in fact, that I would now like to discuss in some detail.

In order to review the secondary literature it will be worthwhile, in the first place, to take note of the publication dates of Weil's writings. Except for a few articles, nearly all of Weil's writings were, as we know, published posthumously. The earliest of these writings to be published was La Pesanteur et la grâce (1947), a collection of fragments and notes taken from Weil's personal diaries or notebooks (Cahiers) and arranged under various topic headings by Gustave Thibon.⁴ The rest of Weil's writings (seventeen volumes) were published between 1949 (L'Enracinement) and 1968 (Poèmes, suivis de 'Venise sauvée', Lettre de Paul Valéry). The majority of her writings (eleven volumes) were published prior

to 1956, although it is significant that seven volumes were still to be published between 1956 and 1968. The reason why this is significant is that the majority of those who wrote about Weil in the fifties did not, and could not, present a comprehensive analysis of her thought, an analysis, that is, which could only arise out of an understanding of the whole of her work. Many of those who wrote during this period were concerned with either one or only a few of the works that had just been published. This is not to say that all of this literature is uninformed or suspect; it is to say, rather, because such a significant proportion of the literature that is devoted to the study of Weil was written during this period, that much of this literature is characterized by a very limited understanding of her thought.

It has very often been the case, and is very frequently the case even today, for example, that La Pesanteur et la grâce has been and is used as the primary source for understanding Weil's religious and philosophical thought. There is no doubt that La Pesanteur et la grâce is an essential source with respect to Weil's religious and philosophical thought. It is also certain at the same time, however, that many of the ideas contained in this work are more fully expanded upon and clarified in other works, works such as Attente de Dieu (1950), La Connaissance surnaturelle (1950), Intuitions pré-chrétiennes (1951), Lettre à un religieux (1951), La Source grecque (1953), Pensées sans ordre concernant l'amour de Dieu (1962), and Sur la science (1965). More importantly, with

the publication of the third volume of the Cahiers in 1956, La Pesanteur et la grâce has been, or at least should have been, entirely superseded. This, at least, is true for those engaged in a serious study of Weil's thought, for the Cahiers, of which La Pesanteur et la grâce is but a small sampling, contain nearly all the writings from her notebooks; they are virtually an inexhaustable catalogue of everything that she reflected upon and of everything that she struggled with over the years. In this respect the new edition of the Cahiers which was published in 1970, and which includes a never before published notebook, is the definitive edition of these writings, and the one which should be consulted in any comprehensive investigation of Weil's thought. We might also make a note in this context of the 1962 publication date of Pensées sans ordre concernant l'amour de Dieu, a work which contains the full text of what is often considered to be one of Weil's most brilliant essays, "L'Amour de Dieu et le malheur", an essay of which only the first part was originally published in Attente de Dieu (1950). Another work that we might take note of here, a work which is never mentioned in the early writings on Weil, and that has rarely been considered since its publication in 1965, is Sur la science. Suffice it to say that it is quite unfortunate that this work was not published earlier, and also that it has largely been ignored since its publication, for it contains a number of essays of inestimable value with respect to Weil's understanding of the question of necessity.

The question of date should also be considered with respect

to the secondary literature which has been written in English, and which is dependent on the English translations of Weil's writings. Nearly all of Weil's major writings, through the work of Emma Craufurd, Elizabeth Chase Geissbühler, Arthur F. Wills, and most particularly, Richard Rees, have been translated into English. It was not until 1968, however, that Richard Rees published his translation of the major essays from Pensées sans ordre concernant l'amour de Dieu and Sur la science (Science, Necessity, and the Love of God), and not until 1970 that he published a translation of La Connaissance surnaturelle and the third volume of the Cahiers (First and Last Notebooks). Leçons de philosophie (translated by Hugh Price as Lectures on Philosophy) did not appear until 1978. It is also the case, therefore, that a significant proportion of the literature in English that was written on Weil during the fifties and the early sixties was concerned with either one or only a few of the works that had just been translated, and that much of this literature, like much of the secondary literature in general, is characterized by a very limited understanding of Weil's thought.

It is not surprising that so many felt inclined to write about Weil in the fifties and in the early sixties. With the publication of her first few books, one could say that she had become an instant celebrity, albeit posthumously. In one way or another she provoked everyone who came into contact with her; each new publication, it seemed, was either highly praised or vehemently criticized. She is generally received even today in very much the

same way, although there has not been nearly as many reviews and studies devoted to her in the past decade as there was initially. What is important to keep in mind, however, is that much of the secondary literature, particularly the literature which was published during the initial stage of Weil's public reception, is very limited in scope, either because it could not or because it simply failed to take into account the whole of her written work. Many authors, as a result, judge Weil in terms of either one or only a few of her writings. The reader, consequently, should be very careful in either accepting or rejecting the veracity of any judgement that is made concerning Weil, particularly when that judgement is based, as so many are, on a partial reading of what Weil wrote. Let me just say that it is extremely difficult (if not entirely unjust) to deal with any aspect of Weil's thought without taking into account the whole, and, more importantly, without coming to grips with the metaphysical principles which underlie all that she thought. With these cautionary remarks in mind, I think that we can safely proceed to introduce the reader to the kinds of secondary literature that he or she is likely to encounter should the need or the desire arise to go beyond the primary sources.

My essential purpose in reviewing the secondary literature is to provide the reader with a general overview of the different kinds of studies that have been written about Weil. My concern, at the same time, is to indicate to the reader where I stand with respect to this literature. What I wish to do, therefore, is to discuss the

different kinds of studies that have been written about Weil in terms of six categories, categories which distinguish between the general subject matter and the basic intentions of those who have written about her. Some of these categories are, of course, quite broad, as they are the reflection of a wide range of articles and books which address themselves either to a very general and modest introduction to the life and thought of Weil, or to one or more specific aspects or themes of her work. It is evident, in this context, that many of the articles and books on Weil could be included under more than one category. In that my purpose, however, is simply to present a general review of the secondary literature, I have not bothered to list any article or book under more than the one category which I feel is most representative of its general scope. It should be noted, as well, that the examples from the secondary literature that I do include under any one category are in no way meant to be exhaustive. As I have said, I wish only to provide the reader with a general overview of the different kinds of studies that have been written about Weil, and to indicate to him or to her where I stand with respect to this literature.

1) Biographies.

Certainly the majority of those who have written about Weil have had something to say about her life. What is of concern to me under the heading of biographies, however, is the work of those who have dealt exclusively and comprehensively with her life.

The first comprehensive biography to be written of Weil, Jacques Cabaud's L'expérience vécue de Simone Weil, was published in 1957. Cabaud also wrote and published the English edition of this same work (Simone Weil: A Fellowship in Love) in 1964, and followed this with the publication, in 1967, of a work devoted to the end of Weil's life: Simone Weil à New York et à Londres: Les quinze derniers mois (1942-3). His work, at least up until 1973 (the publication date of Simone Pétrement's biography of Weil), has clearly been the major source of information with respect to the details of Weil's life. Simone Pétrement is herself frequently dependent on Cabaud as a source of information. My only criticism of Cabaud is that he occasionally has a tendency to be sensationalistic.

It is fairly certain to say that the work of Cabaud has been largely overshadowed since the publication in 1973 of Simone Pétrement's biography of Weil: La Vie de Simone Weil, 1 & 2. Pétrement's biography is certainly the most comprehensive and informed account of Weil's life that has been written to date. There is no doubt, at least in my own mind, that Pétrement's biography is, and that it will remain, the definitive biography of Weil. Not only is it both a significant and enduring piece of work because of the wealth of detail and information that it offers the reader, but also, and more importantly, because of the depth of understanding that everywhere pervades Pétrement's discussion of her subject matter. One could say, in fact, that no one was more qualified to

write Weil's biography than Pétrement, for not only was she Weil's closest friend, but she was also eminently qualified (agrégée de philosophie, docteur ès lettres) to deal with Weil's thought. She has a very clear understanding, for example, of the nature and the extent of the influence that Alain (Emile Chartier) exerted on Weil, as both she and Weil were students of Alain during essentially the same period of time.⁵ As a highly respected scholar in her own right (Le Dualisme dans l'histoire de la philosophie et des religions: 1946; Le Dualisme chez Platon, les gnostiques et les manichéens: 1947), Pétrement also has a very clear understanding of the Platonic, Gnostic, and Manichaeian elements in Weil's thought, as well as of the many other diverse sources which both underlined and contributed to the formulation of Weil's thought. In the final analysis, and in relation to my own study of Weil, let me just say that I in no way hesitate to refer to Pétrement in support of my own understanding of Weil.

It is necessary, finally, to mention the biographical work of J.-M. Perrin and Gustave Thibon: Simone Weil telle que nous l'avons connue (1952).⁶ Father Perrin (a Dominican priest) met Weil for the first time on June 7th, 1941, while Gustave Thibon (a Catholic writer and farmer) met her for the first time on August 7th, 1941. It was with Perrin, in particular, that Weil first began to formulate and to express both the possibilities and the impossibilities of her entering the Church. It was Perrin, in turn, who made arrangements with Thibon for Weil to work on Thibon's farm

in Ardèche. Although Weil's relationship with Thibon was very strained at first, it is nevertheless clear that Weil eventually felt she could confide in Thibon. The spiritual turmoil that Weil was experiencing at this time is well documented by both Perrin and Thibon. Indeed, it was only Perrin (and Joë Bousquet) to whom she later wrote about her mystical experiences, one of which occurred during her stay with Thibon. It was Thibon, finally, to whom Weil entrusted her notebooks (extracts of which Thibon published as La Pesanteur et la grâce) before leaving for New York with her parents in May of 1942. The publication of Perrin and Thibon's Simone Weil telle que nous l'avons connue has provided us, ultimately, with an important source of personal reflection on the life of Weil, one that witnesses to both the character of Weil as well as to the spiritual dilemma that characterized the last few years of her life.

2) Writings that essentially take the form of 'readers', that present Weil's life and thought in a manner similar to La Pesanteur et la grâce.

It may be, in that Weil is a thinker of considerable difficulty, that the form of a reader is felt by some to be an appropriate manner in which to introduce the reader to her thought. This is certainly true, of course, with respect to primary sources of Weil's thought such as La Pesanteur et la grâce. In this context we should be aware of the recent publication in English of The Simone Weil Reader (1977), edited by George A. Panichas. Apart from Panichas' short introduction to each chapter of this volume, The Simone Weil Reader is basically

patterned after the style of La Pesanteur et la grâce, although it draws its material from all of Weil's works, not being limited, as La Pesanteur et la grâce is, to the Cahiers. The English reader will find The Simone Weil Reader to be an extremely good and a comprehensive introduction to Weil's thought.

It is a different story, however, when a secondary study of Weil's thought is patterned after the style of La Pesanteur et la grâce. Studies of this nature have a tendency to read like department store catalogues. A good example, I think, of this kind of study is that of Luce Blech-Lidolf, La pensée philosophique et sociale de Simone Weil (1976). Let me say, in the first place, that Blech-Lidolf does provide the reader with a fairly detailed and systematically ordered account of her subject matter, and that her frequent reference to other thinkers is often very useful for purposes of comparison. On the other hand, because of the overwhelming number of headings and subheadings that she has used in her study (the number of direct quotations from Weil is even greater), she is rarely able to deal with or to develop any central idea of Weil's thought for more than a single page. It is not possible in this type of format, for example, to provide the reader with a comprehensive understanding of what Weil means by freedom, or necessity, or incarnation, to mention just a few of the ideas that Blech-Lidolf has treated in her study. This kind of study, in other words, has a tendency to be more of a detailed résumé of Weil's thought than a comprehensive understanding of it. It is for this reason that I, for one, am not entirely sold

on the validity of this kind of study.

3) General and modest introductions to the life and thought of Weil.

The greater part of the secondary literature that has been written about Weil could be included under this particular category. However, as many of these secondary works introduce Weil in terms of a general or a particular theme, in terms of her position with respect to Christianity, for example, or in terms of the question of suffering, I feel that it will give the reader a much clearer overall picture of the nature of the secondary literature if I make a distinction between the general and the particular themes in terms of which certain authors approach the study of Weil, and therefore if I discuss these works under the different categories that I use below.

In relation to general and modest introductions to the life and thought of Weil, the reader might refer to Victor-Henry Debidour, Simone Weil ou la transparence (1963); to François d'Hautefeuille, Le Tourment de Simone Weil (1970); and to the extensive work of Marie-Magdeleine Davy, Simone Weil (1961), Simone Weil: sa vie, son oeuvre avec un exposé de sa philosophie (1966). In English, he might refer to David Anderson, Simone Weil (1971), who is one of the only writers to take Weil's thinking about mathematics seriously, and who, in his chapter on "Analogies" (pp. 99-115), deals with the religious significance of Weil's thinking about 'incommensurables' or 'irrational numbers'; to E.W.F. Tomlin, Simone Weil (1954), whose

work, considering its date, is a very accurate and penetrating study of Weil, especially with respect to his treatment of the relationship between affliction and Creation; and to Richard Rees, Brave Men: A Study of D.H. Lawrence and Simone Weil (1958), Simone Weil: A Sketch for a Portrait (1966), whose writings I feel obligated to discuss at greater length.

Rees, as we know, was the man chiefly responsible for the translation of Weil's writings into English. In Brave Men and Simone Weil: A Sketch for a Portrait, as well as in A Theory of My Time: An Essay in Didactic Reminiscence (a work, published in 1963, which is greatly influenced by Weil), he has also left us with his own understanding of Weil's thought. One might say, in general, that Rees' discussion of Weil's thought is characterized by a high degree of moderation; he certainly cannot be accused of engaging in unfounded speculation. He is well aware of his own limitations in discussing certain aspects of Weil's thought, in discussing, for example, the question of necessity, and therefore he exercises a proper degree of restraint in dealing with these aspects of Weil's thought. There is no doubt, however, that Rees has an excellent grasp of Weil's thought as a whole. Indeed, his understanding of what Weil is saying about modernity, about humanistic and evolutionary philosophies, about freedom and progress, is probably unsurpassed in any of the secondary literature. I feel no hesitation, in the final analysis, in using Rees to support many of the arguments that I deal with in my own study, to support those arguments, at least, where I am

not myself engaging in an interpretation which goes beyond the bounds of what is absolutely clear in Weil herself.

4) Writings which, while tending to situate Weil within the context of both Christian and non-Christian traditions of spirituality, are either sympathetic or critical of what they understand Weil's position to be with respect to these traditions.

It would indeed be difficult for anyone writing about Weil not to address himself, in one way or another, to Weil's position with respect either to Christianity or to the many other spiritual traditions which informed both her life and her thought. The concerns which are generally addressed by writers in this context are, for example, Weil's position vis-à-vis the Church, the question of her being a saint, her understanding of Christianity, especially in relation to the Incarnation and the Crucifixion, her (as some see it) syncretism, her understanding of Judaism and the Romans, and her understanding of history, which, once again, raises questions concerning her views about Judaism. In that the various reactions of many of these writers to most of the preceding questions are dealt with in the Appendix, and in that I also refer to many of these writers throughout my study in the context of my own concern with Weil's understanding of the central aspects of Christianity, it will therefore suffice at this point to simply list a number of writings which are representative of this general category of the secondary literature.

The reader, therefore, might refer to the following: Gerda

Blumenthal, "Simone Weil's Way of the Cross", Thought (1952); Paule Bugnion-Secrétan, Simone Weil, itinéraire politique et spirituel (1954); Melville Channing-Pearce, "Christianity's Crucial Conflict: The Case of Simone Weil", Hibbert Journal (1950-51); Marie-Magdeleine Davy, The Mysticism of Simone Weil (1951); Dina Dreyfus, "La Transcendance contre l'histoire chez Simone Weil", Mercure de France (1951); Bernard Halda, L'Evolution spirituelle de Simone Weil (1964); Gaston Kempfner, La Philosophie mystique de Simone Weil (1960); J.P. Little, "The Symbolism of the Cross in the Writings of Simone Weil", Religious Studies (1970); J.-M. Perrin (editor), Réponses aux questions de Simone Weil (1964); Robert Rouquette, "Simone Weil, Mathématicienne de Dieu", in André Rousseaux, ed., Littérature du XXe siècle (1953); Louis Salleron, "La théologie de Simone Weil", Pensée Catholique (1974).

There are four writings in this context, finally, that I would like to discuss separately. These are the writings of Leslie A. Fiedler, "Simone Weil: Prophet out of Israel, Saint of the Absurd", Commentary (1951); Martin Buber, "The Silent Question: On Henri Bergson and Simone Weil" (1952), in his On Judaism (1967); Elizabeth Jennings, "A World of Contradictions: A Study of Simone Weil", The Month (1959); and Maurice Friedman, "The Modern Gnostic", in his To Deny Our Nothingness: Contemporary Images of Man (1967). The authors of these four writings share two things in common; in the first place they are all extremely critical of what they understand Weil to be saying in relation to the denial of the self; and in the

second place they are all extremely critical of what they understand Weil's position to be with respect to Jews and the Jewish religion.

There is no doubt, to begin with, that Weil thought about the self (the 'I') in the most negative of terms, terms that expressed her conviction that the self is something that should be annihilated (killed, destroyed, denied, etc.), and there is no doubt that her views in this connection have been greeted with a great deal of criticism. She is criticized both in terms of the way in which she treated her own self (her life and death), and in terms of her theorizing about the self. She is criticized, for example, because it is felt that she pursued her own destruction (Jennings), because of her contempt for reality and her self-hatred (Fiedler), because she contested the 'I' (Friedman and Buber), and because her writings express a strong and theologically far-reaching negation of life, a negation of both the individual and society as a whole (Buber). It is my view, however, that the majority of those who have criticized Weil in this regard have not fully understood what she is saying about the self.

As I have discussed this question in great detail in the third and fourth chapters of this study, it will be sufficient for our purposes here if I simply summarize what I understand Weil to be saying about the self. Very briefly, then, it can be said that the self, for Weil, represents all that is imperfect or impure in man. She therefore identifies the self with the state of sin and sees it as being the cause of all suffering and evil. That which

constitutes the self, in the final analysis, is everything in or associated with a human being that in any way expresses or says 'I', which is to say that the self is constituted by all of the faculties (the will, the intelligence, etc.) that all human beings are said to possess in common and in terms of which all aspects of their individual personalities are formed and characterized. It is the self, for Weil, that prevents man from knowing the truth, that prevents him from being virtuous or just, that prevents him, in essence, from loving; -- and man can only love, according to her, if God is present (grace), and God, in turn, can only be present if the 'I' in man is not present. In other words, Weil does not think it is possible to truly practise philosophy (the art of dying, following her interpretation of Plato), or that it is possible to be truly just or virtuous in this world -- not, that is, if one's 'I' is present as the source either of one's thought or of one's actions. It is her belief, more importantly, that love can only have as its object that which is absolutely worthy of love, i.e. God, just as desire, for her, is always, in essence, desire for the good. It is thus axiomatic for her that only God can love God, which is to say that only God incarnate (the God-Man), and those who imitate Him, are capable of love in this world. Such an incarnation, however, necessitates the death of the 'I' or the denial of the self. The denial of the self is thus conceived of as a process of purification which brings about the possibility of love in this world, that brings about, therefore, the incarnation of God in this

world.

On the one hand Weil is denying existence as it is lived in terms of this world alone, while on the other hand she is affirming existence which is lived in harmony with the Truth. This is not to say that she is denying that reality for a man consists in his existence on this earth. Indeed, she would affirm this assertion even for Christ, even, that is, for an incarnation of God.⁷ This, however, does not mean that the existence of the less perfect (he who lives his life in terms of this world alone, or 'non-de-created' existence, to use Weil's terminology) participates in the same reality as the existence of the more perfect ('de-created' existence). Weil does not want to confer the same reality on non-de-created existence as she does on the Incarnation, for example. Although reality for a man consists in his earthly existence, strictly speaking this existence is but a shadow of reality; it would possess the fulness of reality only if it were to become perfect. In other words, existence and reality are not the same thing for Weil. Existence possesses more and more reality to the extent to which it corresponds to perfection, to the extent to which it participates in that which is absolutely pure. De-creation (the destruction or denial of the self, the death of the 'I') is thus a process of purification which allows man to leave behind his 'old being' (his non-de-created existence) and come into contact with God. And the being who has come into contact with God, unless there is a literal death as a result of this contact, does not 'disappear' from this world. His

new being is 'incarnated', for it is only through contact with God in this world that evil can be destroyed, that God's love and justice, God's perfection can be revealed; it is only through the possibility of contact with God in this world that one could forgive God for the affliction of men at any time and in any place. Neither Christ nor the Bodhisattvas forsook this world. Plato is yet another who indicates that the emancipated being (the philosopher) who has emerged from the Cave, who has seen the sun itself, as it is in itself, re-enters the Cave in order to lead others out of it.

This, of course, is an extremely brief and abstract account of Weil's thinking about the self, but it is sufficient, I think, to allow me to address myself to the criticisms mentioned above. Let me say, to begin with, keeping in mind that I have discussed these questions in great detail in the main text of my study, that Weil cannot be accused, as Buber accuses her, of expressing a strong and theologically far-reaching negation of life.⁸ This is not to say that she did not contest the 'I', or even that she did not hate her 'self'. She did wish to destroy her 'I' or her 'self', but not in the sense of a literal self-destruction (the destruction of 'her-self'), i.e. suicide. I think that Fiedler and Jennings are also wrong in this respect, for the destruction of the self that Weil is speaking about should be understood in terms of a 'self-emptying', a getting rid of or a transcending of all that is impure or tainted in one's self. This 'de-creative' process, far from being a negation of the individual or of society, is an affirmation of existence,

existence, that is, which is lived in the fulness of reality and in harmony with the Truth. Weil's thinking in this context is informed by a 'love of reality', not, as Fiedler would have it, by a 'contempt for reality'.⁹ And the ultimate example of a being who loves reality, and who lives his or her life in the fulness of reality, is, like Christ, an incarnation of God. Weil does not, therefore, as Friedman claims, conceive of God as being so transcendent that He has nothing to do with the world.¹⁰ If this were so, then the whole notion of 'incarnation' would be foreign to Weil's thought. It might be said, finally, that Buber's criticisms may stem from the fact that Weil would want to remove the 'I' in his 'I - Thou' relationship before she would want to say that the 'Eternal Thou' (God) is present in that relationship. Be that as it may, I think that all of these writers have failed to fully understand what Weil is saying about the self. I doubt, in the case of Buber and Fiedler, considering the date of their articles, that they were very well acquainted with Weil's writings. Friedman, on the other hand, may simply be following the criticisms of Buber, for he is not only the English translator of most of Buber's works, but also a devoted follower of Buber's thought.

The writings of the four authors that I have been considering here in relation to their criticism of Weil's thinking about the self are also critical, as I remarked earlier, of her thinking about Judaism. In fact, she is frequently criticized in this respect, for she is often extremely harsh and abrupt in her reactions to

certain aspects of the Jewish religion. Apart, however, from her reading of the Old Testament and Spinoza, there is little indication in Weil's writings that she was familiar with very many of the major Jewish writers and thinkers. There is no indication, for example, that she was aware of the Hasidic tradition, to which, I think, she would have been very sympathetic. Nevertheless, there is no reason to think, had she been more familiar with the Jewish tradition, that she would have changed her mind about important theoretical questions. She may have been less harsh in some of her statements, but even that is debatable. After all, she was extremely critical of Christianity (and far more often than she was of any other religious or philosophical tradition), even after she was 'taken possession of by Christ'. The question, I think, which is at the heart of her criticism of Judaism has to do with the notion of 'Providence'. Let me simply say, as once again this is a question that I discuss in detail in the fifth chapter of my study, that the notion of God intervening in this world, whether on behalf of an individual or a group of individuals, or in the sense of directing the flow of events in time, is a notion which is absolutely unacceptable to Weil. I believe that most of Weil's criticisms of Judaism arise out of her thinking about the question of Providence.

It would seem that many who write about Weil from within the Jewish tradition feel that their people and their tradition have lost a great mind and spirit in the person of Weil. This is certainly true of Buber, who also thinks of Henri Bergson in this

way. Fiedler is another who expresses this sentiment in his claim that it is Weil's tragedy as well as Judaism's tragedy¹¹ that she could not turn to Judaism. This same sense of remorse is also expressed by many who write about Weil from within the Christian tradition. They too feel a great loss in the fact that Weil refused to be baptised, and therefore that she never officially became a Christian. In fact, she refused to become a member of any group or organization, whether political, ideological, or religious. She stood outside of all such groups, taking from each the truth that could not be confined within strict boundaries but which belonged, at any time and in any place, to whosoever desired it. It is unfortunate, however, that her position in this respect has drawn such harsh criticism from within both the Christian and the Jewish traditions. In spite of the fact that many think of Weil as a saint, she is also thought of as a heretic. From within the Christian tradition, at least, there can be no harsher criticism than this. The criticism that Weil is subjected to from within the Jewish tradition, on the other hand, reaches its limits when she is thought of as a Jewess who hated Judaism (Jennings),¹² that is, when she is thought of as a passionate anti-Semite (Fiedler).¹³ This, without a doubt, is the harshest criticism that Weil is subjected to in any of the literature that is devoted to the understanding of her position with respect to both Christian and non-Christian traditions of spirituality.

5) Writings which discuss Weil's thought from a certain

angle or in relation to a particular theme.

The writings that I would include under this particular category are those that are primarily concerned with Weil's thought, and not with her life. They are writings which concentrate on a particular theme in Weil's thought, and attempt, in varying degrees, to come to grips with the metaphysical principles which underlie Weil's thinking in relation to this particular theme. I would, for example, include my own study of Weil under this particular classification of secondary literature. I am not only concerned with a particular theme in Weil's thought ('the idea of the absence of God'), but I also approach her thought from a certain angle; that is to say, I am also concerned throughout my study of Weil with understanding how her thinking about the idea of the absence of God can be said to be the 'link' which would enable us to think with truth at the same time about the affliction of men and the perfection of God. I would say, at least generally, that most of the writers who focus on a particular theme in Weil's thought are genuinely concerned, above all else, with understanding her. I say 'generally' because certain writers do not appear to be concerned with understanding her. In this context I would like to look specifically at the work of both Miklos Vetö (one who is concerned with understanding her) and Susan A. Taubes (one who does not appear to be concerned with understanding her). To begin with, however, I will indicate to the reader a number of writings that might be consulted in relation to this particular category of secondary

literature.

The reader might therefore consult the following: Maurice Blanchot, "L'Affirmation (le désir, le malheur)" in his L'Entretien infini (1969); André-A. Devaux, "Liberté et nécessité selon Simone Weil", Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie (1976); Alain Goldschläger, "Remarques sur la notion de Dieu chez Jules Lagneau et Simone Weil", Pensée et les Hommes (1977); J.J. McManmon, "Simone Weil and the Tyranny of Self over Spirit", Chicago Review (1964); Michel Narcy, Simone Weil: Malheur et beauté du monde (1967); Hilary Ottensmeyer, Le Thème de l'amour dans l'oeuvre de Simone Weil (1958); Susan Anima Taubes, "The Absent God", Journal of Religion (1955); and the extensive work of Miklos Vetö, "Uprootedness and Alienation in Simone Weil", Blackfriars (1962), "Le Piège de Dieu: l'idée du beau dans la pensée de Simone Weil", La Table Ronde (1964), "Simone Weil and Suffering", Thought (1965), "La Connaissance et la mort", La Table Ronde (1965), "Le Mal selon Simone Weil", in Akten des XIV. internationalen Kongresses für Philosophie, III (1969), La Métaphysique religieuse de Simone Weil (1971).

Of the two writers that I would like to discuss separately, Miklos Vetö and Susan A. Taubes, I shall begin with Taubes. The reason why I am particularly interested in the article by Taubes ("The Absent God") is that its title very clearly suggests that she is concerned with understanding Weil's thinking about the idea of the absence of God. This, unfortunately, is not the case. Taubes is not concerned with understanding Weil's thinking about the idea

of the absence of God; she is concerned, rather, with the idea of the death of God, and with showing how Weil, following in the wake of Nietzsche, has formulated a new kind of atheism -- "a religion of a dead God".¹⁴ Not only has Taubes failed to grasp what Weil means by the absence of God, but what is worse, she has identified the idea of the absence of God with the idea of the death of God. In the first place, the very essence of what Weil means by the absence of God is expressed for her in Christ's cry of dereliction on the Cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" This cry, far from expressing the death of God, expresses, rather, the 'absence of God from God', and what this implies for Weil is that the idea of the absence of God cannot be thought without at the same time thinking the idea of the presence of God, without, that is, thinking the idea of 'incarnation'. Weil's thinking about the idea of the absence of God is simply incomprehensible apart from her thinking about the Cross and the idea of incarnation. The total lack of consideration that Taubes gives to these ideas, and to the fact that they are inextricably tied together, is clearly indicative that she does not have the slightest conception of what Weil really means by the absence of God.

In the second place, the 'death of God' and the 'absence of God' are terms that cannot be identified in Weil. I doubt, in fact, that Weil's theoretical position would even allow her to conceive of the death of God. Let me explain by reference to a passage from Weil's Cahiers, a passage that Taubes herself quotes.¹⁵ Weil says

that "Ce monde en tant que tout à fait vide de Dieu, est Dieu lui-même", and that "La nécessité en tant qu'absolument autre que le bien est le bien lui-même." (Cahiers, III, p. 39)¹⁶ This, in my view, is one of the most important passages in all of Weil's writings; it is, at the same time, one of the most difficult passages to understand. Weil is making an identity here, an identity between this world and God, and between necessity and the good. The difficulty lies in determining on which level this identity is being made, whether, that is, it is being made on the level of this world or necessity, or on the level of God or the good. In other words, is God or the good being subsumed in this world or necessity, or is this world or necessity being subsumed in God or the good? It is my view that Weil is saying the latter (even the construction of the two sentences would seem to indicate this), even though it is not until the Conclusion of my study that I feel I have satisfactorily worked out her position to the extent that I can unreservedly make this claim. To make this claim is to deny that Weil is identifying God and this world on the level of this world, because then she would be affirming that God is dead, that God has never been, is not, and never will be anything other than a fiction for us. God is a reality for Weil, however, and therefore she is not referring to the death of God when she speaks of the absence of God. Taubes, on the other hand, has interpreted the passage that is quoted above to mean that Weil is identifying God and this world on the level of this world, to mean that God is subsumed in this world, that God, in effect,

is dead. She does not explain how she comes to interpret Weil in this way, but simply assumes that Weil is speaking about the death of God whenever she is speaking about the absence of God.

I believe, in the end, that Taubes has not only misunderstood Weil, but that she has interpreted her in a way that is diametrically opposite to the way in which she should be interpreted. In spite of the fact that she speaks of the 'religious atheism' (a term which has little, if any, meaning) of Weil, and distinguishes between this form of atheism and secular atheism, there is ultimately no argument presented by Taubes that suggests why 'religious atheism' is not 'atheism' pure and simple. She cannot present such an argument, in fact, for she completely fails to understand the way in which the idea of incarnation is inextricably linked to the idea of the absence of God for Weil; in other words, she completely fails to understand the idea of the absence of God from God. Her article on Weil is misleading, to such an extent, I believe, that it misleads Thomas J.J. Altizer into thinking that it is an accurate reflection of Weil's thought, and, as such, that it should be included in the first part, "The death of God in the Modern World", of his (the editor) Toward A New Christianity: Readings in the Death of God Theology (1967). Why, I wonder, did he not use selections from Weil's own writings, as he did with William Blake, for example, or Dostoevsky and Nietzsche? -- except for the fact, if he had read Weil, that he would find nothing in her writings that could be construed as a 'death of God theology'. My own study of Weil should,

I hope, dispel any illusions concerning Weil's 'atheism'.

In sharp contrast to the work of Taubes, and indeed to most of the secondary literature on Weil, is the work of Miklos Vetö. Vetö is one of the very few who have endeavoured to present a comprehensive and systematic explanation of the very foundations of Weil's thought. His work, I believe, particularly La Métaphysique religieuse de Simone Weil, is unparalleled in this respect. Vetö has attempted in this work to enucleate the essential roots or foundations of Weil's thought, and he has done this by concentrating on a conceptual study of 'conversion' (the conversion of the individual, i.e. his return to God) as well as on the metaphysical-theological context of this idea as it is developed in Weil's thought. He endeavours, at the same time, to situate her thought in relation to the two thinkers who most decisively influenced her, i.e. Plato and Kant. In this respect, once again, his contribution to the Weillian scholarship is unparalleled. I, at any rate, am not in the least hesitant in referring to Vetö throughout my own study of Weil, as I feel that his work is probably the best, if not the very best, of its kind that has so far been published on Weil.

I think it is an achievement of a high order, in fact, that a writer such as Vetö is able to evoke in a reader the true desire to understand a thinker of Weil's stature. He has certainly evoked this desire in my own case, especially, for example, in relation to the question of the 'identity and continuity of the self', a question which Vetö raises near the end of La Métaphysique religieuse.

I was simply unable, as it were, to allow this question to stand there without responding to it, and my response, in turn, forced me to think very clearly and at length (pp. 153-182 of Chapter Four) about Weil's position in relation to this question. It may be, in the end, that I go too far in my extending of the language of 'absence' in order to develop analogies that reflect, in my view, the position that Weil adheres to; and it may be that my response, which is an attempt to understand the question of the identity and the continuity of the self in terms of my interpretation of Weil's thinking about the idea of 'incarnation', will not satisfy Vetö himself. It is not, however, that I have attempted to 'resolve' this particular question in my study; I have simply attempted, in my own way, to elicit a deeper understanding of some of the more significant issues that are related to this question. I may, of course, be wrong in my interpretation of Weil in regard to this particular question, or in regard to the many other questions that I have discussed in her thought, but I would not easily or quickly change my mind -- not, that is, unless someone with as deep and clear an understanding of Weil as Vetö has were to clearly demonstrate that I was in error. In summary, then, I would highly recommend the writings that Vetö has contributed to the study of Weil, particularly La Métaphysique religieuse de Simone Weil.

6) Feminist literature.

We come, finally, to a form of literature of which we have seen a great proliferation in the past two decades. It would seem

that virtually any woman who in any way has asserted her independence, who in any way has distinguished herself -- whether in the world of letters or in the world of art, in business or in government, in sports or in any other profession (including the 'oldest') or activity whatsoever, in the past, the present, or the future -- has, is, or is likely to become a topic of discussion for the growing number of those who champion the feminist cause. At least we are certainly more aware today than we have been in the past of the lives and the accomplishments of the fairer sex. Their achievements, largely unnoticed or ignored throughout our historical past, have often been given the recognition that is their due through the work and dedication of the feminist movement. The more we are made to realize that women are not inferior beings, that they possess the same abilities and faculties that men possess, the more, I think, the feminists should be applauded. This leads me to wonder, however, why it is that Weil has largely been ignored by the champions of the feminist cause. I say this because I am only aware of two writings about Weil that are in any way associated with the feminist movement. These are the writings of Megan Terry, Approaching Simone (1973; Feminist Press), and Elizabeth Hardwick, "Reflections on Simone Weil", Signs (1975; 'Journal of Women in Culture and Society').

Before specifically discussing these writings, however, it may be helpful to reflect on the stance that Weil herself would take with respect to the feminist movement. To begin with, I think that we should be aware of Weil's attitude towards women in general,

to the fact, that is, that she found nothing that was specifically or typically feminine to be in any way worth emulating. She did not care for the chit-chat, the fashions, or the coquetry of the female. She did not feel, for example, that one's clothing should reflect the social class of which one was a member. Dress, unfortunately, is a constant reminder to the majority of people everywhere that equality is something that they do not possess. Weil herself was unconcerned with 'personal appearance'; she dressed simply, almost austere, more like a man than like a woman, and never in the style of the day. Her life was equally austere, passionately devoted, as it was, to the plight of human beings, to their affliction and oppression, to how they came to be in this state and how their condition could be alleviated. If Weil was lacking anything in this respect, it was the physical strength to do all that she wanted to do. In this respect, in fact, she felt that it was unfortunate she had been born a woman.¹⁷

I think, more importantly, that it is necessary to be aware of Weil's unwavering desire to seek and to uncover the 'truth' and the 'reality' of man's situation in this world, and that such a desire prohibited her from categorically adopting the policy or the doctrines of any group or organization, or from becoming a member of any group or organization. The feminist movement would be no exception in this context. Weil would be as critical of the feminist movement as she was of all other groups and organizations, for all of them would be guilty, in varying degrees, of keeping the

truth about man's situation in this world hidden under a cloak of prestige or ideology. It is difficult, especially from 'within', to penetrate beneath the prestige or the ideology that is draped around any group or organization; that is to say, it is difficult to determine the extent to which any group's opinions correspond to the truth when it is so often the case that it is precisely the doctrines or the opinions of the group that are imposed upon the individual members of the group, and that determine how and what they are expected to think. However, it is not only the 'We' of groups and organizations that tend to prevent an individual from clearly seeing what is real, it is also the 'I' of every individual that tends to keep truth and reality hidden behind a veil of falsehood and illusion. The whole process of thought (which, for Weil, is something that a group, a 'We', is incapable of) that is involved in coming to grips with truth and reality is one that involves a continual self-effacement; it is a process which is not possible if one's thinking is determined in advance by the dictates of some group or organization to which one adheres or belongs. It is a process, so it would seem, that few people have the desire to engage in, and so it is that they escape from thinking either by covering themselves in a blanket of security that is provided from within the confines of some organization or movement, or by using the prestige of some organization or movement to further their own prestige and status in this world. What consistently happens, of course, is that instead of the truth that may be expressed or contained within any individual or group

being made the sole object or concern of one's thinking, it is both the individual and the group who are made the sole object or concern of one's thinking, who, in effect, are idolized.

It was Weil's hope, in the end, should anyone read her, that they would focus on whatever truth might be contained within her writings, and not on her life. She did not feel that the life of any being, unless such a being happened to be perfect (an incarnation of God), was worthy of special consideration, and least of all of adoration. To understand what she was trying to say, on the other hand, which is what she wanted, demands of the reader as much an effort of attention and a degree of self-effacement as she herself possessed. This in itself is surely one reason why Weil has not become a model for the champions of the feminist movement. She is not as easily accessible, for example, as a Virginia Woolf, a Sylvia Plath, or a Simone de Beauvoir, and she is not likely to become 'popular' in the way that such writers have become popular. Nevertheless, in relation to many of the questions that are of deep concern to the feminists, questions such as 'equality', 'working conditions', 'rights' (and 'obligations'), it must be said that the very significant contribution to these questions that has been made by Weil has largely gone unnoticed by the feminist movement.

The two writings which can be considered as being written from within the framework of the feminist movement, the writings of Elizabeth Hardwick and Megan Terry, are, unfortunately, concerned more with Weil's life than with her thought. Hardwick's article,

"Reflections on Simone Weil", is a very brief and general (although accurate enough) discussion of the uniqueness of Weil's thought and of the 'courage' of Weil's life. She is essentially dependent on a few of the English translations of Weil's writings, and on the work of E.W.F. Tomlin, Simone Weil. Terry's work (Approaching Simone), on the other hand, is an excessively inaccurate portrayal of Weil's life in the form of a play. One must assume, however, that Terry, as a playwright, has the licence to portray her main character in whatever way she pleases. One must assume, as well, I suppose, that the portrayal of Weil's life in dramatic form would not work in the theatre without a great deal of sensationalism. As Terry's play is not an accurate reflection of Weil's life, and as it is extremely sensationalistic, I find it difficult to assess either its validity or even the purpose that the author had in mind in writing it.¹⁸ It is best, I think, if the reader judges this play on his or her own, for I am probably not a good judge of drama. I remember, for example, the time that I went to see Samuel Beckett's En Attendant Godot. I was greatly irritated during the performance of this play, not because of the play, mind you, but because of the audience -- because the audience was continually laughing. I suppose that I could not take part in this merriment because of a lack of understanding on my part, for I did not find anything tremendously or even remotely humorous about the play that was being performed. I find nothing even remotely humorous about Weil's life (or thought) either, and I think that Terry's play would make

the audience laugh, and that they would probably leave the theatre with smiles on their faces.¹⁹

I would think that the reader has by this time a much clearer picture of the different kinds of studies that have been written about Weil, as well as a clearer picture of where I stand with respect to this literature. That which remains to be clarified is the problem of how to distinguish between my presentation and my interpretation of Weil's thought. More precisely, it is important that the reader understands why I have written my study of Weil in the way that I have; that is to say, it is important to understand why my study of Weil is not 'critical', why, that is, I am not concerned with whether I agree or disagree with what she is saying, and consequently why I am concerned only with what she 'means'.

Let me say, in the first place, that I do not think it is possible to understand the thought of another person unless one is able to think in the same way that that person is thinking, unless, that is, one is able to think the same thoughts that that person is thinking. To think the same thoughts that another person is thinking is not, however, something that is easy to do, for it means that one must be detached from one's own thoughts, that one must be detached, for example, from the thought of whether what is being thought is true or false. One's personal opinion concerning that which is being thought has nothing to do with what is being thought, and more often than not will prevent one from truly thinking that which is being thought, and thus from understanding the thought that one

supposedly desires to understand. The extent to which I understand Weil depends, therefore, on the extent to which I succeed in detaching myself from my own personal opinions; in other words, it depends on the extent to which I succeed in getting rid of my 'I'. This, in fact, is what Weil would say is required of herself in thinking, and thus understanding, what others have thought; it is the criterion, indeed, in terms of which she understands the practice of philosophy. The reason why I am concerned only with what Weil means is directly linked to her understanding of what philosophy is, and therefore it is necessary that the reader also understand what she means by 'doing philosophy'.

Weil felt that there are two kinds of philosophy, and thus two kinds of philosopher. On the one hand there are those who build or construct systems (Aristotle, Hegel), while on the other hand there are those who are attached to the Platonic tradition (Descartes, Kant), and whose entire study is oriented towards salvation.²⁰ There is absolutely no doubt, however, that it is the latter who are considered by Weil to be the true masters of thought; indeed, they are the only ones in her view that truly deserve the name of philosophers.²¹ Philosophy, as such, is neither concerned with the building of systems nor with the acquisition of knowledge; it is concerned, rather, with bringing about a transformation in the orientation of the soul with a view towards the assimilation of the soul to God. Such a transformation, in turn, is brought about by 'detachment'. Weil explains what she means by detachment in the unpublished essay,

"Quelques réflexions autour de la notion de valeur".

La réflexion suppose une transformation dans l'orientation de l'âme, que nous nommons détachement (...). Le détachement est un renoncement à toutes les fins possibles sans exception, renoncement qui met un vide à la place de l'avenir comme ferait l'approche imminente de la mort; c'est pourquoi dans les mystères antiques, dans la philosophie platonicienne, dans les textes sanscrits, dans la religion chrétienne, et très probablement toujours et partout, le détachement a toujours été comparé à la mort et l'initiation à la sagesse regardée comme une sorte de passage à travers la mort. (...) Mais le détachement dont il s'agit n'est pas vide d'objet; la pensée détachée a pour objet l'établissement d'une hiérarchie vraie entre les valeurs...; elle a donc pour objet une manière de vivre, une meilleure vie, non pas ailleurs, mais en ce monde et tout de suite (...). En ce sens, la philosophie est orientée vers la vie à travers la mort...²²

There is no doubt, as well, that Weil was greatly influenced in her thinking about philosophy by Alain. Alain himself was deeply rooted in the Platonic tradition. He thought, in fact, that Plato not only had not been left behind but was far ahead of us, and in this context Alain was totally opposed to the idea of progress in philosophy.²³ It is precisely this, i.e., the denial of the idea of progress in philosophy, which is at the very heart of Weil's understanding of philosophy. To deny that philosophy can progress or evolve is to deny that there can be anything new in philosophy. It is, at the same time, to affirm all of the following: that there is a universal standard of truth that can be known by all men at all times, a standard of truth which is the limit of all human thought and all human action and in terms of which they should be limited; that the good (or perfection, truth, justice, love) is not,

as the modern notion of progress would have it, situated in chronological sequence (the temporal); and lastly, but most importantly, that the Redemption is not a temporal operation, that it is not a historically unique 'once for all' event. There is no thought or action which does not find its true meaning in the Eternal for Weil. For her, all changes take place within an order that is eternal, and that order, in turn, is not affected by these changes. Her position is clearly that of the classical philosophical tradition. It is a position which modernity is not at home with. Indeed, it is a position which, because it entails that man is not his own (the denial of human freedom), sounds the death toll of the modern notion of progress.

If we focus on the question of how it is possible to conceive of God's perfection when men have always and everywhere been afflicted, we can say that it is the answer to this question which gives rise to Weil's philosophical position. If the answer to this question is to be valid for all men, then something is being said about the nature of truth. Thus the answer to this question leads Weil to formulate a general criterion for truth: "Il est impossible que la vérité entière ne soit pas présente en tout temps, en tous lieux, à la disposition de quiconque la désire", and "Tout ce qui n'a pas toujours été en tous lieux à la disposition de quiconque désire la vérité est autre chose que la vérité." (La Connaissance surnaturelle, p. 270)²⁴ This means, in turn, that "L'esprit de vérité, de justice et d'amour n'a absolument rien à voir avec un millésime; il est

éternel." (L'Enracinement, p. 289)

At least for Weil, there is no answer to man's affliction if truth is not eternal. The fact that one can speak of acts of cruelty as being good in one century and evil in another is indicative of the hopeless situation that is encountered when truth is seen to be relative. Philosophy is usually viewed as a conjectural state of affairs in this context, and those who practise it are usually the ones who construct the systems which have as their main purpose the elimination of contradictions. If truth is relative, and thus something we make for ourselves, then these systems of thought can be varied to infinity. As such there is no reason for choosing one system over any other system. Conversely, however, when truth is viewed as being eternal, the task of philosophy is radically changed. It is no longer concerned with the formulation of systems, but rather with the taking of an inventory of the thoughts which are given to the human mind. As Weil says: "A proprement parler il n'y a pas de nouveauté possible en philosophie. Quand un homme introduit dans la philosophie une pensée nouvelle, ce ne peut guère être qu'un accent nouveau imprimé à une pensée non seulement éternelle en droit, mais antique en fait." (Sur la science, p. 184)²⁵ What, then, is the purpose of philosophy if philosophy can neither be said to progress nor to evolve? "Le seul renouvellement dont elle [la philosophie] soit capable est celui de l'expression, quand un homme se l'exprime à lui-même et l'exprime à ceux qui l'entourent en des termes qui ont rapport avec les conditions

de l'époque, de la civilisation, du milieu où il vit. Il est désirable qu'une telle transformation s'opère d'âge en âge, et c'est la seule raison pour laquelle il peut valoir la peine d'écrire sur un pareil sujet après que Platon a écrit." ("Quelques réflexions autour de la notion de valeur".)²⁶

It should be clear from this brief summary of Weil's understanding of philosophy why my study of Weil is not 'critical', why, that is, I am concerned only with understanding her. If one follows her conception of what philosophy is (which one must do if one is to understand her), then it should be clear that the main purpose of philosophy is to think upon that which is eternally true or unchanging. To think upon that which changes in this context would be to think upon that which takes place within an order that is eternal and unchanging, an order, that is, which is not affected by these changes. Philosophy is thus concerned with those thoughts that have been, are, and always will be given to or imposed upon the human mind. It is not concerned with the discovery of something 'new', for strictly speaking there is nothing new for philosophy to discover; nor is it concerned, therefore, with the construction of new systems which are progressions or advances over older systems, for strictly speaking philosophy cannot progress. This, of course, is how Weil understands and practises philosophy. If I am to understand what she is saying I must also 'practise philosophy' in the same way -- irrespective of whether I agree or disagree with this conception of philosophy. I would not understand her, therefore,

if I attempted to assimilate her thought into some system in terms of which it could be judged or analyzed, nor would I understand her if I attempted to discover new ideas that superseded those that she thought about. In her own terms, Weil herself made no progression over the thought that she came into contact with, nor did she discover anything new. Whether or not I agree or disagree with her, I nevertheless take what she says about philosophy seriously, and consequently I desire above all else to understand her thought in terms of the limitations that her thinking about philosophy imposes upon me. These limitations, in fact, prevent me from engaging in any form of criticism that is based on my own personal opinion; they prevent me, in the final analysis, from trying to do anything more than understand Weil. If I do add anything to the understanding of her thought, it cannot be a new idea or anything that goes further than what she herself is thinking about; it can only be, as she herself suggests, a new 'accent' that may help to clarify and illuminate some thought that is not only eternal by right, but ancient in fact. Indeed, it is only because of this 'accent' that it is necessary to distinguish between my presentation of and my interpretation of (or the 'accent' that I bring to) Weil's thought. If this 'accent' were not present in my study of Weil there would be no reason (beyond my own desire to understand her) for my having written it, nor would there be any reason for anyone to read it, to read it, that is, in addition to the reading of Weil's own writings.

If, therefore, I do add anything to the understanding of Weil's thought, it can only be in the sense that I help to illuminate the way in which the major aspects of her thinking are inextricably linked to her thinking about the idea of the absence of God. The way in which I develop and expand upon her thinking about the idea of the absence of God, the way in which I relate this idea to the other major aspects of her thought, the images and the analogies that I use to make and to support these relations, and finally the conclusions that I draw -- all of this, if you will, is the reflection of my own contribution to the study of Weil's thought. If it is thought that this contribution is in any way original, so be it. I, however, make no claims to originality. To make such a claim, in fact, would not only prove that I have not understood Weil, but also, because of the fact that I have not understood her, that my study does not and cannot contribute to the understanding of her thought. Those, in turn, who claim that Weil is an original thinker have not fully understood what she herself understands by philosophy.

With the understanding, therefore, that I am not attempting to say anything 'new' in my study of Weil, the reader should be aware that I have made no effort, either in the main text of my study or in the footnotes, to distinguish between what Weil says and what I add to or infer from what she says. In other words, I make no effort to distinguish between what she says and how I interpret what she says, as I believe that what I add to and infer

from what she says is an accurate reflection of her thought. The reader, nevertheless, should be able, at least for the most part, to distinguish between my presentation and my interpretation of Weil's thought -- and this in spite of the fact that I never write in the first person singular in the main text of my study. It is much easier, I believe, to follow the main arguments in the text without my constantly interrupting the reader in order to point out that it is 'I' who am making such and such an inference, statement, or claim, or that it is 'I' who am using such and such an image, phrase, or analogy, etc., etc. On the other hand, however, it is still necessary that the reader be aware of where I would make these interruptions, if, that is, I were to make them in the main text of my study.

The reader should realize in a general way, to begin with, that many of the images and analogies that I draw upon to illustrate certain arguments in my study are not necessarily those of Weil. The same is true, of course, with respect to many of the inferences and claims that I make in my study; that is to say, it is not always the case that Weil has literally expressed herself in exactly the same way that I express myself. I make certain inferences and claims, for example, which, although I feel they are accurate reflections of Weil's thought, are not explicitly stated by Weil herself. Once again, however, I think that the reader should be able to distinguish between my presentation and my interpretation in most cases, as these differences are usually sufficiently clear

in the text itself. It is what I say that may not be clearly distinguishable from what Weil says which I feel it is necessary to discuss here in the Preface.

It should be noted, in the first place, that I use the language of 'absence' far more freely, and certainly far more frequently, than Weil uses this language. There is one phrase, in particular, that I quite frequently use in this context: 'the sovereign presence of that which is absent'. I derive this phrase from the only passage in Weil's writings where she expresses herself in a similar fashion. She is speaking about the idea of the cube, and she says: "Le véritable cube, jamais vu, est un exemple de l'absence qui est souveraine présence." (Cahiers, III, p. 112)

I, however, will use this phrase, 'the sovereign presence of that which is absent', in relation to far more than Weil's thinking about the idea of the cube. I will use it, for example, in relation to any aspect of Weil's thought which has to do with her understanding of the idea of 'incarnation'. What I mean in each instance, in turn, is entirely clear in the context, whatever it may be, in relation to which I use this phrase, just as it is entirely clear what I mean by 'absence' in the context in relation to which I use the language of 'absence'.

There are, in the second place, certain images and analogies that I use in my study of Weil which she herself does not use. There are, as well, certain images and analogies that I derive from her, but which I either develop in a different way or use in a different

context. It is necessary in the second place, therefore, to distinguish between certain images and analogies that I use and those that Weil uses.

I speak, both in the Introduction and in the Conclusion (pp. 15, 232-233) in terms of understanding what Weil means by affliction in relation to the 'word become flesh', and in terms of my study of her thought being the study of the 'poetry' which she feels God has written. Weil does not speak in these terms.

I use the analogy (p. 26) of a thermometer which, like a thermometer which is able to read the freezing point of various gases, is able to read the point at which each individual soul is reduced to a state of affliction. This analogy is entirely the product of my imagination.

I use the analogy of a circle three times (pp. 52, 53, 58) in my discussion of the question of necessity. In the first instance I am simply trying to explain what Weil, in terms of her own use of the circle as an analogy in this instance, is saying about necessity in Intuitions pré-chrétiennes (pp. 151-152, 159-160). I develop the analogy of the circle in the second instance in an attempt to explain the idea of mediation in terms of seeing the Word (Christ) as a 'mean proportional' or 'mediator'; while in the third instance I am attempting to explain the 'snare of time' in terms of a circle which encloses us on all sides.

In the context of my discussion of the idea of 'choice', I use the analogy (p. 69) of 'a ball bouncing back and forth between

two walls in a vacuum'. This analogy, once again, is entirely the product of my imagination.

Weil sometimes uses the imagery of 'breaking the shell of an egg' when she is thinking about both Creation and individual salvation. I use this imagery (pp. 108-109) in terms of the latter, i.e. individual salvation, and specifically in relation to the idea that it is the 'I' which constitutes the shell that is placed as a screen between God and God, and which, as such, must be broken or destroyed.

Finally, I use the analogy of 'wearing different coloured glasses' (pp. 110-111) as a means of describing the different individual perspectives which colour things in this world. These glasses, as I explain, must be removed before one can see the true colour of reality. This analogy can nowhere be found in Weil, although it is not entirely the product of my imagination; Frederick Copleston, as I recall, uses a similar analogy in his study of Kant.

There are, in the third place, certain statements or claims that I make in my study which are not explicitly or literally made by Weil. Most of these statements or claims are made in relation to how I interpret Weil's thinking about the idea of incarnation, and these I will discuss separately. For the moment, however, I wish simply to make the reader aware of a few very significant and central claims that I have made in my study. If I am wrong in making these claims, it is important that the reader realize that it is 'I' who am at fault, and not Weil.

For example, I will occasionally make the claim in my study of Weil (pp. 65, 85, 202, 225) that 'to be free is to think clearly about our not being free'. Weil does not express herself in this way, although here, at least, I am quite certain that what is being said is an accurate reflection of her thinking about freedom.

In the third chapter of my study (p. 87), I say that 'salvation is nothing less than the revelation of God to Himself'. This is an inference on my part; Weil does not literally say this.

In the fourth chapter of my study (p. 141), I make the claim that 'evil is the absence of good'. Here again, although Weil does not literally say this, I am quite certain that this is an accurate statement concerning her thinking about evil. I give further support to this claim, in fact, in footnote 26 of the same chapter.

I make the claim in the fifth chapter (p. 205), finally, that 'good is nothing less than the absence of God from God'. This is very much an assumption on my part, and here it is very difficult to know with certainty whether Weil would agree to this, and if she did, whether or not she would express herself in such terms.

There are, in the fourth place, many ideas in Weil's thought that I reflect upon and deal with in different ways than Weil does herself. For the most part it is simply the way in which I emphasize particular aspects of her thinking about certain ideas, and the way in which I develop and underline these particular aspects

of her thought, that can be said to constitute the 'accent' that I bring to or add to her thought. With respect to my discussion of the question of necessity in the second chapter, for example, I attempt to clarify Weil's thinking about necessity by distinguishing between and emphasizing the 'two sides or faces of necessity', while in the fifth chapter as well as in the Conclusion I concentrate on understanding Weil's thinking about necessity in terms of what the identity of good and necessity would mean for her. My discussion of freedom in the second chapter is characterized by my underlining of what I see in Weil as a 'practical way of looking at freedom'. When I look at the question of sin in the fourth chapter, my discussion is developed in terms of drawing out and expanding upon what I understand Weil to be saying about the story of Adam. My discussion of evil, in turn, both in the fourth and in the fifth chapters, is characterized by an emphasis on the idea of 'limits'. There are two ideas that I deal with in my study of Weil, however, which I feel it is necessary to discuss in more detail. These are the ideas of 'predestination' and 'incarnation'.

Weil rarely speaks about the idea of predestination, and when she does it is usually in the context of her understanding of Plato's Republic. I, on the other hand, will frequently use the language of 'predestination' in my study (pp. 35-40, 92-94, 131, 151, 156, 157, 192, 256: footnote 22, 264: footnote 51), and what I mean by this term is based largely on Weil's understanding of Plato, which is to say that I understand 'those who are predestined'

to mean those emancipated beings (the philosophers) who have left the Cave, seen the sun itself, as it is in itself, and re-entered the Cave in order to lead others out of it. Predestination, at least according to the way in which Weil interprets Plato, is directly related to the idea of salvation. There is no doubt in my mind, and I am certain that there would be none in Weil's mind, that this notion of predestination can be applied to anyone who anywhere, at any time and in any way (by whatever method) has received the grace of God in this life. When I speak of predestination, therefore, I am not referring only to those who, according to Plato, are truly philosophers; I am referring to anyone who has ever been the recipient of God's revelation.

Probably the most important idea that I deal with in my study of Weil is the idea of incarnation. I say this because I do not think it is possible to understand what Weil is saying about the absence of God if one does not understand her thinking about incarnation. These two ideas are inextricably tied together in her thought; they are tied together, most specifically, in her thinking about those immortal words of Christ on the Cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" They are tied together, in other words, in the idea of the absence of God from God. This, at least, is what my study of Weil will attempt to demonstrate. This means, in turn, that I will be placing a great deal of emphasis on the importance of the idea of incarnation in my study, far more so, in fact, than Weil does herself. It should be noted, however,

that I do not seriously discuss the idea of incarnation in any depth until that point in my study (p. 153) where I am about to engage in a lengthy discussion of the question of the identity and continuity of the self, although from this point in my study until the very end of my study it is the idea of incarnation that quite clearly underlies and informs my discussion of whatever aspect of Weil's thought that I happen to be dealing with. The reader should consequently be aware that the way in which I develop this idea, the contexts in which I use it, and the analogies in terms of which I attempt to describe it, are all very much the reflection of how I think Weil can and should be interpreted.

To begin with, then, it should be noted (pp. 165-167) that I use Weil's thinking about the necessities and impossibilities involved in thinking pure geometrical forms as an analogy for thinking about the possibility of the incarnation of absolute good in this world. The connection that I make here (which is fully explained in the text of my study) between thinking pure geometrical forms and thinking the possibility of the incarnation of absolute good is not a connection that Weil makes herself.

At the end of the fourth chapter (p. 182) I make the assertion that it is the Incarnation (in the form of the absence of God from God) which is the link that enables us to think with truth at the same time about the affliction of men and the perfection of God. Weil does not explicitly make such an assertion. I also conclude at this point in my study (p. 182) that redemptive suffering is an

operation involving nothing less than an incarnation of God. This, too, is an inference on my part; Weil does not literally say this.

What I say in the fifth chapter (pp. 204-207) about the death of the innocent being in conformity to the will of God, as well as what I say about death and salvation in general, is entirely inferred from how I think Weil can be interpreted in this context.

At the end of the fifth chapter (p. 218), I conclude that 'if we are to give an explication of why God abandons Christ on the Cross, it can only be because that is the only way God can be present in the souls of the innocent who suffer affliction'. This, at least, is what I think can be legitimately concluded here; it is not a conclusion that is explicitly or literally made by Weil.

Everything I say, finally, that has to do with the question of how it is possible to think with truth at the same time about the affliction of men and the perfection of God, or about necessity's indifference to the good and how necessity and the good can be reconciled, is the reflection of how, in terms of Weil's own thinking, I think that she would respond to this question. The entire Conclusion of my study, in this respect, is a summary of my reflections concerning how I think Weil would respond to this question; it is a summary, in effect, of the 'accent' that I have brought to her thought, an accent, hopefully, that will help to clarify and illuminate one of the most important ideas that she thought about: the idea of the absence of God.

I hope, in conclusion, that the reader has at least a clearer

picture of the major concerns that underlie both my approach to Weil's thought and what I hope to accomplish in my study of her thought. The Preface, consequently, has served to introduce the reader to Weil's own writings as well as to indicate to him or to her the method I employ in dealing with these writings; it has served to introduce the reader to the secondary literature as well as to indicate to him or to her where I stand with respect to this literature; it has served to make the reader aware of why my study is concerned only with understanding Weil and therefore of what Weil means by 'doing philosophy'; and, lastly, it has served to make the reader aware of what I understand my contribution to the study of Weil to consist of, and therefore of how I distinguish between my presentation and my interpretation of Weil's thought. It has been necessary, finally, to deal with all of these concerns in the Preface because I do not explicitly deal with them in the main text of my study. In this context the Preface is little more than a series of cautionary remarks on my part which serve to make the reader aware of the limitations that are involved in both my approach to Weil's thought and what I hope to accomplish in my study of her thought. I believe, nevertheless, that the main text of my study of Weil can be understood and judged independently of the cautionary remarks that have been made in the Preface.

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INTRODUCTION

And why do we speak today of the 'absent God,' a term which plays a role in literature and art, and most of all in the personal experience of innumerable people. . . . Let me say something about the 'absent God,' by asking -- what is the cause of His absence? We may answer -- our resistance, our indifference, our lack of seriousness, our honest or dishonest questioning, our genuine or cynical doubt. All these answers have some truth, but they are not final. The final answer to the question as to who makes God absent is God himself!¹

It is true that much of the literature and art of this century addresses itself to the idea of the absence of God. In fact, it is even more common to hear another phrase in this context, that of the 'death of God'. There are undoubtedly many similarities between these two phrases, but nevertheless they entail essentially different meanings; they are not equivalent.² Be that as it may, there is little doubt that in this century the greater number of people who have provoked us to think seriously about God's absence have done so out of and in relation to situations of violence and terror, situations of staggering affliction resulting from man's propensity for engaging in war. Of course this propensity for engaging in war is not exclusive to this century, for there have been few periods in history when men have not somewhere been engaged in armed conflict; but we have more records from survivors today than we did in the past, and it is from these, the survivors, as well as from many who also left records but who did not survive in the midst of this century's atrocities, that we have received the clearest and most profound proclamation of the absence of God. Indeed, it is from one who did not survive the

devastation of the Second World War, Simone Weil, that we receive one of the most penetrating interpretations of the absence of God and of the contradictions inextricably imposed upon human life because of that absence. The absence of God in this world, as one commentator has put it, became the cornerstone of both Weil's personal experience and her dialectic.³

The entire written testimony which has been bequeathed to us by Weil is nothing less, in fact, than the spiritual legacy of a soul patiently waiting upon or attending to the contradictions imposed upon human life because of God's absence. This is not to say that Weil attempted to provide solutions to what she considered to be life's essential contradictions. She was as baffled as anyone else when confronted with the inexorable contradictions at the heart of human life, but she had the courage to contemplate these contradictions tirelessly and ceaselessly. And it can be said that it was as a result of her contemplation of these contradictions that she was led more and more to see the absence of God as being the fundamental fact with regard to the universe, a fact which, ultimately, leads her to see Christ's cry of dereliction on the Cross as the supreme example of man's situation in this world. Indeed, it would not be going too far to say that her contemplation of these contradictions constituted or formed the catalyst for her eventual person to person contacts with Christ.

As Weil's writings are nothing less than a tireless and ceaseless contemplation of the contradictions which are inextricably imposed upon human life, it should not be surprising that the very

essence of her thought is itself expressed in the form of contradiction. We can see this with the utmost clarity in the following three passages.

La contradiction essentielle dans la vie humaine, c'est que l'homme ayant pour être même l'effort vers le bien est en même temps soumis dans son être tout entier, dans sa pensée comme dans sa chair, à une force aveugle, à une nécessité absolument indifférente au bien. C'est ainsi; et c'est pourquoi aucune pensée humaine ne peut échapper à la contradiction. (OL, p. 228)⁴

J'éprouve un déchirement qui s'aggrave sans cesse, à la fois dans l'intelligence et au centre du coeur, par l'incapacité où je suis de penser ensemble dans la vérité le malheur des hommes, la perfection de Dieu et le lien entre les deux. (EL, p. 213)

Comment peut-on sans accuser Dieu supporter la pensée d'un seul esclave crucifié il y a vingt-deux siècles, si on pense qu'à cette époque le Christ était absent et toute espèce de sacrement inconnue? (AD, p. 147)⁵

The thought that Weil is expressing in these lines is that which she feels to be the very essence of man's situation in this world. Is there really anything else to consider except the affliction of men, the perfection of God, and the link between the two? To put this in another way, is there really anything else to consider except necessity, necessity's indifference to the good, and how necessity and the good can be reconciled? Weil thought at great length about the questions raised in the above lines, and her thinking eventually brought forth some very startling ideas which can be summarized in three further lines. She said that "L'absence de Dieu en ce monde est la réalité de Dieu", that "Ce monde en tant que tout à fait vide de Dieu est Dieu lui-même", and finally that "La nécessité en tant qu'absolument autre que le bien est le bien lui-même." (III, p. 39)

The absence of God in this world (or the non-intervention of God in this world) is the idea par excellence which is at the heart of Weil's thinking about man's situation in this world. Our purpose in this study will be to understand what Weil is saying about man's situation in this world with respect to the idea of the absence of God; in other words, our purpose will be to understand the relationship between this world and God in the context of the absence of God, and therefore to understand the relationship between necessity and the good in the context of necessity's indifference to the good. To be even more specific, our purpose will be to understand the significance of the idea of the absence of God in the context of thinking with truth at the same time about the affliction of men, the perfection of God, and the link between the two; or, to express the same thing in different terms, our purpose will be to understand the significance of the idea of the absence of good in the context of thinking with truth at the same time about necessity, necessity's indifference to the good, and how necessity and the good can be reconciled. This, in turn, will mean that we will also be concerned with understanding what is meant in thinking that "L'absence de Dieu en ce monde est la réalité de Dieu", that "Ce monde en tant que tout à fait vide de Dieu est Dieu lui-même", and that "La nécessité en tant qu'absolument autre que le bien est le bien lui-même." (III, p. 39)

Our study will consequently be focused on those aspects of Weil's thought that most clearly reflect her thinking about the idea of the absence of God in terms of the relationship between this world (man) and God, and in terms of the relationship between necessity and

the good. We will therefore develop the idea of the absence of God in terms of five major themes: 1) the question produced in the depths of the soul by affliction; 2) the cause of affliction: necessity; 3) the art of dying: the bringing about of the absence of God; 4) redemptive suffering: the bringing about of the fulness of the absence of God; and 5) the absence of God in Creation. Our discussion of these five major themes in Weil's writings will reveal to us, in turn, that the idea of the absence of God is completely unintelligible apart from a comprehensive understanding of the question of necessity, and that the question of necessity is itself ultimately unintelligible apart from an understanding of Weil's interpretation of Christ's cry of dereliction on the Cross. It will therefore be necessary to deal with and to emphasize the question of necessity as well as Weil's interpretation of Christ's cry of dereliction, not only in and of themselves, but also in relation to each major theme that will be discussed in our study.

It is not possible to consider the idea of the absence of God in Weil's thought without looking at the Cross; indeed, the two cannot be separated. As Bugnion-Secrétan says of Weil: "Elle aussi, comme tous les mystiques, connaît parfois l'absence de Dieu. D'avance, elle l'accepte, elle l'aime; c'est pour elle l'équivalent du point culminant de la crucifixion, de ce cri du Christ qu'elle écoute constamment: Mon Dieu, mon Dieu, pourquoi m'as-tu abandonné?"⁶ Anyone who writes that "Il n'y a, il ne peut y avoir, dans quelque domaine que ce soit, aucune activité humaine qui n'ait pour suprême et secrète vérité la Croix du Christ" (PS, p. 126), that "La seule

source de clarté assez lumineuse pour éclairer le malheur est la Croix du Christ" (PS, p. 124), and that "La Croix du Christ est la seule porte de la connaissance" (III, p. 63), is expressing as clearly as possible the locus classicus of the theology of the Cross: "to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." (I Cor. 2:2) As the contemporary Christian theologian, Jürgen Moltmann, says: "All statements about God, about creation, about sin and death have their focal point in the crucified Christ", and thus "every theology which claims to be Christian must come to terms with Jesus' cry on the cross", that is to say, "with the knowledge of God in the crucified Christ, or, to use Luther's even bolder phrase, with the knowledge of the 'crucified God'."⁷ There can be absolutely no doubt that Christ's cry of dereliction is at the very heart of Weil's thinking.⁸ She quotes the cry of dereliction in full more than twenty times in her writings.⁹ Further, every time that she speaks of the cry in the depths of the human soul, or of the question 'why?' uttered by those in affliction, she is also referring to Christ's cry of dereliction.

Christ's cry of dereliction, as we shall see throughout our study, is most consummately expressed in the idea of 'the absence of God from God'. Here, in a nut shell, is the idea that we will have to enucleate in order to see that God, for Weil, is not only totally absent from this world (that the good is not only totally other than necessity), but that God is also totally present in this world (that the good is also totally inscribed within the very fabric of necessity), that God, in effect, is simultaneously both totally absent from and totally present in this world (that the good is simultaneously both

totally other than and totally inscribed within necessity). In other words, that which we will ultimately draw attention to in discussing the idea of the absence of God in Weil is the idea of the sanctity of matter, the union of divine spirit with matter, i.e., the presence of God in this world: Incarnation. This presence, for Weil, is the source of all pure truth, justice, good, and beauty which can exist in this world. It is a presence, however, which is the plenitude of absence, for it is constituted by the absence of God from Himself in the Creation. There is nothing more crucial to an understanding of Weil than the recognition that God's absence is always and everywhere the reflection of the true reality of God. Whether she is thinking of the absence of pure forms from all the apparent forms that we perceive in the contemplation of theoretical necessity in the understanding of the world, and of the necessities and impossibilities attached to the possibility of the incarnation of these purely theoretical conceptions in technique and in work, or whether she is thinking of the feeling of the absence of good produced in the depths of the soul by affliction, and of the necessities and impossibilities attached to the possibility of the incarnation of absolute good in that soul, what she is underlining, and therefore that which we must endeavour to understand in our study, is that the very reality of this universe and all that takes place within it is constituted by the sovereign presence of that which is absent; it is constituted, in other other words, by the sovereign presence of He who is absent: God. God can be present in Creation in no other form than absence.

The ideas which are presented here, all of which are extremely

important within the context of our study of Weil, will be discussed in detail in the main text of our study. That which we should take note of in the present context, however, is again the fact of how important both the question of necessity and Weil's interpretation of Christ's cry of dereliction are to an understanding of her thought. We cannot over-emphasize the importance of either of these aspects of Weil's thought; the one, in fact, cannot be thought without the other. Our entire study, in a sense, is therefore essentially an explication of the relationship that Weil sees as existing between necessity and Christ's cry of dereliction, the relationship that she sees as existing, in effect, between this world and the absence of God. Weil's thinking about the question of necessity, as well as her interpretation of Christ's cry of dereliction, whether they are considered in and of themselves, or whether they are considered in their relationship to each other, are aspects of Weil's thought which have not been sufficiently and thoroughly analyzed in the existing scholarship that is devoted to her thought.¹⁰ To deal with these aspects of Weil's thought is, of course, to deal specifically with her thinking about the idea of the absence of God; but more importantly, it is to deal specifically, at the same time, with her thinking about the idea of the presence of God, and therefore with her thinking about the idea of incarnation. We cannot separate Weil's thinking about the absence of God from her thinking about the presence of God, and thus we cannot separate her thinking about necessity from her thinking about incarnation. It is not simply the absence of God from this world or necessity's indifference to the good that we must understand

in Weil's thought; what we must also understand, and what, indeed, is more important to understand, is that the distance which separates this world from God or necessity from the good is not absolute, that God is also secretly present in this world, and that the good is also mysteriously inscribed within the very fabric of necessity. This is so, according to Weil, because the supreme expression of the absence of God, the absence of God from God (Christ's cry of dereliction), implies Incarnation. To attempt to understand what Weil is saying about the idea of incarnation, especially in relationship to her thinking about the question of necessity, is to attempt to understand an aspect of Weil's thought which has neither been dealt with in any detail nor analyzed in any depth. This, in essence, is what we hope to accomplish in our study of the idea of the absence of God in Simone Weil.

We must be careful to understand, however, that Weil was not a Christian theologian. Her thought is certainly centred in Christ, but she herself stood outside of the Church. This, of course, does not necessarily invalidate the meaning and significance that she attaches to the Christ event, but it does raise certain difficulties that lie beyond the scope of this study. It lies beyond the scope of this study, for example, to examine the many interpretations of the Christ event which have either been accepted or rejected as official Christian doctrine, and whether Weil's thinking agrees or is in conflict with these many interpretations. Not only is this an unfeasible task, but it is also one that is wrought with further complications because of Weil's situation vis-à-vis the Church, and

because of the differing views as to whether or not she was a Christian or even a saint. It is, of course, as a result of Weil's having been taken possession of by Christ, and of having refused baptism that this debate arises. Lacking all authority to speak to these questions, we can only refer the reader to the writings of Weil where she speaks of her mystical experiences, and to the writings of those who felt qualified to comment on these experiences, as well as on her position with regard to the doctrines of the Church.¹¹

We should note, finally, before proceeding directly with our study of Weil, that when we refer to or quote secondary sources in order to illustrate certain ideas in our discussion, we are in no way suggesting that the authors of these quotations are in agreement with the whole of Weil's thought. On the other hand, it is not our intention to discuss all of the discrepancies that exist between the thought of Weil and that of other writers, although we will, when necessary, point out any major differences. We should note as well in this context that we will not be directly examining the thought of the two thinkers who most clearly influenced Weil's thought, i.e., Plato and Kant.¹² Weil drew from many sources, and therefore in discussing her thought we will necessarily be looking both implicitly and explicitly at her interpretation of those sources. Again, however, it is not within the scope of this study to examine the discrepancies that exist between Weil's thought and that of her major influences, nor to analyze whether she is right or wrong in her interpretation -- be it of Plato, Kant, quantum physics, or the doctrines of traditional Christianity.

It is not our purpose, in the end, to agree or disagree with what Weil is saying in relation to the idea of the absence of God. Our purpose, in the first place, is to understand the contradictions that she believes are inextricably imposed upon human life because of the absence of God, and in the second place, it is to see whether or not her thinking about these contradictions is consistent with her thinking about Christ's cry of dereliction on the Cross. In that it is the Cross of Christ which is exemplified as the secret truth of all human activity for Weil, this truth immediately brings us face to face with a seemingly monstrous scandal and a profound contradiction. After all, Jesus died crying out to God, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" As Moltmann says:

That 'God', the 'supreme being' and the 'supreme good', should be revealed and present in the abandonment of Jesus by God on the cross, is something that it is difficult to desire. What interest can the religious longing for fellowship with God have in the crucifixion of its God, and his powerlessness and abandonment in absolute death? In spite of all the 'roses' which the needs of religion and the theological interpretation have draped round the cross, the cross is the really irreligious thing in Christian faith. It is the suffering of God in Christ, rejected and killed in the absence of God, which qualifies Christian faith as faith, and as something different from the projection of man's desire.¹³

It is hard to imagine any greater contradiction than that represented by Christ being abandoned by God on the Cross. Nevertheless, it is solely in terms of Weil's thinking about this contradiction that we believe we can come to understand the idea of the absence of God and the manner in which her interpretation can be said to be the form of answer that would enable us to think with truth at the same time about the affliction of men, the perfection of God, and the link

between the two.

CHAPTER ONE

THE QUESTION PRODUCED IN THE DEPTHS OF THE SOUL BY AFFLICTION

Weil thought that the two essential truths of Christianity were expressed in the Trinity and the Cross, the one being perfect joy, the other perfect suffering (affliction). She thought that it is necessary to know both of them, as well as their mysterious unity. On the other hand, however, she felt that "ici-bas nous sommes placés par la condition humaine infiniment loin de la Trinité, au pied même de la Croix. La Croix est notre patrie." (PS, p. 113) Weil consequently writes about affliction far more than she does about joy. It is affliction (and more specifically, the affliction of the innocent) which most clearly reveals to Weil the reality of human life.¹

It is not surprising to her that the innocent are tortured and killed, driven from their homelands, reduced to slavery or thrown into concentration camps. Nor is it surprising that some are paralyzed and crippled for life, or die in the wake of floods and famines. For those who have been spared from disease and the devastation of natural disasters, there are always enough human beings in the form of criminals to reduce the rest to slavery or to kill them. Disease, natural disasters, and criminals are all of the same order; that is to say, they are all part of the universe, and as such they are all at the mercy of a mechanical, mathematical, absolutely deaf and blind necessity which is sovereign throughout the universe. What is surprising to

Weil is "que Dieu ait donné au malheur la puissance de saisir l'âme elle-même des innocents et de s'en emparer en maître souverain. Dans le meilleur des cas, celui que marque le malheur ne gardera que la moitié de son âme." (PS, p. 88)

It is affliction which causes us to feel that human life is impossible. It does this because affliction is the feeling of the absence of good.² At least this is what Weil claims to be the feeling of those who have suffered affliction. This is not to say, however, that this feeling of the absence of good is intelligible. A contemporary Jewish writer, Elie Wiesel, speaking of the survivors of Hitler's death camps, says that they, being "more realistic if not more honest, are aware of the fact that God's presence at Treblinka or Maidanek -- or, for that matter, his absence -- poses a problem which will remain forever insoluble."³ This unintelligibility is universalized by Weil. She reflects on it in relation to all beings who have died at any time and in any place. The problem is stated very succinctly when she says: "quel saint transfigurera la misère des esclaves morts sur la croix à Rome et dans les provinces romaines au cours de tant de siècles?" (II, p. 151)

The way out of this darkness for the Christian is found in the contemplation and imitation of Christ. This is also the way that Weil follows. The affliction of innocent souls and their complete subjection to the absolutely deaf and blind play of mechanical necessities are unintelligible unless "on pense que nous avons été créés comme les frères du Christ crucifié", and unless "on pense que l'univers entier dans la totalité de l'espace et du temps a été créé

comme la Croix du Christ." (IP, p. 167) The Cross of Christ becomes ✓
 for her the only source of truth, the only source of light bright
 enough to illumine affliction in no matter what age or country. And
 even if the story of Christ is a symbol, a metaphor, Weil is of the
 belief, as the ancients were, that metaphors produce themselves as
 events in the world.⁴ To refer to the German concentration camps
 once again, with specific reference in this context to the work of
 Terrence des Pres on the subject of the survivors of these camps, it
 may be said that for the majority of us, "what we experience symbolical-
 ly, in spirit only, survivors must go through in spirit and in body.
 In extremity, states of mind become objective, metaphors tend to
 actualize, the word becomes flesh."⁵ It is our purpose to understand
 what Weil means by affliction in relation to the 'word become flesh',
 and thus to come to grips with the form of poetry which she feels
 God has written.

In a letter to an English poet whom Weil had met in Solesmes
 in 1938, she says that it was not till Christ had known the physical
 agony of crucifixion that he uttered his immortal cry, "a question
 which shall remain unanswered through all times on this earth 'My God,
 why hast thou forsaken me?'" When poetry struggles toward the expressing
 of pain and misery, it can be great poetry only if that cry sounds
 through every word."⁶ That cry sounds throughout the Gospels. Here
 we have not simply the revelation of human misery, but the revelation
 of misery in the person of a being who is at the same time human and
 divine. The accounts of the Passion tell us that a divine spirit united ✓
 to the flesh is affected by affliction, suffers and trembles before

death, and at the moment of deepest agony, feels himself separated from men and from God.⁷

In our opinion, all of Weil's thought is grounded in the 'why?' which Christ uttered on the Cross. Her thinking not only begins from this point, but it also ultimately leads back to this point. From the cry of dereliction she is able to define affliction and distinguish between it and suffering. She is able to speak about the cause of affliction (necessity) and the various forms this cause takes (for example, time) in relation to it. As well, she is able to look at the questions of finality and freedom in terms of it. Her thinking about the 'I' and the necessity of destroying it (expiatory suffering) is essentially man's way of preparing himself for the 'why?' Her analysis of redemptive suffering, in turn, is the very essence of her thinking about the 'why?' Finally, it is the 'why?', Christ's cry of dereliction, which leads her to conceive God and the Creation in the way that she does, i.e. in terms of 'absence'.

What is it that Weil sees in Christ's cry of dereliction? It will be best if we begin by simply summarizing the essential ideas that Weil sees as arising out of Christ's cry on the Cross, to have the essential framework of her interpretation behind us, as it were, before discussing each idea separately. In the first place, the cry that is addressed to God by Christ, 'My God, why hast thou forsaken me?', is understood as being addressed to God by Himself. God does not answer Christ; He does not answer Himself; He is silent. It is this silence which is the key for Weil, for it means that God has abandoned Christ, that God has abandoned God. The same thing can

be expressed by saying that God is absent from Christ, that God is absent from God. What must be kept in mind here is that the absence of God from Christ does not have the same significance as does the absence of God from myself, for example. The criterion for the absence of God from Christ being equivalent to the absence of God from myself (or any other human being) is innocence (the state of perfection). One must be innocent, and then reduced to a state of affliction, before one can share in the absence of God from Christ. Then the absence of God takes on its full significance; it becomes the fulness of the absence of God: the absence of God from God.

That which Weil emphasizes above all else is the unity of Christ and God.⁸ From this unity, the words of Christ on the Cross do not simply mean 'My God, why hast thou forsaken me?', but at the same time, and more importantly, 'My God, why hast thou forsaken thyself?' This latter 'why?' (although, strictly speaking, it is identical to the first 'why?') is a question which, if answered, would provide the key for unlocking the mystery of the Creation. The absence of God from God suggests to Weil that the Creation is best understood as a withdrawal on the part of God, as an abdication or abandonment of a part of God by God. God's abandonment of Christ on the Cross is the model for Weil's thinking about the Creation. Christ was allowed to die on the Cross. He was subjected to the cold and pitiless mechanism of necessity that rules throughout the universe (the Creation itself). He died like a common criminal, his body itself bearing the marks of nail and spear. Christ's immortal cry indicates that God does not intervene in the universe, not even to

save Christ -- not even to save Himself. He allows necessity to rule as sovereign master. The absence of God from Christ, and thus the absence of God from the universe imply that the universe would not exist, that is to say that there would not be a Creation, unless God was absent and eternally maintained this absence. And further, it is only when God is totally absent -- the absence of God from God (Christ's cry of dereliction) -- that God's presence is revealed. To understand this presence would be to understand the Creation itself.⁹

It is God's abandonment of Christ on the Cross which leads Weil to conceive of both human and non-human nature in the same way. Since God has withdrawn in the act of Creation, the universe and everything in it are subjected to a harsh and brutal network of relations constituting necessity. We cannot have a thought or take a step without running up against necessity. What this means is that Weil's conception of the universe is one in which human beings are determined and have no freedom. This is an extreme view; but then Christ was not free to come down from the Cross. If we take the view of man held by behavioural psychology, and the view of the universe held by empirical science, we have, in a nut shell, the views of both human and non-human nature that Weil would subscribe to as being the only really legitimate views. On the other hand, however, because of her interpretation of Christ's cry of dereliction, she does not believe that these views are absolute in and of themselves. The affliction of Christ is such that, even though human beings are not free, Weil can see human suffering as having a significance above

and beyond the deterministic world view of the natural sciences.

The 'why?' of Christ carries us beyond any 'cause and effect' answers of this world. For this reason she can speak of the destruction of the human being, and of the notions of sin and evil, as having meaning in terms of expiatory and redemptive suffering. Indeed, it is by means of the crucifixion that Weil comes to see redemptive suffering and extreme evil as being inextricably tied together. Christ's cry on the Cross leads her to conceive of God as being present in extreme evil, as being present through redemptive suffering. The absence of God from God is the divine form of presence which corresponds to evil, an absence which is felt by Christ, and therefore by God.¹⁰

All that we have said in this brief summary of the ideas that Weil sees as arising out of Christ's cry of dereliction is necessarily very abstract and paradoxical. At least now we have some conception of the very intricate and complicated position she adheres to. What she is trying to do is to think as true at the same time both the affliction of men and the perfection of God. In that she characterizes affliction as the feeling of the absence of good (the absence of God), then what she is attempting to do is seemingly impossible. She feels, however, that the affliction of men does not deny or negate the perfection of God, but that, rather, the absence of God as reflected in the affliction of men is itself the necessary clue that is needed in order to unveil the very nature of God's perfection. Consequently, if we are to understand Weil's thinking about the nature of God's perfection, we must first of all

look in some detail at her thinking about the question of affliction.

Weil's understanding of affliction is based upon her interpretation of the crucifixion. In the essay 'L'amour de Dieu et le malheur' she uses the metaphor of a hammer and nail to describe the crucifixion. From this metaphor we are given a most comprehensive picture of the dimensions of affliction. The passage in question is worth quoting in full.

Quand on frappe avec un marteau sur un clou, le choc reçu par la large tête du clou passe tout entier dans la pointe, sans que rien s'en perde, quoiqu'elle ne soit qu'un point. Si le marteau et la tête du clou étaient infiniment grands, tout se passerait encore de même. La pointe du clou transmettrait au point sur lequel elle est appliquée ce choc infini.

L'extrême malheur, qui est à la fois douleur physique, détresse de l'âme et dégradation sociale, constitue ce clou. La pointe est appliquée au centre même de l'âme. La tête du clou est toute la nécessité éparse à travers la totalité de l'espace et du temps.

Le malheur est une merveille de la technique divine. C'est un dispositif simple et ingénieux qui fait entrer dans l'âme d'une créature finie cette immensité de force aveugle, brutale et froide. La distance infinie qui sépare Dieu de la créature se rassemble tout entière en un point pour percer une âme en son centre.

L'homme à qui pareille chose arrive n'a aucune part à cette opération. Il se débat comme un papillon qu'on épingle vivant sur un album. Mais il peut à travers l'horreur continuer à vouloir aimer. Il n'y a à cela aucune impossibilité, aucun obstacle, on pourrait presque dire aucune difficulté; car la douleur la plus grande, tant qu'elle est en deçà de l'évanouissement, ne touche pas à ce point de l'âme qui consent à une bonne orientation.

Il faut seulement savoir que l'amour est une orientation et non pas un état d'âme. Si on l'ignore on tombe dans le désespoir dès la première atteinte du malheur.

Celui dont l'âme reste orientée vers Dieu pendant qu'elle est percée d'un clou se trouve cloué sur le centre même de l'univers. C'est le vrai centre, qui n'est pas au milieu, qui est hors de l'espace et du temps, qui est Dieu. Selon une dimension qui n'appartient pas à l'espace, qui n'est pas le temps, qui est une tout autre dimension, ce clou a percé un trou à travers la création, à travers l'épaisseur de

l'écran qui sépare l'âme de Dieu.

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

Elle se trouve à l'intersection de la création et du Créateur. Ce point d'intersection, c'est celui du croisement des branches de la Croix. (PS, pp. 103-105)

It is evident from this passage that Weil's thinking about the nature of affliction takes on a cosmic dimension when it is seen in relation to the crucifixion. This dimension is such that every man who suffers affliction can be said to participate in the same cross. This cross is "la totalité de la nécessité qui emplit l'infinité du temps et de l'espace, et qui peut, en certaines circonstances, se concentrer sur l'atome qu'est chacun de nous et le pulvériser totalement." (PS, p. 110) To bear one's cross is to be aware that every part of one's being is subjected to this blind and brutal necessity, except that point in the soul which can go on wanting to love. This point in the soul is so secret that it is inaccessible to the consciousness. It is what Weil refers to as the eternal part of the soul, the part of the soul which can go on wanting to love, the part of the soul which can consent to affliction. From the dimension of affliction depicted in the above passage it is clear that this point in the soul is equivalent to Christ, and therefore equivalent to God, for only God in Christ could consent to (love) the immensity of affliction imposed by the whole of necessity throughout all space and time -- even unto death.

Weil describes affliction in this passage in terms of physical pain, distress of soul, and social degradation. Near the

beginning of the same essay she says: "Il n'y a vraiment malheur que si l'événement qui a saisi une vie et l'a déracinée l'atteint directement ou indirectement dans toutes ses parties, sociale, psychologique, physique. Le facteur social est essentiel. Il n'y a pas vraiment malheur là où il n'y a pas sous une forme quelconque déchéance sociale ou appréhension d'une telle déchéance." (PS, p. 87)

This is simply the characterization of the affliction of Christ.

Christ's death was not that of a martyr.¹¹ For Weil, Christ died like a common criminal, in the same class as thieves, only somewhat more ridiculous. He was made a curse for us. Not only his body with the marks of nail and spear was accursed, but his whole soul also.

Every innocent being in affliction feels himself accursed in the same

way.¹² It is therefore essentially in terms of the humiliation of

Christ that Weil is making this particular characterization of

affliction. Suffering is intrinsic to affliction, but it is not

the most important element. The most important element of affliction

is humiliation.¹³ It is humiliation which ultimately makes of

affliction something impossible to desire, for this humiliation goes

as far as death. Christ died on the Cross.

Indeed, one need look no further than to the question of death to understand what Weil means by affliction. It is in terms of death (quite literally) and of those states approximating death that she describes the essential nature of affliction. It is hard to imagine imagery of a more austere nature than that which she uses to depict the state that one is reduced to by affliction. Some of the images she uses are: 'matière inerte', 'une pierre', 'une chose',

'un ver à demi écrasé', 'un cadavre', 'une chose déchirée et sanguinolente happée par les dents d'une machine', 'n'importe quoi de vil et de méprisable'.¹⁴ As such, affliction is the experience of non-being ("le néant"); it is a death of the soul, either quite literally, because affliction can quite literally kill a man, or else it is a death of the soul in a man who still lives.¹⁵ To acknowledge the reality of affliction, and consequently the imminent reality of one's own death is something that human thought recoils from. It would mean saying to oneself: "Un jeu de circonstances que je ne contrôle pas peut m'enlever n'importe quoi à n'importe quel instant, y compris toutes ces choses qui sont tellement à moi que je les considère comme étant moi-même. Il n'y a rien en moi que je ne puisse perdre. Un hasard peut n'importe quand abolir ce que je suis et mettre à la place n'importe quoi de vil et de méprisable." (EL, p. 35)

One might think that Weil can be accused of associating Christianity with a morbid preoccupation with suffering and grief. In one sense this is true, for Christianity is concerned with suffering. Suffering is part and parcel of our human condition in this world. Christianity, however, does not seek a supernatural remedy against suffering, but a supernatural use of suffering. In this context Weil is thinking of suffering ("la souffrance") in terms of the most extreme form it can take, i.e. affliction ("le malheur"). Suffering in itself is not the same as affliction. Suffering and grief are something quite different from affliction; they are sensations or psychological states which are to affliction what opinion

would be to truth.¹⁶ To be as precise as possible, what distinguishes suffering and grief from affliction is that our natural faculties are still in operation in the former, whereas they are not in the latter. Anything at all, whether it be the intelligence, the imagination, even the biological function of self-preservation, which prevent a soul from fully experiencing death, is no more than a sensation or a psychological state. Pain, whether it be physical or psychological, is nothing once it is over. We are always able to think that the pain we are suffering will not last, or imagine that the distress we are feeling is not the way things really are and that the future will see us in a better state of affairs. If our suffering is intense enough, we are at least able to console ourselves in thinking that we are nevertheless alive and that survival is surely better than death.¹⁷ While suffering of whatever nature is being endured, it is, in essence, the mind, through the imagination, which is capable of eliminating it to a great extent by focusing on something else. And whatever the mind focuses on is a form of consolation which prevents the soul from truly experiencing affliction.

Suffering and grief which are bound up with any form of consolation are incapable of marking a soul with the unique and irreducible mark of affliction: slavery.¹⁸ This mark of affliction is not a psychological state. It is a pulverization of the soul by the blind and pitiless mechanism of circumstances which reduces it to a more or less attenuated equivalent of death. It is imposed from without, quite against a man's will, effecting, in turn, a transformation of his human condition into one analogous to a half-crushed worm writhing

on the ground. The horror and revulsion of the whole being which is felt by the victim is the very branding of the soul which constitutes affliction; it is the experience of the humiliation of Christ.

Although affliction is quite distinct from physical suffering, it is nevertheless inseparable from it. Physical pain is the only thing possessing the power to chain down men's thoughts here below, the only thing that can keep thought from turning away from the contempt and hatred which are inextricably attached to affliction. There are many things which are capable of chaining down men's thoughts (beyond, of course, brute force, which is the essential thing), including certain phenomena which are not exactly physical but which produce an equivalent result. One can imagine, for example, a survivor of Hitler's concentration camps who, following his or her release, and after the war has ended, runs into a German soldier in uniform. The suffering of the survivor in this situation results from the link between the uniform and the hell of the concentration camps. In other words, there are certain things which cause no suffering by themselves, but which, due to an association between a sign (the German soldier's uniform) and the thing signified (the hell of the concentration camps) cause us to suffer a pain which is felt by the body. And it goes without saying that if the survivor were to run into German soldiers in uniform every day for several weeks or months, it would not be very long before he or she was again reduced to the self-same state of affliction that was lived through in the concentration camps.¹⁹

It is obvious, however, that not everyone will be brought to

affliction through the same causes. The multitude of factors that go to make up physical pain, distress of soul, and social degradation (and all of these together) is such that on a purely objective plane, it is not possible to tell at which point a person may be reduced to affliction.²⁰ The same event could plunge one person into affliction and not another. Again, for Weil, the criterion here would seem to be innocence.²¹ In her essay, 'Formes de l'amour implicite de Dieu', she says:

D'une manière tout à fait générale, il y a malheur toutes les fois que la nécessité, sous n'importe quelle forme, se fait sentir si durement que la dureté dépasse la capacité de mensonge de celui qui subit le choc. C'est pourquoi les êtres les plus purs sont les plus exposés au malheur. Pour celui qui est capable d'empêcher la réaction automatique de protection qui tend à augmenter dans l'âme la capacité de mensonge, le malheur n'est pas un mal, bien qu'il soit toujours une blessure et en un sens une dégradation. (AD, p. 157)

✓ "La capacité de mensonge" is the source of the consolations that prevent the soul from truly experiencing affliction. What is certain for Weil, however, in that no one can escape the possibility of affliction, is that there is a limit, a limit on this side of which the most violent, deep, and long lasting misery is not affliction, but on the other side of which there is affliction. If it were possible to make something analogous to a thermometer which can read the freezing point of various gases, the thermometer which would be able to indicate the limit beyond which one is plunged into affliction would indicate a different point at which each individual soul is frozen (death), just as there is a different reading for the freezing point of different gases.

Affliction is ultimately a mystery. For Weil, there is nothing more difficult to comprehend than affliction, for affliction is mute.²² Affliction is felt as being something impossible; it is impossible (i.e. a contradiction) from the point of view of logic that a human being should be reduced to being no more than a thing. This impossibility is felt as a rent in the soul (the feeling of the absence of good), and it is this feeling which is at the heart of Weil's interpretation of the Cross.²³ One can neither regard suffering as an offering nor as a punishment, for these are no more than consolations which throw a veil over the true reality of suffering. "La souffrance n'a pas de signification. C'est l'essence même de sa réalité. Il faut l'aimer dans sa réalité, qui est absence de signification. Autrement on n'aime pas Dieu." (III, p. 112) Even God cannot be present to the sensibility in affliction, because even this is yet another form of attachment. It is for this reason that "Il faut passer par 'Mon Dieu, pourquoi m'as-tu abandonné?' Le malheur extrême ôte Dieu, comme tous les autres objets d'attachement, à la sensibilité." (II, p. 112) The absence of God from the sensibility is what characterizes extreme affliction as an impossibility, an impossibility, however, which becomes reality in the absence of God from God as reflected in Weil's interpretation of Christ's cry of dereliction.

It must be clearly understood from the very beginning that the question 'why?' cannot be given an answer. When Christ uttered the cry of dereliction he did not receive an answer. God was silent. "Dieu a laissé Dieu crier vers lui et n'a pas répondu." (III, p. 274)

It is this silence of God, this non-answer, that Weil finds so significant. Nothing can mark the soul of the afflicted in so lasting a manner as the silence of God. "Le malheur contraint à poser continuellement la question 'pourquoi', la question essentiellement sans réponse. Ainsi par lui on entend la non-réponse. 'Le silence essentiel. . .'" (CS, p. 27) The afflicted feels this silence of God, this absence of God, as an impossibility. From infancy until death, every human being goes on indomitably expecting that good and not evil will be done to him, and this in spite of the crime and suffering that weighs so heavily on human life. Indeed, it is that which, at the bottom of the heart of every human being, goes on expecting good and not evil to be done to him, that is sacred in every human being. There is only one source of the sacred for Weil, and that is the good and all that pertains to it.²⁴ And yet it is precisely that which is sacred in human beings that is put into question by the afflicted when they cry out 'why?' "Le malheur a contraint le Christ à supplier d'être épargné, à chercher des consolations auprès des hommes, à se croire abandonné de son Père. Il a contraint un juste à crier contre Dieu, un juste aussi parfait que la nature seulement humaine le comporte." (PS, p. 88) "Le malheur rend Dieu absent pendant un temps, plus absent qu'un mort, plus absent que la lumière dans un cachot complètement ténébreux." (PS, p. 89) The 'why?' of the afflicted is without an answer. His world is the world of silence; it is the world of the dead, of the millions murdered throughout the centuries. It is a world no longer present, the intimate absence -- of God, of man, of love -- by which he is

haunted. In the cry of the afflicted the dead's own scream is active.

The cry of the afflicted is the single thing which is mentioned more often than anything else in the writings of Weil. It is: 'un cri appelant une finalité'; le cri 'pourquoi me fait-on du mal?'; 'un cri silencieux qui sonne seulement dans le secret du coeur'; 'un cri de douloureuse surprise'; 'un cri muet'; 'un cri pour une réponse qui ne nous est pas accordée'; 'un cri à vide'; 'un appel éternellement sans réponse'; 'un cri de privation et de douleur'; 'un cri d'espérance issu du fond du coeur, tellement inarticulé qu'il est indiscernable pour ceux qui crient'; 'tout ce qui contraint impérieusement la partie sensible de l'âme à crier: Je n'en peux plus! Que cela finisse!'²⁵

It is the cry which, for a moment, deprived Christ of God; which constrained him to believe that he was forsaken by the Father; which accused his Father of having abandoned him; which accused God Himself, through the mouth of Christ, of the Passion; which removed the feeling of God's presence from Christ; which made Christ feel, at the moment of deepest agony, that he was separated from men and from God; which, for an instant, prevented Christ from knowing that the void is the supreme plenitude.²⁶ "Le cri du Christ et le silence du Père font ensemble la suprême harmonie, celle dont toute musique n'est qu'une imitation, à laquelle ressemblent d'infiniment loin celles de nos harmonies qui sont au plus haut degré à la fois déchirantes et douces. L'univers tout entier, y compris nos propres existences qui en sont de petits fragments, est seulement la vibration de cette suprême harmonie." (IP, pp. 168-169) For Weil, the harmony between Christ's 'why?' (ceaselessly repeated by every soul in affliction) and the

silence or absence of the Father is supreme mediation.²⁷ Indeed, the cry of dereliction, 'My God, why hast thou forsaken me', is the perfect praise of God's glory;²⁸ and thus the absence of God from God (the form that God's presence takes in this world) expresses the true glory of God.

The cry which is incessantly repeated by the soul in affliction is really the cry: 'Why are things the way they are?' The afflicted man naïvely seeks an answer from anything or everything, whether it be from men, things, or God (even if he disbelieves in Him). He is asking why it is necessary that he should be hungry, or worn out with fatigue or cruel and brutal treatment, or be in prison or a concentration camp, or be killed or executed. He is asking a question which cannot be given an answer, because his question is not looking for a cause, but rather, for a purpose. Even if one could take into account the whole of the complex interaction of circumstances that led up to his being reduced to a state of affliction, it would not seem to him to be an answer. Indeed, if a comforting or satisfactory reply is found, it can only be that one has constructed it oneself, and the fact that one has been able to do this is indicative that one's suffering has not really attained the degree of intensity necessary for affliction to have entirely gripped the soul.²⁹ The cry of the soul that is truly torn by affliction expresses the search for an end. There is, however, no answer to its cry, for the world is necessity and not purpose. For Weil the whole universe is devoid of finality. This world does not give us final causes; affliction would not be the feeling of the absence of good if there were finality in the world.

It is the feeling of the absence of good, the absence of God, which leads Weil to place the good outside of the world, i.e. to see it as transcendent.

When the soul torn by affliction continually cries out for a finality, it touches what Weil calls the void ("le vide"). It is in this void that the soul feels the absence of God, the absence of anything to love. Yet the soul must go on loving, or at least wanting to love, even if with only an infinitesimal part of itself. "Si elle ne renonce pas à aimer, il lui arrive un jour d'entendre, non pas une réponse à la question qu'elle crie, car il n'y en a pas, mais le silence même comme quelque chose d'infiniment plus plein de signification qu'aucune réponse, comme la parole même de Dieu. Elle sait alors que l'absence de Dieu ici-bas est la même chose que la présence secrète ici-bas du Dieu qui est aux cieux." (IP, p. 168) It is necessary, for Weil, to have been forced to seek vainly for a finality before one is able to hear the divine silence, and only two things possess the power capable of forcing one to do this, either affliction or pure joy which comes from the perception of beauty.³⁰ She feels that beauty has this power because, although it contains no particular finality, it nevertheless presents one with the imperious feeling of a finality.³¹ As we mentioned earlier, affliction (the Cross) and pure joy (the Trinity) are two ways which are equivalent for Weil, but in that affliction is the way of Christ, it is consequently affliction which is of concern to us.

Another point that we should make in relation to the cry of the afflicted is that this cry is not a personal thing. There is

another cry which is essentially related to the personality and its desires, and that is the cry: "Pourquoi l'autre a-t-il plus que moi?" Injury to the personality and its desires refers basically to rights. The cry that is evoked in relation to this personal protest can, for the most part, be answered in terms of this world with the help of our law enforcing agencies and the legal minds which are capable of solving problems of this kind.³² It is a cry, however, which is of an entirely different order than the cry: 'Why am I being hurt?' This latter cry does not refer to rights; it is not a personal thing. It is a contact with injustice through pain, a contact with the cold and merciless mechanism of mechanical necessity (whether of human or non-human nature) which reduces a man to a thing; and it is always an impersonal protest. "Il constitue toujours, chez le dernier des hommes comme chez le Christ, une protestation impersonnelle." (EL, p. 16) The cry: 'Why am I being hurt?' "pose des problèmes tout autres, auxquels est indispensable l'esprit de vérité, de justice et d'amour." (EL, p. 38)

That the cry of the afflicted raises problems that only the spirit of truth, justice, and love can respond to is evident in the description that Weil gives of affliction. It is necessary to repeat (by quoting) part of what we have already said about affliction, so that we will be able to see as clearly as possible the essentially paradoxical nature of the truth, justice, and love that Weil feels is capable of responding to the question 'why?'

Le malheur rend Dieu absent pendant un temps, plus absent qu'un mort, plus absent que la lumière dans un cachot complètement ténébreux. Une sorte d'horreur submerge toute

l'âme. Pendant cette absence il n'y a rien à aimer. Ce qui est terrible, c'est que si, dans ces ténèbres où il n'y a rien à aimer, l'âme cesse d'aimer, l'absence de Dieu devient définitive. Il faut que l'âme continue à aimer à vide, ou du moins à vouloir aimer, fût-ce avec une partie infinitésimale d'elle-même. Alors un jour Dieu vient se montrer lui-même à elle et lui révéler la beauté du monde, comme ce fut le cas pour Job. Mais si l'âme cesse d'aimer, elle tombe dès ici-bas dans quelque chose de presque équivalent à l'enfer. (PS, p. 89)

When the soul in affliction feels the absence of God, that is to say, when it can no longer believe that God is a reality, if it nevertheless continues to love while holding in horror everything in this world (riches, honours, prestige of any form) which would take his place, then it is that God reveals Himself to the soul. For Weil this moment is what St. John of the Cross referred to as 'the dark night of the soul'.³³ What would seem to be assumed here by Weil is that God does not abandon the soul completely to the mercy of chance and men's caprice (necessity). She says that "Le mal infligé du dehors à un être humain sous forme de blessure exaspère le désir du bien et suscite ainsi automatiquement la possibilité d'un remède. Quand la blessure a pénétré profondément, le bien désiré est le bien parfaitement pur. La partie de l'âme qui demande: 'Pourquoi me fait-on du mal?' est la partie profonde qui en tout être humain, même le plus souillé, est demeurée depuis la première enfance parfaitement intacte et parfaitement innocente." (EL, p. 39) And yet, if the soul refuses to love or ceases to love while it is in the void (the dark night of the soul), the absence of God becomes permanent and the soul falls into something which, even in this life, would be almost equivalent to hell.

Weil is not always clear with regard to what is being said here. On the one hand she presents us with a picture of the universe in which we are invariably subjected to necessity. In this respect we are no different in our attitude towards affliction than a flock of hens who rush up and peck another hen who is injured. Through our senses we attach to affliction all the contempt, all the hatred, and all the revulsion that our reason attaches to crime. This is as automatic a phenomenon as gravitation, and it holds equally with regard to ourselves. For someone in affliction, all the contempt, hatred, and revulsion are turned inwards to the centre of the soul from where they colour the whole universe with their poisoned light. Weil believes that this second result can be prevented from coming about, but not the first. Every soul in affliction will feel accursed, just as Christ felt accursed. The humiliation that this accursedness embodies is the very essence of affliction. She feels, however, that those whose soul is inhabited by Christ will not despise the afflicted, and that supernatural love (the soul inhabited by Christ), if it has survived, will prevent the contempt, hatred, and revulsion of the afflicted from tarnishing the world.³⁴ "Il est parfois facile de délivrer un malheureux de son malheur présent, mais il est difficile de le libérer de son malheur passé. Dieu seul le peut. Encore la grâce de Dieu elle-même ne guérit-elle pas ici-bas la nature irrémédiablement blessée. Le corps glorieux du Christ portait les plaies." (PS, pp. 91-92)

On the other hand, for those who cease to love in the void where there is nothing to love, the absence of God becomes permanent.

This can only mean that the cry 'why?' has not really arisen in the depths of those souls which have ceased to love, because, according to Weil, every time that "ce cri monte au coeur d'un homme, la douleur a éveillé dans les profondeurs de son âme la partie où git, enfouie sous les crimes, une innocence égale à celle même du Christ." (CS, p. 308) One cannot awaken this part of the soul without grace. In having an innocence equal to Christ's own, this part of the soul is clearly the 'eternal part of the soul'; it is the only part of the soul which is at the same time both the source of supernatural love and the recipient of supernatural love; it is equivalent to Christ, and therefore to God. Consequently grace and revelation are inextricably attached to the 'why?' They are, however, lacking to those souls which cease to love. Indeed, these souls are unable to love precisely because grace and revelation have not been given.

To say then that the absence of God becomes permanent is to say that certain souls are not saved. There are many obstacles which may prevent a soul from receiving grace. We will discuss the nature of these obstacles specifically when we come to discuss expiatory suffering. Suffice it to say for the present that anything of this world (this universe) which acts as a veil or a screen placed between God and God will prevent the soul from receiving grace. Grace can only be received by that part of the soul which is equivalent to God. Strictly speaking, therefore, only God can reveal Himself to God. What gets in the way of God completely revealing Himself to Himself is the universe, the Creation. To say this in another way would be to say that the eternal part of the soul (which is God) does not

receive grace (is not revealed to itself) because the universe is placed between it and God (between God and God). The permanent absence of God must consequently refer to the separation of God from the eternal part of the soul (or from Himself) constituted by the universe, i.e. the Creation. But in that the eternal part of the soul is equivalent to God, what is implied is that God's absence from Himself is the very reason for there being a Creation at all. The moment that the universe is no longer placed between the eternal part of the soul and God, Creation is, as it were, undone; or, to use Weil's language, it is de-created.³⁵ The fullest expression of this de-creation is embodied in Christ's cry of dereliction for Weil, in the absence of God from God, which, for her, is the plenitude of the absence of God, i.e. the presence of God, or the fulness of the reality of God.

Even though we shall discuss the Creation in detail in the final chapter of our study, it is imperative at the moment to continue with our reflection on certain aspects of Weil's thinking about the Creation, for her thinking in this context is intimately connected with the question that is not entirely clear to us at present. That question is: what does it mean to say that the absence of God becomes permanent for certain souls? Or, why are certain souls not saved? There are many reasons, as we said, why a soul might not receive grace. There would seem to be a natural compulsion on the part of the afflicted to rail out against nature or other men for having reduced them to their present condition. It might be the case of revenge, or of the imagination intervening to lessen the horror of the void by any

number of seductive illusions, or anything else whatever (whether it be physical or psychological) which places a part of the universe as a screen between God and the eternal part of the soul. The afflicted could quite literally die before the eternal part of the soul is opened up to grace, before he has had a chance to attain to an innocence equal to that of Christ. In that Weil sees every part of our being, except the eternal part of the soul, as subjected to an absolutely deaf and blind necessity, it is only Christ who can speak to and touch the eternal part of the soul of those in affliction, and therefore it is only Christ who can hear the silence of God, feel His touch, and receive His grace. In a world where everything is determined, where there is no freedom, it is not likely that many souls are going to be saved. In other words, how often do incarnations take place? As Weil says: "il n'y a peut-être qu'un homme sauvé dans une génération." (CS, p. 183)

Necessity is such for Weil that men cannot go towards God; they cannot take a step vertically. It is only God who can descend and come to men. What is suggested here is that grace, revelation, and incarnation (which are all of the same order) can all be understood in terms of the idea of predestination. There is nothing in Weil's thought which is radically opposed to this notion. In fact, in relation to her thinking about the collective (Plato's 'Great Beast') she speaks quite explicitly about predestination. "La pensée centrale, essentielle de Platon, qui est elle aussi une pensée chrétienne, c'est que tous les hommes sont absolument incapables d'avoir sur le bien et le mal d'autres opinions que celles dictées par les réflexes de

l'animal, excepté les âmes prédestinées qu'une grâce surnaturelle tire vers Dieu." (OP, p. 236) What Weil says here refers to the Republic (VI, 492a-493a) where she feels that Plato has asserted quite categorically that grace is the only source of salvation, and that it is only from God that salvation comes.

Car il n'y a pas, il n'y a jamais eu, il n'y aura jamais d'autre enseignement concernant la moralité que celui de la multitude. Du moins pas d'autre enseignement humain. Car pour ce qui est divin il faut, selon le proverbe, faire exception. Il faut bien savoir ceci. Quiconque est sauvé et devient ce qu'il doit être alors que les cités ont une telle structure, celui-là, si l'on veut parler correctement, doit être dit sauvé par l'effet d'une prédestination qui procède de Dieu.³⁶

There is no difference here, at least on one level, between what Nietzsche says about morality and what Plato says. In all societies without exception ("il n'y a pas, il n'y a jamais eu, il n'y aura jamais") it is the herd, in one way or another, which imposes its values. But for Nietzsche, as opposed to Plato, there is nothing beyond social morality which can be revealed to those who are enlightened by grace.

Weil follows Plato here, and therefore in relation to what she says about the absence of God becoming permanent, and of those souls which fall into something almost equivalent to hell because of this absence, the idea of predestination is certainly not out of place. The 'why?' of the afflicted may mean no more than that things were ordained in this way from eternity. If the eternal part of the soul of every being in the universe were to be, in Weil's terms, de-created, i.e. if every being were to become innocent, the Creation would be undone. The universe would no longer constitute that which separates

God from Himself. The universe would be God and God the universe, or, more exactly, since the Creation would be 'uncreated', there would only be God. Obviously the Creation itself remains a mystery. The mystery of the Creation is expressed for Weil in terms of absence, the absence of God; and it is this absence of God which maintains the universe in place, which separates God from Himself, which keeps God from being fully united with Himself, and which, finally, is the reason for certain souls not being saved -- the reason for God not being fully God.³⁷ Predestination has ultimately only to do with God, with: 'Why did God create?'

Whether or not we can legitimately speak of the idea of predestination (more specifically, the predestination of souls) as being intrinsic to Weil's thought is something which we will only fully be able to determine when we have completed our entire study of her thinking in relation to the Cross. It is nevertheless certain that the form of answer given to those souls in affliction who utter the cry 'why?' is the key for unlocking the question of salvation for Weil. It is the link between the affliction of men and the perfection of God. Christ's cry: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" was the cry of all humanity in him.³⁸ The answer to his cry, and therefore the basis for Weil's thinking about the perfection of God, was silence. "Une sorte de convention divine, une pacte de Dieu avec lui-même, condamne ici-bas la vérité au silence." (CS, p. 312) "Le silence du Christ frappé et bafoué, c'est le double silence ici-bas de la vérité et du malheur." (CS, p. 312)³⁹ "Les créatures parlent avec des sons. La parole de Dieu est silence. La secrète parole

d'amour de Dieu ne peut pas être autre chose que le silence. Le Christ est le silence de Dieu." (PS, p. 129)⁴⁰

It may be, as Weil says, that on the level of man we can explain all human atrocities (even Auschwitz); but on the level of God they will always remain the most disturbing of mysteries. The explanations that we can produce, whether they be in the realm of the physical or the psychological, are related to 'causes'. But the 'why?' of the afflicted is not seeking for causes; it is seeking for an 'end', a 'purpose', a 'finality'. In the feeling of the absence of good, the absence of God, the afflicted is seeking for a metaphysical 'why?'. He finds himself, however, in a universe devoid of finality and totally subjected to necessity, to that which, in effect, is for Weil the vibration of God's silence.⁴¹ And yet it is necessity which is the sole cause of affliction.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CAUSE OF AFFLICTION: NECESSITY

The question of necessity is an obstacle which it is impossible not to run into when reading Weil. We have said from the beginning of our study that Weil sees everything in nature, including psychological nature, as being under the dominance of a mechanical, mathematical, absolutely deaf and blind necessity. The mathematical aspect of necessity is something that must be discussed separately in relation to the question of human perception, i.e. in relation to the work of the pure intelligence applied to the contemplation of theoretical necessity in the understanding of the world. We will do this in the fourth chapter of our study.¹ What we are concerned with now is the idea of necessity as might or force, with that blind mechanism, indifferent to degrees of spiritual perfection, which throws men in all directions, and which tosses a few of them at the very foot of the Cross. Christ himself was helpless before this blind mechanism. Christ's abandonment by his Father indicates to Weil that God does not intervene in the world, not even to save Himself. The silence of God in response to Christ's cry of dereliction is therefore indicative of the nature of God's Providence. Christ's abandonment by God suggests that it is by His Providence that God allows necessity to rule as a blind mechanism.² It is not that God's Providence is absent, but rather, it is by His Providence that necessity is allowed to rule as sovereign master in this world. The non-intervention or silence

(absence) of God is that which ultimately constitutes God's Providence for Weil. Thus, when the blind mechanism of necessity marks certain men with the brand of affliction (slavery), and tosses some of them at the very foot of the Cross, this is, metaphorically speaking, the touch of God's hand.

We must be very careful in understanding what Weil is saying here. Providence for her is the order of the world itself; or, to be more precise, it is the ordering principle of the universe. Providence is equated by her to the eternal Wisdom (of which Plato spoke) that extends throughout the entire universe in a sovereign network of relations. In this context she does not see 'brute force' as being sovereign in this world (which is by nature blind and indeterminate), but rather determinateness or limit. The universe is constructed out of indeterminateness and the principle which determines or limits, and it is the latter which is always dominant. The blind forces of matter, which we see as necessity, are (following Weil's interpretation of Plato) constrained to obey the eternal Wisdom (Providence) because of a wise form of persuasion -- love.³ The model for understanding this wise form of persuasion is the Cross. The Cross stands as the limit of all our knowledge; it is the source of the double understanding of might which is at the heart of Weil's thinking. It is also the source of her thinking about the love of God.

La connaissance de la force comme chose absolument souveraine dans la nature tout entière, y compris toute la partie naturelle de l'âme humaine avec toutes les pensées et tous les sentiments qu'elle contient, et en même temps

comme chose absolument méprisable, c'est la grandeur propre de la Grèce. . . . Pourtant, cette double connaissance est la source la plus pure peut-être de l'amour de Dieu. Car savoir non pas abstraitement, mais avec toute l'âme, que tout dans la nature, y compris la nature psychologique, est soumis à une force aussi brutale, aussi impitoyablement dirigée vers le bas que la pesanteur, une telle connaissance colle pour ainsi dire l'âme à la fenêtre de sa cellule, comme une mouche reste collée au fond d'une bouteille par son élan vers la lumière. (IP, p. 53)⁴

The difficulty in understanding Weil's thinking about force is that on the one hand she says it is absolutely sovereign in this world, and on the other hand she denies that it is absolutely sovereign in this world. Clearly she thinks, on the one hand, that everything in this world is exposed to the contact of force, and that everything is degraded or defiled by this contact. Whether one submits to or exerts force, strikes or is struck by force, one is in the same way and in the same measure subject to its degrading empire. Whether one is wounded by the sword or wields the sword, the contact with force is such that it petrifies and transforms a man into a thing.⁵ The slave and the tyrant, the vanquished and the victor -- all men are defiled by contact with force. Not even Christ could look on the rigours of destiny without anguish. He, however, was not protected by an armour of lies, by the illusions, intoxications, or any other form of fanaticism (prestige) which appear to place some men above human misery by disguising the rigours of destiny in their own eyes. Unless protected by an armour of lies, men are unable to endure the contact of force without suffering a blow in the depths of their souls.

"Une fois les armes mises à nu, la domination du prestige est installée; la non-résistance n'est pas un moyen de s'y soustraire; le Christ

même a été un moment privé de Dieu. Le contact avec la force, de quelque côté qu'on prenne contact (poignée ou pointe de l'épée) prive un moment de Dieu." (I, p. 134) Grace can prevent contact with force from corrupting the soul, but not even it can prevent its wound. Christ's body and soul were accursed.⁶

On the other hand, however, there is one thing which is not exposed to the contact of force: supernatural love.⁷ "Seul mérite le nom de bien ce qui échappe à ce contact et aussi, pour une part, ceux des hommes qui, par amour, ont transporté et caché en lui une partie de leur âme." (IP, p. 54) That is to say, only the eternal part of the soul (which is equivalent to God for Weil) escapes from the contact of force. Supernatural love, which issues from the eternal part of the soul, cannot, however, protect the soul from being wounded, from feeling, for a moment, the absence of God. If we desire some form of earthly attachment, some form of love which shall protect the soul from the coldness of force, we must love something other than God.⁸

On the one hand, therefore, force is seen by Weil as an absolutely sovereign thing in all of nature, including psychological nature. It fills the infinity of space and time and can be concentrated on any one of us at any time, completely destroying us. One must be aware that one is entirely subject to this blind necessity in every part of one's being. This is one side of the double knowledge concerning force. "Si cruellement qu'un homme souffre, si une partie de son être est intacte, et s'il n'a pas pleinement conscience qu'elle a échappé par hasard et reste à tout moment exposée aux coups du

hasard, il n'a aucune part à la Croix." (PS, p. 110) On the other hand, however, one must recognize force as an absolutely detestable thing. What brings one to this realization is that contact with force deprives one for a moment of God. If one can go on wanting to love God in spite of the feeling of His absence, then one will uncover that point in the soul which is as hidden as God is (which is God) and which is not exposed to the contact of force. To know this is fully to bear one's cross. To know this is also to know that the blind forces of matter, which we see as necessity, are not sovereign in this world. What is sovereign is that which is not subject to the empire of brute force, and which, in effect, constitutes the limit of brute force. That limit is God. It is represented for us by supernatural love, by that love which Christ bore for all men as well as for his Father when he himself felt abandoned by both men and God. It is love (a wise form of persuasion) which constrains the blind forces of matter to obey the eternal Wisdom constituted by God's Providence.

We must say then that Weil is looking at force from two points of view, both of which she feels are true. That is why she can speak of force as being absolutely sovereign in this world, and at the same time deny it. It may help if we examine this contradiction by looking more specifically at the question of 'limit',⁹ although in certain ways we may be simply stressing further difficulties that are involved in thinking clearly about this problem. There is no doubt that Weil sees a rigorous necessity governing all aspects of human and non-human nature. We can call this necessity

the laws of nature or the order of the universe, for that, indeed, is what it is. We have also been saying that necessity is brute force, and brute force is described by Weil in the following terms: 'aveugle et indéterminée'; 'un mécanisme aveugle, qui ne tient nul compte du degré de perfection spirituelle'; 'la rigueur du destin'; 'une fortune variable'; 'le hasard'; 'un caprice absolument déréglé'; 'illimité'; and so on.¹⁰ Apart from the adjectives which simply describe certain characteristics of necessity, necessity is all of these things. It is brute force, might, power, fate, fortune, destiny, chance, and so on. Weil uses all of these terms interchangeably. In her mind they are all equivalent; that is to say, they are all simply various names which we give to the selfsame reality, to that which we see as necessity.

The reason that Weil can seem so confusing is because she does use all of these terms interchangeably. Clearly it is not every day, if it is at all common, that chance and necessity are equated. Weil does equate them, however, and that is why she is not contradicting herself when she says: "Une nécessité rigoureuse, qui exclut tout arbitraire, tout hasard, règle les phénomènes matériels." (II, p. 151) And the reason that all of the above terms are embodied within the more comprehensive term necessity, and are ultimately equated to it, is because everything in this world is limited. Once more, this is a view that is not at all widespread, particularly among those living in today's modern industrialized nations, for the idea of progress which is the driving force behind modern technological societies is essentially predicated on the notions of unlimitedness,

unbounded freedom, and infinite possibility. What is of concern to us at the moment is the notion of the unlimited and its relationship to the idea of limit.

Weil says that what makes brute force or power terrible is that it contains the unlimited. It makes the tyrant mad. It reduces the slave to a state of inert matter. Even the greatest of stoics are degraded by the simplest cruelties (hunger, imprisonment, torture, . . .) when they are inflicted as the result of an absolutely lawless whim. Human misery and cruelty are unlimited, and according to Weil it is necessary that they should remain unlimited, because: "Des rapports de force doivent apparaître en éclair où l'homme perd soi-même, Dieu, l'univers, tout." (I, p. 136)¹¹ It is also necessary, however, that power ceases to be unlimited. Here again, we are presented with Weil's double understanding of might. In her essay, 'L'Iliade, ou le poème de la force', Weil depicts the limits necessarily imposed upon those whom destiny has lent might.

Il ne se peut pas qu'ils ne périssent. Car ils ne considèrent pas leur propre force comme une quantité limitée, ni leurs rapports avec autrui comme un équilibre entre forces inégales. Les autres hommes n'imposant pas à leur mouvements ce temps d'arrêt d'où seul procèdent nos égards envers nos semblables, ils en concluent que le destin leur a donné toute licence, et aucune à leurs inférieurs. Dès lors ils vont au-delà de la force dont ils disposent. Ils vont inévitablement au-delà, ignorant qu'elle est limitée. Ils sont alors livrés sans recours au hasard, et les choses ne leur obéissent plus. Quelquefois le hasard les sert; d'autres fois il leur nuit; les voilà exposés nus au malheur, sans l'armure de puissance qui protégeait leur âme, sans plus rien désormais qui les sépare des larmes. (SG, p. 22)

In reality man never actually exercises force, no matter what the circumstances. Nobody possesses the ability to exercise

force because force is a mechanism; it is a pure concatenation of conditions. The ability to exercise force is an illusion. Force is imposed upon man; he is subjected to force in his every move; he is subject to the weight of the entire universe. "Savoir (en chaque chose) qu'il y a une limite, et qu'on ne la dépassera pas sans aide surnaturelle, ou alors de très peu et en le payant ensuite par un terrible abaissement." (I, pp. 267-268) He who is not aware of the extent to which necessity is imposed upon and dominates the human soul cannot treat his neighbour as an equal, nor love as himself all those whom chance has reduced to affliction. To be capable of love and justice he must know the empire of might, that it is a limit, and that it is an absolutely detestable thing. Those who have been reduced to affliction do know that necessity is ultimately a limit, for at the moment that affliction falls they are no longer under the illusion of possessing liberty; they know only constraint. Not only do they suffer by constraint, but as well, their suffering is inflicted by constraint. This, for them, is the recognition that it is the principle which determines or limits which is sovereign in this world. It is the recognition of Christ's words to St. Peter: "Another shall gird thee and carry thee where thou wouldst not." (John 21:18)¹²

Ultimately, therefore, we must say that Weil is looking at two sides or two faces of necessity. That side of necessity which is referred to as blind and indeterminate is probably thought of most clearly in relation to terms such as chance and fate. It is that side of necessity which, in the context of human suffering and

affliction, suggests the blind and indeterminate nature of brute force. At any moment, in any place, any human being whosoever can be reduced to a state of inert matter. The thought of being struck down at any moment as if by a bolt of lightning makes necessity appear to us as blind and indeterminate. And if the extent to which we have suffered is great enough, human misery and cruelty will appear to us as unlimited; that is to say, necessity will appear to us as containing the unlimited, for if we have suffered enough, we will lose everything, including ourselves, and we will feel the absence of all good, the absence of God. This side or face of necessity is not, however, the full reality of necessity. It appears to us as sovereign in this world, as the very warp and woof, as it were, of human existence. But if this side of necessity is absolutely sovereign, then the unlimited must be taken as the sole reality of human misery and cruelty. This would make human life meaningless for Weil; it would mean that 'everything is permissible'.¹³

That is why Weil does not see indeterminateness and unlimitedness as the full reality of necessity. It is not brute force which is sovereign in this world, but rather determinateness and limit. In fact, in that no one can escape the crushing weight of brute force (not even Christ), the idea of limit would seem to be inscribed within the very fabric of the universe itself. The difficulty for us is that we think in the first person, and therefore we see necessity from below or from inside. Necessity encloses us on all sides as the surface of the earth and the arc of the sky. Affliction, however, deprives us of the ability to think in the first person; it

deprives us of everything that we can call our own. If we nevertheless consent to necessity, we will see it from outside, from beneath us, for we will have passed to the other side of the unopenable door.

"La face qu'elle nous présentait auparavant et qu'elle présente encore à notre être presque entier, à la partie naturelle de nous-mêmes, est domination brutale. La face qu'elle présente après cette opération à ce fragment de notre pensée qui est passé de l'autre côté est pure obéissance. Nous sommes devenus les fils de la maison, et nous aimons la docilité de cette nécessité esclave que nous avons pris d'abord pour un maître." (IP, p. 153)

The consent to necessity is supernatural love, the only thing which is not exposed to the contact of force. It is the work of grace. For Weil it would have to be the work of grace, for this consent is manifestly absurd. It means that the love we bear for Christ is the same love "que nous devons porter à l'enchaînement mathématique de causes et d'effets qui, de temps à autre, fait de nous une espèce de bouillie informe." (IP, p. 150) The absurdity of consenting to necessity is clearly revealed when we look at the indifference of necessity to moral values. Just as all of us equally receive the benefits of the sun and the rain, so also is it the case that all of us, whether criminals or righteous men, equally suffer violent deaths at the hands of both human and non-human nature. Yet it is precisely this indifference of necessity which Christ bids us to look upon and imitate, for this indifference of necessity reveals to what extent matter is obedient to God.

Necessity, in fact, is nothing other than the obedience of

matter to God. "Ainsi le couple de contraires constitué par la nécessité dans la matière et liberté en nous a son unité dans l'obéissance, car être libres, pour nous, ce n'est pas autre chose que désirer obéir à Dieu. Toute autre liberté est un mensonge."

(IP, p. 152) This is to say that just as we are subjected to necessity, necessity is obedient to God. Necessity is thus an intermediary between matter and God. "Comme un plan horizontal est l'unité de la face supérieure et de la face inférieure, la nécessité est pour la matière l'intersection de l'obéissance à Dieu et de la force brutale qui soumet les créatures. A ce niveau même de l'intersection, il y a dans la nécessité participation d'une part à la contrainte, d'autre part à l'intelligence, à la justice, à la beauté, à la foi." (IP, pp. 153-154) Thus it is that we must always be aware of the two sides of necessity if we are to understand what Weil is saying about necessity.

For Weil, "Toute connaissance précise des choses qui passent découle de ces propositions éternelles qui enferment un jamais." "Les choses sont naturelles, temporelles, mais les limites des choses viennent de Dieu." (CS, p. 74) This, according to her, is what the Pythagoreans said, i.e., that there is the unlimited and that which limits, and that which limits is God (the eternal Wisdom, Providence). Therefore limits are eternal. God said to the sea: 'Thou shalt go no further.' Every visible and palpable force is subject to an invisible limit which it will never transgress. "Dans la mer, une vague monte, monte et monte; mais un point, où il n'y a pourtant que du vide, l'arrête et la fait redescendre." (En, p. 361)¹⁴

Anaximander said: "C'est à partir de l'indétermination que s'accomplit la naissance pour les choses, c'est par un retour à l'indétermination que s'opère leur destruction conformément à la nécessité; car elles subissent un châtement et une expiation les unes de la part des autres, à cause de leur injustice, selon l'ordre du temps." (IP, pp. 151-152)¹⁵ If we think of a circle turning upon itself, a movement involving no change and one that is completely self-contained, and if we think at the same time of the alternating movement of a point which comes and goes upon the diameter of the circle, we have an image made of all becoming here below, an image reflecting the successive and contrary ruptures of equilibrium in action. Anaximander applied this conception to nature itself; the whole course of nature was viewed as a succession of disequilibriums compensating one another. For Weil, this becoming is a projection of divine life on earth. To contemplate the moving point upon the diameter which is enclosed by the circle, is to contemplate all the becomings of this world which have been assigned their limits by God.¹⁶

The picture of necessity that has been drawn for us is thus a two sided picture where, on the one side, we have an image of man subjected to the entire weight of the universe, and where, on the other side, we have an image of the world beyond which acts as a counterweight. If these two sides of necessity are to exist in harmony, that is to say, if they are united in some way, then there must be some form of intermediary which locks them together. The form of mediation that Weil thinks will work is derived from Philolaus and Plato. She quotes Philolaus: "Les choses qui ne sont ni de même

espèce ni de même nature ni de même rang ont besoin d'être enfermées ensemble sous clef par une harmonie capable de les maintenir en un ordre universel." (IP, p. 164)¹⁷ Christ is that key. Christ locks together the Creator and Creation. Christ is Mediation itself. To use the analogy of the circle again, if we think of a circle which is divided into four equal quadrants, the centre point on the diameter (the Word) is an intermediary between the two parts of the diameter which are on either side of the point, as well as being an intermediary between the diameter and the circle. Plato speaks of the most beautiful bond between contraries in terms of that which brings perfect unity to itself and the parts linked. This bond, reflected in the idea of the circle, is achieved by geometrical proportion.

Car quand de trois nombres, ou de trois masses ou de quelque autre quantité, l'intermédiaire est au dernier comme le premier est à lui, et réciproquement le dernier à l'intermédiaire comme l'intermédiaire au premier, alors l'intermédiaire devient premier et dernier; d'autre part le dernier et le premier deviennent tous deux intermédiaires; ainsi il est nécessaire que tous en arrivent à être identiques; et, étant identifiés mutuellement, ils seront un.¹⁸

What is so significant in thinking about the Word as a mean proportional is that the terms between which a mean is sought are not always in the relation of one to two, and when this is the case, it can be demonstrated that no whole number will furnish the solution. The solution would, in fact, be at once even and odd. The opposition between the odd and the even was considered by the Pythagoreans to be an image of the opposition between the supernatural and the natural (between God and His creatures). They related the odd to unity.¹⁹

The idea of mediation (unity) is one of the most important elements in Weil's thought. When she is thinking about the affliction of men, and conversely, about the perfection of God (two things which are of entirely different orders), it is always the link between the two which she is trying to lead forth. She does not try to do away with either side of this dilemma; she attempts, rather, to find a means of deepening our understanding of both sides by means of something which is common to both or which shares in both. And clearly, that which is common to both or which shares in both will appear to us as contradictory; it will appear to us in the form of paradox. In the context of the question of necessity, the mediator (Christ) which ties together the affliction of men and the perfection of God inevitably involves us in the ultimate paradox at the heart of the Christian religion. The idea of the absence of God from God that arises at the moment when Christ utters his immortal cry is such that: "A ce moment Dieu apparaît comme soumis à la nécessité; non seulement Dieu comme victime, mais Dieu comme bourreau; non seulement le Dieu qui a pris la forme d'un esclave, mais aussi le Dieu qui a gardé la forme du maître." (IP, p. 105) The absence of God from God is the form of response (the link) that arises in relation to the Cross. It is the link between Christ rendering to Caesar what was due to Caesar and at the same time, his rendering to God what was due to God. It is the link between the greatest evil being inflicted on the greatest good, and the love that one should bear towards that (blind necessity, the order of the world) which allows such a thing to be possible.²⁰ If we can understand what is being

said here, we will be able to understand what Weil means when she says: "Le spectacle de la nécessité aveugle est beau parce que il suggère un accord NON REPRÉSENTABLE avec le bien." (II, p. 162)

There are, of course, many other ways of approaching the question of necessity. If we are fully to understand what Weil says about the affliction of men in relation to the limit constituted by necessity, it is necessary that we look at what she considers to be the purest form of necessity, i.e. time. Weil's thinking about time clarifies the limits imposed upon human beings in terms of work or labour (the question of means and ends: finality), as well as in terms of human freedom and the will. The problem of human freedom and the will is, in turn, very important in terms of expiatory and redemptive suffering; for physical suffering is nothing more than the constraint of time felt by the soul. It is time which always leads us whither we do not wish to go.²¹ "Le temps est la croix." (II, p. 293)²²

Strictly speaking, there is no other necessity for Weil than time. Space would simply be the same necessity sensed in a different way.²³ In one of the first essays that Weil ever published,²⁴ and which was written on the question of time, she speaks of man's sufferings, desires, doubts, etc., as so many ways of saying that what a man is does not satisfy him and has become him without his consent. What he is, is simply endured. She speaks of the future of man in relation to the fact that he is not immediately in his own power. "Demain n'est autre chose pour moi que ce qui ne m'est pas immédiatement donné, ce que je ne puis immédiatement changer,

ou, pour mieux dire, demain est moi que je ne puis immédiatement changer. Ce rapport entre le présent et l'avenir est ce qui constitue le temps." ("Du Temps", p. 388) Time is therefore the separation between what one is and what one would like to be. And work is the only road from self to self. Consequently man cannot free himself from time except by bringing his actions into conformity with the conditions that time imposes on him.²⁵

If I see a book on the floor and I wish to see it on the table, it is only by lifting the book through the whole distance which separates the table from the floor that my wish can be satisfied. There are an infinite number of possible events which may occur in the interval which separates my wish from its fulfilment, but in no case will my wish be fulfilled unless the book has passed through the horizontal plane between the table and the floor. "L'ensemble des nécessités géométriques et mécaniques auxquelles une telle action est toujours soumise constitue la malédiction originelle, celle qui a châtié Adam, celle qui fait la différence entre l'univers et un paradis terrestre, la malédiction du travail." (S, p. 125)

Since time expresses the complete impotence of man's will to legislate without doing, time is beyond time, time is eternal, time is, in some fashion, present by the very presence of this alien existence which imposes it upon man. It is in this sense that man does not have to go outside himself to discover what is foreign to him.

Ce qui seul n'est pas mien en une impression quelconque, c'est la loi par laquelle je ne puis passer à une autre sans passer par des impressions intermédiaires, étrangères

à la fois à celle que je ressens et à celle que je désire ressentir, étrangères les unes aux autres sinon par ceci même que chacune d'elles succède à telle autre, étrangères chacune à n'importe quelle autre impression. Or cette loi est la loi même du temps, selon la vue géniale de Kant, et c'est par cette loi du temps comme forme du travail, que je saisis en chaque impression l'existence du monde. ("Du Temps", pp. 389-390)

What is ultimately so significant in thinking about time is that time, strictly speaking, does not exist. "Nous sommes soumis à ce qui n'existe pas. Qu'il s'agisse de la durée passivement soufferte -- douleur physique, attente, regret, remords, peur -- ou du temps manié -- ordre, méthode, nécessité -- dans les deux cas, ce à quoi nous sommes soumis, cela n'existe pas. Mais notre soumission existe. Réellement attachés par des chaînes irréelles. Le temps, irréel, voile toute chose et nous-mêmes d'irréalité." (I, p. 188) The unreality of time can be seen in relation to the past, the present, and the future. The past is out of our reach because it exists no longer; it is irretrievable. As such it has the character of inevitability ("la fatalité") for Weil. In relation to existence, the past has no existence whatsoever. If we think of the present without any reference to thoughts having to do with the past and the future, we are left with something that immediately disappears. What we do possess, in fact, is something non-existent, i.e. something that is present to consciousness only as something past. The future, in turn, appears to us as chance, and therefore as something blind. We are completely helpless in relation to time: "nous ne pouvons rien sur le présent parce qu'il existe²⁶ (du moment que c'est présent, c'est un fait); nous ne pouvons rien sur le passé parce

qu'il n'existe plus; nous ne pouvons rien sur l'avenir parce qu'il n'existe pas encore." (LP, p. 212) It is no wonder that the fleeting character of time gives rise to the feeling that life is a dream, that existence is nothing.

Our impotence in relation to time is the source of all real tragedies. We can momentarily escape time's enslavement through entertainment (through any number of vices -- intoxication, dreaming, whatever),²⁷ but inevitably we will always find ourselves in the same predicament; that is to say, we think that by moving horizontally we will progress (escape from time), yet ultimately we only turn round in a circle like a squirrel revolving in its cage. The snare of time is like a circle which encloses us on all sides. We can move back and forth along the diameter or along any one of the innumerable radii, but we cannot get beyond the circumference which is the limit constituted by time. The circumference is the whole extent of necessity throughout all space and time. To traverse the whole length and breadth of this distance (the Cross) which separates us from God would mean progressing vertically for Weil. It would require grace.²⁸

One cannot pass from time to eternity, however, without suffering. To know that one cannot be sure of oneself for the future is to know that each second of time that passes may bring any one of us in spite of ourselves nearer to that which is unbearable. As well, to be deprived of the connecting link between the past and the future (or of either of them separately) is the very essence of suffering. When one is deprived of the past, one is uprooted, degraded socially,

and enslaved. It is to lose everything that one thought to be one's own, or the annihilation of what one had been -- of everything associated with the 'I': affliction. Analogously, to be deprived of the future is nothing less than a sentence of death. To be reduced to just waiting for what the next moment will bring, and to accepting whatever the present moment has brought, is time's way of gluing one to the present against one's will. This is the reality of suffering; it removes from time all that has to do with the past and the future, i.e. time's orientation. And without time's orientation, the reality of suffering is simply that suffering is. To accept suffering in this form is to accept time; it is to accept the Cross.²⁹

The Cross, however, is an intermediary, and therefore the world in which we live is seen by Weil to be a mixture of time and eternity. If there was only pure time, we would, in her view, be living in Hell. If the Cross (time), through the mediation of Christ, did not participate in both this world and the world beyond, then to be deprived of both the past and the future would be equivalent to living in Hell (unlimited evil). But in that Weil sees Christ as a mediator between this world and the world beyond, she sees the affliction of Christ as participating in the good (God). This is why she can say that the possibility of being deprived of either the past or the future (of which Christ was deprived) represents a good; indeed, that: "La possibilité du mal est un bien." (I, p. 239) The Cross indicates that evil is limited by the good (God). To share in the Cross is to know this good through the possibility of

evil that can be inflicted on any one of us at any moment, just as Christ suffered the plenitude of evil while remaining perfectly good, while remaining identical to his Father. We can say, therefore, that the possibility of any man being reduced to a state of affliction which leads him to share in the Cross (and therefore in the affliction of Christ) is a good.

We are clearly dealing with an unfathomable notion here in the idea of 'possibility'. Again, it must be said that the only way in which one could fully fathom what is being said here about evil and the good (the unlimited and limit) would be to unlock the mystery of the Creation. We will look more closely at the question of evil and at the Creation as we progress in our study of Weil's thought, although we might use an analogy at this point to tie together what has been said about necessity (and therefore about time) and what has been said about evil. We said earlier that that side of necessity which we see as brute force (which is blind and indeterminate by nature) is not sovereign in this world for Weil. What is sovereign, rather, is determinateness or limit (God). Time is simply another way of looking at necessity, and it too is characterized by two sides or faces. Like brute force, it is that to which we are subjected. It also appears to us as blind because of its fleeting character. We cannot even say, strictly speaking, that time exists; but we know, nevertheless, that it is the conditions that time imposes upon us which come between and separate what we are from what we would like to be (the relationship between the present and the future). No matter what we do, therefore, we must bring our actions into

conformity with the limits imposed upon us by time. By this very fact, then, we can see the other side of time, i.e. limit. Time indicates to us the full extent to which we are impotent to legislate without doing, and thus time can be seen to be beyond time; that is to say, time is eternal, and is present by the very presence of this alien existence which imposes it upon us. The sovereignty of this side of time (time as a limit) is clearly revealed in the case of someone who has been deprived of both the past and the future.

Evil is also inextricably linked to the question of necessity for Weil. It also appears to us as blind and indeterminate, and if our suffering has been great enough it will appear to us, just as brute force appears to us, as containing the unlimited. Evil, like brute force, appears to us as unlimited because it can reduce us to a state of extreme affliction which deprives us for a moment of the good or of God. If this side of evil, like that side of necessity which is brute force, is absolutely sovereign in this world, then the unlimited must be taken as the sole reality of human misery and cruelty. This side of evil is not, however, the full reality of evil. It appears to us as sovereign in this world. Force appears to us in the same way. But appearance is not reality; it is not being. In the picture of necessity that Weil has drawn for us, appearance and being (reality) are virtually glued together. It is as if one must experience or know the one to the depths of one's being before one can experience or know the other. That is why necessity is always presented with two faces. Extreme affliction, however, tears the two sides apart. As Weil says in relation to time: "Le cours du

temps arrache le paraître de l'être et l'être du paraître, par violence." (II, p. 120) Just as force and time inevitably show us their other side in extreme affliction, the side of constraint and limit, so also does evil show us its other side when it comes into contact with that which is pure. Just as the good (supernatural love, that which is pure or innocent, the eternal part of the soul) is not defiled by the contact of force, so also is the good not defiled by evil. Good is the limit of evil. When evil encounters the good, as in the case of Christ, the evil disappears; it is taken up into God.

Everything that Weil says about necessity, whether she is speaking in terms of brute force, time, or evil, has to do ultimately with the question of limits. Everything that can be thought about the human condition is expressible for her in terms of limit. Nothing escapes Weil's criticism in this context, not even the idea of the will. For man, there are no other restraints upon his will than material necessity and the existence of other human beings around him. Necessity is experienced by man only in so far as it is at once an obstacle and a condition of accomplishing his will. Yet necessity, in the form of fatigue, illustrates to what extent the will is limited or in fact illusory. In a state of intense fatigue man no longer clings to his actions or even to his own will. He sees himself as a thing which pushes others because it is itself pushed by a constraint.³⁰ "Effectivement la volonté humaine, quoiqu'un certain sentiment de choix y soit irréductiblement attaché, est simplement un phénomène parmi tous ceux qui sont soumis à la

nécessité. La preuve est qu'elle comporte des limites. L'infini seul est hors de l'empire de la nécessité." (IP, p. 145) The exercise of will always involves illusions in the practical experience of necessity.

It is obvious that Weil would see the idea of freedom in terms of limitation as well, for it too would be subjected to necessity. To give the idea of freedom a concrete definition in her terms would be to say that freedom is when the thought of an action precedes the action. Therefore, a statement such as 'I am frightened, therefore I am running away' is incorrect. It should be changed to: 'there is danger, therefore I am running away'. The content of this thought can be nothing other than necessity, for thought has no other object than the world. What is freedom then but a limit? And since necessity is the obedience of matter to God, and since the pair of contraries constituted by necessity in matter, and liberty in us, has its meeting in obedience, freedom for us is to desire to obey God. Any other liberty is false. Thus not to be able to sin (Augustine) would be the only freedom. Weil wants us, in the final analysis, to get rid of the illusions of freedom and the will. She reduces them to obedience, for in relation to necessity, they can be nothing else. To renounce them, in turn, is to consent to be purely obedient to necessity as Christ was; it is to love God.³¹

It is difficult, however, if not impossible, to do away with the language of freedom and the will. Not even Weil can do it, although she thinks that everything about the human condition can be described in terms of behaviour without mentioning terms such as

freedom, spirit, and the soul. Action, thought, love even freedom itself, can be described in terms of behaviour.³² Of course, we know that she does not think that the picture of the universe held by behavioural psychology is true, for it is not the whole picture; it represents only one side of necessity. There is always something for Weil which escapes being included in a wholly deterministic view of the universe, i.e. that which limits. In the case of freedom, that which escapes the behaviouristic interpretation of the human condition is that which, since it is thinking, cannot be thought. That which does the thinking is outside of our grasp. It is in terms of this idea that Weil can speak of freedom or liberty at a practical level.

We normally think of freedom as a relationship between desire and its satisfaction (between what we are and what we would like to be). We think that we are free to do and think as we please. At least this is one way in which we commonly think of freedom. The idea of rights is, for the most part, no more than an expression of this way of thinking about freedom, for rights are generally related to personal things that we desire and therefore do not possess. We often hear: 'It is my right (I am free) to do what I want and to think as I please.' We have seen, however, that we cannot become what we would like to be without bringing our actions into conformity with the conditions that time imposes on us, and that we cannot have what we want without the threat of losing it at any moment under the crushing weight of blind necessity. Chance can deprive us of anything attached to the 'I', including the 'I' itself. This is why Weil

considers the idea of freedom in terms of the relationship between thought and action rather than in terms of that between desire and its satisfaction. This 'thought', in turn, is nothing other than the thinking about necessity, about the limits (conditions) necessarily imposed upon us and which deny our freedom. In this context, to be free is to think clearly about our not being free.³³

The idea of freedom that Weil employs is what she refers to as "la sagesse commune". It is a practical way of looking at freedom. By this view, as we indicated earlier, a free man would be one who had thought about the conditions imposed by necessity which separate his present situation from what he hopes his situation will be like in the future, before proceeding with any action. In other words, he would think about the end that he wishes to attain, and also about the sequence of means that would be required to attain this end. He would adapt his actions to the representation of necessity that he forms in his own mind. He will still, of course, be hemmed in on all sides by an absolutely inflexible necessity, but the fact that he orders his actions in terms of his thoughts, rather than blindly submitting to necessity, is the difference between freedom and servitude. If a man's actions proceeded only from the irrational reactions of the body to necessity, or from the minds of other men, or from the dictation of machines, that is to say, if all his actions proceeded from a source other than his own mind, he would be completely a slave.³⁴

On the other hand, if the performance of any work whatsoever consists in as methodical a combination of efforts as the combination of numbers by which the solution of a problem in mathematics (all the

elements for the solution being given) is brought about by reflection, this performance would be an example of complete liberty. Clearly, however, the two sides of this contrast, complete slavery and complete liberty, are only ideal limits. Human life moves between these two ideals, but it can attain to neither of them fully without ceasing to be life.

It can be said, at least on one level, that Weil is simply trying to put man's fate into his own hands. She is trying to tear him away from the blind grip of passions and to place him in a position where he cannot change, bring about any change, or obtain anything, without having a clear view of the necessities and impossibilities that confront him. She wants man to have a clear view of what is possible and what impossible, what is easy and what is difficult, of the labour (means) that separate any project from its accomplishment (end). Only in this way will life lose some of its unchecked frenzy and take on the virtues of moderation and courage.

On ne peut rien concevoir de plus grand pour l'homme qu'un sort qui le mette directement aux prises avec la nécessité nue, sans qu'il ait rien à attendre que de soi, et tel que sa vie soit une perpétuelle création de lui-même par lui-même. L'homme est un être borné à qui il n'est pas donné d'être, comme le Dieu des théologiens, l'auteur direct de sa propre existence; mais l'homme posséderait l'équivalent humain de cette puissance divine si les conditions matérielles qui lui permettent d'exister étaient exclusivement l'oeuvre de sa pensée dirigeant l'effort de ses muscles. Telle serait la liberté véritable. (OL, p. 117)³⁵

As an ideal limit, this liberty cannot be found in reality any more than perfect triangles or straight lines can be drawn on a blackboard. What separates us from this ideal is the infinite

number of conditions (as well as the complexity of their relations) that confront us in this world. There are an infinite number of things that may occur between any task and its accomplishment, just as there are an infinite number of conditions (whether on a microscopic or macroscopic scale) that a physicist cannot take into account when he is formulating an hypothesis. Necessity is essentially conditional for us; it is consequently revealed to our minds through a small number of perfectly definite conditions. The world, however, is able to impose upon our actions an unlimited number of conditions, conditions which can neither be enumerated nor expressed. In formulating an hypothesis (a method by which to complete a task) we can only hold in our minds a certain number of the conditions which have been revealed to us. We certainly cannot hold in our minds those conditions which have not been revealed to us, and which could surprise us at any moment. What we do, therefore, is provide ourselves with a closed system, a system in which nothing else is included except those few perfectly definite conditions we have chosen. We then proceed with our task.

We will not, of course, be acting with absolute certainty, for we know that the results of our actions are dependent on conditions or accidents outside our control; but in placing our actions under the control of the mind, we can at least circumscribe and limit the role that chance might play in thwarting our actions. We can never entirely eliminate chance, but we can conceive of a chain of intermediaries which link the actions we are capable of performing to the result that we wish to accomplish. What is surprising, in that

we cannot take into account the infinite number of conditions which have not been revealed to us, and which can arise at any moment to thwart the most carefully drawn-up plans, is that so often we can attain the results that we hoped to attain. It would seem that, in spite of the blind cross-currents of the universe, a relative stability exists on the scale of the human organism. Without this stability, it would be difficult to imagine how any of our actions could be accomplished. As it is, it is quite astonishing that any of our actions are successful, because they are regulated by a deliberate and erroneous application of principles which involve an infinite error.³⁶

We have, in the end, discussed freedom and the will within the framework of the question of necessity. This has been inevitable, for once again, what we have been discussing is the idea of limit. It has been necessary to explicate the two sides or faces of freedom and the will, the one which appears to us as unlimited desire (choice), and the other which constrains us to realize the limits imposed upon us in relation to the satisfaction of desire. The practical or concrete idea of freedom that we have been speaking of is really nothing other than the clear contemplation of necessity, that contemplation which is necessary before the will is exercised in carrying out any action in this world. The limits involved in this definition of freedom and the will have been illustrated in terms of the infinite number of conditions that cannot be taken into account in formulating a method for work, the infinite number of conditions that can intervene between the formulation of the task and its accomplishment, preventing

the task from being realized, as well as the limits imposed upon the human body by fatigue (not to mention death).

On the one hand, therefore, when we think that we have a choice, it is because we are unconscious, because something other than our own mind is dictating our responses. In this context, we are like a ball bouncing back and forth between two walls in a vacuum. Our choices are nothing but illusion. And no matter what we choose to think or to do, our choices are the result of the necessities and impossibilities that are necessarily imposed upon us by necessity. We can never escape the domination of necessity in this world. All choices made where the mind is not involved in the operation can, as Weil says, be explained without recourse to anything other than behaviour. Indeed, all our actions are determined; we are not free to choose, but rather, our choices are determined for us in advance by conditions that are foreign to us. On the other hand, the freedom that Weil speaks of, i.e. the preliminary judgement made prior to any action, is also involved in necessity. It is, in fact, the contemplation of necessity itself. "On cesse d'être un jouet en s'élevant au-dessus de l'illusion jusqu'à la nécessité, mais alors il n'y a plus de choix, une action est imposée par la situation elle-même clairement aperçue. Le seul choix est celui de monter." (I, p. 171)³⁷ The necessity involved in the contemplation of necessity, however, is not the same necessity that is involved in the 'blind' submission to necessity. Actions which are carried out where a preliminary judgement has been made concerning them are actions which may 'possibly' lead to better conditions, in which duty

may be less mixed up with evil.

We must remember that we are only speaking about an ideal limit. Weil says: "On n'est pas souillé par les actions dont on est ainsi absent (ainsi, car il y a une autre manière d'être absent), bien qu'elles soient mélangées de mal." (I, p. 171) "La liberté est une limite [la liberté comprise comme nécessité surmontée, car la liberté d'indifférence n'est qu'un rêve]. L'esclavage aussi. Toute situation réelle se place entre les deux." (I, p. 35)³⁸ To say, however, that we should act in such a way that we are absent from our actions, is to express what complete freedom would be if it were possible. It implies that we must also be absent from good, for complete freedom is complete obedience, and thus to act in a manner which is completely free (and therefore completely obedient) is not to act "pour quelque chose, mais parce qu'on ne peut pas faire autrement." (I, p. 171)

If we do not act for something, for some particular end, then Weil is saying that there is no finality in this world. "La nécessité est l'essence de la réalité des choses d'ici-bas. Autrement dit leur essence est conditionnelle. Leur essence est de n'être pas des fins. Leur réalité même est qu'ils ne sont pas des biens." (III, p. 124) "Comme Dieu est un bien qui n'est pas autre chose qu'un bien, la matière n'est pas autre chose qu'un non-bien." (III, p. 124) Even the ends that Weil speaks about in terms of practical freedom are not really ends; they are means. "Partout, sans exception, toutes les choses généralement considérées comme des fins sont par nature, par définition, par essence et de la manière la plus évidente

uniquement des moyens. On pourrait en citer autant d'exemples qu'on voudrait dans tous les domaines. Argent, pouvoir, Etat, grandeur nationale, production économique, diplômes universitaires; et beaucoup d'autres." (EL, p. 132) Any form of labour or work is but a means for acquiring money or some kind of exchange (means) in order to be able to eat, which, in turn, is a means of maintaining life so that one can continue to work. The cycle is clearly without end, so long as one is still alive. Existence never becomes an end for us until death is close at hand. When we are not threatened by death, however, we take existence for granted; but the ultimate purpose of this existence must be sought elsewhere. "Les moments où on est forcé de regarder la simple existence comme unique fin, c'est l'horreur totale, sans mélange. C'est là l'horreur de la situation du condamné à mort, que le Christ même a ressentie." (III, p. 184)

Everything in this world that we take for an end becomes, once we have it, a means to something else. This is true, in work, of the material, the tools, the body, and even the soul. When we look at the question of ends in relation to the idea of power, and thus in relation to the question of social oppression, we can see how Weil radically reverses the relationship between means and ends.

Le pouvoir, par définition, ne constitue qu'un moyen; ou pour mieux dire posséder un pouvoir, cela consiste simplement à posséder des moyens d'action qui dépassent la force si restreinte dont un individu dispose par lui-même. Mais la recherche du pouvoir, du fait même qu'elle est essentiellement impuissante à se saisir de son objet, exclut toute considération de fin, et en arrive, par un renversement inévitable, à tenir lieu de toutes les fins. C'est ce

renversement du rapport entre le moyen et la fin, c'est cette folie fondamentale qui rend compte de tout ce qu'il y a d'insensé et de sanglant tout au long de l'histoire. L'histoire humaine n'est que l'histoire de l'asservissement qui fait des hommes, aussi bien oppresseurs qu'opprimés, le simple jouet des instruments de domination qu'ils ont fabriqués eux-mêmes, et ravale ainsi l'humanité vivante à être la chose de choses inertes. (OL, p. 95)

Power is consequently nothing but a pure means. It is nevertheless, and almost inevitably, taken to be the supreme end by all those who have not understood that there is no finality in this world. The evil in this world results from this inversion of means and ends; but it is inevitable, because there are no ends. Evil results from taking as an absolute end that which is purely a means, and that which is purely a means is ubiquitous, and therefore an ersatz form of an absolute end.³⁹

We come, once again, to understand that Weil is speaking on two levels. We obviously cannot function in this world without many relative ends, and the knowledge that is necessary to know these ends. The kind of practical freedom that we have been discussing in Weil's thought indicates that all men pursue various ends, that they make choices, and that they follow a program designed to direct their actions toward the ends they have chosen. Excepting those who are in a state of unconsciousness, man cannot avoid thinking about ends and about the means necessary to bring about those ends, and therefore he must necessarily make certain choices about what ends to pursue and the manner in which to pursue them. This is simply the way in which everyday life appears to us. It is one side of necessity. It is not, however, the full reality of the way things are for Weil.

The full reality of the way things are is that we are limited. Every thought we have is a thought of necessity, and therefore of limit. Methodical action based on our thinking about necessity is action which corresponds to the limited picture of necessity that has been revealed to us, for, as we explained earlier, there is always an infinite number of conditions that have not been revealed to us and which we cannot take into account. The choices we make in pursuing one end rather than another are therefore not really choices at all, for whichever end we pursue, it is necessity which has determined or limited our choice in advance. We are not free to choose; we can only obey the limits that have necessarily been imposed upon us. This means that the ends we pursue are dictated by necessity as well.

Food is necessary in order to appease hunger; money is necessary in order to buy food; work is necessary in order to acquire money; food is necessary in order to work; and so on. Not only are all our ends a reflection of the limits imposed upon us by necessity but they are ultimately transformed by necessity into being nothing more than means. It is especially in terms of manual labour (the curse that fell upon Adam and which constitutes the difference between this world and an earthly paradise) that Weil illustrates this point. In manual labour, or, in general, in any work of execution, there is an irreducible element of servitude which not even a perfect social equality could eliminate. "C'est le fait qu'il est gouverné par la nécessité, non par la finalité. On l'exécute à cause d'un besoin, non en vue d'un bien; 'parce qu'on a besoin de gagner sa vie', comme disent ceux qui y passent leur existence. On

fournit un effort au terme duquel, à tous égards, on n'aura pas autre chose que ce qu'on a. Sans cet effort, on perdrait ce qu'on a." (GO, p. 355) We are like a hamster turning around on its little wheel; we always come to rest at the same spot that we began. All of the ends that we run after are ultimately means of taking us nowhere at all. This is what necessity shows us, i.e. that all our efforts are without finality. This is the other side of necessity, and it is that side of necessity which, for Weil, we should consent to as such. Only efforts without finality, efforts without any end attached to them, are pure. They are pure because they are an acceptance of death, an acceptance, in the final analysis, of a finality without end, of the absence of God.⁴⁰

We are always led back to the idea of the absence of God as reflected in Christ's cry of dereliction. The silence of God in response to Christ's cry is the acceptance by God, through Christ, of a finality without end. It is the transformation of finality into necessity. The absence of God and the obedience of Christ to the necessity (the finality without end) that this absence represents is the very essence of the notion of obedience (and therefore of freedom). It means, in effect, that the utter lack of finality in human life is God's way of showing us that our true home is not in this world. There is no end in this world that can ultimately satisfy our desires. That end is absent. If we are nevertheless to act in accordance with that end, then we must act in such a way that our actions correspond to the lack of finality in this world. "The Good has nothing to do with purpose, indeed it excludes the idea of purpose. 'All is vanity'

is the beginning and the end of ethics. The only genuine way to be good is to be good 'for nothing' in the midst of a scene where every 'natural thing', including one's own mind, is subject to chance, that is, to necessity. That 'for nothing' is indeed the experienced correlate of the invisibility or non-representable blankness of the idea of Good itself."⁴¹ Here we have, in the words of Iris Murdoch, the essence of Weil's thinking about finality.

All of the aspects of the question of necessity that we have discussed (brute force, time, freedom and the will, and the idea of finality) indicate the extent to which Weil's thought is incomprehensible without a firm grasp of her thinking about necessity. We have demonstrated how each aspect of necessity that we have considered can be shown to have two sides or faces, that side which appears to us as indeterminate and unlimited, and that side which is limit. Whatever side of necessity we are looking at, however, it is clear that we have no other choice but to be obedient. Whether we blindly submit to necessity, or whether we clearly perceive that we are completely limited by necessity, we are ultimately free only to obey. Nevertheless, there is a profound difference between the obedience entailed in the one case and in that of the other. We are obedient in both cases, but in the first case we do not consent to be obedient. We do not love that which can reduce us at any moment to being no more than a half crushed worm writhing on the ground. What Weil is saying is that in the second case, even if one is reduced to a state of extreme affliction, it is possible just the same to consent to (love) the necessity which has reduced one to a state analogous to

death.

The crucifixion of Christ, in turn, is the model in terms of which this possibility is understood. It is the model of extreme affliction, of the absence of God from Christ, of the absence of God from God. It is the model of a perfectly innocent being abandoned by both men and God to the mercy of a mechanical, mathematical, absolutely deaf and blind necessity, as well as the model of God, through Christ, submitting to this very same necessity. If the reality of the universe were only necessity -- necessity, that is, as indeterminate and unlimited -- then we would be forced to conclude that human misery and cruelty (evil) are unlimited, and that affliction is ultimately meaningless. There would be nothing beyond the whims (the blind play of circumstances) associated with both human and non-human nature that could be given as the reason why evil and not good is done to human beings. There would be no transcendent source of truth (of justice, good, or love). This would mean, in terms of the absence of God, that God is not, never was, and never will be a reality. Weil cannot accept this view of things, for it would mean that there is no ultimate limit in terms of which we can be judged. It would mean that everything is permissible. The cry 'why?' of the afflicted, however, leads Weil, by means of her interpretation of Christ's cry of dereliction, to place the source of truth, justice, and the good outside of this world. The cry of the afflicted cannot be given an answer in terms of this world, for it is a cry which is seeking for a purpose (and the universe is devoid of finality), not for a cause (which can easily be provided in relation to necessity

itself). It is a cry that arises out of the feeling of the absence of good, the absence of God, and it is precisely in terms of this absence of God that a transcendent limit is revealed to Weil.

We can say, finally, that this limit expresses, through the cry of the afflicted, the infinite distance which separates God from this world (God is felt as being absent), or the infinite distance which separates the good from necessity (the good is felt as being absent). This infinite distance which separates God from the world or the good from necessity is the form that God's love and justice take in this world. We are all equally separated from God because of necessity, but so also is God separated from Himself because of necessity, i.e. because that is the only way God can be impartial with respect to everything and every being in the universe -- the only way, indeed, the universe can remain in existence at all. God's impartiality (the divine love or Providence) goes as far as God's submitting, through the crucifixion of Christ, to necessity Himself, and therefore God Himself suffers extreme evil. Both the innocent and criminals suffer the same fate at the hands of necessity. This, for Weil, is the very nature of God's justice. It is the limit imposed upon all men at all times, a limit that not even God will transgress. Criminals, however, blindly submit to this limit; that is to say, they are not conscious that they are subjected to this limit. The innocent, on the other hand, experience this limit in affliction, in the experience of the absence of God. But it is possible, through grace, that they can love God in His absence, that they can consent to the infinite distance which separates God from

this world, and the good from necessity. The possibility of loving God who is absent, the God who abandoned Christ on the Cross, is the possibility that the suffering inflicted on innocent beings is necessary, that it is equivalent, in fact, to the suffering of God Himself, and that, finally, the absence of God from this world, which allows suffering to be inflicted on the innocent and the guilty alike, is the reality of God. It is the possibility of impossibility; but if the story of Christ is more than just a symbol, it is a possibility which can and should be actualized by each and every one of us. The possibility of loving God who is absent, and the steps leading up to the full reality of that possibility through suffering, will necessarily provide the focus for the greater part of what is still to be discussed in our study of Weil.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ART OF DYING: THE BRINGING ABOUT OF THE ABSENCE OF GOD

It is Weil's 'profession of faith'¹ that there is a reality outside this world, inaccessible to the human faculties, that is the sole foundation of the good and the unique source of all beauty, truth, justice, legitimacy, order, and human obligations that can exist in this world. Only by turning the whole of one's attention and love towards this reality can the good descend from outside this world and come upon men. Weil is not saying that one should seek for this reality, i.e., that one should seek for God, or even that one should believe in God.² "Il doit seulement refuser son amour à tout ce qui est autre que Dieu. Ce refus ne suppose aucune croyance. Il suffit de constater ce qui est une évidence pour tout esprit, c'est que tous les biens d'ici-bas, passés, présents ou futurs, réels ou imaginaires, sont finis et limités, radicalement incapables de satisfaire le désir d'un bien infini et parfait qui brûle perpétuellement en nous." (PS, pp. 42-43) Affliction reveals that the goods of this world are finite and limited, and at the same time that the infinite and perfect good that we desire is absent from this world. The feeling of the absence of good is a feeling that makes man want to die; all that he foresees, in fact, is death. But he does not know beforehand that the death inflicted by the feeling of the absence of good leads to a resurrection. He must choose either truth and death or falsehood and life. "Si on fait le premier choix, si on s'y tient, si on persiste indéfiniment à refuser de mettre tout son

amour dans les choses qui n'en sont pas dignes, c'est-à-dire dans toutes les choses d'ici-bas sans exception, cela suffit. . . . Si un homme persiste dans ce refus, un jour ou l'autre Dieu viendra à lui." (PS, p. 43)

It is death, the death of the soul, as well as the way in which this death is brought about, which preoccupies the attention of Weil throughout so much of her writing. To refuse to give one's love to everything which is other than God is nothing less than the death of the soul. The death of the soul is thus the central idea with respect to Weil's thinking about suffering and affliction. Suffering, in one form or another, is irreducibly attached to the death of the soul. At the same time, however, it must be noted that not every death of the soul will result in salvation (the love of God),³ and it is for this reason that Weil distinguishes between three kinds of suffering in the context of what we may justifiably speak of as the art of dying. She says: "Il y a trois espèces de douleur. La douleur inutile (dégradante). La douleur expiatoire. La douleur rédemptrice (celle-ci est le privilège des innocents). Nous constatons que Dieu les inflige toutes trois. (Pourquoi?) Il n'est permis à l'homme d'infliger que la seconde. (Pourquoi?) (II, p. 110)

From our discussion of necessity it is clear that no matter what kind of suffering is inflicted on human beings, whether it be the suffering inflicted by the blind whims of criminals, or the suffering submitted to and accepted in terms of self-conscious obligation, or the extreme suffering that characterizes the affliction

of Christ, this suffering is determined by necessity, and this necessity is the very touch of God's hand. We have seen, particularly in relation to Christ's cry of dereliction, that the idea of the absence of God means not only that everything in this world is at the mercy of a mechanical, mathematical, absolutely deaf and blind necessity, but also that this very same necessity is an expression of the impartiality of God's love (Providence), for even God Himself, through Christ, submits to necessity. We can understand, therefore, in looking at both sides of the picture of necessity that Weil has drawn for us, how she can speak of God inflicting all three kinds of suffering. What we must come to understand is what is being said when she claims that expiatory suffering is the only kind of suffering in which man is able to participate through his own efforts.

To understand what Weil is saying about expiatory suffering, we might begin by putting all three kinds of suffering into perspective. We can do this, in the first place, by looking at what Weil says about suffering in the context of her notion of punishment.

Châtiment. C'est le mal que moi de telle date fais à moi de telle date ultérieure. Ainsi, si j'ai tant de pain pour lundi, mardi et mercredi, et si je mange tout lundi, moi de lundi inflige la faim à moi de mardi et mercredi. Mais si mardi ce qui m'a poussé au mal est encore en moi, c'est moi qui me fais mal à moi, dans un même instant. Je puis l'ignorer. Si la racine de la faute a disparu (*μετανοεῖν*, changer d'esprit), le mal que je souffre mardi est extérieur; c'est de la souffrance innocente. Quand je souffre le mal infligé par moi sans le savoir, c'est de la souffrance infernale. Quand je me mets à savoir qu'il est infligé par moi, c'est de la souffrance expiatrice. Quand j'ai changé, c'est de la souffrance innocente. (II, pp. 120-121)

To begin with, the infernal suffering referred to is the suffering

brought about as a result of unconsciousness (the state of mind of the criminal, for example). Nevertheless it is suffering that is brought about as a result of necessity, as is expiatory and redemptive suffering, although it is obvious that infernal suffering is not of the same order as the latter two forms of suffering. All forms of suffering, however, have one thing in common; they involve, in varying degrees, the destruction of the 'I'. The 'I' for Weil means the total human being, his personality and traits, his human faculties, including that of the intelligence, and even the faculty of human love, his ego, and therefore ultimately his very self, his very existence. The partial or total destruction of the 'I' which is brought about by external circumstances (by necessity), and entirely against a man's will, is the essence itself of suffering. That which distinguishes between the various forms of suffering is the extent to which the 'I' has been destroyed, the extent to which the destruction of the 'I' is consented to, and the extent to which the soul of the person being destroyed is innocent.

In effect, therefore, what Weil is describing in her characterization of the different forms of suffering is the process or stages of salvation. If we look specifically at what Weil says concerning affliction, we can see very clearly the lines of demarcation which inform her thinking in this context.

Si l'âme qui tombe dans ce malheur a en partie aboli en soi le je pour laisser place à Dieu, mais non pas complètement, le malheur produit le double effet. Destruction extérieure du je et absence de Dieu. Douleur expiatoire et douleur rédemptrice. Mais c'est seulement dans l'état de perfection que peut se produire, si on peut s'exprimer ainsi, la plénitude de l'absence de Dieu.

La destruction purement extérieure du je est douleur quasi infernale. La destruction extérieure à laquelle l'âme s'associe par amour est douleur expiatoire. La production d'absence de Dieu est douleur rédemptrice. (II, pp. 251-252)

The external destruction of the 'I' is clearly what is common to all forms of suffering. In expiatory suffering, however, the soul associates itself through love (consent) with this external destruction of the 'I'. Expiatory suffering is essentially the way in which a human being can participate in the bringing about of the absence of God. Strictly speaking, therefore, redemptive suffering is not precisely the 'bringing about' of the absence of God. Suffering does not become redemptive until the absence of God is a reality, i.e. until the feeling of the absence of God has been experienced by the soul. The absence of God can, of course, be brought about without the aid of expiatory suffering, but it would seem that expiatory suffering is necessary for the purification of the soul. It is through expiatory suffering that one participates in the destruction of the 'I' (the killing of the ego), that one strives to be rooted in death. It is only when one has been rooted in death that the suffering of affliction can touch one in its full reality, for what it touches is an innocent soul. What it touches is the eternal part of the soul which is equivalent to Christ. Then, and only then, can the full reality of the absence of God be experienced, the absence of God from God. This, as Weil says, is the experience of "la plénitude de l'absence de Dieu." (II, p. 251) The only way we can legitimately speak of the presence of God in terms of Weil's thought is to speak of the absence of God from God.

Since it is Christ's cry of dereliction which is the source of Weil's thinking about the absence of God from God, and thus the source of her thinking about redemptive suffering, it is probably best if we speak of redemptive suffering solely in terms of the absence of God, and expiatory suffering in terms of the art of dying: the 'bringing about' of the absence of God. We know, of course, that it is only God who can bring about the absence of God. Even in the case of expiatory suffering, it is God's grace or revelation which permits one to bring about God's absence, and therefore it is ultimately God who is acting and not the human individual. Nevertheless, because expiatory suffering involves human beings who are not at every moment the equivalent of God, it is legitimate to speak of individuals bringing about the absence of God through their own efforts. This brings us back to the dilemma that runs throughout Weil's thinking, i.e. to the fact that everything in the universe is obedient to God, and yet, at the same time, human beings have the choice of consenting or of not consenting to be obedient. They are obedient whether they consent or not, but there is a difference of degree in relation to the state of perfection (innocence) of the soul that is constituted by the fact of consenting or of not consenting to be obedient.

Everything that Weil says about suffering is inevitably tied to her thinking about necessity. That is why, if we do not keep in mind the two sides or faces of necessity, it is virtually impossible to penetrate to the heart of what she is saying about suffering. In particular, we must keep in mind what we have referred to as Weil's notion of 'practical freedom' if we are to understand her thinking

about expiatory suffering. For we know, to begin with, that affliction is suffered by constraint.

Il est impossible de croire sans y être contraint par l'expérience que tout ce qu'on a dans l'âme, toutes les pensées, tous les sentiments, toutes les attitudes à l'égard des idées, des hommes et de l'univers, et surtout l'attitude la plus intime de l'être envers lui-même, tout cela est entièrement à la merci des circonstances. Même si on le reconnaît théoriquement, ce qui est déjà très rare, on ne le croit pas avec toute l'âme. Le croire avec toute l'âme, c'est cela que le Christ appelait non pas, comme on traduit d'ordinaire, renoncement ou abnégation, mais se nier soi-même, et c'est la condition pour mériter d'être son disciple. (PS, pp. 113-114)

To believe that everything in the soul is entirely at the mercy of circumstances is to accept the death of the soul. This death of the soul, according to Weil, is the same as that of which Plato spoke when he said that to philosophize is to learn to die. "Il ne s'agit pas en réalité pour l'âme de mourir, mais simplement de reconnaître la vérité qu'elle est une chose morte, une chose analogue à la matière." (PS, p. 115) In the context of the notion of freedom, it is a matter of thinking clearly about necessity, that the soul, like inert matter, is entirely subjected to necessity, and therefore it is to think clearly about our not being free. To know humanity in this way, that is, to know that we are not free and that the soul is a dead thing, is something which can be known by God alone, and also by those in this world who have received revelation, who have been regenerated from on high.

Car on ne peut pas accepter cette mort de l'âme si on n'a pas en plus de la vie illusoire de l'âme une autre vie; si on n'a pas son trésor et son cœur hors de soi; non seulement hors de sa personne, mais hors de toutes ses pensées, hors de tous ses sentiments, au-delà de

tout ce qui est connaissable, aux mains de notre Père qui est dans le secret. Ceux qui sont ainsi, on peut dire qu'ils ont été engendrés à partir de l'eau et de l'Esprit. Car ils ne sont plus autre chose qu'une double obéissance, d'une part à la nécessité mécanique où ils sont pris du fait de leur condition terrestre, d'autre part à l'inspiration divine. Il n'y a plus rien en eux qu'on puisse appeler leur volonté propre, leur personne, leur moi. Ils ne sont plus autre chose qu'une certaine intersection de la nature et de Dieu. Cette intersection, c'est le nom dont Dieu les a nommés de toute éternité, c'est leur vocation. (PS, p. 115)

If we are to understand this double obedience whereby a human being becomes nothing more than a certain intersection of nature and God, it will be necessary to look at the idea of expiatory suffering in more concrete terms. To do this it will be best if we begin by examining the heart of the problem, that is to say, it will be best if we look at Weil's thinking about the 'I', for one can say that it is the 'I's' participation in its own destruction which constitutes expiatory suffering. Then, in order to link our examination to Weil's thinking about necessity, we will look at the manner in which the faculties of the human intelligence and the will are involved in the expiatory process. This means, as well, that we will be looking at what Weil speaks of as vegetative and supplementary energy.

As we suggested earlier, the bringing about of the absence of God (expiatory suffering) can be referred to as the art of dying. It can be said as well that the bringing about of the absence of God is a method by which a human being strives towards the attainment of salvation (the state of perfection), and that therefore it is a method which is ultimately attempting to bring about a contact with the full

reality of God. In terms of Weil's thinking, we know that whatever comes between or is placed between God (the source of revelation) and that part of the soul which is able to receive God's revelation (the eternal part of the soul) will prevent the soul from coming into contact with the full reality of God (from receiving God's revelation). In other words, anything which is placed as a screen between God and God is an obstacle which must be removed before God can fully reveal Himself to Himself. Salvation is nothing less than the revelation of God to Himself. In the case of human beings, that which acts as a screen or veil placed between God and God or between God and the eternal part of the soul is the 'I'.

Toutes les choses que je vois, entends, respire, touche, mange, tous les êtres que je rencontre, je prive tout cela du contact avec Dieu et je prive Dieu du contact avec tout cela dans la mesure où quelque chose en moi dit je. (II, p. 295)

Ceux que j'aime, je leur fais un tort infini en leur étant présente, en maintenant l'écran que je suis entre eux et Dieu qui aime les toucher non seulement du dedans, par l'inspiration, mais du dehors, par l'intermédiaire des êtres humains qui les rencontrent. (III, p. 16)

For Weil, everything that the 'I' does, without any exception, including good, is bad, because the 'I' itself is bad. This is why she can say that "Plus je disparaissais, plus Dieu est présent dans ce monde-ci" (II, p. 271), or "A mesure que je deviens rien, Dieu s'aime à travers moi" (II, p. 193), or "Répondre à l'absence de Dieu, qui est amour, par l'absence et l'amour." (III, p. 16) It is the 'I', the human personality (including all the human faculties) which prevents us from receiving revelation, which prevents God from revealing

Himself to Himself. The 'I' is the shadow cast by error and sin, that which obstructs God's revelation. We, however, take this 'I' to be our being. We view the 'I' as the source of our knowledge and creativity, of our personal and social (moral) existence, as the source, indeed, which determines every aspect of our earthly existence.

Weil realizes, of course, that virtually everything in this world which we consider to be true, just, or good has been determined or created by the 'I'. The history of human civilization can be said to be no more than a documentation of the numerous personalities who have determined, in one way or another, the widely disparate tables of values that mankind has placed over his head. It is therefore a history, as Nietzsche demonstrated, which lacks any universal standard of truth, justice, or good. It is precisely this idea, however, i.e. the idea that it is man himself, through his own efforts (and in conjunction with the idea of autonomous reason), who determines his own destiny and thus the table of values which he will place over his head and live by, that is the source of all error and falsehood for Weil. Weil does not deny that the history of human civilization is a history of individual (and collective) perspective, a history in which the 'I' is always at the centre of the universe. What she denies, as Nietzsche does, is that an individual (or collective) perspective can be the source of any universal standard of truth, justice, or good. If there is a universal standard of truth, justice, or good, it cannot be said to arise from any individual perspective; it is not determined by the 'I'. If there is a perspective

from which pure truth, justice, or good is derived, that perspective lies outside of the 'I'. Indeed, for Weil, it lies outside of all space and time, outside the universe altogether, and therefore it is a perspective which involves revelation.

In that Weil sees all pure truth, justice, and good as having to be revealed to us, it is clear that the nature of this truth, justice, and good is impersonal, and that it comes from an impersonal source.⁴ We can see the way in which Weil looks at the idea of impersonality by analogy, that is, by looking at an example as simple as that of a child doing a sum in arithmetic. For Weil, if the child does the sum wrong, the error bears the stamp of his personality. On the other hand, however, if he does the sum exactly right there is no trace of his personality; his personality is absent from the operation. As Weil says: "La perfection est impersonnelle. La personne en nous, c'est la part en nous de l'erreur et du péché. Tout l'effort des mystiques a toujours visé à obtenir qu'il n'y ait plus dans leur âme aucune partie qui dise 'je'." (EL, p. 17) And since the goal is to have nothing left in the soul which can say 'I', then the state of perfection consonant with impersonality is even more impossible for a person who views himself as a member of a collectivity, for a collectivity says 'We'. "Un groupe d'êtres humains ne peut pas faire même une addition. Une addition s'opère dans un esprit qui oublie momentanément qu'il existe aucun autre esprit." (EL, p. 18)⁵

We must view all aspects of the human personality in the same way, that is to say, as the clothes which God has given us and

which we should divest ourselves of. We must uproot ourselves, unmake the creature in us; we must become nothing, cease to exist.⁶ The language being used here to describe the destruction of the 'I' is that which is evocative of Weil's idea of de-creation.⁷ It is God who has given us being (or at least what appears to us as being, i.e. our existence). At the same time He has given us the possibility of giving Him something in return by ceasing to be. God's abandonment of Christ on the Cross is the model for Weil's understanding here.

The withdrawal of God from Christ (and therefore from God) is the point of departure for her thinking about the Creation. Christ's consent to his abandonment by his Father is a consent to necessity, to the existence of the universe as it is. It is God's consent to the universe, to the Creation. This consent, in turn, is what maintains the universe in existence, and it is expressed, as we have seen, in the form of God's absence from the universe. The absence of God from the universe, and in the present context, His absence from every 'I' in the universe, is what maintains the universe and therefore every 'I' in the universe in existence. As long as there are 'I's in the universe, God will be separated from Himself. These 'I's form a screen that is placed between God and God. The only way in which God can be fully present to God (which would mean the end of the universe, the undoing of the Creation) would be for every 'I' in the universe to consent not to be (to de-create itself). To de-create in this sense is to give back to God what He has given us by creating us, that is to say, the very thing (our 'I') which constitutes our existence. In other words, we must be fully absent from this world

(the death of the 'I'), just as God is fully absent from this world (the abandonment of Christ on the Cross), for then our 'I's will no longer form a screen between God and God. If there is nothing left which we can call our 'I', then we are little more than inert matter which is completely obedient to God.

Inert matter is an extremely provocative image in this context. Weil uses this image throughout her writings. As we have seen, it is that to which we are reduced by affliction. Matter is completely obedient to God, and it is the whole of matter, as such, which we see as the universe. Yet God is absent from the universe, this being, on the basis of Weil's interpretation of the Cross, the only way the universe can remain in existence. What we must realize here, however, is that everything in the universe is obedient to God. We may think that we are free to obey or not to obey, but in the picture of necessity that Weil has drawn for us it is clear that we are nevertheless obedient whether we choose to obey or not. Therefore Weil is not saying that we should destroy our 'I's so that we can obey God as matter. There is nothing in us to begin with that does not obey God. To obey God as matter is consequently to do evil, for what is absent in obeying God as matter is the spirit. If the spirit is absent, then God in us is dead.⁸ What is being said, then, is that there is an infinite qualitative difference between simply obeying God as matter and consenting to obey God as matter. In the latter case the spirit is present. It is present because the consent to obey God as matter is absurd; it is an impossibility. As such it requires a love which is supernatural (which is animated by the spirit), and therefore it is

a consent which can only come from the grace of God. The image of perfection that Weil is proposing for us is thus an image which involves the direct union of divine spirit with matter (Christ).⁹

"De la matière inerte qu'on regarde comme pensante est une image parfaite de la perfection." (CS, p. 260)

It is imperative that we underline the idea of consent in Weil. If we do not have this notion at hand at all times, it will become very difficult to distinguish between the destruction of the 'I' from without and the destruction of the 'I' in which the 'I' itself can participate through grace. The difficulty arises because there is really nothing in this world that we do possess except the power to say 'I'. We can be deprived of absolutely everything else, and when this does happen, as is the case in extreme affliction, there is no longer an 'I' left which can participate (through consent) in its own destruction. Once again we seem to be led back to a notion that Weil rarely dwells upon, a notion, nevertheless, which seems integral to thinking out her position. That notion is the idea of predestination. As she says in relation to affliction: "Si, par le malheur, on perd l'enracinement sans avoir même commencé à le transfigurer (ou si on ne l'a jamais eu), quel espoir peut-il y avoir?" (II, p. 205)

Almost anything whatsoever can, entirely against a man's will, completely destroy his 'I'. What happens to those whose 'I' has been destroyed by external circumstances in this way? Weil suggests that "On ne peut se représenter pour eux que l'anéantissement à la manière de la conception athée ou matérialiste." (II, p. 246)

Again, what seems to be suggested here is that the souls of those who have lost their 'I's have not attained to innocence, and therefore they have not experienced the full reality of extreme affliction. Their 'I's have been killed prior to their being able to consent to the possibility of that very destruction in and of itself. That means, in turn, that they are still attached in one way or another to this world. They have not received the grace necessary to allow them to renounce all the goods of this world, the grace which is necessary to satisfy the desire for an infinite and perfect good which perpetually burns within them. It is only when the feeling of the absence of good is accompanied by grace that the attachment to the goods of this world can be given up. In fact, to detach oneself from the goods of this world presupposes grace, for this detachment is a consent to the absence of good, and the consent to the absence of good is equivalent to the love of God.

As long as we keep the Cross in mind as the model upon which Weil's thinking rests, we will not stray too far from the central focus of our study: the affliction of men, the perfection of God, and the link between the two. For Weil it is God, through Christ, who accuses Himself of abandoning Himself (the cry of dereliction), and it is this accusation (cry) which paradoxically expresses, in the form of the absence of God from God, the full reality of God's love (the plenitude of the absence of God, God's presence, as well as His perfection). The perfection of God is brought to light by Weil in terms of the absence of God, and in the context of the question of affliction, in terms of the absence of good. Consequently, when she

is speaking about those who have lost their 'I's before they have been able to consent to this loss, she is speaking of souls which are not saved, souls which fall into something which, even in this life, would be almost equivalent to hell. She is speaking about a state in which the absence of God becomes permanent. Therefore, in addressing herself to the problem of salvation (and implicitly to the question of predestination), she is necessarily underlining the model upon which her thinking about salvation takes its point of departure; that is to say, she is underlining the idea of God's perfection as it is reflected in her interpretation of Christ's cry of dereliction.

It is clear then, using Weil's interpretation of the Cross as our model, that the purely external destruction of the 'I' is not at all efficacious in the salvific process unless the soul of the person who is undergoing this operation is innocent. Only an innocent soul (Christ) is able to consent to the absence of all good, the absence of God, and therefore to its own destruction. The participation of the 'I' in its own destruction can therefore occur only at those moments when the soul is innocent, at those very moments when grace is present to the eternal part of the soul. Thus the 'I' is not, strictly speaking, involved in the consent to its own destruction; it does not, strictly speaking, act in its association with its own de-creation. Rather, it is Christ (God, the eternal part of the soul) in us who consents and who acts through the medium of the 'I'. This does not mean, however, that real actions will not take place in this world. Christ had a human body, and he performed actions in this world. We must understand these actions in the light of the image

of perfection that Christ represents, that is, in the light of the direct union of divine spirit with matter.

In looking at the destruction of the 'I', therefore, we must always be aware that Weil's criticisms are ultimately based on her interpretation of the Cross. The Cross is the model of salvation, the criterion in relation to which we must understand the nature and degree of the 'I's destruction. This is why, in the first place, the total destruction of the 'I' does not in itself constitute salvation. It may be the case, for example, that the 'I' has been completely killed in someone before he has had a chance to associate himself with the possibility of that death through consent. Because his 'I' has been killed, he is no longer able to love, nor is he affected by the love shown for him by others. "Il se laisse faire comme les chiens et les chats qui reçoivent de la nourriture, de la chaleur et des caresses, et comme eux il est avide d'en recevoir le plus possible. Selon le cas, il s'attache comme un chien ou se laisse faire avec une espèce d'indifférence comme un chat. Il boit sans le moindre scrupule toute l'énergie de quiconque s'occupe de lui." (II, p. 247)¹⁰

In spite of the fact that the 'I' has been killed in this example, it is difficult not to see a kind of egoism still in operation here, a kind of naked, vegetative egoism: "Un égoïsme sans je." (II, p. 246)

We must be careful in speaking of egoism here, however, because Weil does not think that it is within man's power to be egoistic.

L'homme voudrait être égoïste et ne peut pas.
C'est le caractère le plus frappant de sa misère et la source de sa grandeur.

L'homme se dévoue toujours à un ordre. Seulement,

sauf illumination surnaturelle, cet ordre a pour centre ou lui-même, ou un être particulier (qui peut être une abstraction) dans lequel il s'est transféré. (Napoléon pour les soldats de l'Empire, la Science, le Parti, etc.) Ordre perspectif. (II, p. 178)¹¹

What man does, in effect, is project his 'I' on to finite things, which is to say that his ego becomes the thing (particular or abstract) on to which it has been projected. And even if he devotes himself to an order that is centred in himself, that order is ultimately imposed from without by necessity; it is not his 'I' or ego which determines that order.

We know, in relation to Weil's thinking about necessity, that man is not the maker of his own destiny. Man is limited in his every movement and in his every thought by a rigorous necessity. Even more than this, we know that these limits are eternal for Weil; they are imposed by God. Thus it is that all changes take place within an order that is eternal, and that order, in turn, is not affected by these changes. Man should live in harmony with this eternal order. This order is beyond any human perspective, and at the same time it is the very source of our true being. According to Weil, however, we live as reversed beings. We define our being in terms of the things of this world, or, more precisely, our being becomes defined (is determined) by the things of this world. The things of this world in terms of which we define our being (or the things of this world on to which we project our 'I's) become our idols, and these idols, in turn, become the substitutes for our true being. These idols become substitutes for God. "Celui qui n'a pas

renoncé à tout sans aucune exception au moment de penser à Dieu donne le nom de Dieu à une de ses idoles." (CS, p. 175) Man tends, as well, to seek his salvation in terms of these idols, but for Weil it is wrong to seek one's salvation, not because it is egoistic, "mais parce que c'est orienter l'âme vers une simple possibilité particulière et contingente, au lieu de la plénitude de l'être, au lieu du bien qui est inconditionnellement." (II, p. 178) What man does, then, is to make his idols God, rather than making God his only idol. Christ, on the other hand, made God his only idol. "Cela peut sembler revenir au même, mais ce sont deux mouvements contraires, faire de son idole Dieu, ou faire de Dieu son idole. De même que faire de son désir la loi ou faire de la loi son désir sont deux manières contraires de concevoir la royauté." (CS, p. 171)

To return to the question of the 'I', to the question of man's egoism, it is evident from Weil's thinking about necessity that man's 'I' is determined for him in one way or another by external circumstances and by other human beings in this world. Man's 'I' can be defined essentially in terms of behaviour. This in itself demonstrates the relative character of the 'I', the lack of any unique perspective which is common to all men and which they can call their own. If we can speak of man as being egoistic, it is only in terms, as Weil suggests, of a kind of naked vegetative egoism, an egoism minus the 'I'. A person in this state is no more than a piece of inert matter. As matter he is obedient to God, but at the same time the spirit in him is dead, and therefore God in him is dead. For those in whom the 'I' is not completely dead,

there is still the possibility that they can participate in the destruction of the 'I' by attaining to a perspective which is outside of all individual perspectives, outside of all space and time, a perspective which is transcendent with respect to all individual 'I's. If we can think of an 'I' at the centre of this perspective, that 'I' would be equivalent to God. We must lose our own 'I's, the 'I's determined by external circumstances and other human beings in this world, so that we can see things from the point of view of the 'I' which is God. Strictly speaking, of course, there is no 'point of view' in this context. We can only think in terms of an image here, of an image, in fact, which is totally different from our usual thinking about subjectivity and objectivity -- an image which expresses God's seeing. To elucidate the idea expressed by such imagery, it is worthwhile to quote what Weil says about the 'I' in relation to God as it is presented in her thinking about the Trinity.¹²

Trinité. Si nous pensions Dieu seulement comme un nous le penserions ou comme être ou comme acte tourné vers le dehors. Le penser comme acte non tourné vers le dehors, on y parvient en se représentant qu'il est deux, et en même temps un par l'union, c'est-à-dire trois. Dire qu'il est trois et un, c'est dire qu'il est deux, et un de l'unité d'union, et encore un d'une unité plus profonde.

Cette union est une personne, c'est-à-dire qu'elle est différente de l'union entre sujet et objet que nous connaissons, qui est un rapport abstrait. Là le sujet est sujet, et l'objet est encore sujet, et l'union est aussi sujet. Dieu comme sujet dit je, Dieu comme objet dit je, Dieu comme connaissance ou amour dit je. En quelque qualité qu'on le considère, il dit toujours je. Le Fils est ce mot même, à savoir: je.

La vision a moins de réalité que le sujet qui voit ou l'objet vu. En Dieu c'est presque le contraire.

L'intelligence ne peut jamais pénétrer le mystère, mais elle peut, et peut seule, rendre compte de la convenance des mots qui l'expriment. Pour cet usage,

elle doit être plus aiguë, plus perçante, plus précise,
plus rigoureuse et plus exigeante que pour tout autre.
(II, pp. 244-245)

The perspective which has an 'I' outside of all perspectives, where the subject and the object are identified, is Weil's way of suggesting that man's "vrai but n'est pas de voir Dieu en toutes choses, mais que Dieu à travers nous voit les choses que nous voyons." (II, p. 268) It is the descending movement of God (revelation -- Incarnation) and not the ascending movement of man (which is impossible for Weil) that she has in mind when she places God on the side of the subject and not on that of the object. It is only God, through us, who can give the crushed and bleeding pile of flesh at the side of the road his humanity back, who can see, not the crushed and bleeding pile of flesh (the object) lying there, but the humanity buried within it. The difficulty for man is that he is in a state of duality. It is he who loves, who knows, and who acts, and yet he is separated from that which is loved, from that which is known, and from the material of his actions. On the other hand, the unity wherein the subject and the object are one single and the same thing, the state of him who knows himself and who loves himself, is something which is only possible for God (God as Subject) and for those who have been assimilated in God. The unity which would allow us to see the afflicted other than as objects of repulsion and disgust is the love of God for God. It is that unity, transcending all individual perspectives, which allows an individual to feel compassion for the afflicted.¹³

We are now in a position in our discussion to look specifically

at the roles that the faculties of the human intelligence and the will play in expiatory suffering. We know as clearly as possible that the 'I' is something which must be done away with if the soul is to be saved, if, that is, God is to be revealed fully to Himself. At the same time, however, the intellectual faculty as well as the will are part of the 'I'. This means that both the intelligence and the will must also be done away with. To be more exact, they must be used up in the process of laying the soul open for the reception of God's grace. In this sense we can say that the intelligence and the will serve as mediators between this world and the fulness of God's grace. Of course, at the moment that grace is received, these faculties are no longer in operation; at this moment we can only speak, as has been suggested already, in imagery which evokes the ideas of God seeing and God acting. It is imagery which expresses the direct union of divine spirit with matter, and thus it is imagery which relates to the fundamental contradiction at the heart of our study: the affliction of men, the perfection of God, and the link between the two.

If we begin with the faculty of the human intelligence, the question that we must put to ourselves, knowing that the intelligence must ultimately be done away with in order for the 'I' to be completely destroyed, is: in what way can the intelligence participate in its own destruction? Weil is quite explicit in her response to this question. "L'intelligence discursive se détruit par la contemplation des contradictions claires et inévitables. Koan. Mystères." (CS, p. 295) Inescapable contradictions are the means by which thought

is evoked in this world for Weil. They are also the means by which thought can be carried above and beyond the domain of the intelligence.

La notion de mystère est légitime quand l'usage le plus logique, le plus rigoureux de l'intelligence mène à une impasse, à une contradiction qu'on ne peut éviter, en ce sens que la suppression d'un terme rend l'autre vide de sens, que poser un terme contraint à poser l'autre. Alors la notion de mystère, comme un levier, transporte la pensée de l'autre côté de l'impasse, de l'autre côté de la porte impossible à ouvrir, au delà du domaine de l'intelligence, au-dessus. Mais pour parvenir au delà du domaine de l'intelligence, il faut l'avoir traversé jusqu'au bout, et traversé en suivant un chemin tracé avec un rigueur irréprochable. Autrement on n'est pas au delà, mais en deçà. (CS, pp. 79-80)¹⁴

Contradiction is thus an obstacle for the human intelligence.

Whenever a contradiction is encountered by the intelligence, it is forced to conceive of a relation (ratio) which transforms the two sides of the contradiction (the contraries) into a correlation. The result of this operation is that the soul is drawn upwards (grace). Relation is therefore an intermediary which "est d'une part d'être situé à mi-chemin entre l'ignorance et la pleine sagesse, entre le devenir temporel et la plénitude de l'être ('entre' à la manière d'une moyenne proportionnelle, car il s'agit de l'assimilation de l'âme à Dieu). De plus il faut qu'il tire l'âme vers l'être, qu'il appelle la pensée." (SG, p. 106)¹⁵

When the faculty of thought is evoked by running up against contradiction or mystery, the relation that the intelligence is forced to conceive draws the soul upwards. The steadfast contemplation of contradiction will eventually bring the soul into contact with that (God) which is above the intelligence; it will exhaust the intelligence by using it up. And it is of little account how intelligent

a man is to begin with. Even men with the most brilliant minds can live and die in error and falsehood. Their intelligence is no asset when it is separated from the good, or from truth and justice. "La différence entre hommes plus ou moins intelligents est comme la différence entre des criminels condamnés pour la vie à l'emprisonnement cellulaire et dont les cellules seraient plus ou moins grandes. Un homme intelligent et fier de son intelligence ressemble à un condamné qui serait fier d'avoir une grande cellule." (EL, p. 33) A man who hates falsehood, and who therefore loves the good, even though it is absent from this world, will prefer to beat his head against the wall of the cell in which his mind is entrapped rather than submit to this imprisonment. He must do this endlessly and without hope, continually fainting,¹⁶ until one day he will find on awakening that he is on the other side of the wall.

He may find that he is still in a prison, although it is a more spacious one. This is of no importance, for what he has discovered is the key which unlocks all doors, the key which breaks down every wall. He has passed beyond the intelligence into the beginning of wisdom. His mind has reached the point where it can grasp thoughts which are inexpressible because of the number of relations they combine; it has reached the point where it already dwells in truth.

Et il importe peu qu'il ait eu à l'origine peu ou beaucoup d'intelligence, qu'il ait été dans une cellule étroite ou large. Ce qui importe seul, c'est qu'étant arrivé au bout de sa propre intelligence, quelle qu'elle pût être, il soit passé au-delà. Un idiot de village est aussi proche de la vérité qu'un enfant prodige. L'un et l'autre en sont séparés seulement par une muraille. On n'entre pas dans la vérité sans avoir passé à travers

son propre anéantissement; sans avoir séjourné longtemps dans un état d'extrême et totale humiliation. (EL, p. 34)

In the same way that the discursive intelligence can be destroyed by the contemplation of clear and inescapable contradictions, so also can the will be destroyed in the accomplishment of impossible tasks. It is of little significance whether we are in possession of a large or of a small share of these faculties. What is important is that we should persevere to the end and completely use them up.¹⁷ However, as we are human beings living in a state of imperfection, we are not at every moment the recipients of grace. We are like plants that live by light and water, not by light alone. We cannot count upon grace alone, and therefore we need energy from this world.¹⁸ And yet it is precisely the energy that we receive from this world, "toute l'énergie vitale qui nous est fournie par la totalité des choses et des êtres auxquels nous tenons" (SG, p. 98), that we have to lose. The only good use for the will is thus a negative one.

Pour parvenir à la parfaite obéissance il faut exercer sa volonté, il faut faire effort jusqu'à ce qu'on ait épuisé en soi-même la quantité finie de l'espèce d'imperfection qui correspond à l'effort et à la volonté. Cette imperfection en quantité finie, l'effort de volonté doit l'user comme une meule use un morceau de métal. Après cela, il n'y a plus effort ni volonté. Tout ce qui tant qu'on est au niveau de la volonté apparaît comme résistance à vaincre, inertie, fatigue, désir inférieur, tout cela, quand on a passé un certain seuil, devient souffrance passivement subie; et les mouvements ne sont pas plus des actions que l'immobilité. Quand on en est là, il y a réellement obéissance. (II, p. 275)

The energy which feeds the will is the vital substratum of all human activity. It is essentially one, a single entity. Weil, however, qualifies her thinking about energy by distinguishing between

two categories of energy which differ according to the part of the soul in relation to which they are in the process of sustaining. She therefore distinguishes between what she calls "l'énergie supplémentaire" (or "l'énergie volontaire") and "l'énergie végétative". The former is the part of our energy which sustains desire and the will. It is animal energy, energy on the level of time. It is that energy which allows us to think that the suffering we are undergoing will not last more than an hour. The latter is the part of our energy which sustains the chemico-biological mechanisms necessary for the maintenance of human life. It is energy which is below the level of time. If our supplementary energy is exhausted and we have to expend our vegetative energy for something other than the strictly biological functions for which it is destined, then even the shortest duration of time is transformed into an endless duration. As there is no supplementary energy left, the soul is without the resources for saying that the suffering it is undergoing will not last for more than an hour; it is forced to cry out: 'Enough!'

As is the case with the cry 'why?', the soul does not know to whom this supplication is addressed. Just the same, it cannot help crying out. There is, however, a part of the soul (the eternal part of the soul) which can consent to the unendurable sufferings it is undergoing, which can consent that these sufferings should go on forever if it is God's will. If this consent is given, the soul is cut in two. "Ce qu'on sent comme étant le moi est dans la partie qui crie: 'Assez!', et pourtant on prend le parti de l'autre interlocuteur. C'est vraiment sorti de soi." (CS, p. 178) It is

then, as it were, that the very sap of life is drained away and man becomes a dead thing (inert matter) while still alive. This death, although it is a physical operation, is a spiritual death for Weil. It is what conversion is.¹⁹

The cry 'enough!' can only invade the soul when all the reserves of supplementary energy have been exhausted. It is of little consequence whether we expend this energy in seeking for what we think are worldly goods or whether we expend it in seeking for God. What matters is that it be expended, and if it revives again, as often happens, that it be expended once more. We will never see that the goods of this world that we are seeking are not goods, or that the God we are seeking is not God, until we are led to feel the absence of all good, the absence of God. This means that the will must be used up in seeking for goods in this world, that it must be destroyed in seeking for that which does not exist.

Il faut que l'énergie volontaire soit dépensée de manière à ne pas être récupérée, de manière à être épuisée. Pour cela, il faut que la volonté soit dirigée vers des choses placées au-dessus de son pouvoir. Peu importe lesquelles, pourvu qu'elle se tende et se tende et ne parvienne pas. Il faut qu'elle sente ses limites et s'y heurte continuellement.

Il faut que tout ce qui est obtenu apparaisse sans valeur, qu'en échange des dépenses d'énergie on ne reçoive jamais un bien. Qu'il y ait ou échec ou succès méprisé aussitôt qu'obtenu. (CS, pp. 179-180)²⁰

When all of one's supplementary energy has been expended, and therefore when the will has been used up, nothing remains but vegetative energy. So long as this vegetative energy is directed towards something other than the biological functions which it

supports, it will itself be consumed because it will be exposed to the attacks of both human and non-human nature. It will be exposed to affliction. There is no longer any 'I' remaining to say that one's sufferings will not last. To be exposed to sufferings in this state is really equivalent to an endless duration of voluntary efforts. Even a quarter of an hour is felt as an endless duration. If nevertheless, after this quarter of an hour, a part of the soul refuses to cry 'enough!', it will have travelled through the indefinite length of time and passed beyond time, into eternity.²¹ It will have remembered, in the feeling of the absence of all good, that there is another kind of good, an unconditioned good. If the soul cleaves to this inexpressible idea of a pure, unconditioned good, it chooses between hell and heaven. Perhaps it is only remaking a choice made since the foundation of the world,²² but the soul does not know this; it does not know it is choosing. This choice is ultimately a mystery. It can only be made by a man who has become rooted in love (supernatural love). And when the soul does cleave to the idea of pure good, it begs never again to have a choice.²³

When the soul does choose between hell and heaven (between the transient goods of this world and pure good) it splits in two. One part of the soul is innocent and the other guilty, and the innocent part of the soul suffers for the guilty part and justifies it.

L'âme se divise en une partie illimitée et une partie limitante.²⁴ Le composé qui est sur le plan du fini a disparu. Dans ce microcosme, le chaos originel est reproduit, les eaux originelles où flotte l'Esprit.

Une partie souffre au-dessous du temps, et toute fraction du temps lui semble une perpétuité. Une partie souffre au-dessus du temps, et la perpétuité lui semble chose finie. L'âme est coupée en deux et entre les deux parties se trouve la totalité du temps. Le temps est l'épée qui coupe l'âme en deux.²⁵ (En un autre sens, l'Amour est cette épée.) La partie sensible de l'âme est en enfer, la partie qui est au ciel ne sent rien, sinon par une contagion de la première. (CS, p. 182)

After the soul has been split in two, there is a new creation. This new creation is accepted by the soul, not for the sake of existing, since its desire is not to exist, but solely for the love of creatures. One consents to be created in the same way that God consents to create -- for the love of other creatures. "Cette nouvelle création est comme une incarnation. La seconde création n'est pas création, mais génération. Le Christ entre dans l'âme et se substitue à elle." (CS, p. 182) Those who have been born from on high become sons of God, but they are not sons in the sense of being adopted by God; they are the true sons of God.²⁶ For Weil the Son is unique, and it is He who enters into souls.

To be born anew, then, is to receive the grace of God. It is to receive the Holy Spirit or the seed (breath of fire, pneuma) which falls on every soul. "The seed is the word of God." (Luke 8:11) To receive the seed, the soul must simply become a matrix, a vessel. The 'I' and therefore the will must be entirely absent if this embryonic seed is to become a child, if Christ is to be born in the soul. When the 'I' is destroyed, a new being can grow from the seed that fell from God into the soul. This is what it is to be born anew, to be born from on high, to be born of God and not of the will of man or the will of the flesh.

Au terme de ce processus, 'je ne vis plus, mais le Christ vit en moi'. C'est un autre être qui est engendré par Dieu, un autre 'je', qui est à peine 'je', parce que c'est le Fils de Dieu. Il n'y a pas d''enfants adoptifs'. L'unique adoption, c'est que, comme un parasite pond ses oeufs dans la chair d'un animal, Dieu dépose dans notre âme un sperme qui, parvenu à maturité, sera son Fils. (CS, p. 253)

The image of the egg is very illuminating in this context. Weil sees the soul as an egg in which is entrapped a divine seed.

Notre âme doit être uniquement un lieu d'accueil et de la nourriture pour ce germe divin. Nous ne devons pas donner à manger à notre âme. Nous devons donner notre âme à manger à ce germe. Après quoi il mange lui-même, directement, tout ce qu'auparavant notre âme mangeait. Notre âme est un oeuf où ce germe divin devient oiseau. L'embryon d'oiseau se nourrit de l'oeuf; devenu oiseau, il brise la coquille, sort, et picore des grains. Notre âme est séparée de toute réalité par une pellicule d'égoïsme, de subjectivité, d'illusion; le germe du Christ déposé par Dieu dans notre âme se nourrit d'elle; quand il est assez développé, il brise l'âme, la fait éclater, et entre en contact avec la réalité. C'est l'Amour dans le microcosme. Celui du macrocosme, une fois que ses ailes d'or ont poussé, brise l'oeuf du monde et passe de l'autre côté du ciel. (CS, pp. 253-254)²⁷

In the end it can be said that we are all entrapped within this world (this universe). That which essentially keeps us enchained here below are all the things and opinions which are manufactured as representations of what is real, but which are not in themselves real. We live these representations; they are the shadows which constitute our very lives. It is above all the collectivity which keeps us entrapped here below; but also, and more importantly in the final analysis, it is each human being with his own individual personality -- his 'I' -- which prevents man from breaking the shell of the egg within which he finds himself. The 'I' is the shell which is placed as a screen between the eternal part of the soul (the divine

seed or germ) and God, that is placed between God and God. In order for the growth of the seed which has been placed within the egg constituted by the 'I' to be possible, the 'I' must consent that the sufferings which it is subjected to should continue indefinitely, and that consequently the 'I' should itself be destroyed. This acceptance of suffering which breaks the shell of the 'I' is the beginning of the de-creative process. It results as a consequence of consenting to God's grace, of consenting to the growth of the seed of grace that God has put in us.

The growth of this seed is very painful however. This is where the will comes into play, although the role it plays is a negative one. What it does, in conjunction with reason and duty such as they are revealed by the natural light within, is 'slice off the desires' emanating from the 'I', the desires attached to this world which form the shell preventing us from consenting to a supernatural destruction. "La volonté ne peut que les trancher, non pas les déraciner. Mais comme pour le chiendent, il suffit de les trancher assez souvent, et bien qu'ils semblent d'abord repousser plus vigoureux, il est tout à fait sûr que cette opération, répétée un nombre de fois fini, suffit pour que la racine s'épuise." (III, p. 16) The pain that is felt during this gardening is what Weil calls expiatory suffering. It is de-creation, the process of expiating the crime of existence. As Miklos Vetö says: "Expiatory suffering is the beginning of the healing of the fundamental contradictions of the universe."²⁸ And as Weil says in relation to the crucifixion: "Dieu a expié la création, et nous qui y sommes associés l'expions

aussi." (I, p. 203)

Expiatory suffering, however, is not sufficient in itself to bridge the distance between man and God. It cannot enable us fully to participate in the revelation of God to Himself. To quote Miklos Vetö once again: "Accepted sufferings make a human being more and more transparent, but it will only be the redeeming suffering which will change not only him, but even the evil from which he suffers, into perfect transparency so that the rays of the Love of God may shine through it."²⁹ The image of transparency is another extremely illuminating image that Weil uses as an analogy to describe man's situation in this world and the situation that man should be in with respect to God. The highest point a human being can attain to for Weil is to become a worthless slave, and it is in terms of the imagery of transparency that she elucidates her thinking in this context.

Pour du verre il n'y a rien de plus que d'être absolument transparent. Il n'y a rien de plus pour un être humain que d'être néant. Toute valeur dans un être humain est réellement une valeur négative. C'est comme une tache dans du verre. Le verre qui est plein de taches peut bien croire qu'il est quelque chose, et qu'il est très supérieur au verre parfaitement transparent, au travers duquel la lumière passe comme s'il n'y avait rien. C'est pourquoi. 'Quiconque s'élève sera abaissé, quiconque s'abaisse sera élevé.' Il n'y a pas besoin pour cela d'une opération de compensation. Simplement nous sommes nées avec une déformation congénitale du sens de la direction, qui fait qu'en montant nous avons la sensation de descendre, et en descendant nous avons la sensation de monter. (CS, pp. 326-327)

We are analogous to beings who have been born with different coloured glasses. These glasses represent the different perspectives from which we view things in this world. They are the individual 'I's,

the individual perspectives which colour things in this world. They must be removed so that the true colour of reality can be seen, so that the clear light of divine illumination can invade the soul. Our true state is to be without perspective (without different coloured glasses); it is to consent to be nothing more than nothingness.³⁰ We believe ourselves to be something (which is the consequence of wearing coloured glasses), and thus we are far from being nothingness; we are far from being without perspective. We are reversed beings who have lost our sense of direction.

Ainsi, si l'on considère des nombres négatifs, si on passe de -20 à -10, il y a amoindrissement du point de vue de la quantité absolue, et celui qui n'est sensible qu'aux modifications de cette quantité croit qu'il y a amoindrissement. Mais dans la suite totale des nombres ce passage est un accroissement.

Nous naissons loin au-dessous de zéro. Zéro est notre maximum, la limite accessible seulement après avoir franchi une série qui a un nombre illimité de termes (par exemple $-1/2^n$). Zéro, c'est l'état de l'esclave sans valeur. (CS, p. 327)³¹

To become a worthless slave is a perfect image of transparency for Weil. If we could rid ourselves of our different coloured glasses (the destruction of the 'I'), the love of God for God would be able to pass through our souls like the light passes through a piece of perfectly transparent glass.³² To become this transparent (to attain to zero), however, requires more than expiatory suffering. Expiatory suffering is the way in which man can participate in the destruction of his own 'I'; it is the way in which he can bring about the unimpeded growth of the divine seed in the soul. To do this requires that the will be used up in the accomplishment of impossible tasks, and that

the intelligence be used up in the contemplation of ineradicable contradictions. It therefore requires the expenditure of all supplementary energy, the death of the 'I' (the ego), and the splitting of the soul in two. Expiatory suffering roots one in death, and thus it ultimately corresponds to 'the bringing about' of the absence of God. Expiatory suffering is truly the art of dying. At the same time, however, the presence of death in the soul, and the absence of God corresponding to this death, imply that expiatory suffering has come to an end. The criterion in relation to which we must understand Weil here is once again that of innocence. In order for the consent to death (and thus the consent to the absence of God) to be perfect, it must be consented to by the innocent part of the soul (the uncreated or supernatural part of the soul) in a state of extreme affliction. This consent must be made without even the consciousness of God's presence. It is innocent or redemptive suffering, the suffering of Christ on the Cross when he cried: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me."

CHAPTER FOUR

REDEMPTIVE SUFFERING: THE BRINGING ABOUT OF THE FULNESS OF THE ABSENCE OF GOD

We have seen that expiatory suffering is essentially a preparatory stage in the salvation of the soul for Weil. It is a way (the only way) in which a human being can participate (through grace) in the destruction of the 'I', in the destruction of that which is placed as a screen between God and God. / As creatures in this world we do have a certain sentiment of choice (a kind of practical freedom) which must be used up in a negative way in an endeavour to make of the soul a receptacle for God's love. We expend this sentiment of choice in the undertaking of impossible tasks and in the contemplation of ineradicable contradictions. This destruction of the will and of the intelligence, the destruction of the 'I', is, in the end, nothing less than the clear realization that we are totally obedient to necessity in our every action and thought, and that we cannot be otherwise than totally obedient no matter what sentiment of choice we believe is attached to the 'I'. The realization that we are not free, that we are not our own, that we are at every step subjected to a strict and merciless necessity which is the very touch of God's hand (the limits imposed by God) is the necessary first step in any suffering that is to become expiatory. It is the realization that our true state is that of worthless slaves.

Our true state is a state of absolute transparency and

impersonality. It is a state which lies beyond any individual and personal perspective (beyond the categories of the human intelligence); it is a state in which the duties we have with respect to ourselves and our neighbours are not determined by individual and personal wills, but which are beyond the category of choice, and which are carried out in complete obedience to God (the will of God) through the intermediary of the human body. The suffering that is undergone in expiation is the irreducible suffering which is necessary in order for a human being to become more and more transparent and impersonal, in order, that is, for a human being to receive the revelation or grace of God. And when an individual receives the grace of God, it can no longer be said that it is he (the individual 'I') who is determining how he thinks or acts; it is, metaphorically speaking, God who is thinking and acting through him. At the moment that the 'I' has been destroyed through expiatory suffering and the grace of God has been received, there is, speaking metaphorically again, a union of divine spirit with matter.

We must pause for a moment in order to examine what is meant by 'speaking metaphorically' here. It must be said, in the first place, that in speaking of God as thinking and acting through the intermediary of a human body, and of the union of divine spirit with matter, we are quite obviously overstepping the bounds of what human reason can possibly know. Even though these ideas have arisen in the context of our discussion of what Weil means by expiatory suffering, our discussion itself has shown that it is precisely when all the human faculties have been destroyed (when they can no longer be said

to be in operation) that these ideas come to light. They come to light at the moment when an individual is no longer in possession of his faculties, and when, therefore, he cannot be said to have any 'knowledge', for there is no 'I' left which can either receive knowledge or determine what this knowledge may be. As soon as the individual says: "I know", he is no longer in a state of transparency and impersonality (the state of perfection); his 'I' is back in operation and thus his intelligence is qualified by the language and categories of this world.¹

This is, of course, a common dilemma that is faced by mystics who attempt to describe their experiences. Their intelligence and the way they act in this world may be illumined by their experiences, but they know at the same time that what they have experienced goes beyond what reason can apprehend in this world, and that the language which has been created by man can only inadequately describe what they have experienced. Language can only inadequately describe what they have experienced because that which they have experienced goes beyond the limits of human reason. In this sense, at least, they are saying that reason can understand its own limits, that reason can, through language, indicate the point at which reason itself encounters a limit beyond which it cannot go without transcending itself. It is a limit beyond which reason cannot go without ceasing to be reason, and thus the transcendence of reason is really the death of reason. Paradoxically then, they are saying that reason can, through human language, describe its own death, or that reason can describe the limit beyond which it is no longer reason. Even

here, in describing the dilemma with which mystics are faced in speaking about their experiences, we are ultimately faced with the same difficulty; that is to say, we cannot avoid the use of paradoxical language in describing what it is mystics are attempting to do, for what they are attempting to do is to describe, from a human standpoint, that which is humanly impossible.

What is being said then, to speak in different terms, is that the supreme Truth is not accessible to the human intelligence; it is beyond all formal expressions of itself. This is not to say, however, that the formal expressions that we use to express this supreme Truth have no validity. Our state in this world is that of 'fallen' man. As such we are imperfect and therefore incapable of distinguishing for ourselves good from evil, truth from error, justice from injustice. A formulation of the Truth is consequently valid, as Philip Sherrard says in his study on The Greek East and the Latin West, "not because it contains the whole Truth in itself, for this is impossible, but because it provides, for those capable of receiving it, a mental form through which a ray of this Truth is communicated to man; it thus provides an indispensable support through which the individual may approach the Reality of which it is the expression."² In the context of the Incarnation of Christ (the union of divine spirit with matter) and the problem of language and truth which is involved here, it will be helpful if we quote Sherrard at greater length.

One might say that just as the Incarnation of the eternal Logos in the life and actions of the historical Christ is a condescension of the Divinity towards human

obscurity, through which are revealed 'things hidden from the foundation of the world', so this same Logos, the Truth itself, condescends also to become 'incarnate' in religious forms and dogmas which serve man as a guide through the maze of confusion and ignorance in which he finds himself. In other words, doctrinal formulations have a double aspect. On the one hand, they 'reveal' the Truth in terms accessible to the human intelligence, and to this extent have an affirmative, or cataphatic, aspect, serving both as supports for man in his spiritual realization, and as defences against such misconceptions of things as the human intelligence may be tempted to make; and, on the other hand, they are not the Truth itself, but merely its expression in human terms, and in this respect they have a negative, or apophatic, aspect.³

From what is being said here, we can say that the formulations which Weil uses to express the Truth of Christianity are both cataphatic and apophatic. On the one hand this means that the Truth is hidden; it must be revealed. This in itself, i.e., the fact that the Truth must be revealed, is indicative of the essentially closed and initiatory character of Christianity. It is only those who follow the 'Way' of Christ (the 'Way' of God, of salvation) who will, through degrees, attain the knowledge, the gnosis, of which Christ spoke: "Know the Truth, and the Truth will make you free." The knowledge spoken of here, however, is not a knowledge which can be acquired by abstract or theoretical speculation, i.e., through the discipline of rational and logical thought (philosophy in the narrow sense).⁴ In other words, this Truth, constituting, as it does, the Mysteries of the faith, is not entirely accessible to natural reason. The Mysteries of the faith can only appear as contradictory to natural reason. There is another form of reasoning, however, that referred to by Weil as 'supernatural reason', and although this form of reasoning

can only use the language of natural reason, it nevertheless contains a logic which is more rigorous than that of natural reason. There is thus a hierarchy involving natural and supernatural reason, one which, according to Weil, forms the fundamental doctrine of Pythagoreanism, Platonism, and early Christianity. It is the source, for example, of the dogmas of the Trinity, of the two-fold nature of Christ in one person, of the duality and unity of good and evil, and of transubstantiation. What is being said, in terms of this hierarchy, is that natural reason cannot be applied to the Mysteries of the faith without producing heresy, and yet, at the same time, that the Mysteries of the faith cannot be completely severed from reason, for then they would no longer be mysteries, but absurdities. What is needed is a reason which comes from above, a supernatural reason which only exists in souls which burn with the supernatural love of God.⁵ Christ is the key, the source of the love which animates supernatural reason. It is evident, then, that the knowledge or illumination that is sought in the Mysteries of the faith is not acquired through simple learning and study, as rational and philosophical knowledge are usually said to be acquired, but through a process of initiation by which the seeker is prepared and put in a position to receive, stage by stage, and according to his or her capacity (according, therefore, to predestination, to grace), spiritual understanding. It is not, consequently, the human intelligence, or reason alone, to which this knowledge of which Christ spoke is accessible. The knowledge of which Christ spoke is of another and higher order.⁶

On the other hand, because the seeker must be initiated into

the Truth, and because the knowledge of this Truth is of another and higher order than the knowledge accessible to the human intelligence or reason alone, the latter knowledge is necessarily limited and therefore ultimately inadequate to express or to contain the whole Truth in itself. Indeed, this latter knowledge, as well as the formulations used to express it, can be said to be confounded by the Truth of which Christ spoke, and this 'confoundedness', if we may speak in this manner, is ultimately the reason why this latter knowledge, and the formulations used to express it, give rise to contradictions and paradoxes, and thus to the use of metaphorical language. But even though these formulations in human terms of the Truth are ultimately limited and inadequate, even though they ultimately arrive at expressing only contradictions and paradoxes, they are nevertheless important and useful as sign-posts which indicate that the Truth is of another and higher order, that the Truth must ultimately be revealed through an initiation (through contact) into the Christian Mysteries.

It may be said, then, that the formulations used by Weil to speak of man's situation in this world arise out of a contact (through experience) with Christ, for it is only through initiation in the Christian religion, which, as we have said, involves the following of the 'Way' of Christ, or the imitation of Christ, that one can come into contact with, that one can be illuminated by, the Truth of which Christ spoke and of which he was the manifestation in this world. The formulations that Weil uses, arising, as they do, out of an attempt to express, in human language, the supreme

Truth that has been revealed in the Christian religion, are necessarily limited and therefore inadequate to express the whole of that Truth. Their inadequacy is demonstrated in the contradictions and paradoxes that necessarily result from the attempt made by the human intelligence, and in terms of human language, to express that Truth. Weil thinks, however, that it is precisely these contradictions and paradoxes that the human intelligence runs up against which will eventually exhaust the intelligence and carry it beyond itself into the realm of pure Truth. She thinks, indeed, that these obstacles, the contradictions and paradoxes, which the human intelligence (as well as the human body) runs up against, are intrinsic to human life and cannot be done away with (resolved) by the intelligence.

We have seen many of these contradictions in relation to her thinking about affliction and necessity. The central contradiction that we have focused upon has been that of the affliction of men, the perfection of God, and the link between the two; and it can be said that this contradiction arises as a result of thinking about man's striving after the good in this world, while being, at the same time, completely subjected, in his thought and in his flesh, to a totally deaf and blind necessity that is absolutely indifferent to the good. This necessity is shown by Weil to be the cause of affliction; it is shown to be that which brings about the feeling of the absence of good, because necessity is seen to be completely indifferent to the good. We can therefore express the central contradiction which we have been focusing on in Weil's thought in terms of thinking with truth at the same time about necessity, necessity's indifference

to the good, and how necessity and the good can be reconciled. It is to think about the absence of God (of good) and the possibility of loving Him in His absence. To put this contradiction in more concrete terms, we can ask the question, as Weil does: "Quel saint transfigurera la misère des esclaves morts sur la croix à Rome et dans les provinces romaines au cours de tant de siècles?" (II, p. 151)⁷ What saint, indeed, is able to transfigure the misery of any human being who dies at any time and in any place?

This question cannot be given an answer solely in terms of this world for Weil. If the affliction of innocent souls and their complete subjection to the absolutely deaf and blind play of mechanical necessities is at all intelligible, this intelligibility lies above and beyond what we can see and understand by truth, justice, love, and good as they have been characterized by this world. What is required is a being who is at one and the same time of this world and not of this world, a being who is subjected to the mechanisms of this world and who is therefore capable of all the sins that human beings are capable of, but who, at the same time, is the source of all pure truth, justice, love, and good which can exist in this world. Such a being would stand, in the way of a mediator, between this world and the world beyond. He would be at once both human and divine. This is not to say that such a being is completely intelligible, or that the existence of such a being is even a possibility. Rather, it is to say, because (according to Weil) there is no universal standard of what is true, just, or good in this world, and consequently no ultimate reason why human beings should or should not be killed

either discriminately or indiscriminately at the hands of both human and non-human nature, that it is necessary to assume the possibility of the existence of a being who is both human and the source of a universal standard of truth and justice which applies to all men, in all places, and at all times. That is to say, it is necessary to assume the union of divine spirit with matter, the union of the necessary and the good.⁸ It is to assume, in the final analysis, that there is a harmony which ties together in an indissoluble bond the affliction of men and the perfection of God.

These are clearly notions which are difficult to entertain. They cannot, strictly speaking, be proven. This, however, is not as important as one might immediately think, for it is debatable within the discipline of empiricism itself whether anything can be proven. One has only to think of Heraclitus, or the Buddhist doctrine of anatta ('no-self'), or David Hume's thinking about cause and effect, or the thinking associated with the modern notions of probability, uncertainty, and quantum physics, to understand the difficulties involved in empirical proof. On the other hand, in thinking of notions which go beyond the dictates of empiricism, one is simply suggesting that certain things which are not subject to our usual laws of proof may be possible, that they may be actualized in this world.

In our present context, it is to assume that there is a source of pure truth, love, justice, and good which is real and which can be revealed to all human beings who live, have lived, or will live in this world. It is to assume, because there is no universal standard of truth, love, justice, and good in this world and no

universal standard which can be created by man in this world, that the source of pure truth, love, justice, and good is transcendent, that the source of all perfection is God. And we need not concern ourselves with the question of whether God exists or not. It matters only that we assume that God is real and that He is the source of that which is absent in this world, that is to say, that He is the source of all pure truth, love, justice, and good. Further, it is to assume that God's perfection can be embodied or actualized in a real flesh and blood human being, in a being who consequently participates fully in both the world of human beings and in God's perfection. If such a being existed in this world, what form would the truth, love, justice, and good that he embodies take, and how would we recognize it? In other words, what form would God's perfection take? What meaning do the notions of sin and evil have in relation to a being who is at once both human and divine? These are the questions that we are faced with in thinking about the union of divine spirit with matter, a union which is, from the point of view of man, an impossibility.

It is clearly the case that Weil is using the model of Christ, and most specifically, Christ's cry of dereliction on the Cross, as the basis for her thinking about the union of divine spirit with matter. The Cross of Christ is for her the only source of truth, the only source of light bright enough to illumine affliction in no matter what age or country. And even if the story of Christ is taken as a symbol or a metaphor, Weil is, as we noted earlier, of the belief, as the ancients were, that metaphors produce themselves as events in

the world.⁹ We are consequently obligated to take the metaphor of Christ (the union of divine spirit with matter) seriously, as Weil took it seriously, and to see what form of answer this metaphor gives to the questions raised above. And the language that must be used to describe the form of answer given to these questions will necessarily be metaphorical language, for in the context of what we will be dealing with in this chapter, i.e. redemptive suffering: the bringing about of the fulness of the absence of God, we will be looking at the central paradox at the heart of the Christian religion: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Thus we will be looking both explicitly and implicitly at what Weil means when she says that "L'absence de Dieu en ce monde est la réalité de Dieu", that "Ce monde en tant que tout à fait vide de Dieu est Dieu lui-même", and that "La nécessité en tant qu'absolument autre que le bien est le bien lui-même." (III, p. 39) That is to say, we will be looking at a number of ways of expressing the link between the affliction of men and the perfection of God.

The essential way in which the link between the affliction of men and the perfection of God is expressed by Weil is in terms of the idea of the absence of God, particularly as this idea comes to light in relation to her thinking about redemptive suffering. It is of course affliction which produces the cry 'why?' in the depths of a human soul, a cry which, in turn, produces the feeling of the absence of good, the absence of God. And yet it is only when the soul is innocent, as in the case of Christ, that the suffering one is undergoing takes on a redemptive quality. As Weil says, "c'est

seulement dans l'état de perfection que peut se produire, si on peut s'exprimer ainsi, la plénitude de l'absence de Dieu." (II, p. 251) What exactly is this redemptive quality that Weil sees as being attached to innocent suffering, and what exactly does the absence of God that is felt in extreme affliction in the soul that has reached perfection mean?

La douleur rédemptrice est ce par quoi le mal a réellement la plénitude de l'être dans toute la mesure où il peut la recevoir.

Par la douleur rédemptrice Dieu est présent dans le mal extrême. Car l'absence de Dieu est le mode de présence divine qui correspond au mal -- l'absence ressentie.. (II, p. 252)

For Weil, it is through the sense of presence that we come into contact with human creatures. To come into contact with God is only possible, however, through the sense of absence.¹⁰ The absence of God in this world corresponds for Weil to the reality of God; it is the form of divine presence which, for her, corresponds to evil.¹¹ Without attempting to explain what evil is just yet, it can be said that the abandonment of Christ by God means that Christ has been abandoned to necessity, and consequently that he is subject to the suffering of all of the evil of this world. This is indeed what happened to Christ. He was subjected to force, to the injustice and violence exercised by human beings in this world. He suffered extreme affliction and was made a curse. And yet it is God Himself who allows this to happen, who allows Christ to be abandoned by both men and God. God allows Himself to be abandoned; He remains absent from Himself out of love for the human creature, so that the creature may exist (the Creation), and also so that the creature may de-create

himself in the same way that God created, i.e. by abandoning himself. When God abandons Himself, however, He is allowing the possibility of evil to exist; He is allowing something (the universe and all the creatures in it) other than Himself to exist, and therefore He has Himself consented to suffer all possible evil. In this sense it may be said that original sin is something which God Himself committed in the Creation; it is a sin consonant with the Creation.¹²

If we accept the Creation, that is, if we accept the existence that God has given us, then we are accepting a gift which will unavoidably involve us in sin, for we are accepting to be other than God. What we have received from God (our existence) is, if we can speak this way, a gift from the point of view of God. From man's point of view it is a theft. We have stolen from God; we have stolen existence or being. We should give our being back to God; we should de-create ourselves.¹³ If we do not return to God what we have stolen from Him, then we are, like Adam, accepting to live in a state of sinfulness. God's crime is that He has created us (the sin of love, for that is what the Creation implies for Weil); our crime is that we have accepted this gift of God's without wishing to give it back. By not wishing to return God's gift to Him we become autonomous 'I's or 'egos', or at least that is what we believe ourselves to be. We place ourselves at the centre of the universe; we turn our 'selves' into an idol, rather than having God as our only idol. To be separated from God is ultimately the only sin there is; it is a sin related to the original sin of the Creation (a sin outside of space and time, a sin committed before any sin), for it is to accept God's gift (the

Creation), which is to say that it is to accept to be separated from God.

To accept to be separated from God is to accept to live in a state of sinfulness; it is to accept our individual 'I's as constituting our true state. We live in a world, however, in which individual 'I's are accepted, a world in which individual 'I's are seen to be the determining factor in everything that is carried out in thought and in action. In this sense it is not difficult to see how sin and evil rebound indefinitely in this world; it is not difficult to see that sin and evil are unlimited. If man lives in a state of separation from God, and if the state of perfection is to be one with (equivalent to) God, then sin and evil will at least appear to be unlimited in this world. We know, however, in relation to Weil's thinking about necessity, that everything in this universe is limited, and that these limits are eternal; they are imposed by God. Therefore sin and evil, even though they may appear to us as unlimited, are themselves limited.¹⁴

Evil is put into circulation in this world because those who suffer evil at the hands of other creatures want to be relieved of it by putting it elsewhere. Their concern is with revenge and self-satisfaction; they do not want to get rid of the evil, to abolish it out of their own lives, and therefore they do evil to other creatures, who, in turn, do evil to yet other creatures. Evil is thus put into circulation and passes continually from one creature to another. This gives evil the appearance of the unlimited, but in reality there is a point beyond which evil is destroyed. That limit is a perfectly

pure being (Christ). The evil that is stirred up in this world will continually pass from one man to another "jusqu'à ce qu'il tombe sur un être parfaitement pur qui le subit tout entier et le détruit" (CS, pp. 105-106), "jusqu'à ce qu'il tombe sur une victime parfaitement pure." (CS, p. 106)¹⁵

Dieu qui est dans les cieux ne peut pas détruire le mal, il ne peut que le renvoyer sous forme de malédiction. Seul Dieu ici-bas, devenu victime, peut détruire le mal en le subissant.

Ainsi la conception du mal comme satisfaction mène à la notion de rédemption avec une transposition correcte.

Le Père qui est aux cieux ne renvoie pas le mal, mais comme Il ne peut en être touché d'aucune manière, le mal retombe.

Celui qui se venge imite Dieu le Père. C'est la mauvaise manière d'imiter Dieu. Il n'est permis à l'homme d'imiter que Dieu le Fils. C'est pourquoi 'Nul n'arrive au Père sinon par moi'.

Cependant: 'Soyez parfaits comme votre Père céleste est parfait.' Mais il s'agit là d'imiter Dieu le Père dans son abdication, dont l'Incarnation est la plénitude. (CS, p. 106)

It is Christ, or any being in a state of perfection, who is the limit of evil. Evil is abolished when it comes into contact with an Incarnation of God. It is abolished in the sense that it cannot fall back in the form of a curse; i.e., there is no 'I' which can keep the evil in circulation by throwing it off elsewhere. Therefore the evil disappears; it falls into nothingness when it comes into contact with a perfectly pure being. Whereas man does not want to abolish the evil in his own life, but wishes, rather, to gain satisfaction by throwing the evil out elsewhere, a perfectly pure being wants to abolish the evil and does so, not by casting the evil out elsewhere, but by submitting to it (Christ on the Cross). "Adam en mangeant la pomme a offensé Dieu, et cette offense est retombée en malédiction,

parce qu'elle n'a pas touché Dieu. Mais ceux qui ont enfoncé des clous dans la chair du Christ, leur offense n'est pas retombée en malédiction, elle a touché Dieu et a disparu." (CS, p. 107) Only a perfectly pure being could submit to evil without the evil being sent back into this world. This is not to say that innocent beings do not suffer or even die from the evil that is inflicted upon them (Christ suffered and died on the Cross), but simply that innocence is the criterion in terms of which redemption must be understood. How, for example, could a being who was not innocent expiate for all of humanity? "Expier, c'est restituer ce qu'on a pris injustement. L'humanité avait volé le libre arbitre, le choix du bien et du mal. Le Christ l'a rendu en apprenant l'obéissance. La naissance est une participation au vol d'Adam. La mort est une participation à la restitution du Christ." (CS, p. 169) We must consent to this death, however, before we can be saved by Christ's restitution. To consent to death is what salvation is for Weil; salvation consists in perceiving that we are not.

Our sin, like Adam's, consists in wanting to be. Our punishment follows automatically in the belief that we possess being. "Adam nous a fait croire que nous étions; le Christ nous a montré que nous n'étions pas." (CS, p. 175) That is why Christ became a curse for us. He showed us that Adam was wrong in making us believe that we possess being. It may be said, using the metaphor of Adam, that in the eating of the apple Adam sinned against God because he chose to keep what God had given him as a gift; he chose the existence or being that God had given him. God had to abdicate, to separate

Himself from Himself (the Creation as implied in Weil's interpretation of the crucifixion of Christ) so that Adam could exist. Adam accepted this existence, and therefore he accepted to be separated from God; he accepted that God should be separated from Himself. God's separation from Himself (the Creation) is, in Weil's thinking, what constitutes original sin, for it is a sin committed before any sin, a sin outside of space and time. It is a sin, in reality, which constitutes the very limit of all space and time, and thus of all sin that is possible in space and time. The sin involved in the Creation nevertheless remains a mystery for us. We can only think about it analogically in relation to man and the idea of separation or absence.

Analogously, therefore, the sin of Adam is that of remaining or choosing to remain separated from his true home (God) by wanting to live elsewhere (in this world). His true home (his Father's home) is consequently in a state of disarray: God is separated from God. At the moment that Adam chooses to be separated from his Father (by eating of the apple), it may be said that he commits an original sin (a first sin), although it is a sin in time and not outside of time. It is not, strictly speaking, an original sin, but we may speak of it as original in relation to Adam, that is, in relation to the first moment that he chooses to be an 'I' or to be separated from God. As long as he remains in this state of separation he will live in a state of sin. Every man, woman, and child is Adam, and either makes the same choice as Adam, or else chooses (as a result of divine revelation) to return to his or her true home. To return to one's true home is to overcome the separation between God and God; it is

to de-create, to undo the Creation. It can be said, therefore, that just as God sins in separating Himself from Himself (the Creation), man sins in accepting this separation, in accepting to remain as a screen or veil (the acceptance of the 'I') placed between God and God. Man overcomes this sin by not accepting to be separated from God, and therefore by de-creating himself so that God is no longer separated from Himself. And it goes without saying that this de-creation (understood in relation to what it means for an individual to participate in expiatory suffering) is carried out by God Himself, which is to say that not choosing to become an 'I' is to be predestined; it is to become incarnate. It is God Incarnate (Christ) who de-creates.¹⁶

If we can think of humanity as a single being, it may be said that humanity sinned in Adam and expiated in Christ. In the destiny of humanity (which suffered torment in the person of Christ) the Passion represents what death (de-creation) would represent for the individual. The compassion that Christ had for his own suffering was the compassion for the suffering of all humanity in him. The cry of dereliction was the cry of all humanity in him. "Quand ce cri monte au coeur d'un homme, la douleur a éveillé dans les profondeurs de son âme la partie où gît, enfouie sous les crimes, une innocence égale à celle même du Christ." (CS, p. 308)¹⁷ Sin is transformed into suffering when it comes into contact with an innocent soul; -- it comes into contact with Christ. "Toute la partie du péché du monde qui vient le toucher, l'être parfaitement pur le transforme en souffrance. Telle est la fonction du juste d'Isaïe, de l'Agneau de Dieu. Telle est

la souffrance rédemptrice. Toute la violence criminelle de l'Empire romain (car c'est par crainte de Rome qu'on agissait) s'est heurtée au Christ, et en lui est devenu pure souffrance." (III, p. 135)

It is clear that redemptive suffering is the essence of affliction for Weil. "La douleur rédemptrice doit être injustice, violence exercée par des êtres humains. Elle doit consister à subir la force." (III, p. 135) We must understand, though, that suffering is brought about as a result of the distance separating the creature from the Creator, a distance which is irremediably one of pain. It is our being which is farthest removed from God, which tears God asunder. Our being or existence is God's crucifixion. We often speak of perfect joy in God, so why not also of perfect suffering in God? The notion of perfect suffering in God arises in relation to God's being torn asunder in the Creation, a notion, in turn, which arises in relation to Weil's thinking about Christ's crucifixion. And yet we conceive of the crucifixion of Christ under the name of compassion, a divine compassion which "est à la souffrance humaine la plus pure ce qu'est la joie divine à la joie humaine la plus pure." (III, p. 137) Christ suffered on the Cross. The physical pain, psychological distress, and social degradation (affliction) he felt was felt immediately and directly as compassion. The laceration of his entire being, because he was pure, only affected his soul in the manner of transfixing it with compassion. Christ loved God in spite of the unbearable suffering that he was subjected to because it was God who, through the Creation, inflicted this suffering upon him. It is with this same love, transposed from beyond space and time, that God loves us.

"L'amour de Dieu pour nous est passion. Comment le bien pourrait-il aimer le mal sans souffrir? Et le mal souffre aussi en aimant le bien. L'amour mutuel de Dieu et de l'homme est souffrance." (III, p. 203)

The Christian Church celebrates the suffering of God in a joyful way through the consecration of the bread and the wine in Holy Communion.¹⁸ If the suffering of God is joy in us, should we not think that our own suffering is joy in God when it is fully consented to? There can be no consolation arising from our consent, however, for then we would not be loving God. We must consent to extreme affliction in all its bitterness, and thus to the possibility that it might continue indefinitely. Our consent must be given at the moment when God is no longer present to the sensibility, for this is still a form of consolation, a form of attachment. That is why it is necessary to pass through extreme affliction, through "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It is then that our consent gives to suffering a redemptive quality; it turns suffering into divine suffering, the suffering of God. For only a purely spiritual suffering could suggest the form of answer that is required for Weil's question: "Comment aurais-je besoin d'une consolation quelle qu'elle soit pour supporter mes souffrances sans cesser d'aimer Dieu, dès lors que je peux supporter sans succomber à la haine les souffrances des esclaves des Romains, pour lesquelles il est impossible de découvrir aucune consolation?" (III, p. 204)

If we fall to the point where the soul cannot keep back the cry "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?", if we fall to this point

and do not cease loving, we will end by touching something which is neither affliction nor joy, something which is not of the senses, but which nevertheless is the central essence common to joy and sorrow, something which is the very love of God. "On sait alors que la joie est la douceur du contact avec l'amour de Dieu, que le malheur est la blessure de ce même contact quand il est douloureux, et que le contact lui-même importe seul, non pas la modalité." (AD, p. 58)

This contact with God does not afford any kind of consolation for Weil; in no way does it lighten the frightful bitterness of affliction, nor does it heal the mutilation of the soul.¹⁹ For her, however, it is quite certain that the bitterness of affliction and the mutilation of the soul are the very substance or essence of God's love for us. It is our misery, in the end, which shows us that our true place is at the foot of the Cross.

Nous autres hommes, notre misère nous donne le privilège infiniment précieux d'avoir part à cette distance placée entre le Fils et le Père. Mais cette distance n'est séparation que pour ceux qui aiment. Pour ceux qui aiment, la séparation, quoique douloureuse, est un bien, parce qu'elle est amour. La détresse même du Christ abandonné est un bien. Il ne peut pas y avoir pour nous ici-bas de plus grand bien que d'y avoir part. Dieu ici-bas ne peut pas nous être parfaitement présent, à cause de la chair. Mais il peut nous être dans l'extrême malheur presque parfaitement absent. C'est pour nous sur terre l'unique possibilité de perfection. C'est pourquoi la Croix est notre unique espoir. (PS, pp. 95-96)

The Cross is our only hope because it gives us, through the crucifixion of Christ, the form of link that binds suffering and the supernatural together. Christ is clearly the link between suffering (the affliction of men) and the supernatural (the perfection of God)

for Weil. According to the Christian tradition which Weil follows, Christ is considered to be as perfect a being as it is possible to find here below in human form, and this perfection goes as far as identifying Christ with God. And yet the greatest possible amount of evil which surrounded Christ was automatically concentrated upon him in the form of suffering. At the time in which he lived, the greatest misfortune and crime that existed among men was attached to the state of slavery, and the death that Christ suffered was the extremity of affliction that was possible for a slave. According to Weil, the evil which was concentrated upon Christ and which reduced him to being no more than a worthless slave is, in a mysterious manner and by analogical transference, what constitutes the Redemption.²⁰

The Redemption is therefore ultimately unintelligible apart from an understanding of evil, for after all, what is it that man is redeemed from if it is not from evil (and sin). This immediately suggests that evil deprives man of something, something, one must assume, that he comes into contact with through redemption. It is clear, for Weil, that what one comes into contact with through redemption is the good, or God.²¹ It is absurd, as she says, to think of this world or this life as being worthless, and to adduce evil as the proof; "car si cela ne vaut rien, de quoi le mal prive-t-il?" (II, p. 192) Fallen man, living in a state of sin, is led, through evil, to feel and understand that he is deprived of something. Sin and evil have thus always been very central ideas in man's attempt to understand his situation in this world. They have certainly been central in any understanding of the Christian tradi-

tion. And yet every time an effort is made to understand these ideas it would seem that the human mind inevitably runs up against insuperable difficulties which it is unable to resolve. We might put these difficulties into an initial perspective by quoting from a contemporary Canadian writer, Douglas Hall.

Like all the central doctrines of Christianity, sin is never quite definable. It is a mystery. For it occurs at the deepest level of our relationships. Its reality has always evoked from men the propensity to reduce it to its consequences: to make sin 'sins'. For the mystery beneath the deeds is too deep for us to understand and too devastating for us to face. It is comforting for us to think of sin as evil, whether religious or moral evil, and so to posit goodness as its antithesis. But the antithesis of sin is not goodness, it is love.²²

A number of the difficulties that anyone is faced with in coming to an understanding of sin and evil are implied in the above lines. For example, it is implied that sin cannot be reduced to 'sins', that sin is not identifiable with acts or deeds, but rather, that sin is a state. It is implied that sin is not necessarily identifiable with evil. It is also implied that goodness is not the antithesis of sin (that good is not the antithesis of evil), but that, rather, love is. These are by no means self-evident truths. They are nevertheless in essential agreement with Weil's thinking about sin and evil. It is necessary, therefore, to expand on the implications of these statements in order to see exactly where Weil stands in relation to the ideas of sin and evil.

The first difficulty in understanding what Weil means by sin and evil is that she often speaks of the terms together. This, however, is unavoidable for her, because she sees sin and evil as being indis-

solubly linked together. They are linked together, but at the same time they are separable. "Le mal n'est ni la souffrance ni le péché, c'est l'un et l'autre à la fois, quelque chose de commun à l'un et à l'autre; car ils sont liés, le péché fait souffrir et la souffrance rend mauvais, et ce mélange indissoluble de souffrance et de péché est le mal où nous sommes malgré nous et où nous avons horreur de nous trouver." (PS, pp. 14-15) It is the indissoluble mixture of sin (which makes us suffer) and suffering (which makes us evil) which constitutes evil for Weil. Suffering is the middle term here; it is suffering which is common to both sin and evil, which, in the form of an intermediary, ties sin and evil together. And because suffering is an intermediary, it follows that sin and evil can be objectively distinguished from each other.

Sin, for Weil, is essentially related to our wanting to be, to our belief that we possess being. It is related to existence, to the separation of man from God. It is linked to the Creation. "Le seul fait qu'il existe des êtres AUTRES que Dieu implique la possibilité du péché. Ce n'est pas à la liberté que cette possibilité est attachée (car elle n'existe pas pour Dieu), mais à l'EXISTENCE. L'existence séparée. (Le Christ ne pouvait pas pécher.) Dieu en créant a créé la possibilité du péché. Création, renoncement. (II, p. 69) Sin is therefore related to the 'I' (the ego, autonomous reason, etc.) -- to that which places man at the centre of the universe, to that which separates man from God. Sin in a human being is 'I'.²³ As sin is directly related to our separation from God for Weil, i.e. to the Creation (the fact that we are here on the

earth), sin must necessarily originate with God's separation from Himself in the Creation. This separation of God from Himself in the Creation is what constitutes original sin for Weil. It is, as we have seen, sin committed before any sin, sin which is outside of time, sin which is transcendental.

Toutes les difficultés (insurmontables) concernant l'histoire du péché originel viennent de ce qu'on se représente cette histoire comme se déroulant dans le temps. Alors qu'elle exprime des rapports de causalité, ou plutôt ce qui dans le surnaturel répond analogiquement aux rapports de causalité.

Dieu a créé l'homme avec la capacité de devenir semblable à lui, mais en état de péché consenti.

La faute exprime ce caractère de consentement essentiel au péché. Le péché est intérieur, non extérieur à l'homme; il vient de l'homme; mais l'homme a été créé tel.

L'homme a été créé tel et cependant Dieu est innocent. Cette innocence n'est pas plus difficile à concevoir ainsi que, pour ceux qui se représentent l'histoire se déroulant dans le temps, l'innocence de Dieu au moment où Adam désobéit. Car tout ce qui se produit est la volonté de Dieu, à chaque instant tout autant qu'à l'instant de la création, si cette expression a un sens. (II, pp. 216-217)

Sin is thus attached to existence for Weil. As long as we are attached to our 'I's (to existence or being) we are separated from God; as long as we are attached to our 'I's we live in a state of sin. It is in this context that Weil speaks of sin, as well as of virtue, as states and not as acts. "Les actes ne sont que la conséquence automatique de l'état."²⁴ Mais nous ne pouvons nous les représenter que sous forme d'actes. D'où le symbole du péché antérieur à tout acte. Nous naissons en état de péché. Y-a-t-il eu un temps où l'homme n'était pas en état de péché? Mais il n'avait pas connaissance." (II, p. 124) The knowledge that we are lacking

is the knowledge that Adam lacked; it is the knowledge that we are not our own creators, that we are not our own. The lack of this knowledge is what sin is for Weil, for sin is nothing else but the failure to recognize that we are separated from our true home, and that this separation is what causes human misery. "La misère de l'homme consiste en ce qu'il n'est pas Dieu. Il l'oublie continuellement." (II, p. 127) Sin is the failure to recognize human misery; it is thus unconscious misery (the state of existence) and therefore guilty misery. "L'histoire du Christ est la preuve expérimentale que la misère humaine est irréductible, que chez l'homme absolument sans péché la misère humaine est aussi grande que chez le pécheur. Elle est seulement éclairée. Mais cette misère n'est pas séparable de l'état de péché; l'histoire du Christ est liée à celle d'Adam." (II, p. 126)

Sin is therefore essentially the state of misery that human creatures live in as a result of their separation from God. Even Christ, who was without sin (being identified with God), was subjected to the full reality of human misery; he was subjected to the full reality of the suffering that results from human creatures being separated from God (the abandonment of Christ by God on the Cross, the Creation). Not even Christ (God) can escape the suffering that is necessarily implied in being separated from God, the suffering implied in the Incarnation. The Creation and the Incarnation indicate to Weil that God has renounced being everything. "Dieu a renoncé à être tout au point d'avoir été suspendu à la croix. Nous devons renoncer à être quelque chose dans la même mesure." (II, p. 70)

God's renunciation is the origin of sin for Weil. Our only good lies in an inverse renunciation, the renunciation of being something.

If our sin consists in wanting to be, then evil can be said to arise as a result of the suffering that is engendered by this state. The state of wanting to be cannot but help to place human creatures (through power, self-interest, etc.) into conflict with other creatures; it cannot but help to produce suffering, and this suffering can go as far as reducing a man to a state of extreme affliction. To experience extreme affliction, for Weil, is to experience what she calls the void, and the void is clearly the experience of the absence of good. Christ himself experienced the total void. "Il a eu toute la misère humaine, sauf le péché; mais il a eu tout ce qui rend l'homme capable de péché. Ce qui rend l'homme capable de péché, c'est le vide; tous les péchés sont des tentatives pour combler des vides." (CS, p. 113)²⁵ Man's inability to accept human misery, his inability to consent to the absence of good, is what ultimately rebounds in the form of further sufferings in this world; it rebounds in the form of evil.

It is essentially in terms of suffering that we must understand the way in which Weil thinks about evil. We can say that she thinks of sin in terms of the being or the existence that God has given us in this world, and that she thinks of evil, in turn, in terms of the suffering that is caused as a result of not renouncing this being or existence. As she says: "Le mal dans l'univers est analogue à la souffrance, non au péché. Le péché a rapport à l'individu." (II, p. 165) Why suffering is so important here is because it is suffering,

in the form of affliction, that teaches us that we are no more than inert matter (half crushed worms writhing on the ground), that we are non-beings. It is suffering, in the form of affliction, which gives rise to the feeling of the absence of all good in this world, and it is this feeling which, for Weil, expresses the true reality of this world and the very essence of evil. Evil rebounds in this world in the form of suffering (suffering which is as irreducible in the sinful man as it is in Christ) because the good is absent from this world. Evil is the absence of good.²⁶

As the absence of good, evil must be perceived to the full extent of its bitterness; the bitterness of evil must be conceived as infinite, for the absence of good is a reality for every one of us (if only we knew it). The whole of mankind, under the crushing weight of necessity, is delivered over to evil. "Le mal est la distance entre la créature et Dieu." (II, p. 251) And those who are almost at the greatest possible distance from God are the ones who have been struck down by affliction and tossed at the very foot of the Cross. "Il ne faut pas croire que le péché soit une distance plus grande. Le péché n'est pas une distance. C'est une mauvaise orientation du regard." (PS, p. 93) As long as our eyes are turned in the wrong direction we will remain in a state of sin. This state of sin represents the sacrifice that God has made on our behalf, the sacrifice (Creation) which lets us believe that we have being. Our sacrifice, consequently, lies in the recognition that we are non-beings, and it is to evil that God has entrusted the work of teaching us that we are non-beings.

Le désir et l'illusion d'être, de la part des créatures, suscite le mal, et le mal leur apprend qu'elles ne sont pas. Dieu ne se mêle pas de cette première pédagogie.²⁷

Ceux qui ont pleinement reconnu qu'ils ne sont pas sont passés du côté de Dieu. Loin d'apprendre aux autres créatures qu'elles ne sont pas, ils les traitent selon la fiction qu'elles sont.

La création est une fiction de Dieu. (CS, p. 176)

We live in Hell when we perceive that we are not (that we do not exist) and refuse to consent to this fact. Our existence is imaginary for Weil; it is an illusion which, for those who believe in it, rebounds in the form of evil. This is why Weil can speak of evil as illusory, and of those who have escaped from this illusion as being released from all evil. And the only thing which releases one from evil, the only thing which cannot be defiled by evil, and which destroys it, is purity (the state of perfection, innocence). "La pureté attire le mal qui vient s'y coller pour être détruit comme les papillons dans la flamme." (CS, p. 176)²⁸ Christ is this purity here below. Christ destroyed the evil that was concentrated upon him, not through his actions, but through the apparently useless and perfectly patient suffering of it. This unconditional consent to suffer evil in all its bitterness is equivalent to consenting to the total and perpetual absence of all good. It is a consent not to be. "Consentir à ne pas être, c'est consentir à la privation de tout bien, et ce consentement constitue la possession du bien total. Seulement on ne le sait pas. Si on le sait, le bien disparaît." (CS, p. 194)

The paradox which is expressed here is one which is common

to mysticism; it is a paradox which expresses the overcoming, on a higher level, of what appears to us as the opposition between good and evil in this world. It expresses an impossibility, an impossibility, nevertheless, of which Christ is the concrete manifestation in this world. "La mystique est le passage au-delà de la sphère où le bien et le mal s'opposent, et cela par l'union de l'âme avec le bien absolu. Le bien absolu est autre chose que le bien qui est le contraire et le corrélatif du mal, quoiqu'il en soit le modèle et le principe."

(EL, p. 102)²⁹ This union, which arises out of the consent to the privation of all good, constitutes the possession of good in its totality; it constitutes the Cross. The operation (the consent to affliction) which brings about this union is real and effective, even though, from the point of view of this world, this union can only appear as an impossibility. From the point of view of this world, that which is possible is simply the expression of what we can see and understand of the laws of nature (of necessity) which have been revealed to us and which constitute the very limits of what we can know and do in this world. But on the other hand, however, that which imposes these limits is outside the realm of the possible. It is only in terms of God (the Eternal) that we can think of the impossible. Indeed, for Weil, because God does not intervene in this world, that is, because "Il a abandonné le possible aux mécanismes de la matière et à l'autonomie des créatures" (EL, p. 103), it is, in a sense, only the impossible which is possible for God. The mystery of the Creation, the Incarnation, and the Passion are directly related to this unfathomable notion of impossibility.³⁰

In the realm of the possible (the realm of nature, including psychological nature) good and evil endlessly and mutually produce one another. Here the wicked do all the evil which belongs to their nature, and the good all the good which belongs to their nature.³¹

The realm of nature is constituted by the inexorable mixture of good and evil which arises in conjunction with the conflicts that occur within each individual as well as between individuals. Here good and evil are contraries; they appear to be in opposition. This is to say no more, however, than that it is possible to portion out the good and the evil in such a way that the evil is always that which is in opposition to what any individual or group of individuals take to be pleasurable, beneficial, or in any way to their liking, and to which they give the value 'good'. And what any individual or group of individuals label 'good' may, of course, be labeled 'evil' by any other individual or group of individuals. Good and evil cannot but endlessly and mutually produce one another in a world where no universal and absolute standard of justice is recognized. So long as good and evil are seen in this way, i.e. as relative values, they will inevitably end up being identified with each other by various individuals and groups who maintain different points of view. Even if we look at good and evil simply as opposites or contraries, then in a sense it can be said that good as the contrary of evil is the equivalent of it, as is the case with all pairs of contraries.³²

In the realm of the spirit, however, it is Weil's contention that good produces only good and evil produces only evil.³³ But then the good that she is referring to in this context is the absolute

good. This good is not the good which is the contrary and correlative of evil, although it is its model and its source. The essential truth concerning good and evil for her is that they are not reciprocally related. "Le mal est le contraire du bien, mais le bien n'est le contraire de rien." (CS, p. 88) "Il n'y a pas de contraire du bien." (CS, p. 287) The true good stands above the conflict between good and evil. The true or absolute good belongs solely to the spiritual realm, to that realm where the principle that 'nothing is lost, nothing is created' applies,³⁴ to the realm where good produces only good and evil produces only evil. The conflict between good and evil in this world, i.e., the conflict within the temporal order, takes place within an order that transcends it and which is not affected by it. This order (the Eternal) is the source of all pure truth, justice, love, and good which can exist in this world. This order is the absolute good (God). It stands above the correlation good-evil; and it imposes limits. Indeed, we only have the illusion of good and evil as a pair of contraries, as well as the illusion of evil as unlimited, because our desire is attached to the things of this world.³⁵

Desire is extremely significant in this context, for it is the desire that good and not evil will be done to us that, in terms of affliction, leads us inevitably and against our will on a collision course with necessity's absolute indifference to the good. We are often reduced by external circumstances and other human beings to a state of affliction in spite of our desire for the good; we are brought, in effect, through desire, to experience the absence of all good in this world. We are brought, through desire, to understand

that the good is not of this world, that the good is transcendent. And yet even in a state of extreme affliction where the essence of one's experience is defined by the absence of good, if one still desires the good (the love of God, the consent to the absence of good), one will not be deprived of the good for very long. To desire the good when one has been deprived of it, when one has experienced that nothing in this world is good, is to sever one's desire from all the things of this world. It is to de-create, to become pure. Only that which is perfectly pure can come into contact with the good (God), and this contact is made by likeness, an identity with God (the union of the soul with God).³⁶

Ce qui est parfaitement pur ne peut pas être autre chose que Dieu présent ici-bas. Si c'était autre chose que Dieu, cela ne serait pas pur. Si Dieu n'était pas présent, nous ne pourrions jamais être sauvés. Dans l'âme où s'est produit un tel contact avec la pureté toute l'horreur du mal qu'elle porte en soi se change en amour pour la pureté divine. (PS, p. 16)

God is present in the soul of he who has become pure. The desire that he bears within him is transformed into divine love (the love of God for God). Therefore we can say that desire, in the face of the total and perpetual absence of all good, is, paradoxically, the possession of total good. Desire, in the face of the absence of good, is that which paradoxically expresses the possibility of good. "Le désir est en lui-même le bien." (CS, p. 287)³⁷ Desire can be nothing other than the divine spirit acting through us; it can be nothing other than divine love -- that love, exemplified by Christ, which suffers all evil.

Therefore the good which stands above the conflict between

good and evil in this world also takes part in the conflict.³⁸ It takes part in the conflict because it consents to suffer all evil (redemptive suffering). As such it is the limit of evil, and if we are to understand the idea of good as a limit, we must look at how we come to know good and evil in this world. We can only know evil in this world through contact (suffering), and this contact, if it penetrates deeply enough (affliction), will indicate that nothing in this world that we desire as good is absolutely good. In this context, then, we cannot say that we know good through contact with good (good as it is determined by this world). What we know of good, in effect, is the lack of good, and we know this through contact with evil (the absence of good). Therefore we know evil through contact, and good not at all, for evil teaches us that good is absent from this world. If the true good that we nevertheless desire plays some role in this world, it must be said, unless this good is entirely an illusion, that we know this good through contact, just as we know evil through contact.

We can say that we come into contact with evil through our separation from God. In fact, we become conscious of our separation from God as a result of the suffering that evil inflicts upon us; we become conscious that all good is absent from this world and that evil appears to be unlimited. It would seem, therefore, that if we can come into contact with that which is truly good, this contact would have to occur at the moment when we experience the limit of evil. And if this limit is to have any meaning for us, it would necessarily have to take the form of a being of flesh and blood. This limit would

have to be a being who suffers all of the evil that is inflicted upon him without consciously or unconsciously sending that evil back into the world as a result of revenge or any other form of satisfaction. In other words, the evil that is inflicted upon this being would not rebound in this world; it would not produce any further evil, but rather, it would disappear. What is being said, then, is that the limit of evil is manifested and takes part in the conflict between good and evil in this world at the moment when a human being (any human being) both recognizes what evil is, i.e. the absence of good, and consents to suffer all evil because he knows that the complete and total absence of all good in this world is the very reality of the good. He, indeed, is the one who suffers and consents to suffer the complete and total absence of all good in this world. That is because the good is absent from this world, and he has come into contact with -- he has become the manifestation of -- this 'absence', by being absent from the evil in this world.³⁹ He neither inflicts evil nor is affected by evil (he may suffer physically and mentally, but the evil itself is ultimately illusory; it disappears) because he knows that 'the good' is not evil, that evil is the absence of good and therefore that the good cannot be affected by evil. By being absent from the evil of this world, he comes into contact with, and manifests, that which evil teaches us is absent from this world, i.e. the good. He is the manifestation (the incarnation) of that which is absent from this world (the good); that is to say, he is the presence of good in this world.⁴⁰

Evil is the distance which separates us from God; it is a

distance, however, which God Himself consents to. God allows evil to exist out of love: the Creation. The Creation, in turn, would not exist without the abdication of God: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" "L'Amour est abdication. Dieu est abdication." (CS, p. 267) Evil teaches us that the good is absent from this world; it teaches us that God's abdication (God's separation from Himself) is what separates us from God. The form, consequently, that God's love and justice take in this world is 'absence'. God is absent even from Himself (Christ's abandonment on the Cross), but this 'absence' is, paradoxically, the only way in which God's love and justice (the presence of God, of 'the good') can be manifested in this world. God's love and justice (God's perfection) are manifested in Christ's abandonment by both men and God, and in Christ's (God's) consent to this abandonment. "L'Amour consent à être haï." (CS, p. 267) Our desire for the good (our love for God, and thus God's love for God, for only the eternal part of the soul (God) can love God) must necessarily pass through the evil -- across the distance -- that separates us from God. One can understand, in this context, why Weil can say: "La possibilité du mal est un bien." (I, p. 239) Evil, experienced in the depths of affliction as the absence of good, becomes the good (the plenitude of the absence of God) at the moment that it (the absence of good) is consented to in its fulness. For it is no longer evil (the evil disappears) at this moment; the evil is transformed into pure suffering, the suffering that results from God's separation from Himself (the Creation), from God's absence from Himself (Christ's cry of dereliction on the Cross), the divine

suffering which is the presence of the good, of God, in this world.

Evil is purified, therefore, when it comes into contact with an innocent being. The evil touches God and disappears, which is to say that it is transformed into innocent suffering, the suffering of God. For the Christian, the visible image of this suffering, the suffering of the innocent God, is Christ crucified. The Incarnation takes the form of a victim. The Cross of Christ sheds the light of salvation, of redemption, upon evil; the Cross of Christ reveals why a God who loves man (Creation) and a man who loves God (de-creation) have to suffer.⁴¹ The Cross ties evil and the Redemption together in a mysterious, but nevertheless, inextricable manner. This is not, however, to mistake the Redemption for a 'once for all' event. The Redemption is an eternal operation. "Le Christ a racheté le monde dans toute la mesure où peut le faire un homme, un seul homme, s'il est égal à Dieu, et dans cette mesure seulement; mais la rédemption se prolonge dans la personne de tous ceux qui avant ou après sa naissance ont imité le Christ." (II, pp. 300-301)

If Christ is not present at any time (the past, present, or future) and in any place where there is affliction, then salvation, and thus redemption, are totally meaningless. The Redemption cannot be reduced to the temporal plane for Weil.

La Rédemption se place sur un autre plan, un plan éternel.

D'une manière générale, il n'y a pas de raison d'établir une liaison entre le degré de perfection et la chronologie.

Le christianisme a fait entrer dans le monde cette notion de progrès, inconnue auparavant; et cette notion devenue le poison du monde moderne, l'a déchristianisé. Il faut l'abandonner.

Il faut se défaire de la superstition de la chronologie pour trouver l'Eternité. (LR, p. 50)⁴²

God's justice and love cannot be reduced to a single, unique event that occurs on the historical plane, for this justice and love does not belong to any one individual, nor to any one people or race, nor to any one geographical area, nor to any historical era. God's justice and love are present at any time and in any place to whosoever desires them, and if that desire is pure enough, God's justice and love will be revealed; God will manifest Himself in this world.⁴³

This manifestation must be seen within the Christian tradition, as well as outside the Christian tradition, for it is not too hard to imagine that, in the future, if there are any human beings left on this planet, there may be no trace left of Christianity whatsoever. For those who are living at this future time, just as for those who lived prior to Christ, affliction and salvation will be entirely meaningless unless Christ is somehow mysteriously present, unless God is somehow mysteriously present at that time.⁴⁴

In the Christian tradition God is present in and through Christ. He is also present in and through anyone who imitates Christ, whether or not they have even heard or know of Christ. That is why, at least for Weil, God has many names (many incarnations: Christ, Krishna, Osiris, Dionysus, etc.); that is why God can manifest Himself, paradoxically, in more than one place at the same time.⁴⁵ What follows from what is being said here is that anyone can, through grace (and thus predestination), become an incarnation of God. This is the same, of course, as saying that anyone can be redeemed or saved, that anyone can become innocent

or attain to a state of perfection. In other words, to the extent to which a human being becomes, through grace, innocent, and to the extent to which he remains in a state of innocence, to that extent can it be said that he is Christ, that he is God. This, in the very strict sense in which Weil uses the term, is what a saint is. In this sense, anyone who has become innocent, who has reached the state of perfection, is a saint, i.e., an incarnation of God. As Weil says:

Le panthéisme n'est vrai que pour les saints parvenus à l'état de perfection.

Il n'y a pas de vérité des états inférieurs, car ils enferment l'erreur. C'est pourquoi il n'y a pas de vérité du mal, sinon sous la forme d'un être parfait qui souffre.

Ainsi être lavé du péché et ensuite souffrir, c'est la condition pour parvenir à la vérité. La Croix est la route. (CS, p. 58)⁴⁶

To be cleansed from sin (expiatory suffering) is a death of the 'I', a death which brings about the absence of God, and in which the 'I' itself participates through suffering. Innocence is to be cleansed from sin (the state of existence) altogether. To be innocent, and then to suffer, is to experience the absence of good, of God; it is, in fact, to experience the fulness of the absence of God, for to be innocent is to imitate Christ. The innocent being who suffers (redemptive suffering), having come into contact with God (the experience of the fulness of the absence of God), having, that is, been born anew from on high, is the manifestation (the incarnation) here below of that (the good, God) which is absent from this world. He, like God, is absent from the evil in this world. He nevertheless remains present in this world. His presence is, as it were, a conduit through which passes the illuminating rays of God's love,

a conduit through which the evil of this world passes to be destroyed. The being who has come into contact with God, unless there is a literal death as a result of this contact, does not 'disappear' from this world. His new being is 'incarnated', for it is only through contact with God in this world that evil can be destroyed, that God's love and justice, God's perfection can be revealed; it is only through the possibility of contact with God in this world that one could forgive God for the affliction of men at any time and in any place. Christ did not forsake this world. Neither did those Buddhist monks (the Boddhisattvas) who, after attaining Nirvana, came back into the world and would not leave it until all men were saved. Plato is still another who indicates that the emancipated being (the philosopher) who has emerged from the Cave, who has seen the sun itself, as it is in itself,⁴⁷ re-enters the Cave in order to lead others out of it.⁴⁸

En somme, après avoir arraché l'âme au corps, après avoir traversé la mort pour aller à Dieu, le saint doit en quelque sorte s'incarner dans son propre corps afin de répandre sur ce monde, sur cette vie terrestre, le reflet de la lumière surnaturelle. Afin de faire de cette vie terrestre et de ce monde une réalité, car jusque-là ce ne sont que des songes. Il lui incombe d'achever ainsi la création. Le parfait imitateur de Dieu d'abord se désincarne, puis s'incarne. (SG, p. 106)

We know that it is the efforts made by the non-de-created man that bring about his de-creation or his new birth. This leads one to wonder, as Miklos Vetö does, how any centre of individual existence, how any identity and continuity of the self can be maintained between the de-created man and his former non-de-created personality. It is Vetö's contention that the continuity of the

self must be maintained because the de-created man's new birth is dependent upon the efforts made during his non-de-created life, efforts which, in the end, can be reduced to the 'consent' to be de-created.⁴⁹ Vetö is aware, of course, that the difficulties involved in understanding how an identity and continuity of the self can be maintained are compounded by the fact that the self (the ego, the 'I') is ultimately considered by Weil to be illusory. The being that God has given us out of love is the being which, out of love, we should renounce. The being that God has given us is not true being. What does this say about the self? Weil's main biographer, Simone Pétrement, speaks very clearly to this question.

Quel est cependant cet être qu'il [Dieu] nous a donné? Est-ce un être véritable? Simone dit plus d'une fois que le moi est en réalité néant, que l'être de l'homme est du non-être. Et en effet, que reste-t-il qui soit proprement l'homme? La personnalité semble dès à présent dissoute, partagée entre un pouvoir de refuser le bien, pouvoir qui est la personne même mais qui n'est qu'un faux pouvoir -- car d'une façon ou de l'autre nous obéissons finalement à Dieu; si ce n'est par amour du bien, c'est par sujétion à la nécessité -- , et d'autre part un pouvoir d'accepter le bien, qui est en son fond identique au bien, identique à Dieu. Car Dieu seul peut aimer Dieu. L'amour de Dieu en nous, ce n'est pas nous, c'est le Fils de Dieu, incarné de nouveau. Ce qui en nous peut accepter le bien n'est pas moins séparé de la personne que ne l'est Dieu. La personne n'existe finalement ni d'un côté ni de l'autre. D'un côté elle n'est qu'apparence mensongère; de l'autre ce n'est pas elle qui existe, mais Dieu. De même la vraie liberté de l'homme n'est point sa liberté mais celle de Dieu. De même encore la vraie immortalité n'est point l'immortalité de l'âme individuelle, mais l'éternité de Dieu. La part éternelle de l'âme se confond avec Dieu à la mort et déjà dans la vie; la part de l'âme qui n'est pas éternelle tombe dans le néant à la mort et déjà dans la vie elle est néant.⁵⁰

If we are to speak of the self in Weil, we can do so only in

terms of 'that which should not be' ('le ne-devant-pas-être').⁵¹

This self, the 'I', is ultimately a fiction: "La création est une fiction de Dieu" (CS, p. 176), but it is a fiction which, for the majority of us, constitutes the very reality of the universe. As such, it is a fiction which is extremely difficult to get rid of. It is a fiction which does appear to have an identity and continuity in time, for it is a fiction which is determined and propagated by necessity. And yet it is necessity itself which shows us, through affliction, that this fiction (the self) is just that -- a fiction -- , for the self, the 'I', and whatever element of freedom that is attached to it, is destroyed by affliction. Affliction breaks the identity and continuity of what we had previously taken to be the self; and it reveals to us, through the experience of the absence of good, of God, in this world, that that which is absent from this world -- the good, God -- is the only unchanging centre that should be spoken of in terms of identity and continuity. Affliction reveals to us that the 'True Self' (God as Subject)⁵² lies outside of this world.

It is necessary, indeed, to ask whether the identity and continuity of the self is something which we can clearly define for ourselves? And further, if we think in terms of the human intelligence, what self are we thinking about -- the self which is thought about, or the self which does the thinking? We can think about ourselves, and we can think about ourselves thinking about ourselves, and we can also think about ourselves thinking about ourselves thinking about ourselves, ad infinitum, but we can never grasp the self or the 'I' which does the thinking. As Simone Pétrement asks: "Quel est le

genre d'existence de la personne? Quel est le genre d'existence de l'esprit? 'Je suis une chose qui pense', disait Descartes. Mais une chose qui pense est-elle encore une chose, est-elle même un être? Ne sommes-nous pas forcés de dissoudre la personne quand nous voulons décrire la vie de la pensée et le dépassement perpétuel, le renoncement perpétuel de la pensée à elle-même?"⁵³ Pétrement goes on to say that the continuity of the self seems even less assured in certain parts of the New Testament than it does in Weil. Whereas Weil at least makes a connection between the new birth and certain conditions fulfilled in the individual person, in the Gospel of St. John and in St. Paul it often seems that the new birth is entirely the result of God's decision and predestination. "Où est alors la continuité entre le vieil homme et le nouveau? Le changement semble encore plus total. Où est le centre neutre qui choisirait entre le bien et le mal et demeurerait identique à travers les changements?"⁵⁴

Pétrement's comments are certainly apropos in this context. On the other hand, they are not as detailed and therefore as clear as they might be. We must remember that no matter what efforts are made by the 'old man' (the non-de-created man), every action and every thought that is ultimately in accord or in harmony with the Truth (God) is the result of grace (predestination); it is, as we said earlier, God who is acting and thinking through the individual. And it is clearly not the individual who makes a choice between good and evil in the end, because in the first place there is no choice in relation to necessity, and because in the second place 'choosing the good' is to be without choice; it is to be completely obedient to God.

To choose good over evil is to love God, and since only God can love God, the neutral centre which chooses between good and evil and which remains identical throughout all changes is God. Both expiation and redemption are ultimately the work of God for Weil. In spite of the fact that she can speak of the new birth in connection with certain conditions fulfilled in the individual person, in the end the new birth is entirely the result of God's decision and predestination. Besides, the conditions which are fulfilled in the individual person amount to the annihilation of the individual, that is to say, they amount to the recognition that the individual person, including all of his human faculties, and therefore his 'I', his very existence, is ultimately non-being; they amount to the consent to be non-being, the consent to the absence of good, of God, in this world, and only God can consent to such a thing.

It is very difficult, in the final analysis, to understand how an identity and continuity of the self can be maintained in Weil. The death that is entailed in the de-creative process is really and truly a death. What is killed is the self, the 'I', and everything -- the will, freedom, choice, the human intelligence, etc. -- that is attached to it and which can manufacture any number of consolations that will keep the soul from truly dying, that will maintain the 'I' in place as a screen between God and God. The image that Weil uses most frequently to describe the state that one has been reduced to after this death is that of 'inert matter'. Now presumably, unless this death literally leaves one lying on the ground as a corpse for the vultures, the physical body will still be alive after this death,

for it is into his own body that the saint incarnates himself. And this body, although subject to necessity because it is matter, is not determined in the same way as it was prior to becoming 'inert matter', for there is no self, no 'I' left which can affect the movements of this body. This body is inhabited, as it were, by another being; it is the union of divine spirit with matter. In other words, whereas previously in the non-de-created person there was a union of the physical and mental (man), the entire non-de-created person being totally determined by (totally obedient to) necessity, in the person who has been de-created and then incarnated, there is a union of divine spirit with matter (the God-Man), one part of which is totally obedient to necessity, i.e. matter, and one part of which is totally free, i.e. the divine spirit: God. The matter in the latter instance, however, is better thought of in terms of 'inert matter', for the 'I' which was united to the body of the non-de-created person has been killed. All of the supplementary energy attached to the 'I' has been destroyed, and even the vegetative energy has been expended for something (consent to the absence of good) other than the strictly biological functions for which it was destined. Therefore even if we take the physical or bodily aspect of man as being a constituent of the self, it would be very difficult to see an identity and continuity even of the body. If we think in terms of the union of thought and matter, the subtleties of what is being said here are indicated by Weil herself.

Une pensée humaine peut habiter la chair. Mais
si une pensée habite de la matière inerte, ce ne peut

être qu'une pensée divine.

C'est pourquoi, si un homme est transformé en être parfait, et sa pensée remplacée par la pensée divine, sa chair, sous les espèces de la chair vivante, est devenue en un sens du cadavre.

Il faut qu'un homme ait péri et que le cadavre soit animé de nouveau par un souffle vital venu directement d'au-dessus des cieux. (CS, p. 261)

In the end, therefore, it is not really legitimate to postulate an identity and continuity of the self in Weil; that is to say, Weil's position does not allow for an identity and continuity between the non-de-created and the de-created man. To think about de-creation for Weil is ultimately to think about incarnation, for it is Christ who is always at the centre of her thought and in relation to whom her notion of de-creation is centred. Indeed, she is quite explicit at one point that there can be no continuity in relation to the idea of incarnation. "Les conceptions fondées sur l'incarnation regardent la régénération spirituelle comme une possession de l'homme par Dieu. Cela implique rupture de continuité." (CS, p. 261) We know, after all, that redemption is nothing less than an incarnation. As such, the identity and continuity of the self is a source of imperfection, something that must be suppressed before existence can be said to participate in the fulness of reality, before, that is, redemption can be said to be a possibility. Pétrement, in turn, has indicated the difficulties involved in determining what such an identity and continuity of the self would be in the first place, without even going beyond the boundaries of this existence. Nevertheless, the complaint that Vetö makes, i.e. that Weil's suppression of any centre of individual existence contains a mortal threat ("une menace mortelle"),⁵⁵

is a complaint that we must take seriously. On the other hand, it must be asked whether the suppression of any centre of individual existence is a denial of existence by Weil, or whether it is a denial of existence as it is lived in error and falsehood, as it is lived in ignorance of the Truth or in separation from God, whether, in fact, it is existence as such that Weil is denying, or that aspect of existence which characterizes existence as 'individual', as possessing reality in its own right independently of the Divine. It is a question, in the end, of whether or not the self that we think of as having an identity and continuity in time can be said to participate in Reality, in that Truth of which Christ spoke and was the representative in this world. It is a question of whether the existence of the less perfect can be said to possess the same reality as the existence of that which is perfect.

After all, Weil's point is that Christ showed us that our existence is of little worth if it is not in accord with the Truth. To follow this Truth, of which Christ is the Way, is to die; it is to de-create, and then to incarnate oneself in one's previous body. It is then that we are no longer our own; it is Christ who lives in us. There is in this, of course, a mortal threat. At the same time, however, there is an affirmation of existence. Existence as it is lived in terms of this world alone is denied, whereas existence which is lived in harmony with the Truth is affirmed. All that Weil is saying, in one sense, is that the less perfect cannot have more reality than the more perfect. She is not denying that reality for a man consists in his existence on this earth; in fact, she even

underlines this assertion when she says: "La plénitude de la réalité de Dieu est hors de ce monde, mais la plénitude de la réalité d'un homme est dans ce monde, cet homme fût-il parfait." (II, p. 291)

This does not mean, however, that the existence of the less perfect (non-de-created existence) participates in the same reality as the existence of the more perfect (de-created existence). Weil does not want to confer the same reality on non-de-created existence as she does on the Incarnation, for example. Although reality for a man consists in his earthly existence, strictly speaking this existence is but the shadow of reality; it would possess the fulness of reality only if it were to become perfect.

Existence and reality are not the same thing for Weil.⁵⁶ Existence possesses more and more reality to the extent to which it corresponds to perfection, to the extent to which it participates in that which is absolutely pure. As it is generally assumed that existence is something which cannot be proven, but rather, that it is something we can only observe as a fact, it may be said, using Kantian language, that existence is to reality as phenomena are to noumena. Just as phenomena are only a shadow of noumena, so also is existence but a shadow of reality. In this context, the problem would be to understand what it would mean for existence to participate in the fulness of reality (perfection), and whether such a thing is possible. In other words, what necessities and impossibilities are attached to the Incarnation?⁵⁷

There is one way of looking at this question which will help to clarify Weil's thinking. It is to look at human perception in

terms of thinking pure geometrical forms, and at how these purely theoretical conceptions are applied in nature. In Weil's terminology, it is to look at two of the mysteries in human life: "l'opération de l'intelligence pure appliquée à la contemplation de la nécessité théorique dans la connaissance du monde, et l'incarnation des conceptions purement théoriques dans la technique et le travail." (IP, p. 165) We cannot, of course, deal with these questions at great length. Our purpose will simply be to understand how Weil's thinking about these questions can be seen as an analogy that will enable us to penetrate more fully into the relationship between existence and reality. It will enable us to see why the Redemption (and thus the Incarnation) is both a denial of and an affirmation of existence, why, indeed, it is necessary to deny existence (the annihilation of the self) before one can truly exist.

We might begin our discussion by examining human perception in relation to the idea of the cube. If we analyze our perception of a cubic box we will notice that there is no point of view (even if the box is suspended in air so that one is able to view it from any perspective whatsoever) from which the box has the appearance of a cube. One will see flat and unequal sides, angles which do not appear to be straight, but one will never see a cube, nor will one ever touch a cube for analogous reasons. The cubic form transcends all the apparent forms that we perceive; it constitutes their unity and truth. Yet we are nevertheless certain of the reality of the cubic box (as an object) in that our varied perceptions are constituted by the immobile form of the cube, even though that form is different

from and transcends our perceptions of it. The necessity which is in evidence in this example, that is to say, the necessity which constitutes the unity and truth of all our apparent perceptions, is a necessity which is intelligible, but not tangible. The feeling of reality that we have is thus both a feeling of harmony (the concrete object) and of mystery (that which gives the object its form). But since the cubic form is detached from the sensible object (we cannot see the cubic form), then from whence come the necessities and impossibilities which are attached to the cubic form and which impose themselves on our mind?⁵⁸

We are involved in the same difficulties, of course, when we think of a pure straight line. The line that is drawn on a piece of paper with a pencil is not a straight line; it is somewhat jagged and curved, and yet the relationship between the movement of the pencil and our sight, which makes us think of a pure straight line, is the very foundation of perception. This is a mystery. Therefore every time we think of a pure straight line, or a pure triangle, we are aware that these thoughts involve an effort of attention in detaching themselves from sensible phenomena and acts, and that they do not come out of our own minds, for there is nothing to which they correspond, but that the necessities and impossibilities which do correspond to these thoughts are mysteriously imposed upon our minds. Any precise and rigorous analysis of perception will indicate that ". . . la perception du monde réel ne diffère des erreurs qui lui ressemblent que parce qu'elle enferme un contact avec une nécessité. . . . La nécessité nous apparaît toujours comme un

ensemble de lois de variation déterminées par des rapports fixes et invariants." (IP, p. 142) So each time we see, through all our experiences, a single, fixed and unchanging order of the world, what we see, in fact, is not a mathematical form, but a Person.⁵⁹ It is God who "a enfermé dans notre sensibilité même une révélation." (IP, p. 169)

Let us look at the problem from another perspective. If a child is asked to perform the task of constructing a number of objects fulfilling certain requirements, and he is told at the same time that it is possible to construct some of these objects, but impossible to construct others, how will this child be able to convince us that the construction of some of these objects is impossible? The fact that the child does construct a number of the objects, even if by chance, is sufficient empirical proof of the possible, but there can be no empirical proof of the impossible. Impossibility is what limits the possible; it is necessity in its concrete shape, and thus any demand which involves the infinite cannot be met without passing from the realm of empiricism into the realm of necessity.⁶⁰

It would seem that we are always led back to necessity. In the picture that we have before us, we can say that necessity is a somewhat degraded image of impossibility, whereas existence is a somewhat degraded image of necessity. It is impossibility that we must touch in order to emerge from the dream state (the state of existence) that we find ourselves in. As Weil says in the Cahiers: "L'existence n'est qu'une ombre de réalité. La nécessité est une réalité solide. L'impossibilité est une réalité manifeste. La

nécessité étant conditionnelle laisse place à des 'si'. L'impossibilité s'impose." (III, p. 24) Our existence is but a shadow of reality, until, that is, we come into contact with necessity, that necessity which, as in the example of the cube, allows impossibility to manifest itself (the necessities and impossibilities attached to the cubic form). This impossibility, in turn, is the manifest appearance of reality, that reality which arises out of contradiction (constituted by the box as a concrete object and that which mysteriously gives the box its cubic form). Contradiction is always the criterion, in the form of an obstacle, for a thinking being, and this obstacle is what reality is for Weil.⁶¹ "Est réel pour nous ce que nous ne pouvons nier et qui pourtant nous échappe. Tout ce que nous saisissons est irréel." (III, p. 157)⁶² In other words, that which we are unable to grasp represents the limit of that which we are able to grasp. This limit constitutes reality. To use the example of the cube once more, we can say that the limit of the visible aspects of the cube is represented by the unseen cube, the veritable cube. "Le véritable cube, jamais vu, est un exemple de l'absence qui est souveraine présence. Les apparences de cube lui obéissent." (III, p. 112) All of our thinking, in fact, that is, all of our thinking which is in accord with the Truth, is governed by the sovereign presence of that which is absent. "Est-ce ainsi", as Weil asks, "que s'explique le mystère de l'absence du bien au-dedans de la société humaine? Un homme pur n'accomplit rien. Ou ce qu'il accomplit tourne en boue." (III, p. 112)

It would be legitimate, by means of substituting terms in

the cube analogy, to assert that the veritable (absolute) good, never seen, is an example of absence which is sovereign presence, and that the relative goods of this world are obedient to it. We know that the relative goods of this world are not the absolute good. Affliction teaches us that this good is absent. But just as the sensible appearances of geometrical forms are not pure geometrical forms (these forms are unseen; they are absent from sensible perception), is it any less intelligible to think that the necessities and impossibilities attached to pure geometrical forms, and which allow us to conceive them, are not also mysteriously present in the case of absolute good? Is it any less intelligible that absolute good should be sovereignly present through the experience of the absence of all good in this world? When we think of pure geometrical forms, as we indicated above, we are aware that our thoughts involve an effort of attention in detaching themselves from sensible phenomena and acts, and that they do not come out of our own minds, for there is nothing to which they correspond, but that the necessities and impossibilities which do correspond to these thoughts are mysteriously imposed upon our minds. The thought of absolute good (the love of God) would likewise involve an effort of attention in detaching itself from the relative goods of this world, and it would not come out of our own minds, for there is nothing to which it corresponds (affliction being the feeling of the absence of good), but the necessities and impossibilities which do correspond to this thought would be mysteriously imposed upon our minds. This is only an analogy, of course, but then it is good that men desire, and it is difficult to think that this good is

any less real than are pure geometrical forms. It is also difficult to think that the presence or incarnation of good in this world is any less intelligible than the incarnation of purely theoretical conceptions in technique and in work.

This latter statement requires further elucidation. In order to do this it will be necessary, in the first place, to briefly review what necessity is, and secondly, it will prove useful to look at the differences that Weil sees between what the geometer and the physicist are attempting to do in their respective disciplines. We have seen, to begin with, that necessity is essentially conditional. Necessity, however, is also an intermediary; that is to say, the relations which we perceive in our minds through the contemplation of the order of the world are given to us through revelation; we have no idea where the necessities and impossibilities connected with these relations come from. We must be careful at all times, therefore, to distinguish between the reality of the pure straight line (or of the absolute good) which is constituted by a contact with necessity, and the conditional or semi-reality (or the relative 'goods') which we perceive in the world around us.⁶³ This is an extremely important point in relation to the problem of the application of mathematics in nature. We must stop for a moment and consider the implications of Weil's thinking in relation to this problem.⁶⁴

In that necessity is essentially conditional for us, it is consequently revealed to our minds through a small number of perfectly definite conditions. The world, however, is able to impose upon our actions an unlimited number of conditions, conditions which can

neither be enumerated nor expressed. The geometer and the physicist, in formulating an hypothesis, can only hold in their minds a certain number of the conditions which have been revealed to them. They certainly cannot hold in their minds those conditions which have not been revealed to them, and which could surprise them at any moment. What they do, therefore, is provide themselves with a closed system, a system in which nothing else is included except those few perfectly definite conditions which they have chosen. They then try to determine what necessities and what impossibilities their systems will reveal; in effect, they practice mathematics.

It is at this point, however, that we must distinguish between the geometer and the physicist. The geometer's interest is directed solely to the necessities and impossibilities that his system will reveal. Once he has his closed system, he is no longer interested in the things of this world, for they have already served their purpose in providing him with the conditions which he has selected for his system. For example, he is not interested in whether the pencil marks he has drawn on a piece of paper are roughly straight or curved; he is interested in pure straight lines. The physicist, on the other hand, cannot ignore the question of whether the pencil marks on the paper are straight or not, because physics is essentially the application of mathematics to nature. The physicist is not interested, like the geometer, in the closed system which he constructs in his mind, but in the relation of this system to the things of this world. This relation cannot be anything but impenetrably obscure, for it is applied to nature at the price of an infinite error. This

is what Weil calls the idea of the negligible. It is that which has to be neglected in order to construct physics, though it is by no means that which is of no significance, for what is neglected is always an infinite error as large as the world, as large as the whole difference between what the physicist sees in front of his eyes and the perfectly closed and definite system which he holds in his mind, and which is represented on paper by symbols and signs. A limited number of relations can always be perceived between two points, no matter how close together, but the infinite number of relations between these two points that cannot be perceived is such that mathematics cannot be applied to nature without involving an infinite error.⁶⁵

What is extremely significant about what is being said here is this: that if we admit, as geometers and physicists undoubtedly do, that geometrical relations make up the laws of the universe and that our actions are simply applications of geometrical principles, then is it not quite astonishing that our actions should be successful when they are regulated by a deliberate and infinitely erroneous application of those principles?⁶⁶ This is one of the mysteries that Weil sees in human life; it is the incarnation of purely theoretical conceptions in technique and in work. But is it, we may well ask, any more of a mystery or any more unintelligible than the incarnation of good, of God, in this world? The question reduces itself, in the final analysis, to whether or not matter is capable of sanctity, for we are beings of flesh and blood and it is only through this medium that sanctity can be manifested in this world. Weil enucleates the thinking that is involved in this question with the utmost clarity

in her essay, "La Science et nous".

Il est vrai que la matière qui constitue le monde est un tissu de nécessités aveugles, absolument indifférentes à nos désirs; il est vrai aussi en un sens qu'elles sont absolument indifférentes aux aspirations de l'esprit, indifférentes au bien; mais en un sens aussi ce n'est pas vrai. Car s'il y a jamais eu dans le monde, fût-ce chez un seul homme et pendant un seul jour, de sainteté véritable, c'est qu'en un sens la sainteté est quelque chose dont la matière est capable; puisque la matière seule et ce qui est inscrit dans la matière existe. Le corps d'un homme, et par suite en particulier le corps d'un saint, n'est pas autre chose que de la matière, et c'est un morceau du monde, de ce même monde qui est un tissu de nécessités mécaniques. Nous sommes régis par une double loi, une indifférence évidente et une mystérieuse complicité de la matière qui constitue le monde à l'égard du bien; le rappel de cette double loi est ce qui nous atteint au coeur dans le spectacle du beau. (S, p. 133)

If purely theoretical conceptions, with their concomitant necessities and impossibilities, can be incarnated in technique and in work, that is, in matter, is not matter, in a sense, capable of sanctity? We know, because of necessity, that we are little more than earth-worms who live our lives under the crushing weight of gravity. This weight can become so heavy that we experience the obvious indifference of matter with regard to the good. What we experience is affliction, the absence of good. At the same time, if good is not capable of being present in matter in some mysterious way, then redemption is an absurdity, for redemption implies incarnation. It is not that we can know good, that we can see or touch it, any more than we can see or touch pure geometrical forms. Good stands outside of our perceptions and feelings of it; it is absent from our perceptions and feelings of it, and, in our sense of the word existence, it cannot be said to exist. But then the presence

of pure geometrical forms are only given to us in their absence, that is, as a result of our contact with necessity, that necessity which shows us that they too, like good, are absent from this world; and the purely theoretical conceptions that we derive from the contemplation of necessity, and which our actions are simply applications of, are successful when incarnated in technique and in work: the sovereign presence of that which is absent. This is the mysterious complicity, as regards the good (that which is absent), on the part of the matter which composes the world. It is that which constrains necessity to obey the eternal Wisdom. In other words, it is that -- Love -- which constitutes the mystery of the Creation itself.

The whole problem that we have been dealing with, at least as it has been developed so far, has essentially been focused upon the possibility of the union of divine spirit with matter (incarnation), with whether matter (and therefore man) is capable of sanctity or not. An examination of human perception provides us with an analogy for understanding this problem, for what we have seen in relation to human perception is that the object of perception (in this case, pure geometrical forms) transcends all the apparent forms that we perceive, while, at the same time, constituting the unity and truth of all the apparent forms. Nevertheless, we could not think of the pure forms, we could not hold them in our minds, if they were not somehow mysteriously imposed upon our minds. They cannot arise out of our own minds, for there is nothing to which they correspond, and yet they come to be present to our minds through sense perception. In some mysterious way, these forms are not only transcendent, they are also immanent.

Their immanence is more clearly revealed in their incarnation in technique and in work, in the actions of human beings which are successful and which are founded upon and correspond to these purely theoretical conceptions. The transcendence and immanence which is involved here, or, in other terms, the sovereign presence of that which is absent which is reflected here, expresses the very nature of the Creation itself. Indeed, for Weil, the Creation implies the sovereign presence of that which is absent; it implies both the immanence and transcendence of God with respect to matter. The Creation necessitates the union of divine spirit with matter: the Incarnation. To put this in another way, we can say that the less perfect (sensible phenomena, relative goods) cannot be the measure of the more perfect (pure forms) or of that which is perfect (the absolute good, God). Only God can be the measure of all things; and this, too, necessitates the Incarnation.⁶⁷

What is being said here is that which, in one way or another, must be addressed in any doctrinal formulation of the Christian message, for what this message demands is the simultaneous recognition of both the total transcendence and the total immanence of God.⁶⁸ The Christian Revelation, as it is revealed in the incarnate and crucified Christ, does not allow us to affirm only one side of this paradox and to deny the other. To affirm only the total transcendence of God would mean that everything in the universe, everything that is visible and in change, has no connection, no link whatsoever with the Divine. It would mean that everything in the universe, including the existence of human beings, is entirely negative and illusory. It is clear that

Weil emphasizes the totally transcendent nature of God, the absence of God, to a great extent, and it is because of this emphasis that we come to see the very negative and illusory character which she does give to everything in the universe. This does not mean, however, that everything in the universe is absolutely negative and illusory, that existence cannot participate in reality, for Weil thinks that everything in the universe, including the existence of human beings, does mysteriously participate in a transcendent reality, and that that reality, which is absent from the things and beings of this world, is somehow mysteriously present as the limit of all that we can know and do in this world (as in the example of the cube). In that this limit can be successfully manifested in this world in terms of our thought and actions, she thinks that the immanence of the transcendent is a reality. Therefore, even when she emphasizes the immanence of God, this immanence is necessarily related to the transcendent. The things of this world are therefore seen in terms of their participation in the Divine; they lose their negative and illusory character only to the extent to which this participation manifests itself. God's transcendence (the absence of God) is a denial of the reality of existence, whereas His immanence (the presence of God) is an affirmation of the reality of existence in terms of transcendence, and therefore it is a denial of existence (the recognition that without God we are nothing) which allows us to exist in reality. Without the relationship of the transcendent to this world, which is necessarily expressed in terms of immanence, the transcendent would be entirely meaningless for us; we could not speak of it as a reality at all, whether in terms

of existence or non-existence. The immanence of God thus allows us to speak of the relationship of the transcendent to this world.

If we affirm only the total immanence of God, however, this would mean that everything in the universe would necessarily possess reality in its own right, rather than possessing reality because of its derivation and participation in the Divine. To affirm only the total immanence of God would be to worship creation rather than the Creator, the material rather than the spiritual. This, of course, is pantheism, an entirely materialistic conception of things which renders God superfluous.⁶⁹ What is required is not the affirmation only of the total transcendence of God or only of the total immanence of God, but rather the simultaneous recognition of both the total transcendence and the total immanence of God. The Incarnation would seem to suggest that we affirm only the total immanence (presence) of God, but the crucifixion would seem to suggest that we affirm only the total transcendence (absence) of God. The cry of dereliction, however, would seem to suggest that we affirm the two together, the total presence of God and the total absence of God: the absence of God from God. The cry of dereliction is the key.

Médiation suprême, harmonie entre le pourquoi du Christ (répété sans arrêt par toute âme dans le malheur) et le silence du Père. L'univers (nous y compris) est la vibration de cette harmonie.

(On ne comprend vraiment l'univers et la destinée des hommes, notamment l'effet du malheur sur l'âme des innocents, qu'en concevant qu'ils ont été créés, l'un comme la Croix, les autres comme les frères du Christ crucifié.)

Pour corriger le danger d'erreur panthéiste dans cette comparaison, comparaison avec le cube et la boîte cubique.

Toucher ainsi Dieu à travers tout. (CS, pp. 35-36)⁷⁰

Just as there is a harmony between the cubic box as a concrete object and the veritable cube which transcends (is absent from) all the appearances that we perceive, so also, for Weil, is there a harmony between the affliction of men and the absence of God, a harmony which is reflected in the ultimate harmony between the 'why?' of Christ and the silence of the Father. This harmony is the sovereign presence of that which is absent. "'L'harmonie'", as Weil sees it, "'procède absolument des contraires. C'est l'union en un seule pensée de pensées qui pensent séparément.'" (II, p. 305)⁷¹ It is a harmony of minds which conceive separately, not of things which are conceived separately. The Incarnation is the fullest possible harmony of this kind, for there is nothing which can possibly conceive more separately than man and God. "Avoir foi dans la réalité de quelque chose -- s'il s'agit d'une chose qui n'est ni constatable ni démontrable, c'est seulement accorder à cette chose une certaine qualité d'attention. La foi dans l'incarnation, c'est la plénitude de l'attention accordée à la plénitude de l'harmonie." (II, p. 306) Is there any way of conceiving a real relationship between God and man which is not every bit as unintelligible as the Incarnation?⁷²

We know that man, in his every thought and in his every movement, is entirely subjected to necessity. How, therefore, can man go to God? "Nous sommes exactement aussi incapables de nous décoller qu'un ver de terre. Et comment, lui [Dieu], viendrait-il à nous, sans descendre?" (III, p. 49) But we also know that necessity, being conditional, leaves room for 'ifs', and thus for 'impossibility' to impose itself. The Incarnation "est la manière la plus concrète

de penser cette descente impossible. Pourquoi dès lors ne serait-il pas la vérité?" (III, p. 49)⁷³ This does not mean, however, that the Incarnation brings God closer to us. On the contrary, the distance between God and us is increased, for the Incarnation and the Cross must be thought together. What is placed between God and us as a result of the Incarnation is the whole of that necessity, throughout all space and time, which constitutes the universe.⁷⁴ The entire universe has been created as the Cross, as that distance which lies between God and us. How, unless we have been created as the brothers of Christ crucified, can this distance which separates us from God be overcome? There can be no higher contradiction than this for man to think about. It is to think about the affliction of men, the perfection of God, and the link between the two. In different terms, it is to think about the supreme harmony between the 'why?' of Christ (ceaselessly repeated by every soul in affliction) and the absence of God, and in what way the universe (ourselves included) is nothing but the vibration of this harmony.

La contradiction est notre chemin vers Dieu parce que nous sommes des créatures et que la création est elle-même contradiction. Il est contradictoire que Dieu, qui est infini, qui est tout, à qui il ne manque rien, fasse quelque chose qui est hors de lui, qui n'est pas lui, tout en procédant de lui. (Le panthéisme, qui est suppression d'un terme de la contradiction, est utile comme passage pour faire sentir la contradiction.) (II, p. 303)

In Weil's terminology, the supreme contradiction can be expressed simply as "la contradiction créateur-créature," and for her "le Christ est l'union de ces contradictoires." (II, p. 303) The extreme expression of this contradiction is, of course, the

cry of dereliction on the Cross, the abandonment of God by God. Even when Christ is viewed solely from the angle of the creature, there is the greatest possible contradiction between the perfection of righteousness and the appearance of injustice in the form of the worst of criminals. Christ was not only treated as a common criminal, he also had the appearance of a slave. In reality he was a slave, but not to the things of this world. He was a slave in being perfectly obedient to his Father, an obedience, in turn, which went as far as being crucified on the Cross, an obedience, in fact, which is nothing less than a spiritual quartering that takes place within God Himself, and which constitutes the love of God for God. "L'union des contradictoires est écartèlement. L'union des contradictoires est par elle-même passion, elle est impossible sans une extrême souffrance." (II, p. 303) As Weil says elsewhere: "Dieu ne peut descendre sur terre, s'incarner, et demeurer bien pur, qu'en subissant l'extrême souffrance." (III, p. 28) This suffering is the stripping of God's divinity, the absence of God from God as reflected in Christ's cry of dereliction. Christ was equal to God in divinity, but he stripped himself of this divinity when he cried out to God on the Cross. The Incarnation, which is simply a figure of the Creation, implies, in conjunction with the cry of dereliction, that even God Himself must be stripped of His divinity in the Creation. This sacrifice of God's is at the same time an eternal operation, which means that as long as the universe remains in existence God is not really God unless He is incarnate. Here, in a nut shell, is the heart of the creator-creature contradiction.⁷⁵

On the level of Creation, if God did not strip Himself of His divinity, the creature would not exist. In this sense, the reality of the creature's existence is determined totally by the absence or transcendence of God. The creature is abandoned to necessity. What is not abandoned to necessity, however, is the eternal part of the soul of every creature. God is entrapped (hidden) within that which He abandons, for that which He abandons in creating is Himself. Creation and Incarnation, seen in this light, are synonymous, which is to say that God is totally transcendent and totally immanent at one and the same time: the sovereign presence of that which is absent.

Affliction reveals to us the total absence of God. At the same time, what it does is remove the veil constituted by the self (the 'I'), and thus the veil constituted by the Creation itself, that separates the eternal part of the soul (the immanence of God) from the absent God (the transcendent God) who is in Heaven. It is only when this veil is removed that God can love God, that God can be fully present to Himself across the distance (the Creation) that separates God from Himself. For God to be fully present to Himself across the distance which separates Himself from Himself necessitates the incarnation of God in the soul of the innocent man who suffers affliction. Yet God cannot become incarnate without remaining absent from Himself: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" God can only be fully God and fully man (God-Man) by remaining absent from Himself. He alone can become man while remaining identical with Himself. However, it would be better not to use the language of 'becoming' here, but rather, to speak of God as that which eternally

'is'. It would be better to say that God alone can 'be' man. Only man 'becomes', for he lives his life in time, i.e. under the crushing weight of necessity; but he cannot become God, for God is totally absent from man, that being the reason for man's existence (his becoming) in the first place. It is only when man is stripped of the false divinity that has been bestowed upon him, when he has been stripped of the 'I' which constitutes his becoming, that God can descend and incarnate Himself in man. So long as he is not literally killed from this contact, the creature will still exist, but not as man, whose essence is defined by the total absence of God; he will exist, rather, as God-Man, whose essence is defined by the total absence and the total presence of God: the absence of God from God. He will exist as the link which ties together the creature and the creator, the link which ties together the affliction of men and the perfection of God.

This link is the Incarnation, the essence of which is expressed in Christ's cry of dereliction on the Cross. The Incarnation is the only form of answer that can give any meaning to the affliction of men, for if good cannot be incarnate in this world, then there simply is no such thing as good; that is to say, if matter is not capable of sanctity, then the absence of God which the innocent soul in affliction experiences would mean not simply that God is absent, but that God never has, is not, and never will be present -- that God is dead. If the Incarnation is possible, this means, as we have seen, that God must be stripped of His divinity: the absence of God from God. The Creation implies the Incarnation, which means that God cannot become incarnate without remaining absent from Himself: "My God, my

God, why hast thou forsaken me?" If God abandons even Himself to the pitiless mechanism of necessity, then, because this impartiality on the part of God extends even to Himself, so long as the universe remains in existence, God will be incarnate; that is to say, God will be absent from God. It is thus that the suffering which is undergone by the innocent soul in affliction, and which is constituted by the experience of the absence of God, is answered by the suffering of God, God's separation from God (Incarnation, Passion): the absence of God from God. God can only be present in the soul of he who is in a state of extreme affliction by means of an absolute affliction, by being absent even from Himself. Redemption is nothing less than the absence of God from God. Indeed, every time that grace or revelation is received by a soul in this world, for a moment, God is absent from God; every time that the good is present in this world, for a moment, God is absent from God.

It is clear, as well, that an identity and continuity of the self cannot be maintained at any moment that God is absent from God. Again, however, this is not a denial of existence, for it is only when God is absent from God that existence can be said to possess the fulness of reality, and reality for a man, even if he should happen to be perfect, as Weil says, consists in his existence in this world. What is being denied is that existence can possess reality without the good being incarnate. As Christ's cry of dereliction has indicated, the absence of God from God implies that God is both totally transcendent and totally immanent simultaneously (the God-Man), and therefore that matter, in some mysterious way, is capable of

sanctity. As men, including saints, are simply a part of the matter which composes the universe, sanctity must be seen to be a possibility for all men. It is in this sense that the body and soul of every human being must be considered sacred, for it is only through this medium that sanctity is possible; it is only through this medium (the entire universe) that God can be absent from God, and thus incarnate.

It is therefore the Incarnation which is proposed as the form of answer which links together the affliction of men and the perfection of God. The cry 'why?' of the afflicted is answered by silence, by the absence of God. On the one hand this means that man is totally abandoned to necessity, that necessity is entirely other than the good, and that God is either totally transcendent or entirely an illusion. This, however, is only one side of the reality that constitutes the world in which man lives. Our study has indicated, on the other hand, that necessity, which is the cause of affliction and therefore that which brings about the experience of the absence of God, is at the same time an intermediary which is responsible for revealing to us that our existence is but a pale and imperfect shadow of reality, and that the perfection which constitutes this reality, although we can neither touch it nor see it, as it is beyond our grasp, is nevertheless real. We have seen this revelatory aspect of necessity in relation to the necessities and impossibilities attached to any pure intellectual effort of attention applied to the contemplation of theoretical necessity in the understanding of the world, and in the incarnation of these purely theoretical conceptions in technique and in work. What we have seen, in effect, is

the sovereign presence of that which is absent, a presence which is inscribed within the very fabric of the universe itself and which is included within our very own sensibilities. Therefore the absence of God is not the entire picture of the reality which constitutes the world in which man lives, for the sovereign presence of that which is absent which is revealed in the clear contemplation of necessity is also revealed in the absence of God from Christ on the Cross: the absence of God from God, the total transcendence and the total immanence of God. The form of answer which links together the affliction of men and the perfection of God is thus Christ's cry of dereliction. Nothing less than the Incarnation, which involves the eternal separation of God from Himself (the affliction of God), can possibly transfigure the misery of any human being who dies at any time and in any place. Redemptive suffering, which is nothing less than the imitation of God's compassion, a de-creation which imitates the Creation, is therefore an operation involving nothing less than an incarnation of God; it is that which brings about the fulness of the absence of God.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE ABSENCE OF GOD IN CREATION

Throughout our study of the idea of the absence of God in Weil's thought, we have consistently been led to examine her thinking about the Creation. This has been unavoidable, for what we have come to see is that the Passion and the Incarnation are both inextricably linked to the Creation. Indeed, it is all three together, the Passion, the Incarnation, and the Creation, which have brought us to see that the idea of the absence of God is the only form of response that would enable us to think together at the same time the affliction of men and the perfection of God. To put this in another way, what we have come to see is that if the absence of good in this world (the affliction of men) is not to be considered as the full reality of this world, then the incarnation of good, the sanctity of matter, must be a possibility; and if it is a possibility, then the perfection of God that is implied means that God must be absent from God in the Creation: Incarnation. In other words, the only legitimate response to the cry 'why?' uttered in the depths of the soul of the afflicted is the incarnation of God in that soul. This response can only be given, however, if, for a moment, God is absent from God, and therefore it is a response which reflects the affliction of God: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It is a response which reflects that the good cannot be present within the universe unless Creation is viewed as a perpetual tearing apart of God Himself. The only

response to the cry 'why?' of the afflicted, and that which reflects the very perfection of God Himself, is therefore the divine silence reflected in the absence of God from God in the Creation. Affliction and Creation are thus inseparably linked together. As E. W. F. Tomlin says in his study on Weil: "The mystery most akin to that of creation, even in respect of its absurdity, is that of affliction. The two are so intimately related that they cannot fail to illuminate each other."¹

As we have essentially dealt with the Creation throughout our study in the light of the question of affliction, it would seem justifiable at this stage to look more specifically at the Creation itself in order to see to what extent Weil's thinking in this context can be said to illuminate her thinking about affliction, and thus her thinking about the absence of God. In that the essential lines of Weil's thinking about the Creation have previously been drawn in our study, it will not be necessary to deal with this question at great length or in great detail. It will be sufficient for our purposes, to begin with, if we simply review what has already been said about the absence of God in the Creation. From this initial review we can then examine other aspects of Weil's thinking about the Creation which will further illuminate her thinking about the absence of God. We will do this, first of all, by looking at the idea of God's Love in relation to the Creation, and then by looking at the contradiction that is brought about when this Love is seen in relation to God's Power. The examination of this latter problem will bring us face to face with another aspect of Weil's thinking which, once

more, we have already encountered and dealt with to some extent previously in our study, i.e., the idea of Providence. The idea of Providence is extremely important with respect to the idea of the absence of God in Weil, and therefore it is necessary that we understand why Weil denies the notion of a personal Providence as well as the idea of 'miracles' which is associated with the notion of a personal Providence. In this context we will also be looking at the ideas of divine and necessary causation, and therefore at the relationship that Weil sees as existing between the necessary and the good. This will essentially complete the overall picture of Weil's thought which it is necessary to have before us if we are to understand the full implications of the idea of the absence of God, if, more specifically, we are to understand the link which ties together the affliction of men and the perfection of God.²

It may be said, in fact, that the only thing Weil is attempting to understand in looking at the Creation is how the affliction of men (who are a part of the universe) and the perfection of God (who is the Creator of the universe) can be thought together. Weil does not try to solve the mystery of the Creation. She simply looks at the Creation, i.e. the universe, as it is, as that which we can clearly see before our eyes. What we see is a cold and brutal mechanism which rules over both human and non-human nature with an iron fist. No one is exempt from the suffering that can be wrought by necessity; not even Christ was exempt. This, however, is the clue, for if not even Christ is exempt from the crushing weight of necessity, must not the perfection of God be reflected in the Creation itself? If

everything that proceeds from God must necessarily be perfect, or as perfect as God is Himself, in what way can God's perfection be described in terms of the universe which stands before us, and of which Christ was, and we are, a part? What Weil is attempting to do is to describe the nature of that perfection in terms of Creation; or, more precisely, what she is attempting to do is to describe the nature of the creative act which maintains the universe in existence in terms that reflect the perfection of Christ, and therefore in terms that reflect her interpretation of Christ's cry of dereliction. The Creation is consequently described in terms of the absence of God. As Weil says: "Dieu ne peut être présent dans la création que sous la forme de l'absence." (III, p. 33)

All of the formulations that Weil uses to describe the Creation refer explicitly to the abandonment of Christ on the Cross, and therefore they all express the same idea: that God is absent from God in the Creation. The Creation is thus described in terms of restraint, renunciation, and abdication; as the abandonment of God by God; as the separation of God from God; as God emptied of His divinity; or as the withdrawal of God from Himself. It is not that God actually creates something, at least not in the sense of producing something outside of Himself, but rather that God withdraws Himself, permitting a part of being to be other than God.³

La création est de la part de Dieu un acte non pas d'expansion de soi, mais de retrait, de renoncement. Dieu et toutes les créatures, cela est moins que Dieu seul. Dieu a accepté cette diminution. Il a vidé de soi une partie de l'être. Il s'est vidé déjà dans cet acte de sa divinité; c'est pourquoi saint Jean dit que l'Agneau a été égorgé dès la constitution du monde.

Dieu a permis d'exister à des choses autre que lui et valant infiniment moins que lui. Il s'est par l'acte créateur nié lui-même, comme le Christ nous a prescrit de nous nier nous-mêmes. Dieu s'est nié en notre faveur pour nous donner la possibilité de nous nier pour lui. Cette réponse, cet écho, qu'il dépend de nous de refuser, est la seule justification possible à la folie d'amour de l'acte créateur. (AD, p. 106)

Only those religions are true, for Weil, which express this renunciation or voluntary effacement of God in the Creation, for what they express is the sovereign presence of that which is absent, the apparent absence and the secret presence of God in this world.

The Creation is thus an abandonment on the part of God. The entire being of every creature is abandoned to the pitiless necessity of matter, for in creating what is other than Himself, God necessarily abandons it. At the same time, however, in that what He abandons is a part of Himself, He is necessarily present in that which He abandons. He is present in the uncreated part of every creature, in the eternal or supernatural part of the soul. It is only in this way that God can love Himself across the distance (the Creation) which separates Him from Himself. God is thus both present and absent in the Creation. His presence, however, is impossible unless He is separated from Himself, which is to say that even His presence necessitates His absence: "My God, my God, . . ." The Passion and the Incarnation are ultimately inseparable from the Creation.

It may be said that the Passion is simply the consummation of this renunciation and sacrifice on the part of God, for God already voids Himself of His divinity by the Creation. This renunciation and sacrifice on the part of God is the love that He bears us

at every moment, that love which maintains in existence beings other than Himself, beings other than the good, beings abandoned to affliction and sin, for otherwise they would not exist. Even God's love is thus expressed in terms of absence. If God is not absent, that is to say, if we are not abandoned in time and therefore to necessity, there would be no Creation. God would be All-in-All, i.e., God as He is before the Creation, if this latter statement is at all intelligible. God's presence, as such, would annul existence, which is not to say that God cannot be present, and therefore that existence would not be annihilated by this presence, but rather that He chooses not to be present 'directly', that He chooses not to remain All-in-All so that the universe (including ourselves) can be maintained in existence. God can only be present 'indirectly', or in secret; that is to say, He can only be present by remaining absent. The love that God bears towards us is thus the state of abandonment that we find ourselves in because of God's absence from this world. It is a love which attains the plenitude of perfection in Christ's abandonment on the Cross. The Creation is ultimately an unfathomable act of madness with respect to God's love.

Dieu a créé par amour, pour l'amour. Dieu n'a pas créé autre chose que l'amour même et les moyens de l'amour. Il a créé toutes les formes de l'amour. Il a créé des êtres capables d'amour à toutes les distances possibles. Lui-même est allé, parce que nul autre ne pouvait le faire, à la distance maximum, la distance infinie. Cette distance infinie entre Dieu et Dieu, déchirement suprême, douleur dont aucune autre n'approche, merveille de l'amour, c'est la crucifixion. Rien ne peut être plus loin de Dieu que ce qui a été fait malédiction. (PS, p. 92)

We are simply a point in this infinite distance put by the

divine Love between God and God. The entire universe is this distance; that is to say, the whole of space and time as well as that cold and rigorous mechanism (necessity) which governs matter constitute the distance across which the love of God for God must travel.⁴ There is nothing in this distance which separates God from God, however, which is absolutely worthy of love, which is to say that there is nothing in the world which is absolutely good. The only appropriate object for our love is therefore that which is absent: God. To love something other than God is to be deceived. But how, then, can we love God when only God can love Himself? It would seem, as Weil says, that "il n'y a pas d'autre amour pour nous que de prier que Dieu s'aime à travers nous." (II, p. 70) "Son amour pour nous est amour pour soi à travers nous. Ainsi, lui qui nous donne l'être, il aime en nous le consentement à ne pas être. Si ce consentement est virtuel, il nous aime virtuellement." (III, p. 260)

As long as the Creation is a reality, that is, as long as the universe remains in existence, it would seem that the only way in which God can love Himself is by way of His creatures. How could He love Creation in any other way? He therefore has need of man; He allows man to exist solely because He wants to be loved by him.⁵ This is clearly a problematical assertion on the part of Weil. It must be understood, however, that the Creation is a sacrifice on the part of God, a sacrifice which is an act of love. For man to love God, in turn, requires an equal sacrifice on his part; man was given existence as a result of God's love so that he might have the possibility of renouncing it out of love for God. This sacrifice on the part

of man, which is the reason for which God has need of man (why else would there be a Creation?) is God's love of Himself passing through the medium of man, passing through the whole of Creation. It is therefore not man, as such, who loves God; it is always and only God who loves God. The love of man for God is an impossibility. Nevertheless, because the Creation is a reality, and therefore because reality for a man, even should he happen to be perfect, consists in his existence in this world, it is not unintelligible to speak of God needing man, for the Creation does not simply imply the separation of God from Himself, but also the union of God with Himself through the Creation: Incarnation. The Creation implies the Incarnation. God would not have need of man without the Creation, but in that only He can love Himself, this love would be impossible by way of man if He were not incarnate. Again, therefore, as long as the universe remains in existence, the only way God can love Himself is by way of His creatures; and the only way we can love God, which is to say exactly the same thing, is for God to love Himself through us, for God to be absent from God: Incarnation.

Il [Dieu] ne peut aimer le monde visible, et l'âme des êtres pensants dans sa partie naturelle, que par l'intermédiaire d'une créature parvenue à l'état de perfection.

Incarnation. (II, p. 242)

It would therefore seem that the only way in which the assertion that God has need of man is intelligible is for the Incarnation and the Creation to be thought together. If the universe did not exist, if, that is, God was All-in-All, God could not be said to have need of anything. As the Creation implies the Incarnation, the separation

of God from God, it can be said that God needs man simply because the universe exists. God is entrapped within the universe, in the eternal or uncreated part of the soul of every man. His need for man is thus the need for man to de-create himself, for man to be man no longer; His need is for man to be God-Man. We cannot speak of man as being God alone (God before the Creation),⁶ for then he would not be man; although it is true at the same time that the de-creation of man involves the denial of the self, of that which is the very thing in terms of which we tend to characterize the essence and nature of man in this world. But then the de-created man does not vanish from this world; he incarnates himself in his previous body. Although not being of this world, he nevertheless stays in this world so that others may also attain salvation. If every thinking creature were to be de-created, then in a sense we could say that the universe would no longer exist; it would be thought out of existence, just as Weil sees God as having created by thinking the universe into existence.⁷ We could then legitimately conceive of God alone, God as All-in-All.⁸ But as long as every man has not attained the state of perfection, it would seem legitimate to speak only of God-Man (the Incarnation), for that is the reality of the existing world as we know it. It is, indeed, the reality of God as long as there are thinking creatures in existence within the universe.

What, then, does it mean for man to love God when that love is impossible except for God?

Aimer, c'est aimer les êtres et les choses créées
comme le Verbe divin les a aimées au moment où il s'est
vidé pour prendre l'essence d'un esclave; et c'est aimer

Dieu comme le Christ au moment où, sur la croix, il disait 'Dieu, pourquoi m'as-tu abandonné?' Aimer ce monde comme l'a aimé le Verbe divin quand il a abandonné Dieu pour ce monde. Aimer Dieu comme le Verbe divin l'a aimé au moment où il était abandonné de ce monde et de Dieu. Avoir à la fois les deux amours. Ce double amour, dont chacun est impossible, et dont l'union est impossible au deuxième degré, c'est là l'amour du Christ qui passe toute connaissance.

Cet amour est constitué par une certaine attitude envers les choses d'ici-bas.

Dieu est toujours absent de notre amour comme de ce monde, mais présent en secret dans l'amour pur.

Quand la présence de Dieu dans l'amour est visible, c'est la présence d'autre chose que Dieu. Le Père céleste n'habite que dans le secret.

La signification de tous les mariages princiers des contes est enfermée dans la copla espagnole 'Les amours possibles -- sont pour les sots -- Les sages ont -- des amours impossibles'. (CS, pp. 238-239)

What we are asked to love in the final analysis are the two things which it is impossible to love. We are asked, in the first place, to love that which, in our sense of the word existence, does not exist: God; and in the second place, we are asked to love that which is not lovable: necessity. Only God can love in this way, for the impossible is only possible for God, and for those who, being predestined, are the incarnation of God in this world. This double love, of which each part is impossible, and their combination impossible to the second degree, is that love which ties together the affliction of men and the perfection of God; and if this love is to be available at any time and in any place to whosoever desires it (for how else could we forgive God for the affliction of even one man?), then the Incarnation cannot be a 'once-for-all' event, and therefore the Creation cannot be a 'once-for-all' event. "S'il n'y avait pas ici-bas de pureté parfaite et infinie, s'il n'y avait que de la

pureté finie que le contact du mal épuise avec le temps, nous ne pourrions jamais être sauvés." (AD, p. 146) The Creation is consequently conceived by Weil as a perpetual act of love on the part of God.

If, however, we think of the Creation as a perpetual act of love on the part of God, we must also think of it as a perpetual relinquishing of God's power. Both the Creation and the Incarnation, as Weil understands them, would be inconceivable if God exercised all of the power at His disposal. Christ's abandonment on the Cross indicates, rather, that there is a separation (divine suffering) in God between power and love.⁹ "Mais", as Weil says, "il faut l'harmonie derrière cette douleur, car c'est l'Amour divin seul qui limite la Puissance divine, et sans cet Amour la Puissance engendre plus puissant que soi, engendre une nouvelle Puissance qui abolit la création." (III, p. 199)¹⁰ The Creation would be annihilated if God's power was not limited by His love. "La puissance de Dieu le porte à l'anéantissement, son amour produit le rachat. Cette opposition de la puissance et de l'amour de Dieu est souffrance suprême en Dieu. Et la réunion de cette puissance et de cet amour est joie suprême, et cette douleur et cette joie ne font qu'un." (III, p. 179) It is in this way that Weil conceives God as an eternal act which is perpetually unmaking and remaking itself at the same time;¹¹ and it is in this way that we must conceive of God's specific mode of operation, of the apparent absence and the secret presence of God in the Creation.

Weil sees God's specific mode of operation most clearly reflected in the ancient Chinese tradition: "la non action divine

qui est plénitude de l'action, l'absence divine qui est plénitude de la présence." (EHP, p. 76)¹² In terms of Christ's abandonment on the Cross, what is meant is that God's power is limited by His love (the separation of these two supreme opposites which occurs at the moment when the Holy Spirit withdraws itself from Christ), that God's love "est du côté de la non-action, de l'impuissance. L'Amour, qui consiste à aimer que quelque chose soit, à ne pas vouloir y porter la main. Dieu nous aime ainsi; autrement nous cesserions immédiatement d'exister." (III, pp. 178-179) Man can therefore love God in no other way than by loving Him "DÉPOUILLÉ DE SA DIVINITÉ (VIDÉ de sa divinité)" (II, p. 184), by loving Him 'all-powerless'. The notion of God's powerlessness is centred in Christ's abandonment on the Cross, and thus it cannot be said to be an uncommon notion with respect to Christian theology. One of the more famous expressions of this notion can be found in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Letters and Papers From Prison.

So our coming of age leads us to a true recognition of our situation before God. God would have us know that we must live as men who manage our lives without him. The God who is with us is the God who forsakes us (Mark 15:34).¹³ The God who lets us live in the world without the working hypothesis of God is the God before whom we stand continually. Before God and with God we live without God. God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us. Matt. 8:17 makes it quite clear that Christ helps us, not by virtue of his omnipotence, but by virtue of his weakness and suffering.¹⁴

God is powerless in this world. He allows the sun to shine on the good and the evil alike, and the rain to fall on the just and the unjust alike.¹⁵ He does not intervene in this world -- at least

not directly -- not even to save Himself. In conceiving of God's relationship to man, Weil does not want to mix up, and least of all to identify, the natural and the supernatural, or the necessary and the good. As she says:

Beaucoup de problèmes seraient simplifiés au moins dans leurs données si l'on posait en principe: Dieu ne brouille pas les ordres; il agit surnaturellement dans le domaine du surnaturel, et naturellement (c'est-à-dire, en un sens nullement) dans le domaine de la nature. La création est ce respect des ordres. Il ne défait pas la création, c'est à la création à se défaire elle-même.
(II, p. 137)

In other words, she conceives of God as the indirect cause of everything, but as the direct cause only of what is purely spiritual. God is therefore all-powerful as regards indirect causality; but this omnipotence, as we have seen, is defined in terms of the abdication on God's part which allows necessity to rule in this world. God permits, that is, consents to, everything that occurs in this world without any distinction. As regards direct causality, God's power in this world is therefore infinitely small; He is the cause only of that which is pure good.¹⁶

In effect, Weil is giving a double explanation of the world. It is the result, in the first place, of a divine or good cause (direct causality), and in the second place, of a necessary cause (indirect causality).¹⁷ "Les explications sont sans lacune, et elles ne s'entrecroisent pas. Le bien -- dégradé par étages -- et la nécessité sont chacun une cause suffisante du même effet." (I, p. 225) The incarnation of purely theoretical conceptions in technique and in work is an imitation of this, as is any action which is in

conformity with virtue; they are, in the first place, entirely caused by good, and in the second place, they are entirely caused by necessity. "Pour que le bien passe dans l'existence, il faut que le bien puisse être cause de ce qui est déjà entièrement causé par la nécessité." (I, p. 225)¹⁸

Everything that occurs within the universe is thus in conformity with the will of God.

Tous les événements qui composent l'univers dans la totalité du cours des temps, chacun de ces événements, chaque assemblage possible du plusieurs événements, chaque relation entre deux événements ou davantage, entre deux assemblages d'événements ou davantage, entre un événement et un assemblage d'événements -- tout cela, au même degré, a été permis par le vouloir de Dieu. Tout cela, ce sont les intentions particulières de Dieu. La somme des intentions particulières de Dieu, c'est l'univers lui-même. Seul ce qui est mal est excepté, et cela même doit être excepté non pas tout entier, sous tous les rapports, mais uniquement pour autant que cela est mal. Sous tous les autres rapports, cela est conforme au vouloir de Dieu. (En, pp. 356-357)

If, to begin with, we look at what Weil is saying on the plane of 'events',¹⁹ it can be said that there is as much conformity to the will of God in a spring shower as there is in the worst of floods. This is not to say, however, that the will of God is the 'cause' of either of these events. Causality is the relationship between phenomena in this world, whereas the will of God, strictly speaking, is the very being of everything that exists. God's will is completely impartial with respect to everything that occurs in this world. He does not look lovingly on a particular event as a means with a view to any other particular event as an end, but on both events (on all events) on exactly the same grounds. In this sense, we cannot say,

for example, that God wants the suffering of any man (even if he should happen to be a saint) with a view to his progress towards perfection or salvation, but rather that He wants both his suffering and his progress (or his suffering and his lack of progress), as well as the relationship between the two -- and any number of other possible relationships besides. It is not possible, in the end, to formulate a hypothesis about the will of God; we can only observe what takes place in this world, and what takes place is God's will. "Le Verbe est le silence de Dieu." (II, p. 164) Therefore we should not love our sufferings because they are useful, but simply because they are. Conformity to the will of God is thus the equivalent of reality for Weil. Conformity to the will of God is Providence.²⁰

Providence, for Weil, is the very order of the world itself; or, to be more precise, it is the regulating principle of the universe. It is, as we have seen previously in our discussion of necessity, that (Love) which persuades necessity to obey the eternal Wisdom.²¹ The good cause must be able to be the cause of what is already entirely caused by necessity if the incarnation of God (the Good) is to be a possibility in this world. God cannot create, however, without, at the same time, both abandoning the world to necessity and being incarnate, for what God abandons is a part of Himself. That is why, inscribed within the very fabric of the universe itself, there is to be found that regulating principle (Love) which limits necessity, which persuades necessity to obey the eternal Wisdom. The Creation is in reality a composition on two planes: that which limits (God, the eternal Wisdom), and that which is limited (necessity). The universe is

Providence was clearly perceived by the Christian thinker Boethius (Anicius Manlius Severinus, A.D. 480-524) in his book, The Consolation of Philosophy. The picture that Boethius draws with respect to the relationship between necessity and Providence is in all respects the equivalent of the way in which Weil sees this relationship. The passages which follow from The Consolation of Philosophy are a clear reflection of the notion that all events which occur in the universe occur in conformity to the will of God. What we must do in reading these passages is to simply substitute the word 'necessity' for the word 'fate'.

Providence is the divine reason itself which belongs to the most high ruler of all things and which governs all things; Fate, however, belongs to all mutable things and is the disposition by which Providence joins all things in their own order. For Providence embraces all things equally, however diverse they are, however infinite. Fate, on the other hand, sets particular things in motion once they have been given their own forms, places, and times. Thus Providence is the unfolding of temporal events as this is present to the vision of the divine mind; but this same unfolding of events as it is worked out in time is called Fate.²²

Providence is the immovable and simple form of all things which come into being, while Fate is the moving connection and temporal order of all things which the divine simplicity has decided to bring into being. It follows then, that everything which is subject to Fate is also subject to Providence, and that Fate itself is also subject to Providence.²³

Therefore, the changing course of Fate is to the simple stability of Providence as reasoning is to the intellect, as that which is generated is to that which is, as time is to eternity, as a circle to its centre.²⁴

Everything that occurs in this world is therefore in conformity to the will of God; it is in conformity to Providence. God wants everything that takes place to the same degree. He does not want

certain things as means and certain other things as ends, but everything in its totality -- the whole, the parts, and all possible relationships between the two. He wants the whole and the parts as well as all possible relationships between each part and every other part and between each part and the whole. Nothing can be cut out from this continuous reality which is not in conformity to His will. And yet His will is not exercised in the form of power, in the direct causation of suffering or happiness, for He does not intervene in this world. It is necessity, in accordance with its own proper mechanisms, which is the cause of all that takes place in this world. In this sense, it may be said that God wants necessity to exist, for it is only in this way that God can remain withdrawn from Creation as He must remain in order that we may be and may thus be able to consent not to be any longer. God's withdrawal in the Creation means that He has abandoned His power to necessity in this world, that He is absent from this world. That is why pure goodness is not anywhere to be found in this world. To put this in another way, if God commanded everywhere where He had the power to do so, that is, if He intervened directly in this world, why is there even one instance of evil in this world?

Ou bien Dieu n'est pas tout-puissant, ou bien il n'est pas absolument bon, ou bien il ne commande pas partout où il en a le pouvoir.

Ainsi l'existence du mal ici-bas, loin d'être une preuve contre la réalité de Dieu, est ce qui nous la révèle dans sa vérité. (AD, p. 106)²⁵

No one doubts that evil is present in the universe, for apart from the rare instances of genuine love in this world, what characterizes man above all else is that he is an animal who suffers. Even

love does not prevent man from suffering. The love of Christ for God did not prevent Christ from being crucified. What is so difficult to understand, however, is that the evil which causes one to suffer is the direct consequence of necessity, and necessity is one of the eternal dispensations of Providence; necessity conforms to the will of God. This is not to say that God directly causes evil, but rather that God consents to whatever takes place in the universe because He has withdrawn Himself from the universe, abandoning it to necessity. Is evil, therefore, in conformity with the will of God? Weil proposes the following answer:

Sur le plan du bien et du mal, il peut y avoir conformité ou non-conformité à la volonté de Dieu selon la relation au bien et au mal. La foi dans la Providence consiste à être certain que l'univers dans sa totalité est conforme à la volonté de Dieu non seulement au premier sens, mais aussi au second;²⁶ c'est-à-dire que dans cet univers le bien l'emporte sur le mal. Il ne peut s'agir là que de l'univers dans sa totalité, car dans les choses particulières nous ne pouvons malheureusement pas douter qu'il y ait du mal. Ainsi l'objet de cette certitude est une disposition éternelle et universelle constituant le fondement de l'ordre invariable du monde. La Providence divine n'apparaît jamais autrement, sauf erreur, ni dans les textes sacrés de la Chine, de l'Inde et de la Grèce, ni dans les Évangiles. (En, pp. 340-341)

The difficulty here does not lie in Weil's certitude that good outweighs evil in the universe (the universe in its totality),²⁷ for if this were not the case the Creation would not simply be a joke on the part of God, it would be an act of the most inconceivable cruelty; the difficulty, rather, is that the Providential ordering of things which allows man to exist and necessity to rule here below does not exclude evil from also being in conformity with this Providential

arrangement. It would seem that evil must, in some mysterious way, serve the supernatural end. After all, Christ suffered evil while he lived in this world. How are we to exclude the evil that Christ suffered as not being in accord with God's will?

Part of the difficulty here arises in conjunction with the language of 'willing'. God does not actually will anything, at least not directly, except that which is pure good (the love of God for God). His will is really a consent, a consent which is an abandonment of His power to command everywhere where He has the power to do so, and thus His will is effectively a Non-Will which is expressed by Weil in terms of divine Non-Action. God is powerless in this world. We tend to think of God as willing, as intervening, making something happen, etc., because we believe that we are free to will what we want. We have seen, however, from our discussion of the question of necessity, that what we take to be our will is extremely limited, and that the only freedom we possess in reality is the freedom to think clearly about our not being free. God has arranged the order of the world in such a way that we cannot but be obedient to Him, either indirectly through necessity, or directly, by giving up the illusion of power that we think we possess, as God consented to give up His power in this world.

In that God does not intervene in this world, no one can escape the suffering that is wrought by necessity, by that cold and rigorous mechanism which governs matter. The power that men wield in this world is nothing less than this cold and rigorous mechanism which governs matter, and therefore no man is exempt from the evil

that is put into play as a result of this mechanism. Evil is nothing less than this mechanism (in the hands of thinking creatures) in operation; and it is this which kills men, which killed Christ, and which can kill any man, whether or not he is innocent; it is this which destroys good. It is because God chooses to remain absent that the relationships of force in this world, which are nothing less than the reflection of this absence, are given the power to destroy good, to destroy sensible objects in which good is really present. "Les rapports de force donnent à l'absence le pouvoir de détruire la présence." (III, p. 203) These relationships destroy good, but God is innocent. God does not intervene in the operation of necessity, and consequently it is the evil which destroys good in this world which is the very thing that reveals this truth about God, i.e., that God, and therefore good, is absent from this world. "Si l'homme ne pouvait subir du mal de la part de la nature et surtout de la part des hommes, la partie humaine de l'âme ne serait donc pas soumise à la nécessité." (II, p. 163); and if the human part of the soul could not be subjected to necessity, we could never know that our existence itself is entirely dependent on that which is absent: God; we would not, in fact, exist.

It is clear, on the one hand, that Weil sees this world as being completely devoid of good; and it is not only the question of affliction which leads her to make such an assertion, it is also as a result of wanting to preserve the scientific conception of the world, of wanting to preserve that pure determinism which is the postulate of all objective knowledge. This means that she must separate

the good from the scientific conception of the world, that is, from necessity, for she does not believe that good can ever be conceived on the basis of what is shown us by fact. Indeed, on the basis of what is shown us by fact -- the mutilated bodies and souls of the afflicted -- good is either an illusion or something we are incapable of knowing. Therefore Weil, like Plato, stresses the profound difference between good and necessity and the infinite distance which separates the two.²⁸ On the other hand, however, this separation between good and necessity is not absolute; for it is good that there should be necessity, which is to say that the indifference of necessity to the good is willed by good itself. This is the essential meaning of Providence for Weil, i.e., that Creation is a composition on two planes, and on the plane where necessity reigns good is, as it were, prevented from reigning directly.²⁹

To put things in a different light, it can be said that this composition on two planes means that both necessity and the Incarnation are necessitated in the Creation. The Incarnation is the good cause which persuades the necessary cause. At the same time, the Incarnation is itself subject to the limitations that are necessarily involved in the creative act (the limitations that are necessarily involved in the Incarnation itself), which is to say that the Incarnate consents to necessity, to being powerless in this world. The perfection of God is thus defined in terms of limit,³⁰ i.e. in terms of not commanding everywhere where He has the power to do so. In this sense it can be said that necessity's indifference to the good is itself good because God consents to this limitation of His power.

Therefore it is good, i.e., it serves the supernatural end, that the innocent are reduced to affliction. The affliction of the innocent, of anyone who has attained a state of perfection, is nothing less than the perfection of God's love. This love, which expresses itself most consummately in Christ's cry of dereliction, is the absence of God from God. Innocence, perfection, good -- none of these would be possible in this world if they were not abandoned to necessity, if, that is, God was not absent from God. It is good that God be absent from God, otherwise there would be no innocence, perfection, or good in this world. Good is nothing less than the absence of God from God, and consequently it is inseparably linked to the Passion, the Incarnation, and the Creation. It is no wonder that it is forever fleeing from our grasp.

It is thus in the order of things constituted by the Creation itself that the destruction of innocent beings in this world is in conformity to the will of God, for otherwise such beings could never exist in this world. It would also seem to be in the order of things that the innocent are more likely to be struck down very early in their lives, or very early after attaining a state of innocence, by that very necessity which they consent to and love, because their innocence, the good that they are the manifestation of in this world, is not visible and therefore recognizable to those who wield power and who believe themselves to be the creators of their own good. One must be careful here, however, for although power in the hands of men is a tool of indiscriminate destruction which can destroy anything and everything, including all that men take to be good, it cannot destroy

that which is absolutely good.³¹ Absolute good is the limit of evil; it is that which, when evil comes into contact with it, destroys evil. The innocent, like Christ, being the manifestation of this unfathomable good in this world, destroy whatever evil comes into contact with them. Their innocence, however, does not protect them from the suffering or the death that contact with evil may bring; and yet both their suffering and their death are in conformity to the will of God. Their death, in fact, is their final salvation, for at the moment that they die the eternal part of their soul is no longer entrapped within the universe (within matter); it returns to the abode that it has forsaken out of love for this world and comes to rest in the eternal bliss that is God as He is in Himself.³²

What is so tragic, however, at least from the point of view of this world, is that the death of the innocent extinguishes a beacon of light³³ which may have served to bring at least one other soul out of the darkness. From the point of view of God, if we may be allowed to speak in this manner, the death of the innocent (taking the innocent to be those who, like Christ, are rooted in the love of God) cannot be said to be tragic, for their death is the completion of God's love for Himself. The innocent are not the ones in need of salvation. In this sense it is not the innocent whose love God is in need of; they already love God. The love that God needs is the love of those who do not love Him, the love of those who are not yet de-created. They, however, could not love God if the possibility of this love, and therefore the possibility of de-creation, were not given in the Creation itself; and what is given in the Creation is

Incarnation, the divine seed placed in the soul of every creature. What is also given in the Creation, however, is the abandonment of this divine seed to necessity, and thus it is that not every seed will grow to maturity, sprout wings, and flee from the darkness in which it finds itself. This is what is tragic; it is the tragedy of Creation itself. It is the supreme suffering that God Himself must undergo in creating. And it is not simply that we would not exist in any other way, but, more importantly, that good could not be present in the universe in any other way; in other words, this tragedy which allows us to exist and good to be present in the universe necessitates that evil be present as well.

How is it, then, that evil is not in conformity to the will of God in every way? In that the Creation implies that both the existence of man as well as the presence of good in the universe be abandoned to necessity, in what way is evil not in conformity to God's will? On the one hand Weil wants to say that everything that occurs within the universe in its totality is in conformity to the will of God; but on the other hand she wants to say that in its individual aspects there may or may not be conformity to the will of God, that what must be excluded is evil solely in so far as it is evil.³⁴ Here, in essence, is the difficulty that we find in understanding Weil's thinking about Providence, for she wants to say that evil both is and is not in conformity to the will of God. There is only one suggestion that we can make in this context which would seem to be consistent with the contradiction involved here, which would seem to be consistent, indeed, with the contradiction that Weil sees as necessarily being

involved in the Creation itself, and which we have consistently expressed in terms of the absence of God from God (Incarnation). We can say, on the one hand, that evil is necessarily in conformity to the will of God in so far as existence is an abandonment to necessity; but it is not in conformity to the will of God, on the other hand, that this existence be absolutely divorced from the good (for how could God be conceived as the author of Creation if there is no good in the Creation?), and therefore evil, solely in so far as it is evil -- that is to say, solely in so far as evil is the absence of good -- is not in conformity to the will of God, for the Creation is not absolutely devoid of good (as it implies Incarnation), and thus evil, as the absence of good, is in fact an illusion which does not correspond to the true reality of God's Creation.

Evil is and is not entirely in conformity to the will of God, just as necessity is and is not absolutely other than the good, or just as the Creation implies that the world is and is not completely empty of God. Evil, in so far as it is entirely in conformity to the will of God is necessity; necessity, in so far as it is absolutely other than the good is the good; and this world, in so far as it is completely empty of God is God. As long as the universe remains in existence, however, necessity is not absolutely other than the good, just as this world is not completely empty of God, for then God (the Good) would be All-in-All; there would be no Creation. Therefore evil, in so far as it is necessity, and necessity is absolutely other than the good, is an illusion which is not in conformity to the will of God, because God does not will that He Himself remain All-in-All.

The Creation, therefore, does not mean simply that God is absent from this world, or that good is other than necessity; it means as well that God is present in this world, that good is inscribed within the very fabric of the universe, within necessity (for it is the good cause which persuades the necessary cause), because God cannot permit the universe to exist in separation from Himself without abandoning not only the universe but also Himself to necessity. The absence of God from God is the presence of God in this world.

We, however, can only know God in His absence, that is, indirectly through necessity and therefore through the evil which can lead any one of us to experience the plenitude of this absence in the world. God allows necessity to do this work for Him:

Autrement il ne serait pas retiré de la création, comme il doit l'être pour que nous soyons et ainsi puissions consentir à ne plus être. Les rares contacts que produit l'inspiration entre des créatures et lui sont moins miraculeux que sa perpétuelle absence et sont une moins merveilleuse preuve d'amour.

L'absence de Dieu est le plus merveilleux témoignage de parfait amour, et c'est pourquoi la pure nécessité, la nécessité manifestement différente du bien, est si belle.

L'abandon, au moment suprême de la crucifixion; quel abîme d'amour des deux côtés.

Il faut connaître l'absence de Dieu, excepté dans les rares moments de destruction partielle du 'je'. Croire que Dieu puisse être proche sans que cette proximité détruise le je est ignorer tout à fait qui il est. Tout ce qui rend cette absence manifeste est beau. (III, p. 15)

It is by means of necessity, more than anything else, that the intelligence is enabled to grasp the indifference and impartiality of God's love, (God's impersonal Providence), that marvel of love which is represented by Weil in terms of God's everlasting absence. There are no holes in this continuous reality represented by God's absence,

and therefore there is nothing which occurs in this world which can be thought of as having only a first cause, for this would mean that God intervenes directly in this world. The direct intervention of God in this world is what is commonly thought of in terms of 'miracle': "Un fait qui n'aurait pas de cause seconde, mais seulement une cause première." (II, p. 204)

The problem with regard to 'miracles' is that we tend to take the language of 'will' in relation to God too far; we use this language in a way that implies that God intervenes in this world of secondary causation in an arbitrary way. If God did intervene in this way, then we would have to ask, as Weil asks continually throughout her writings: why does God not stop the suffering and affliction of every being at all times and in every place? Why, above all else, does He abandon Christ on the Cross? Weil does not want to break with the scientific conception of the world with respect to miracles; she thinks, rather, that the apparent incompatibility between science and religion arises because the problem of miracles is usually presented in the wrong way. It is meaningless, on the one hand, to think that a miracle is a fact which is contrary to the laws of nature. "Nous ne connaissons pas les lois de la nature. Nous ne pouvons faire à leur sujet que des suppositions. Si celles que nous supposons sont contredites par des faits, c'est que notre supposition était au moins partiellement erronée." (En, p. 335)³⁵ It is no more meaningful, on the other hand, to think that a miracle is the effect of a particular act of volition on the part of God.

Parmi les événements qui se produisent, nous n'avons

aucune raison d'affirmer que certains plus que d'autres procèdent du vouloir de Dieu. Nous savons seulement, d'une manière générale, que tout ce qui se produit, sans aucune exception, est conforme à la volonté de Dieu en tant que Créateur; et que tout ce qui enferme au moins une parcelle de bien pur procède de l'inspiration surnaturelle de Dieu en tant que bien absolu. (En, p. 335)

The absurdity, in fact, of thinking that a miracle is the effect of a particular act of volition on the part of God, of thinking, that is, that God intervenes in the network of secondary causes with the intention of producing a particular result, is that He would have to be held responsible at the same time for every atrocious happening in which He does not intervene.

Weil would want to say, in the end, that every notion of a personal intervention in the world on the part of God is an absurdity, whether this intervention is considered in relation to the individual or to the collective, to a single event or to a series of events (history). If it is admitted that God intervenes in this world in order to adjust certain means in view of certain particular ends, then it must be admitted at the same time "que l'ordre du monde, laissé à lui-même et sans intervention particulière de Dieu à tel lieu, en tel instant, pour telle fin, pourrait produire des effets non conformes au vouloir de Dieu. On admet que Dieu pratique les interventions particulières." (En, p. 352) It must be further admitted, however, in that these interventions are brought about for the purpose of correcting the play of causality, that these interventions are themselves subject to causality. "Dieu viole l'ordre du monde pour y faire surgir, non ce qu'il veut produire, mais des causes qui amèneront ce qu'il veut produire à titre d'effet." (En, p. 352) Every notion of

a personal intervention in the world on the part of God leads to absurdities of this kind.³⁶

It is absurd to think that God intervenes in this world because it implies that He is correcting the mistakes that He made in creating in the first place. How could He be the author of Creation if the universe in its totality is not eternally in conformity to His will? In other words, why would God create this universe as a network of second causes if there were holes in this network, if, that is, He could only attain His ends by tampering with His own creative act? If one admits that miracles occur to fill in these holes in God's creative act, one is either prevented from unconditionally accepting God's will, or one is compelled to look indifferently, to turn a blind eye, on all the cruelty, torture, and injustice that exists in this world.³⁷ Weil is profoundly clear in this context.

Si on admet de tels trous, il devient scandaleux que Dieu n'en fasse pas pour sauver les innocents du malheur. La résignation au malheur des innocents ne peut surgir dans l'âme que par la contemplation et l'acceptation de la nécessité, laquelle est l'enchaînement rigoureux des causes secondes. Autrement on est forcé d'avoir recours à des artifices qui tous reviennent à nier le fait même du malheur des innocents; et par suite à fausser toute intelligence de la condition humaine et le noyau même de la conception chrétienne. (LR, pp. 54-55)

There is no conception of a personal Providence, of a personal intervention in this world on the part of God, which does not end up by denying the very fact of the affliction of the innocent, and therefore by denying that God is almighty, or that God is absolutely good. If it is admitted that God does intervene in this world, then the fact that there is even one innocent being in affliction suggests

either that God is not almighty or that He is not absolutely good. Every account of a special intervention on the part of God in this world ignores the fact of every innocent being in affliction who stands outside of this special intervention. These accounts are truly personal, for they imply that God intervenes in order to save a particular individual or a particular group of individuals, or that He intervenes in order to direct the flow of events in time in such a way that only those so favoured will be protected by His love. In essence, all accounts of a personal intervention in this world on the part of God are an attempt to put good into the world. Good is put into the world on the side of the fortunate or of the elect. In the case of those who worship evolution or history, good is put into the world as that which will be better, more developed, freer, etc., in the future, and consequently that towards which we are striving. If, in turn, it is assumed that God's purposes are unfolded in historical events, then good is put into the world under the rubric of providence, which is to say that history is viewed as an ever-fuller manifestation of good.³⁸ In the final analysis, what is so manifestly clear about all of these attempts to place good in the world is that good invariably becomes identified with necessity.³⁹

It is necessity, in the end, which determines who is and who is not protected by God's Providence. In other words, it is force which becomes the final argument in determining what the good is in this world, and therefore it is those who possess and utilize force in this world, those who are favoured by success in peace or in war, by prestige of any kind, that is, by any form of consolation,

who are the ones in terms of which the good and God's Providence are defined. Those whom force has reduced to misfortune, affliction, or death, are simply the recipients of a just punishment which God has seen fit to administer through the hands of the fortunate and powerful, through the hands of his elect. In one way or another, all conceptions of a personal intervention in this world on the part of God end up by identifying necessity and the good, which is to say that they are nothing more than expressions of a 'God on our side' philosophy -- if, that is, it is at all necessary to keep God in the picture.

It is clear that Weil does not want to put good into the world, and therefore that she does not want to identify goodness and necessity. To make such an identification, for her, is to be completely cavalier with respect to the extent of the evil which man is capable of causing and undergoing in this world. "Comment", she asks, "pourrait-on croire qu'il soit possible de trouver une compensation, une consolation possible à ce mal, lorsqu'à cause de ce mal Dieu a souffert la crucifixion?" (III, p. 203) How then, it may well be asked, can anyone conceive of a personal intervention in this world on the part of God when God does not even intervene to save Himself from evil? Either He is not almighty, or not absolutely good, "ou bien il ne commande pas partout où il en a le pouvoir." (AD, p. 106) The crucifixion of Christ is the model to which Weil consistently turns, for it is in the light of Christ's abandonment on the Cross that she is led to see that evil, far from disproving the reality of God, is the very thing which reveals that God does

not intervene in this world. He remains absent from this world, from the wicked and the righteous alike, from the fortunate and powerful just as much as from the afflicted and powerless. This does not mean that God is not almighty, that He is not omnipotent, but rather that His omnipotence is defined in terms of a divine Non-Action, an absence which is the plenitude of presence and the most marvellous testimony of His love for all creatures. He could not love all creatures equally if He intervened in this world to save some of them, and thus abandon the rest, and therefore He does not intervene at all, not even to save Himself. His love for His creatures is not a personal thing as their love for and of themselves is; His love for His creatures is impersonal, and this is how we should see His Providence. God can only be present in this world in the form of absence, and thus His presence can only be represented by His powerlessness in this world.⁴⁰

Impuissance de Dieu. Le Christ a été crucifié; son Père l'a laissé crucifier; deux aspects de la même impuissance. Dieu n'exerce pas sa toute-puissance; s'il l'exerçait, nous n'existerions pas, ni rien. Création: Dieu s'enchaînant par la nécessité -- On peut espérer que les chaînes tombent à la mort, mais aussi on cesse d'exister comme être séparé -- Pourquoi la création est-elle un bien, étant inséparablement liée au mal? En quoi est-ce un bien que j'existe, et non pas Dieu seul? Que Dieu s'aime par mon misérable intermédiaire? Je ne puis le comprendre. Mais tout ce que je souffre, Dieu le souffre, car c'est l'effet de la nécessité dont il s'abstient de fausser le jeu. (Aussi fut-il homme et est-il matière, nourriture.) (II, pp. 67-68)

The questions that Weil raises here do not admit of explication. We cannot know why God created, why, that is, there is something rather than nothing, or why God is not All-in-All. Might it be, however,

that these questions are not really valid? What we are being asked to speculate about here are in fact things or situations which do not in reality exist. That which exists in reality and which we observe to exist in fact is the universe. The fact that we can even ask why there is something rather than nothing, or why God is not All-in-All is sufficient empirical proof that there is something and that God is not All-in-All. If there were nothing rather than something, or if God were All-in-All, then we would not be around to ask such questions. The only legitimate thing to do, it would seem, is to ask ourselves questions which deal with what exists in reality, for there is something (the universe and everything in it, including ourselves) rather than nothing, and questions which deal with man's relationship to God and God's relationship to man, for God is not All-in-All as long as the universe, and therefore man, exists. These are the questions that we have been looking at throughout our study of Weil. We have been looking at the relationship of necessity to the good and the relationship of this world, and thus of man, to God; and in terms of both of these relationships we have been looking most specifically at the link which ties together the affliction of men and the perfection of God.

The problem, consequently, has been to see not only that Weil does not want to put good into the world, and therefore that she does not want to identify good and necessity -- for the experience of affliction denies both of these suppositions -- , but to see at the same time that the separation between good and necessity is not absolute, that there is a link between good and necessity which is

reflected in the Creation itself. This is the fundamental contradiction that Weil sees at the heart of Christianity and that she feels is most consummately reflected in the crucifixion of Christ. What is reflected in the crucifixion of Christ, for her, is that the good and necessity (God and the universe) are simultaneously both One and infinitely distant (absolutely different) from each other, and that the distance which separates necessity and the good is the selfsame distance which separates the creature from the Creator: "Dieu, par rapport à la création, en tant que parfaitement présent et en tant que parfaitement absent." (II, p. 296)⁴¹ This means that there is a sense in which good and necessity are identified, i.e. in the Incarnation. But the Incarnation involves a spiritual quartering on the part of God, the crucifixion of God (the absence of God from God), and thus God's presence is even more absent than is His absence. It is in this way that necessity is both totally other than and equivalent to the good, that God, in relation to this world, is both totally transcendent and totally immanent. God's perfection must therefore be seen in terms of His absence; He can be present in no other way, which is to say that there is no other way in which He can love all creatures equally, that He can be present at any time and in any place to whosoever loves Him. Far from denying the fact of the affliction of the innocent, and therefore from denying that God is almighty, or that God is absolutely good, Weil sees that the affliction of men and the perfection of God are inextricably linked together in the Creation itself. The form of answer which links together the affliction of men and the perfection of God is the

Incarnation: the absence of God from God. In essence, it is only when Christ utters his immortal cry that he is revealed to us as being Incarnate. If, therefore, we are to give an explication of why God abandons Christ on the Cross, it can only be because that is the only way God can be present in the souls of the innocent who suffer affliction.

CONCLUSION

Why, as Tillich has said, "do we speak today of the 'absent God,' a term which plays a role in literature and art, and most of all in the personal experience of innumerable people?"¹ The reason, as Weil would have it, is that the apparent absence of God in this world is the actual reality of God. If God appeared in any other form than absence, He would not appear at all. His presence must remain hidden, even to the point of crucifixion. It would therefore be misleading to think that God's absence is only applicable today, or only at those times when men are in the depths of affliction. God was, is, and always will be absent. This is the reality of God. ✓ As long as thinking creatures remain in existence within the universe, God will remain absent. He does not intervene in this world. ✓

The non-intervention of God in this world, or the absence of God in this world, is the idea par excellence which is at the heart of Weil's thinking about man's situation in this world. Our purpose in this study has been to understand what Weil is saying about man's situation in this world with respect to the idea of the absence of God; in other words, our purpose has been to understand the relationship between this world and God in the context of the absence of God, and therefore to understand the relationship between necessity and the good in the context of necessity's indifference to the good. To be even more specific, our purpose has been to understand the significance of the idea of the absence of God in the context of

thinking with truth at the same time about the affliction of men, the perfection of God, and the link between the two; or, to express the same thing in different terms, our purpose has been to understand the significance of the idea of the absence of good in the context of thinking with truth at the same time about necessity, necessity's indifference to the good, and how necessity and the good can be reconciled. This, in turn, has meant that we have also been concerned with understanding what is meant in thinking that "L'absence de Dieu en ce monde est la réalité de Dieu", that "Ce monde en tant que tout à fait vide de Dieu est Dieu lui-même", and finally that "La nécessité en tant qu'absolument autre que le bien est le bien lui-même." (III, p. 39)

Our study has consequently been focused on those aspects of Weil's thought that most clearly reflect her thinking about the idea of the absence of God in terms of the relationship between this world (man) and God, and in terms of the relationship between necessity and the good. We have therefore developed the idea of the absence of God in terms of five major themes: 1) the question produced in the depths of the soul by affliction; 2) the cause of affliction: necessity; 3) the art of dying: the bringing about of the absence of God; 4) redemptive suffering: the bringing about of the fulness of the absence of God; and 5) the absence of God in Creation. Our discussion of these five major themes in Weil's writings has revealed to us, in turn, that the idea of the absence of God is completely unintelligible apart from a comprehensive understanding of the question of necessity, and that the question of necessity is itself

ultimately unintelligible apart from an understanding of Weil's interpretation of Christ's cry of dereliction. It has therefore been necessary to deal with and to emphasize the question of necessity as well as Weil's interpretation of Christ's cry of dereliction, not only in and of themselves, but also in relation to each major theme that has been discussed in our study.

There is absolutely no doubt that the very essence of Weil's thought, whether she is thinking about necessity, affliction, or the idea of the absence of God itself, finds its fullest expression in her interpretation of Christ's cry of dereliction. That interpretation, as we have seen, expresses itself most fully in the idea of the absence of God from God. Here, in a nut shell, is the idea that we have had to enucleate in order to see that God, for Weil, is not only totally absent from this world (that the good is not only totally other than necessity), but that God is also totally present in this world (that the good is also totally inscribed within the very fabric of necessity), that God, in effect, is simultaneously both totally absent from and totally present in this world (that the good is simultaneously both totally other than and totally inscribed within necessity). In other words, that which we have ultimately drawn attention to in discussing the idea of the absence of God in Weil is the idea of the sanctity of matter, the union of divine spirit with matter, i.e., the presence of God in this world: Incarnation. This presence is the source of all pure truth, justice, good, and beauty that can exist in this world. It is a presence, however, which is the plenitude of absence, for it is constituted by the absence of God from Himself in the Creation.

There is nothing more crucial to an understanding of Weil than the recognition that God's absence is always and everywhere the reflection of the true reality of God. Whether she is thinking of the absence of pure forms from all the apparent forms that we perceive in the contemplation of theoretical necessity in the understanding of the world, and of the necessities and impossibilities attached to the possibility of the incarnation of these purely theoretical conceptions in technique and in work, or whether she is thinking of the feeling of the absence of good produced in the depths of the soul by affliction, and of the necessities and impossibilities attached to the possibility of the incarnation of absolute good in that soul, what she is underlining is that the very reality of this universe and all that takes place within it is constituted by the sovereign presence of that which is absent; it is constituted, in other words, by the sovereign presence of He who is absent: God. God can only be present in Creation in the form of absence. "L'absence de Dieu en ce monde est la réalité de Dieu." (III, p. 39)

Since the very reality of this universe and everything that takes place within it is constituted by the sovereign presence of that which is absent, it follows that every attempt which is made to bring God into the world is a failure to recognize that the absence of God in this world is the actual reality of God. In the Christian tradition these attempts are ultimately the failure to recognize who Christ is, for in conceiving that God intervenes in this world, whether on behalf of a particular individual or a group of individuals, or in terms of directing the flow of events in time towards a particular

end, what they fail to recognize is that God did not intervene in this world even to save Himself. Every conception of a personal or special intervention in this world on the part of God is thus a failure to recognize the sovereign presence of that which is absent, a failure to recognize that good, of which Christ was the actual manifestation, is secretly present in this world. To fail to recognize this presence is to be indifferent to good; it is to be indifferent to every innocent being in affliction who stands outside of that which is conceived of as God's personal intervention in this world. Every notion which conceives of a personal intervention in this world on the part of God, because it fails to recognize that good is secretly present in this world, that is to say, because it fails to recognize that the absence of good in this world is the actual reality of good, is thus ultimately an attempt by man to put good into the world. Because good is seen to be absent in this world, it is thought that either the flow of events in time (history) will progressively lead us towards that which is better and therefore towards that which is good, or it is thought that man himself is the creator of his own good. The result in either case is not only that God is effectively pushed out of the world, but more importantly, that good and necessity are ultimately identified. They are identified on the level of necessity itself, and therefore necessity -- and thus force -- becomes the final argument in all matters of justice in this world. When good and necessity are identified in this way, how is it possible not to be cavalier with respect to the extent of the evil which man is capable of causing and undergoing in this world?

The result of identifying good and necessity, in the final analysis, is a profound lack of compassion for all those who have died and who will die the most terrible and agonizing deaths in this world. It is precisely because of this lack of compassion that Weil is so emphatic in stressing the importance of understanding the difference between good and necessity, the importance of understanding the infinite distance which separates the two. In no way does this mean, however, that she is denying or doing away with the reality of necessity in favour of the good. On the contrary, as we have emphasized throughout our study, Weil sees everything in nature, including psychological nature, as being under the dominance of a mechanical, mathematical, absolutely deaf and blind necessity. It is this, above all else, that Weil wants us to understand; for it is necessity -- that pure determinism which is the postulate of all objective knowledge -- which reveals to us that good can never be conceived on the basis of what is shown us by fact, that what is shown us on the basis of fact, indeed, is little more than that which is expressed in a few lines of Voltaire's Candide.

'Do you believe,' said Candide, 'that men have always slaughtered each other as they do today, that they've always been liars, cheats, traitors, ingrates and thieves, weak, fickle, cowardly, envious, greedy, drunken, miserly, ambitious, bloodthirsty, slanderous, lecherous, fanatical, hypocritical and foolish?'

'Do you believe,' said Martin, 'that hawks have always eaten pigeons when they find them?'

'Yes, of course,' said Candide.

'Well, then,' said Martin, 'if hawks have always had the same character, what makes you think men may have changed theirs.'²

What is shown us on the basis of fact, indeed, are the all-too-many

corpses of the afflicted: the absence of good in this world.

Not only does necessity reveal to us that good cannot be conceived on the basis of what is shown us by fact, but it also reveals to us that we are limited in our every thought and action, that we are free to think and act only in relation to the conditions that necessity itself imposes upon us. Our freedom, in the end, is nothing more than the clear perception that we are not free; we are only free, in other words, to obey. We are not our own.³ No matter what aspect of the question of necessity is being thought about, whether it be brute force, time, the will, the question of means and ends (finality), human perception, or freedom itself, that which we inevitably and inexorably run up against is necessity in the form of limits. These limits, as we have seen in our discussion of all of these aspects of necessity, cannot, strictly speaking, be said to exist. They are neither visible nor tangible. Nevertheless, we cannot deny that they are present (and therefore that they are real), whether this presence is thought of in terms of human perception, the will, or any other of the human faculties. They are present, as we suggested in relation to the question of time, by the very presence of that alien existence which imposes them upon man. They are present, paradoxically, in their very absence (the sovereign presence of that which is absent), for that alien existence which imposes them upon man is God, and the only way in which God can be present is in the form of absence. Therefore that which is sovereign in this world is not that side or face of necessity which appears to us as indeterminate and unlimited (brute force); that side or face of necessity which is sovereign in this

world is, rather, determinateness or limit. Limits are inscribed within the very fabric of the universe; they are, metaphorically speaking, the very touch of God's hand. It is thus that the blind forces of matter, which we see as necessity, are constrained to obey the eternal Wisdom (Providence), i.e., because of a wise form of persuasion -- love. Necessity, in this sense, is simply one of the eternal dispensations of Providence.

We are not suggesting, in what is being said here, that Weil has somehow inadvertently brought God or the good into the world, and therefore that she has inadvertently identified this world and God or necessity and the good. God, in her view, is present in the world (Creation implies Incarnation). The same is true of the good. Neither God nor the good need to be brought into the world, and least of all is it necessary that man should have to create them. Their presence is eternally inscribed within the very fabric of the universe itself, as that which we encounter at every moment of our existence in the form of limits -- in the form of an absence which is more present than the presence of any physical object or sensation that we can possibly know or experience in this world. This presence, however, does not imply that God and the world or necessity and the good are identified, for this presence necessitates absence, the absence of God even from Himself. God can only be present in this world by remaining absent from this world, just as good can only be present in this world by remaining other than necessity. To identify the terms in either of these relationships (God and the world; good and necessity), especially if this identification is made in terms of this

world or necessity, is to fail to recognize the infinite distance -- the absolute difference -- which separates the one from the other. It is not that this identification cannot be made, nor, in fact, that Weil herself does not make it. She does make it, in fact, i.e. when she says that "Ce monde en tant que tout à fait vide de Dieu est Dieu lui-même", and that "La nécessité en tant qu'absolument autre que le bien est le bien lui-même." (III, p. 39)

What we must be entirely clear in understanding here, however, is that when Weil does make this identification, she does not make it in terms of this world or in terms of necessity. In other words, because (in her view) God is present in this world, because, that is, the Creation necessitates the Incarnation of God, when she makes this identification she is not thinking of God or of the good as being brought into the world; she is thinking of them, rather, as being taken out of the world, as being destroyed. If Weil is to be consistent, it would therefore seem that the only way in which she could conceive of this world and God or of necessity and the good as being identified would be to conceive of this identification in terms of the annihilation of the Creation, that is, by conceiving of God as All-in-All. Because the Incarnation of God must necessarily be thought together at the same time as the Creation for her, the only way in which she could conceive of this world as being entirely empty of God, or of necessity as being absolutely other than the good, would therefore be to conceive of the destruction of every innocent being in the universe. The destruction of every innocent being in the universe would be equivalent to the annihilation of every last vestige of

good that is secretly present within the universe; it would undo the Creation, for God would no longer be incarnate; He would no longer be separated from Himself as He has to be in order that we may exist. It would therefore seem that what Weil is referring to when she conceives of this world and God or of necessity and the good as being identified is the very essence or reality of God as He is in Himself, the very essence or reality of 'the Good' as it is in Itself. The identity that is being postulated is thus an identity on the level of God or of the good, not on the level of this world or of necessity. To conceive of an identity, however, whether that identity is made on the level of God or of the good, or whether it is made on the level of this world or of necessity, is effectively to do away with one of the terms that are being identified; it is, in the first instance, to do away with this world or necessity, whereas in the second instance, it is to do away with God or the good. In neither instance is there a true union between the terms being identified, a union which not only ties the two sides together in an indissoluble bond, but which also recognizes and maintains the infinite distance (the absolute difference) which separates the one from the other.

It is clear that Weil wants to maintain the infinite distance which separates this world from God and necessity from the good. This separation is reflected for her in the very fact that the universe exists, and that God, or the good, cannot anywhere be found in it. At the same time, however, because the universe does exist, it cannot be entirely empty of God, nor can necessity be absolutely other than the good, for the Creation necessitates Incarnation. Therefore it

is neither the case that God is All-in-All, nor that the universe is all-in-all, which is to say that the infinite distance which separates this world from God and necessity from the good is not absolute. This separation is not absolute because, inscribed within the very fabric of the universe itself, there is a link, in the form of a mediator (Christ), which participates fully in both the reality of this world (that which exists) and in the reality of God (that which does not exist), a link which, being fully the one and the other simultaneously, is both the one and the other in infinite separation from each other, and simultaneously the one and the other in an indissoluble union. As long as thinking creatures remain in existence within the universe, we are therefore mistaken if we conceive of the good as being only totally other than necessity. As Weil has interpreted Christ's cry of dereliction, God is not only totally absent from this world (Christ's abandonment to necessity), He is also totally present in this world (Christ, and therefore God, is abandoned by God: Creation, Incarnation). God is simultaneously both totally transcendent and totally immanent with respect to this world, just as the good is simultaneously both totally other than and totally inscribed within necessity.

To conceive of God as being only totally absent from this world is thus to conceive of God as being fully present to Himself, God as All-in-All: God as He is in Himself. To express this in another way, it can be said that the total absence of God from this world is the divine form of presence which is plenitude of absence. It is indeed the plenitude of absence, for we would not, in fact,

exist if God were present in this form. To conceive of God as being only totally present in this world, on the other hand, is to conceive of God as being fully absent from Himself (He can be present in Creation in no other way), God as eternally separated from Himself: Incarnation.⁴ Again, to express this in another way, it can be said that the total presence of God in this world is the divine form of absence which is plenitude of presence. God, therefore, in being totally present is simultaneously totally absent, for He can be present in no other form than absence: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Our entire study has essentially been an explication of the relationship that Weil sees as existing between necessity and Christ's cry of dereliction, the relationship that she sees as existing, in effect, between this world and the absence of God. To deal with these aspects of Weil's thought has been to deal specifically with her thinking about the idea of the absence of God; but more importantly, as we have learned, it has been to deal specifically, at the same time, with her thinking about the idea of the presence of God, and therefore with her thinking about the idea of incarnation. What we have come to see is that we cannot separate Weil's thinking about the absence of God from her thinking about the presence of God, and thus that we cannot separate her thinking about necessity from her thinking about incarnation. To attempt to understand what Weil is saying about the idea of incarnation or the presence of God, especially in relationship to her thinking about necessity or the idea of the absence of God, is to attempt, as we said at the beginning of our

study, to understand an aspect of Weil's thought which has neither been dealt with in any detail nor analyzed in any depth. It is hoped that we may have contributed to an understanding of these questions in Weil's thought through our examination and development of her thinking in relation to Christ's cry of dereliction; for the Cross -- at least as we have endeavoured to show -- is ultimately the key.

Christ's cry of dereliction is very clearly at the centre of Weil's thinking about each and every aspect of man's situation in this world. It is the cry of dereliction which not only reveals to her that the creature and the Creator are separated by an infinite distance constituted by God's absence from this world, but at the same time that this distance, and therefore God's absence, is not absolute, that the creature and the Creator are somehow mysteriously tied together across that very distance which separates them, because that distance is the very distance that God Himself has to traverse (the Cross: "My God, my God, . . .") in order that we may exist. Our existence is nothing less than this contradiction itself, this contradiction which allows us to exist and God to be separated from Himself as He has to be in order that we may exist. Our existence, in other words, is constituted by nothing less than the sovereign presence of that which is absent: God (the Good).

Notre vie est impossibilité, absurdité. Chaque chose que nous voulons est contradictoire avec les conditions ou les conséquences qui y sont attachées, chaque affirmation que nous posons implique l'affirmation contraire, tous nos sentiments sont mêlés à leurs contraires. C'est que nous sommes contradiction, étant des créatures, étant Dieu et infiniment autres que Dieu. (III, p. 24)

What we see in this world on the basis of fact alone is not, therefore, the sole reality of this world. This is not to deny that men have always appeared to be, and undoubtedly always will appear to be, the senseless, cruel, barbarous and bloodthirsty creatures that they are.⁵ What is lacking in this description of man's nature, however, is the realization that appearance is not reality, that reality, in fact, is constituted by the sovereign presence of that which is absent.⁶ What is lacking, in essence, is compassion. It is lacking precisely because compassion is never manifested in the form of appearance. Compassion is manifested, rather, in the form of absence, an absence which is more present, and therefore more real, than anything whatsoever in appearance, for all compassion is nothing less than the reflection of that supreme compassion that God bears towards every one of His creatures, the reflection, that is, of that ultimate Passion which takes the form of the Cross: the absence of God from God.⁷ The 'word become flesh' is thus the form that compassion takes in this world; it is the form of poetry, to speak metaphorically, which Weil feels that God has written and is writing at every moment. Therefore every time that an act of compassion takes place between two or more of God's creatures, for a moment, the 'word becomes flesh', for a moment God is, as it were, writing another 'word' in the eternal poem that is the Creation.

It may be said, in the final analysis, that our entire study of Weil has been the study of the poetry which she feels God has written, for that poetry, in the end, is nothing less than the poetry of 'absence'. What we have come to see, however, is that the poetry

of absence is at the same time the fullest possible expression of the poetry of 'presence', and further, that the poetry of presence is itself the fullest possible expression of the poetry of absence, for it is the poetry of 'the absence of God from God'. We simply cannot understand Weil if we do not understand that the idea par excellence which is at the heart of all aspects of her thinking about man's situation in this world is the idea of the absence of God. 'Absence', for her, is quite literally the form that God's perfection takes in this world. Therefore when it is asked: why are men afflicted?, the answer is that God is absent; and when it is asked: why is God absent?, the answer is that that is the only way in which God can be present in the souls of the afflicted. To think with truth at the same time about the affliction of men, the perfection of God, and the link between the two, is therefore to think the truth contained in those immortal words of Christ on the Cross when he cried out to God: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The link between the affliction of men and the perfection of God is thus the Incarnation. As Weil says: "Le Christ a dû être présent tout entier partout où il y a du malheur. Autrement où serait la miséricorde de Dieu?" (CS, p. 36) But in that this presence can only take the form of absence, the absence of God from God, it is also true, as Tillich has said, that: "The final answer to the question as to who makes God absent is God himself!"⁸

APPENDIX

WEIL'S POSITION WITH REGARD TO THE CHURCH

AND THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

The only place where Weil refers to her mystical experiences is in her personal correspondence with Father Perrin and with Joë Bousquet. She had these experiences when she was in Portugal and Italy, and later in France when she was reciting the poem 'Love' by George Herbert, and the 'Lord's Prayer' in Greek. She also speaks in these letters about not having read the mystics prior to these experiences. See AD, pp. 37-41; PS, pp. 81, 84.

When Weil was teaching philosophy at Roanne (1933-1934), she said to her students one day that "Ceux qui croient entrer en contact avec Dieu par l'expérience (mystique) commettent une sorte de blasphème. On détruit ainsi le divin." (LP, p. 219) When she writes to Father Perrin several years later that "le Christ lui-même est descendu et m'a prise" (AD, p. 38), and that "la pensée de la Passion du Christ est entrée en moi une fois pour toutes" (AD, p. 37), it is evident that she had a radical change of mind.

Hardly anyone who has written about Weil has failed to reflect in some manner on her refusal of baptism, on her position with regard to the Church, and on the question of whether she was nevertheless a Christian or not. One book in particular is devoted entirely to these questions: Réponses aux questions de Simone Weil, edited by J.-M. Perrin (Paris: Aubier, Editions Montaigne, Collection "Les grandes

âmes", 1964). To give an idea of the divergence of opinion expressed by the authors of this book, we will briefly indicate the views of the major contributors.

J. Daniélou ("Hellénisme, Judaïsme, Christianisme", pp. 17-39) criticizes Weil for making the historical aspect of Christianity secondary, for claiming that the truth of Christianity is non-temporal, and for consequently misunderstanding the redemptive event of Christianity. C. Durand ("Attente et refus du baptême", pp. 40-60) criticizes Weil for her failure to break away from inadequate mental categories (especially Platonic idealism) which lead her to see the Church only in its social aspect and to misunderstand the rigour and realism of the Incarnation. J. Kaelin ("L'expérience mystique de Simone Weil et la foi théologique", pp. 61-87) seems very much disposed to Weil's position, and concludes that she was a true witness to the marvels of Christian grace. L. Locht ("Simone Weil et l'Eglise", pp. 89-123) feels that nothing can permit us to doubt that Weil had a true meeting with Christ and followed him, or that we can doubt that grace was lacking to her in relation to entering the Church. He says, however, that it was not just the social aspect of the Church which she judged negatively, but more importantly, it was her judgement of herself and her situation in the world that was negative and that hindered her from complete insertion in no matter what human community. Locht's arguments are essentially psychological. B. Hussar ("Israël et l'Eglise", pp. 125-149) is concerned with Weil's misunderstanding of the divine links between Judaism and Christianity, and with her tendency to judge everything from the point of view of Greek thought.

We can see an even wider divergence of opinion in the comments, presented below, of a number of other writers.

Robert Rouquette in "Simone Weil, Mathématicienne de Dieu" in Littérature du XXe siècle, IV (Paris: Albin Michel, 1953) says that "Simone était une 'chrétienne' en attente, son 'Eglise' est celle de cette attente-là." (p. 242) "Christique, non chrétienne, Simone contemple le Christ, adore le Christ, mais ne reconnaît pas l'Eglise du Christ." (p. 230; see also p. 248)

M. Channing-Pearce in "Christianity's Crucial Conflict. The Case of Simone Weil", Hibbert Journal, XLIX (1950-1951) claims that "It is of heresy of the mind, not of the heart that Simone Weil is chiefly accused. Her heart was, most clearly, with Christ. But her mind was not with the established Church." (p. 337)

H. Ottensmeyer in Le Thème de l'amour dans l'oeuvre de Simone Weil (Paris: Lettres Modernes, Collection "Thèmes et mythes", No. 6, 1958) says that the Christian perspective "ne pénètre jamais jusqu'au fond de son esprit, de sorte que sa pensée, dans ses grandes lignes, ne possède pas une orientation authentiquement chrétienne" (p. 25), and that: "Arrêtée par une myopie stoïcienne, la lumière chrétienne ne lui a jamais été pleinement donnée." (p. 35)

P. West in his essay on "Simone Weil" in The Wine of Absurdity: Essays on Literature and Consolation (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1966) reduces Weil's mystical experiences to adolescent eroticism, to having a crush on Jesus. See p. 152. Presumably he is referring to AD, p. 51, where Weil says: "toutes les fois que je pense à la crucifixion du Christ, je commets

le péché d'envie."

See also E.W.F. Tomlin, Simone Weil (Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, Coll. "Studies in Modern European Literature and Thought", 1954), pp. 39-42; J.-M. Perrin and Gustave Thibon, Simone Weil as We Knew Her, translated by Emma Craufurd (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953), pp. 35-38, 42-53, 90-98, 156-171; Miklos Vetö, La Métaphysique religieuse de Simone Weil (Paris: Vrin, Bibliothèque d'histoire de la philosophie, 1971), p. 148; L. Salleron, "La théologie de Simone Weil" in Pensée Catholique (Paris: No. 149, 1974), pp. 70-80; M. Narcy, Simone Weil: Malheur et beauté du monde (Paris: Editions du Centurion, 1967), pp. 120-121; S. Pétrement, La Vie de Simone Weil, 2 (Paris: Fayard, 1973), pp. 207-210; etc., etc.

It is interesting to note that S. Pétrement, who was Weil's closest friend and who has written the most comprehensive biography of her, speaks of Weil without any hesitation as being a saint. Weil herself wrote to Maurice Schumann about saintliness (undated letter from London -- between 14 Dec. 1942 and April 1943 -- in EL, p. 209).

Je ne voudrais pas que vous me fassiez injustice en imaginant que j'affecte la sainteté -- vous m'avez dit une fois quelque chose qui semblait être à cet effet. . . .

Remarquez en passant que je n'aime pas la manière dont les chrétiens ont pris l'habitude de parler de la sainteté. Ils en parlent comme un banquier, un ingénieur, un général cultivés parleraient du génie poétique -- une belle chose dont ils se savent privés, qu'ils aiment et admirent, mais qu'ils ne songeraient pas un instant à se reprocher de ne pas posséder.

Il me semble qu'en réalité la sainteté est, si j'ose dire, le minimum pour un chrétien. Elle est au chrétien ce qu'est au marchand la probité en matière d'argent, au militaire de profession la bravoure, au savant l'esprit critique.

La vertu spécifique du chrétien a pour nom la sainteté. Ou sans cela, quel autre nom?

What Weil is saying here is that to be a Christian involves a fundamental obligation, which is nothing less, as Kierkegaard would say, than the 'imitation of Christ'. To imitate Christ is to be a saint. The difficulty that we find here, and which gives rise to our hesitation in analyzing any part of Weil's life, is that it seems to us (if we understand Weil correctly) that only a saint could judge whether or not another person is a saint; that is to say, only God can make such a judgement. And yet Christ, who was without sin, did not throw the first stone (John 8:1-11). What we understand by this is that judgement can only be given in silence. We are not saying that Pétrement and others who have said that Weil is a saint are wrong; we are simply saying that if they know, silence may be the wisdom that the Eternal favours.

We are obliged, finally, to add one further note of extreme importance which concerns Weil's interpretation of the Cross. Because of Weil's position with respect to the question of truth and history (see Chapter Four, pp. 150-151), she does not see the resurrection as being essential to Christianity. Indeed it is almost an embarrassment for her, as it is, no doubt, a stumbling block for many Christians. Weil rarely mentions the resurrection in her writings, and where she does, it is usually taken up into her interpretation of the crucifixion. As she says in *En*, p. 339: "Sûrement ceux qui sont dits heureux sont ceux qui n'ont pas besoin de la résurrection pour croire, et pour qui la perfection et la Croix sont des preuves." In a letter to M. Bernard, March 30, 1936, she says: "A cette époque de l'année surtout, je n'oublie jamais que 'Christ est ressuscité'. (Je parle

par métaphore, bien entendu.)" (CO, p. 201) The 'metaphorically speaking' should probably be underlined, for as Vetö says in reference to Weil's speaking about the resurrection in IP, p. 84, "Elle pense que c'est dans la mort sur la Croix et non pas dans la Résurrection que culmine l'Incarnation et elle semble récuser l'immortalité personnelle." (La Métaphysique religieuse, p. 71) Thus, "the risen Christ in triumph plays little part in Simone Weil's Christianity. It is Christ on the Cross who redeems mankind, who brings about union between God and man, paradoxically, by the destruction of the unity of the God-man." (J.P. Little, "Heraclitus and Simone Weil: The Harmony of Opposites", Forum for Modern Language Studies (V, 1, Jan. 1969), p. 78.) Whether or not Weil's interpretation of the Cross is at fault because of the lack of attention she pays to the resurrection is something which goes beyond the scope of this study. It is certain, however, that many Christian theologians would discredit her thinking because of this. See, for example, the comments on Moltmann (footnote 13 of the Introduction), whose 'theology of hope' has little validity without reference to the resurrection. Other places where Weil speaks of the resurrection are to be found in CS, pp. 13, 113; PS, p. 83; LR, p. 58; I, p. 135.

NOTES TO TEXT

Preface

1. Richardson is a Presbyterian who teaches at St. Michael's College, Toronto, Canada.
2. Herbert W. Richardson, "A Lecture To Students At The Unification Theological Seminary In Barrytown, New York" in David M. Bryant and Hebert W. Richardson (editors), A Time for Consideration: A Scholarly Appraisal of the Unification Church (New York and Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1978), p. 290.

It is unfortunate, however, that Richardson does not follow his own advice, for his own understanding of sin and redemption, for example, is certainly the reason why he can claim that the book which he is discussing (The Divine Principle by Rev. Sun Myung Moon) presents the 'true' nature and definition of sin, and thus of redemption. See p. 312.
3. I discuss Weil's mystical experiences in the Appendix.
4. I will shortly discuss Thibon under the heading of 'Biographies'.
5. Pétrement also discusses the influence that Alain exerted on Weil in "Sur la religion d'Alain (avec quelques remarques concernant celle de Simone Weil)", Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale (LX, 3, 1955), pp. 306-330.
6. This work was translated the following year by Emma Craufurd under the title Simone Weil as We Knew Her (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953).
7. This is implied by Weil when she says: "La plénitude de la réalité de Dieu est hors de ce monde, mais la plénitude de la réalité d'un homme est dans ce monde, cet homme fût-il parfait." (Cahiers, III, p. 291)
8. Martin Buber, "The Silent Question: On Henri Bergson and Simone Weil", p. 205.
9. Leslie Fiedler, "Simone Weil: Prophet out of Israel, Saint of the Absurd", p. 38.
10. Maurice Friedman, "The Modern Gnostic", p. 135.
11. I have interpreted Fiedler to mean 'Judaism's tragedy'

when he says 'our tragedy'. See "Simone Weil: Prophet out of Israel", p. 43.

12. Elizabeth Jennings, "A World of Contradictions: A Study of Simone Weil", p. 350.

13. Leslie Fiedler, "Simone Weil: Prophet out of Israel", p. 43.

14. Susan A. Taubes, "The Absent God", Journal of Religion (Chicago: 35, 1955), p. 13.

15. Susan A. Taubes, "The Absent God", p. 10.

16. Taubes quotes the English translation of this passage, although she gives no reference to her source. In fact, she provides no references at all in this article.

17. On Weil's attitude towards women as well as towards her own femininity, the reader should consult the first chapter of Simone Pétrement's La Vie de Simone Weil, 1.

18. I realize, of course, that some of the incidents that are portrayed in the play are entirely imaginary, and that Terry probably included them because of their dramatic effect -- to demonstrate, for example, the tremendous courage of Weil; but I altogether fail to see why Weil is sometimes portrayed in varying stages of undress.

19. It may be of interest to the reader to note that there is a good possibility that Beckett's En Attendant Godot was influenced by Weil's Attente de Dieu. This question is discussed by Robert S. Cohen in "Parallels and the Possibility of Influence between Simone Weil's Waiting for God and Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot", Modern Drama (VI, 4, Feb. 1964).

20. See Simone Weil, "La Philosophie", signed Emile Novis, Cahiers du Sud (XIX, 235, May 1941), p. 293.

21. See Weil, "La Philosophie", p. 293; La Connaissance surnaturelle, p. 305. In L'Enracinement (p. 324), in fact, Weil goes as far as to say that "depuis la disparition de la Grèce il n'y a pas eu de philosophe."

22. This passage is quoted by Simone Pétrement, La Vie de Simone Weil, 2, p. 320.

23. On the influence that Alain exerted on Weil, see Simone Pétrement, La Vie de Simone Weil, 1, pp. 63-97.

24. In a letter to Father Perrin (Attente de Dieu, p. 34), Weil writes: "N'importe quel être humain, même si ses facultés naturelles sont presque nulles, pénètre dans ce royaume de la vérité réservé au génie, si seulement il désire la vérité et fait perpétuellement un effort d'attention pour l'atteindre. Il devient ainsi lui aussi un génie, même si faute de talent ce génie ne peut pas être visible à l'extérieur."

25. See also La Connaissance surnaturelle, pp. 233, 305-306; Cahiers, III, p. 91.

26. This passage is quoted by Simone Pétrement, La Vie de Simone Weil, 2, p. 321.

NOTES TO TEXT

Introduction

1. Paul Tillich, The Eternal Now (New York: Paul Scribner's Sons, 1963), pp. 87-88.
2. It is not our intention to discuss the many interpretations of the death of God. Let us just say, in terms of Christianity, that the heart of this religion is based upon Christ's death, and therefore God's death, on the Cross, but that this death does not mean the same thing for those who write about the death of God as the end of all horizons, the once and for all death of God (and therefore the basis of atheism) as it does for those who write about the crucifixion in terms of the absence of God.
3. Gerda Blumenthal, "Simone Weil's Way of the Cross", Thought (XXVII, 105, New York, sum. 1952), p. 227.
4. This same thought is expressed in a very similar manner in OL, p. 209.
We have used the standard abbreviations for Weil's works throughout our study. These abbreviations, and the editions of Weil's works that we have consulted, are as follows:
AD Attente de Dieu (Paris: La Colombe, Editions du Vieux Colombier, 1963).
I Cahiers, I (Paris: Plon, nouvelle édition, revue et augmentée, 1970).
II Cahiers, II (Paris: Plon, nlle éd., revue et augmentée, 1970).
III Cahiers, III (Paris: Plon, nlle éd., revue et augmentée, 1970).
CO La Condition ouvrière (Paris: Gallimard, Collection "Idées", No. 52, 1969).
CS La Connaissance surnaturelle (Paris: Gallimard, Collection "Espoir", 1950).
EHP Ecrits historiques et politiques (Paris: Gallimard, Collection "Espoir", 1960).
EL Ecrits de Londres et dernières lettres (Paris: Gallimard, Collection "Espoir", 1957).
En L'Enracinement: Prélude à une déclaration des devoirs envers l'être

- humain (Paris: Gallimard, Collection "Idées", No. 10, 1970).
- IP Intuitions pré-chrétiennes (Paris: La Colombe, Editions du Vieux Colombier, 1951).
- LP Leçons de philosophie, transcrites et présentées par Anne Reynaud-Guérithault (Paris: Union Générale de l'Édition, Collection "10/18", 1966).
- LR Lettre à un religieux (Paris: Gallimard, Collection "Espoir", 1951).
- OL Oppression et liberté (Paris: Gallimard, Collection "Espoir", 1955).
- PS Pensées sans ordre concernant l'amour de Dieu (Paris: Gallimard, Collection "Espoir", 1962).
- P Poèmes, suivis de 'Venise sauvée', Lettre de Paul Valéry (Paris: Gallimard, Collection "Espoir", 1968).
- SG La Source grecque (Paris: Gallimard, Collection "Espoir", 1969).
- S Sur la science (Paris: Gallimard, Collection "Espoir", 1966).
5. Weil expresses the very same thought in AD, p. 161; CS, pp. 36, 132; III, p. 204.
6. Paule Bugnion-Secrétan, Simone Weil, itinéraire politique et spirituel (Neuchâtel: Messeiller, 1954), p. 70. A similar assertion is made by François d'Hautefeuille in Le Tourment de Simone Weil (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1970), p. 71. "Le Dieu de Simone Weil est absent, et ce n'est que par la crucifixion dans le malheur qu'elle pourra le rejoindre."
7. Jürgen Moltmann, The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology, translated by R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1974), pp. 204, 153, 65. See also p. 4 where Moltmann says: "Jesus died crying out to God, 'My God, why hast thou forsaken me?' All Christian theology and all Christian life is basically an answer to the question which Jesus asked as he died." Moltmann, however, is not entirely in agreement with Weil in his interpretation of the Cross; see footnote 13 of the Introduction.
- Weil, in EL, p. 159, says: "La Croix est tout. Elle est providentiellement inscrite dans l'espace de manière que nous ne puissions pas la méconnaître."
8. J.-M. Perrin says that "The cross had become for her the clearest manifestation of the love of God." See J.-M. Perrin and Gustave Thibon, Simone Weil as We Knew Her, translated by Emma

Craufurd (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953), p. 33. Victor-Henry Debidour speaks of Weil as being an imitator of Christ in his agony on the cross: see Simone Weil ou la transparence (Paris: Plon, Collection "La Recherche de l'absolu", No. 7. 1963), pp. 22 and 114. Miklos Vetö in La Métaphysique religieuse de Simone Weil (Paris: Vrin, Bibliothèque d'histoire de la philosophie, 1971), p. 16, refers to the importance of the Cross and to Weil's being seized by Christ to support his claim that there is no rupture between Weil's early works and those that came later.

9. See AD, p. 58; CS, pp. 31, 35, 36, 39, 85, 86, 109, 238, 308, 331; IP, pp. 85, 131, 168; OL, p. 191; PS, p. 128; I, p. 176; II, pp. 94, 112, 143, 159, 164, 251; and also Seventy Letters, translated by Richard Rees (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 103 -- an unpublished letter 'To an Oxford Poet' (1938) which was written in English.

10. No study of Weil's thought can avoid, at least in part, touching upon either the question of necessity or Weil's thinking about Christ's cry of dereliction. Those studies which do not in some way touch upon these aspects of Weil's thought cannot but fail to misunderstand and misrepresent her. No major study of Weil's thought, however, has dealt exclusively with either of these questions, or with both of them together.

11. See the Appendix. We should note in this context that, apart from a brief synopsis in the Appendix, our study, unlike most other studies of Weil, is not concerned with Weil's life. Our entire concern is with Weil's thought.

12. The importance of Plato and Kant to the thought of Weil is thoroughly examined by Miklos Vetö in La Métaphysique religieuse. Vetö is concerned exclusively with the idea of conversion in Weil's thought, and with the ontological basis for her thinking about this idea as it is found in Plato and Kant.

13. Jürgen Moltmann, The Crucified God, p. 37. Moltmann is clearly dependent on Bonhoeffer's thinking here. See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1972), especially the letter of July 16, 1944, pp. 360-361. We must point out here that Moltmann, although he often speaks of the absence of God in relation to the crucifixion, and feels that "all Christian theology and all Christian life is basically an answer to the question which Jesus asked as he died" (p. 4), does not, in the end, understand the Redemption in the same way that Weil does. He feels that Christ has died 'once for all', that he "is not drawn into the cycle of the 'eternal return of the like' (M. Eliade), but breaks out of the compulsive repetition of the cult" (pp. 43-44), and that the crucified Christ can no longer be a scandal and foolishness once it is realized that "Christianity is in the fullest sense pro-visio and promissus, for it points forward to the new age and new

creation." (p. 107) These thoughts are in radical opposition to those of Weil.

Chapter One

1. Our focus, therefore, will be on the question of affliction rather than on the Trinity.
2. See II, p. 219; CS, p. 203.
3. Elie Wiesel, Legends of Our Time (New York: Avon Books, 1970), p. 19.
4. As Weil says elsewhere:
 'Nous vivons la mort des Dieux et les Dieux vivent notre mort.'
 Il faut retrouver la notion de la métaphore réelle. Autrement l'histoire du Christ, par exemple, perd soit sa réalité, soit sa signification. (CS, p. 163)
 See also PS, p. 124; CS, pp. 149-150.
5. Terrence des Pres, The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 174.
6. Letter 'To an Oxford Poet' in Seventy Letters, translated by Richard Rees (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 102.
7. See SG, p. 39.
8. This is, of course, a basic doctrine of Christian theology. See, for example, Jürgen Moltmann, The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology, translated by R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1974), p. 151.
9. For Weil, it would be equally to understand the Incarnation.
10. We cannot deal with the ideas that are presented here at this stage in our study. They will be dealt with in Chapter's Three, Four, and Five.
11. This is Weil's term, and by it she means essentially that Christ did not die for 'a cause', whether that cause be considered as 'this-worldly' or 'other-worldly'.
12. See PS, pp. 90-91, 94.
13. "Le fait capital n'est pas la souffrance, mais l'humiliation." (CO, p. 145) Affliction is "l'état d'extrême et totale humiliation qui est aussi la condition du passage dans la vérité. C'est une

mort de l'âme." (EL, p. 35)

14. See En, p. 378; AD, p. 136; SG, pp. 13, 32; I, p. 22; PS, pp. 88, 122; EL, pp. 34, 35.

15. See SG, pp. 12-13. Terrence des Pres in The Survivor, p. 60, speaks about the way in which power was used by the Nazis in the concentration camps to destroy all resistance, all spiritual autonomy, and all sign of dignity in those held captive. In the concentration camps spiritual destruction became an end in itself. "The death of the soul was aimed at. It was to be accompanied by terror and privation, but first of all by a relentless assault on the survivors sense of purity and worth." He speaks, at a later point in his book, pp. 88-89, of the soul being killed quite literally, and of the death of the body following automatically and almost simultaneously. This he refers to as "the empirical instance of death-in-life".

16. See PS, p. 121; II, p. 304; EL, p. 34.

17. Strictly speaking, extreme affliction begins at the point when all attachments are replaced by that of survival. Weil says that attachment then appears in all its nakedness, without any other object than itself, and that this is hell. See II, p. 112. It would seem that if we relate this attachment to death, it then becomes clear that it is not a consolation. To be attached (to consent) to the full reality of one's own death is not consoling.

18. On this point see PS, pp. 85, 107; SG, p. 18.

19. On the idea of 'the sign' and 'the thing signified', see I, pp. 93-94.

20. "Le degré et la nature de la souffrance qui constitue au sens propre un malheur différent beaucoup selon les êtres humains. Cela dépend surtout de la quantité d'énergie vitale possédée au point initial et de l'attitude adoptée devant la souffrance." (EL, pp. 34-35)

21. "Le mal habite dans l'âme du criminel sans y être senti. Il est senti dans l'âme de l'innocent malheureux. Tout se passe comme si l'état de l'âme qui par essence convient au criminel avait été séparé du crime et attaché au malheur; et même à proportion de l'innocence des malheureux." (PS, pp. 89-90)

22. See CO, p. 342.

23. See SG, p. 16; II, p. 304; CS, 203.

24. See EL, p. 13.

25. See IP, p. 168; EL, pp. 13, 14, 15, 22, 31, 36, 38, 39, 40; III, p. 274; CS, pp. 39, 85, 86, 177, 194, 308.

26. See I, pp. 134, 135; II, pp. 17, 274; III, pp. 176, 203, 274; PS, p. 88; IP, p. 103; SG, p. 39; CS, pp. 35, 39, 113. For further references to Christ's cry of dereliction (quoted in full by Weil), see footnote 9 of the Introduction.
27. CS, pp. 35-36.
28. CS, p. 86.
29. "De même que l'eau ne bout pas à 99 degrés." (IP, p. 168)
30. "C'est seulement pour celui qui a connu la joie pure, ne fût-ce qu'une minute, et par suite la saveur de la beauté du monde, car c'est la même chose, c'est pour celui-là seul que le malheur est quelque chose de déchirant. En même temps c'est celui-là seul qui n'a pas mérité ce châtement. Mais aussi pour lui ce n'est pas un châtement, c'est Dieu même qui lui prend la main et la serre un peu fort. Car s'il reste fidèle, tout au fond de ses propres cris il trouvera la perle du silence de Dieu." (PS, pp. 130-131)
31. On the question of 'finality', see PS, pp. 127-128; IP, p. 168; and Chapter Two, pp. 70-74.
32. We will look more closely at the problem of rights when we deal with the question of freedom in Chapter Two. In relation to the point just made about the legal profession, see EL, p. 38. It must be said that today, however, it is precisely the legal profession which would seem to be responsible above all for the propagation of the problems associated with the cry: 'Why has someone got more than I have?' Just in the fact that law (legal aid) and money go hand in hand, it can be said that the legal profession does not really solve the problems associated with rights, but rather, that it is part of the problem. It aggravates the problem. At least this would seem to be true in North America.
33. See, for example, IP, p. 17.
34. See PS, pp. 90-91.
35. On the word 'de-creation', see footnote 7 of Chapter Three.
36. This passage from Plato's Republic (493a) is quoted by Weil in SG, p. 88.
37. It might be that the idea of 'reincarnation' would, along with the idea of predestination, throw some light on the question of why certain souls are not saved. When Weil says that there is perhaps only one man saved in a generation, she also says that: "Pour les autres, ceux qui ne sont pas définitivement perdus, on doit concevoir quelque chose d'équivalent aux notions de purgatoire, réincarnation, etc." (CS, p. 183) Here again, however, one would have to penetrate

the mystery of the Creation in order fully to understand these ideas.

38. CS, p. 308.

39. "Il y a alliance naturelle entre la vérité et le malheur, parce que l'une et l'autre sont des suppliants muets, éternellement condamnés à demeurer sans voix devant nous." (EL, p. 32)

40. "Le Verbe est le silence de Dieu dans l'âme. C'est cela le Christ en nous." (III, p. 275)

41. See PS, p. 129. Elie Wiesel, in Legends of Our Time, pp. 20, 209-210, speaks about the metaphysical why which is still lacking for atrocities such as Auschwitz. However, in his autobiographical book Night (New York: Avon Books, 1969), p. 80, he says that he no longer accepted the silence of God. He cannot, of course, accept the crucifixion as an answer either. See Messengers of God: Biblical Portraits and Legends (New York: Random House, 1976), p. 67.

Chapter Two

1. We should, strictly speaking, consider the idea of time in terms of human perception. However, because the idea of freedom is best understood in relation to the idea of time, it is necessary that we look at the idea of time in our initial discussion of the question of necessity.
2. Weil uses the language of 'willing' here, as she does on numerous other occasions. "C'est par sa Providence que Dieu a voulu la nécessité comme un mécanisme aveugle." (PS, p. 93) We have used the word 'allowed' to translate "a voulu", for reasons which will only become clear when we look at the problem of freedom and the will in itself, and when we deal specifically with the question of Providence in Chapter Five.
3. Weil is also influenced by the Pythagoreans here. See En, pp. 358-361; CS, p. 83.
4. In the same passage Weil mentions T.E. Lawrence as being one who knew the entire extent of the empire of force and who at the same time detested it. She says that very few are likely to know this double knowledge, perhaps only a few Christians very close to God and to saintliness, along with the poet or poets of the Iliad. See also IP, p. 54.
5. This, of course, is the characteristic mark of affliction. Weil frequently makes this remark when commenting on the Iliad.

"La force fait de l'homme une chose. D'abord tout à fait littéralement, en le tuant. L'homme dont soudain la mort fait une chose, l'Iliade peint vingt fois ce tableau.

Eux sur terre
Gisaient, beaucoup plus chers aux vautours qu'à leurs épouses." (I, p. 22)

See also SG, p. 32.
6. The idea of force defiling whoever wields it or whoever submits to it is found especially in Weil's essay "L'Iliade, ou le poème de la force", which is included in La Source grecque. See pp. 18-19, 21, 32-33, 38-41; and also IP, p. 54; EHP, p. 80; III, pp. 125-126.
7. Any other form of love would be subject to necessity for Weil. We will see throughout our study why all forms of love other than supernatural love are only forms of slavery.
8. On the part of the soul which is not exposed to the contact

of force, see PS, p. 110; IP, p. 54; EHP, p. 80; III, pp. 125-126.

9. We can only discuss one aspect of this question here, and very briefly. Our discussion of Weil's thinking about time, freedom and the will, and the question of means and ends (finality), as well as our discussion of evil in Chapter Four will deal with other aspects of the question of limit.

10. En, p. 358; PS, p. 93; SG, pp. 40, 41; I, p. 26.

11. See also I, p. 26.

12. Weil quotes this passage in SG, p. 40. On the idea of force as a limit, see III, p. 128; IP, p. 105.

13. The famous phrase of Ivan Karamazov in Dostoevsky's The Brothers Karamazov.

14. On the notion of the unlimited and its relationship to the idea of limit, see also SG, p. 72; S, pp. 275-276; IP, pp. 129-130; CS, pp. 30-31; III, pp. 17-18, 85, 88, 112, 178. We deal with this same question from various perspectives throughout our study, although most specifically in relation to the question of human perception (Chapter Four) and the question of divine and necessary causation (Chapter Five). It might be pointed out here, as well, that Weil's position with respect to the question of limits is at least to some extent, if not considerably dependent on her interpretation of Plato's Philebus, and that her interpretation of the Philebus is very similar to the interpretation of that of Jacob Klein in "About Plato's Philebus", Interpretation: a journal of political philosophy (II, 3, Spring, 1972), pp. 157-182. In this context, see especially IP, pp. 129-130; CS, pp. 30-31; III, pp. 17-18, 178.

15. Anaximander, whose writings have not survived and whom Weil is quoting from a secondary source, was a practical scientist and philosopher of the early part of the sixth century B.C., and a contemporary of Thales.

16. See IP, pp. 151-152, 159-160.

17. Philolaus of Croton or Tarentum (B.C. 470) was a Pythagorean, and a contemporary of Socrates. The authenticity of the 'fragments' that are attributed to Philolaus is still debated.

18. Timaeus 31c. This is quoted by Weil in IP, p. 116.

19. Presumably because 'One' is usually equated with God, and as such all the other numbers represent division or separation (the Creation), a moving away from God. The notion that Weil is emphasizing here is that of geometrical equality.

L'«égalité géométrique» rend égal à Dieu. Et ce

malheureux Calliclès qui veut seulement acquérir toujours davantage!

Un nombre mauvais, non carré, 17 par exemple, peut croire qu'il serait plus grand s'il était 18. Mais il ne sait pas que le secret, le principe créateur de toute grandeur n'est autre que 1. En devenant 18, il s'éloigne. Il dégrade le 1 dans le plan du nombre. Sa grandeur réside uniquement dans son identification à 1 par sa propre racine, $\sqrt{17}$, la médiation. (CS, pp. 24-25)

The direction towards 18 is consequently associated with evil by Weil, whereas she associates the direction towards one with truth, obedience, and good. As she says elsewhere: "Si 1 est Dieu, ∞ est le diable." (III, p. 249)

On the question of harmony and number, see also IP, pp. 116, 118, 159-160, 163-164; II, p. 228; III, pp. 248-249.

20. See CS, p. 94.

21. The reference is to John 21:18. See I, pp. 262, 137.

22. "Porter sa croix. Porter le temps." (II, p. 297) In relation to Plato, Weil identifies time with the 'Cave' (III, p. 189).

23. S, p. 139.

24. "Du temps" in Libres Propos (Aug. 20, 1929), pp. 387-392.

25. See also S, pp. 139-140.

26. When Weil speaks of the present as existing, she is thinking of the present as a limit. See I, p. 188.

27. Any form of escape from time is a sin for Weil. See I, p. 137; CS, p. 47.

28. "La sainteté seule fait sortir du temps." (CS, p. 154)

29. On the relation between time and suffering, see I, pp. 28-29, 136, 239; II, p. 26.

30. On the limits imposed by fatigue, see I, pp. 230, 278; IP, pp. 145-146.

31. "Quelle que soit la croyance professée à l'égard des choses religieuses, y compris l'athéisme, là où il y a consentement complet authentique et inconditionnel à la nécessité, il y a plénitude de l'amour de Dieu; et nulle part ailleurs. Ce consentement constitue la participation à la Croix du Christ." (IP, p. 149) In relation to what is said here about freedom, see I, pp. 34-35; LP, p. 33; CS, pp. 33-34.

32. See I, p. 13.

33. It is interesting to note the similarities here between Weil's position and what Richard Rees says about the right intellectual approach to humility in his book A Theory of My Time: An Essay in Didactic Reminiscence (London: Secker & Warburg, 1963), pp. 115-116.

The right intellectual approach to humility, as Rees says,

consists in recognizing that we are not only 'creatures passive to the impulses of instinct and emotion' but also 'creatures passive to the visitation of thought'. It means recognizing, in other words, that we are incapable of any spontaneous act arising from our own initiative, and capable only of being acted upon by forces which we cannot control. 'Mind is a sense organ', or, as Orage puts it in his exposition of Gurdjieff's teaching, 'all psychic and psychological phenomena are of the same order as physiological phenomena'. To many of those who dare to face it, this seems a discouraging and, indeed, a devastating realisation. But it is the first and necessary step towards the humility which makes wisdom possible.

34. In that we live in Plato's Cave, according to Weil, it would seem that we are closer to complete slavery than we are to complete liberty. The extent to which we are enslaved is expressed very clearly in her play, Venise sauvée, where Renaud is talking to Jaffier the night before the sack of Venice. Renaud says: "Oui, nous rêvons. Les hommes d'action et d'entreprise sont des rêveurs; ils préfèrent le rêve à la réalité. Mais par les armes, ils contraignent les autres à rêver leurs rêves. Le vainqueur vit son rêve, le vaincu vit le rêve d'autrui. . . . Les armes font le rêve plus fort que la réalité, c'est cette stupeur qui fait la soumission." (P, p. 77) And shortly thereafter, Renaud also says: "Leur vie et leur mort ne seront que votre rêve. Y-a-t-il destin plus glorieux? Tel est le doux fruit de la victoire!" (P, p. 79) One might simply think of television in the modern era to appreciate the extent to which we are reduced to living out other people's dreams.

35. See also OL, pp. 114-119; IP, pp. 144-145.

36. What has been said here about our actions being regulated by the application of principles involving an infinite error has been adapted from what Weil says about the idea of the negligible involved in practising physics. See especially S, pp. 160-176. This same question is dealt with in greater detail and in a somewhat different form in Chapter Four, pp. 167-169.

37. "Ce qu'il y a de mystérieux dans la notion de choix, c'est que se représenter deux choses comme possibles, donc comme éventuellement réelles, c'est se les représenter comme éventuellement conformes à la

volonté de Dieu, donc comme éventuellement bonnes; alors que d'autre part la notion de choix implique que l'une soit bonne et l'autre non. Ainsi la notion de choix est contradictoire. Au reste c'est une notion de bas étage." (II, p. 284)

38. The square brackets are in the original. The other way of being absent would seem to be indifference.

39. Weil does say, however, that the 'collective' is the one thing on earth that it is possible to see as an end, for the collective possesses a sort of transcendence in relation to the human individual. See III, p. 185.

40. On the question of means and ends, and finality, see II, p. 85; III, pp. 123-124, 183-185, 238-239, 259-260; EL, p. 132; OL, pp. 95-96; CO, pp. 355-357, 360-361.

41. Iris Murdoch, The Sovereignty of Good (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 71. In the context of our immediate discussion, there are two things that Murdoch assumes: "that human beings are essentially selfish and that human life has no external point or τέλος." (p. 78) She feels that the latter view, however, is as difficult to argue as its opposite, and so she simply asserts it. She "can see no evidence to suggest that human life is not something self-contained. There are properly many patterns and purposes within life, but there is no general and as it were externally guaranteed pattern or purpose of the kind for which philosophers and theologians used to search. We are what we seem to be, transient mortal creatures subject to necessity and chance. This is to say that there is, in my view, no God in the traditional sense of that term; and the traditional sense is perhaps the only sense. When Bonhoeffer says that God wants us to live as if there were no God I suspect he is misusing words." (p. 79)

Murdoch is, of course, better known as a novelist, and it is in novels such as The Black Prince, The Sacred and Profane Love Machine, The Nice and The Good, and The Time of the Angels, that one can get an overall view of her thought. It is worthy of note that Weil has had a certain, if not a considerable influence on Murdoch's thought.

Chapter Three

1. See EL, p. 74.
2. Weil makes an interesting comment about seeking for God in La Connaissance surnaturelle, p. 223. She says:

Comme les Hindous l'ont vu, la grande difficulté pour chercher Dieu, c'est que nous le portons au centre de nous-mêmes. Comment aller vers moi? Chaque pas que je fais me mène hors de moi. C'est pourquoi on ne peut pas chercher Dieu.

Le seul procédé, c'est de sortir de soi et de se contempler du dehors. Alors, du dehors, on voit au centre de soi Dieu tel qu'il est.

Sortir de soi, c'est la renonciation totale à être quelqu'un, le consentement complet à être seulement quelque chose.
3. Strictly speaking, the love of God for God.
4. On the notion of God as impersonal, see LR, pp. 35-37; CS, pp. 59, 77, 248-249; II, pp. 47, 149, 174, 179.
5. The 'We' is always at the furthest remove from the state of perfection for Weil. "Il faut ne pas être moi, mais il faut encore moins être nous." (II, p. 205)
6. Weil expresses these notions throughout her writings. She says, for example:

Dieu m'a donné l'être et du même coup la possibilité de lu[i] donner quelque chose en retour en cessant d'être. (II, p. 296)

L'humilité, c'est le refus d'exister. Reine des vertus. (III, p. 113)

L'acceptation de la mort est l'unique libération. (CS, p. 59)

True consent "est le consentement à ne pas être." (CS, p. 194)

Etre rien, pour être à sa vraie place dans le tout. (II, p. 128)
7. We should note, in this context, that the word 'de-creation' is a neologism invented by Péguy, and that he uses the word in a manner which is diametrically opposite to the manner in which Weil uses the word. The meaning of the word, as Weil uses it, can be understood in the context of that which she is attempting to explicate, and most specifically, of course, in the context of her thinking about the Creation. She never gives an exact definition of the word, however;

nor, in fact, does she ever decide on an exact spelling, for sometimes we find "décréation" and other times we find "dé-création". The latter spelling is found more frequently, however, and therefore it is this spelling which has been consistently given in English. On Péguy and the genesis of this word, see Miklos Vető, La Métaphysique religieuse de Simone Weil (Paris: Vrin, Bibliothèque d'histoire de la philosophie, 1971), p. 19.

8. See II, p. 160.

9. It is interesting to make a note here of the comments made by Gerda Blumenthal in "Simone Weil's Way of the Cross", Thought, XXVII, 105 (New York, Sum. 1952), p. 234. Blumenthal says that Weil's affirmation of the Cross is too negative an affirmation. She says: "All mystic experience as it is revealed to us, it is true, is in a sense an experience of the way of negation. But, beyond that, she has converted an essentially mystic experience of love into a cosmic, dialectical principle which in itself constitutes a refusal of the plenitude of grace." It is difficult to imagine a less perceptive reading of Weil than this. Grace is so central to Weil's thinking that it is impossible not to encounter its significance and centrality at every turn. The crucifixion of Christ for Weil is the example par excellence of the plenitude of grace.

10. "Par malheur", as Weil says, "toute oeuvre charitable risque d'avoir comme clients en majorité ou des gens sans scrupules qui cherchent leur profit ou surtout des êtres dont le je est tué." (II, p. 248)

11. See also II, p. 285, where she says that her idea that egoism does not exist is the same idea that is found in Plato's Symposium.

12. As we noted at the beginning of our study (p. 13), the Trinity (perfect joy) is considered by Weil to be one of the two essential truths of Christianity, the other essential truth being the Cross (perfect suffering). Our purpose in this study has been to look most specifically at Weil's thinking about the Cross, and thus to keep her thinking about the Trinity at arm's length, to deal with it indirectly, as it were. When we do deal with the Trinity, it is only by way of illustrating a point that we are making in our discussion, as is the case here. It should be noted, nevertheless, that our attempt to come to grips with the link which would enable us to think together at the same time the affliction of men and the perfection of God is something that would also be accomplished by thinking out the Trinity. The Trinity, in other words, must contain within itself the very link that we are attempting to come to grips with by concentrating on the question of suffering rather than on the question of joy. In this sense, needless to say, when we do arrive at fully expressing the nature of the link which would be required to tie together the affliction of men and the perfection of God, we will

be expressing, in no uncertain terms, the very essence of the Trinity. Be that as it may, the question of the Trinity is not our direct concern in this study. For anyone who is interested specifically in Weil's thinking about the Trinity, the following references are those which speak most directly to this question: En, p. 367; LR, p. 36; PS, pp. 94-95; SG, pp. 167-168; CS, pp. 30, 41, 48, 78, 87; IP, pp. 92, 127-128, 130-131, 166-167; II, pp. 95, 160-161, 228, 244-245, 248, 253, 267, 270; III, 60, 201.

13. On the idea of God as 'Subject', God as 'Thought', see CS, pp. 30, 34, 232-233; IP, pp. 127-128, 131, 137-138, 150-151; II, pp. 165, 267-268.

14. For a much more detailed examination of Weil's thinking about the notion of contradiction, see also OL, pp. 208-209, 228, 253; I, pp. 97, 204, 251; II, pp. 33, 149, 220, 239, 250, 305, 313; III, pp. 24-25, 91; CS, pp. 50, 56, 72, 233.

15. What Weil is describing here is one of the ways (the intellectual way) by which the soul of a person who has left Plato's Cave becomes accustomed to the light. What is needed for the transition from darkness to the contemplation of the sun (which Weil equates with the Good or God) are intermediaries (μεταξύ), and she feels that in the Republic Plato has described the way distinguished by the intermediary of 'relation'. The image of the assimilation of the soul to God that Weil uses here is taken from her reading of Plato's Theaetetus, 176a.

16. Weil's image here of a mind that is entrapped within a cell would seem to refer to Plato's Cave. No matter what path is followed to get out of the Cave, it is certain, at least in terms of Weil's interpretation of Plato, that there is an irreducible element of pain or suffering that must be submitted to.

17. See CS, pp. 181, 295.

18. See CS, p. 321.

19. On this last point see SG, p. 98. On what is said here, and in relation to what will be said further on concerning the ideas of vegetative and supplementary energy, see especially CS, pp. 177-183, 252-254. Much of what Weil says about the using up of supplementary energy is based upon her interpretation of the "Prodigal Son". It may also be worthwhile to look at Miklos Vetö's discussion of these ideas in the third chapter ("L'Energie, les Mobiles et le Vide") of La Métaphysique religieuse, pp. 57-68.

20. The role of the will in salvation is clearly a negative one for Weil. It is: "Effort à vide, effort de la volonté malheureuse et aveugle, car elle est sans lumière." (SG, p. 103) Here again, Weil is speaking of the will in the context of coming out of Plato's Cave.

21. The part of the soul which refuses to cry 'Enough!' is outside of time; it is centred in Christ, in God. Keeping Christ's cry of dereliction in mind, it is the part of the soul which can say "je consens à ce que ma chair soit dévorée jusqu'à la mort -- ou encore: jusqu'à la perpétuité des temps." (CS, p. 182)
22. One is again led to think of the idea of predestination here. As Weil says in the same context: "Ceux qui meurent sans avoir jamais épuisé l'énergie volontaire meurent sans avoir fait ce choix -- quelle que soit au reste la vie qu'ils ont menée, vertueuse ou criminelle. Quel est leur sort une fois morts, c'est un mystère." (CS, p. 180)
23. What Weil is saying about the idea of choice is again illuminated in the context of her thinking about Plato's Cave. "Nous naissons et vivons dans la passivité. Nous ne bougeons pas. Les images passent devant nous et nous les vivons. Nous ne choisissons rien. Ce que nous vivons, à chaque instant, c'est ce qui nous est donné par le montreur de marionnettes. . . . Nous n'avons absolument aucune liberté. On est libre après la conversion (pendant déjà), non pas avant." (SG, p. 101) It is important to keep in mind our discussion of choice and freedom in terms of the question of necessity if we are fully to understand what is being said here. See pp. 63-75 of Chapter Two.
24. The unlimited part is the part of the soul which is of this world. Limits, on the other hand, are eternal for Weil. That which limits is God. Therefore the part of the soul which limits is the eternal part of the soul (God).
25. "Ce qui tue l'âme, c'est le cours destructeur du temps." (II, p. 157) "Tous les problèmes se ramènent au temps." "Douleur extrême, temps non orienté; voie de l'enfer ou du paradis. Perpétuité ou éternité." (II, p. 103)
26. "Être engendré d'en haut, être engendré à partir de l'eau et du souffle -- c'est-à-dire après la dissolution de l'âme -- microcosme dans le chaos primitif -- c'est être parfait." (CS, p. 183) It must be said, in the end, that the new creation or the new birth is an incarnation.
27. Weil is clearly dependent here on the imagery she finds in Plato's Timaeus and Phaedrus.
28. Miklos Vetö, "Simone Weil and Suffering", Thought, XL, 157 (Sum. 1965), p. 279. See also p. 278.
29. Miklos Vetö, "Simone Weil and Suffering", p. 281.
30. The idea of 'nothingness' is one which is frequently alluded to by Weil. It must be kept in mind, however, that she uses the term

in two ways. As she says in the Cahiers: "La plénitude de l'être est identique au néant pour la pensée abstraite, mais non pas pendant qu'on fuit le néant et qu'on se dirige vers l'être. Il y a le néant qu'on fuit et le néant vers lequel on va" (II, p. 122); or, as she says in terms of suffering and the Cross: "La Croix, c'est l'enfer accepté. La souffrance est un passage ou vers le Néant d'en haut ou vers celui d'en bas." (CS, p. 64) For Weil, the nothingness below would be the nothingness associated with the wearing of different coloured glasses; it is associated with the state of existence, and could be spoken of, more precisely, in terms of the nothingness of nothingness. The nothingness above, in turn, would be associated with non-perspective or transparency, and it could be spoken of, more precisely, in terms of the fulness of nothingness.

In different terms, what Weil is saying is that the limit of both good and evil is nothingness, but in the first case this limit represents the fulness of reality, whereas in the second case it is without reality. She does not see reality and existence as the same thing, and therefore she does not think it is a matter of indifference whether one arrives at nothingness through good or through evil. It is, on the contrary, the only thing that matters in the end.

Si nous voulons seulement le bien absolu, c'est-à-dire si nous refusons comme insuffisant tout le bien existant ou possible, sensible, imaginaire ou concevable, que nous offrent les créatures, si nous choisissons plutôt rien que tout cela, alors (avec le temps) orientés vers ce que nous ne concevons absolument pas, nous en recevons une révélation. La révélation que ce néant est la suprême plénitude, la source et le principe de toute réalité. On peut alors vraiment dire qu'on a la foi en Dieu. (III, p. 120)

The idea of nothingness, in the final analysis, has to do with the question of annihilation that is being thought about in relation to de-creation: "Dé-crétion en tant qu'achèvement transcendant de la création; anéantissement en Dieu qui donne à la créature anéantie la plénitude de l'être dont elle est privée tant qu'elle existe." (III, p. 98) In other words, Weil represents the notions of hell and heaven to herself as an annihilation either into the nothingness of nothingness or into the fulness of nothingness; which is to say: "A la mort, les uns disparaissent dans l'absence de Dieu, les autres dans la présence de Dieu." (CS, p. 93)

For further references to the idea of nothingness, see II, p. 124; III, p. 89; CS, pp. 279-280.

31. It is interesting to compare what Weil is saying here to what she says concerning the positive numbers. See Chapter Two, footnote 19.

32. See II, p. 253.

Chapter Four

1. What we are saying here is analogous to what Weil says about consenting to the total and perpetual absence of all good as being the only unconditional movement of the soul, as being the only good. For her this consent is a consent not to be. "Consentir à ne pas être, c'est consentir à la privation de tout bien, et ce consentement constitue la possession du bien total. Seulement on ne le sait pas. Si on le sait, le bien disparaît." (CS, p. 194) See also p. 142 of this chapter, where this same idea is presented.
2. Philip Sherrard, The Greek East and the Latin West: A Study in the Christian Tradition (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 51-52.
3. Philip Sherrard, The Greek East and the Latin West, p. 52.
4. Philosophy in its full and original sense denoted a 'love of wisdom'. See Philip Sherrard, The Greek East and the Latin West, p. 27, footnote 1.
5. See CS, p. 56.
6. See Philip Sherrard, The Greek East and the Latin West, pp. 27-29.
7. Weil also expresses this same thought in AD, pp. 147, 161; CS, pp. 36, 132; III, p. 204. See also page 3 of the Introduction.
8. It is necessary to assume the union of the necessary and the good, but this union does not mean that the necessary and the good are 'identified' on the level of necessity. It is only in the latter stages of our study (Chapter Five and the Conclusion) that we will explicitly deal with the difficulties that are involved in identifying the necessary and the good.
9. See PS, p. 124; CS, pp. 149-150.
10. See II, p. 131.
11. The essence of what is being said here will not be entirely clear until we have specifically dealt with evil in the context of the Creation and the idea of Providence in Chapter Five.
12. On the question of original sin, see LR, pp. 68-69; CS, pp. 70-73, 168-170; II, pp. 69, 171, 216-217; III, pp. 176, 249.
13. See CS, p. 232.

14. See AD, p. 147; III, p. 70; CS, p. 208. A more detailed discussion of why Weil sees evil as limited is presented further on, pp. 146-150.
15. See also CS, pp. 13, 62, 176; AD, pp. 145-146; III, pp. 130, 135; PS, p. 15.
16. We can see that it is God Incarnate (Christ) who de-creates in terms of Weil's thinking about expiation. As she says:
 Dieu a souffert au lieu de l'homme -- cela ne signifie pas que le malheur du Christ ait diminué si peu que ce soit le malheur des hommes, mais que par le malheur du Christ (aussi bien dans les siècles antérieurs que dans les siècles postérieurs) le malheur de tout malheureux prend une signification et une valeur d'expiation, si seulement il le désire. Le malheur prend alors une valeur infinie qui ne peut venir que de Dieu.
 Toute expiation suppose que ce soit Dieu qui expie.
 (CS, p. 104)
17. See also CS, p. 62; and p. 35 of Chapter One.
18. We cannot deal with Weil's thinking about the Eucharist in any detail here. We do, however, at a later point in this chapter as well as in the next chapter, look at Weil's thinking about the Eucharist indirectly in terms of her thinking about the idea of incarnation. The references to Weil's writings which follow refer either directly or indirectly to the Eucharist. See I, p. 202; II, pp. 66, 83, 105, 108-109, 129-130, 147, 231-232, 252-253; III, pp. 174-175, 192, 203-204, 235; PS, p. 15; LR, p. 50; SG, p. 120; AD, pp. 116, 143-147, 153; CS, pp. 41-42, 254-257, 264-267, 272.
19. Cet amour divin qu'on touche tout au fond du malheur, comme la résurrection du Christ à travers la crucifixion, et qui constitue l'essence non sensible et le noyau central de la joie, ce n'est pas une consolation. Il laisse la douleur tout à fait intacte. (PS, p. 83)
 Pour quiconque est dans le malheur le mal peut peut-être se définir comme étant tout ce qui procure une consolation. (PS, p. 83)
20. See AD, p. 146.
21. "(Le bien, c'est toujours ce vers quoi on s'oriente, ce qu'on n'a pas.)" (III, p. 238)
22. Douglas Hall, Lighten Our Darkness: Toward an Indigenous Theology of the Cross (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), p. 101.

23. See II, p. 83.

24. All acts are determined by necessity for Weil. Whether one clearly perceives necessity prior to acting, or whether one acts unconsciously (the 'I' determined by other 'I's or by material necessity), one's actions are always the result of necessity. That is to say, one's actions are the automatic result of the state one is in (or the stage one has reached) at the moment prior to acting.

25. This is the same, according to Weil, as saying: "Tous les péchés sont des essais pour fuir le temps." (CS, p. 47)

26. Weil never says literally that 'evil is the absence of good', although in relation to her thinking about affliction as the feeling of the absence of good there can be no doubt that this phrase expresses the essence of her thinking about evil.

27. "Sans le mal, on ne renoncerait jamais à ce monde." (II, p. 157) "Le mal est une condition de la dé-création." (II, p. 157)

28. For further references to the idea of purity not being defiled by evil, see footnote 15 of this chapter, and pp. 127-129.

29. Evil is not the opposite of good if good (as it is understood here, i.e., as the absolute good) is the union of opposites. See II, p. 69.

30. On the many facets of Weil's thinking about the notion of impossibility, see SG, p. 87; CS, pp. 84, 258; II, p. 295; III, pp. 24-25, 48, 51, 60, 184.

31. See II, p. 165.

32. See I, p. 236.

33. See II, pp. 121, 214; SG, p. 82; CS, p. 87.

34. See II, p. 191.

35. On the relationship between good and evil in this world, and the difference between relative or representable good and the absolute good, see also: AD, p. 106; CS, p. 127; I, p. 257; II, p. 237; III, pp. 28, 234.

36. See SG, p. 82.

37. Dire que nous voulons toujours et seulement le bien, c'est comme dire que nous désirons le désiré. C'est purement grammatical. Nous désirons le désirable, nous souhaitons le souhaitable, nous aimons l'aimable,

etc. De même nous voulons le bien. Le bien n'est pas autre chose que l'objet de la volonté. Il faut poser d'abord cela. Posons: bien = désirable. (III, p. 118)

The desire for good is the one thing which is always unconditionally present in every man. It is in this sense that Weil can speak of that which we must love in all men as being either their desire or their possession of good, either their desire or their possession of God. This is what it means to love unconditionally, to love human beings in God. See CS, p. 249.

38. See I, p. 236. Weil speaks of the part that the good plays in this conflict as a supreme mystery.

39. When Weil speaks of our knowing good and evil through contact (contact through likeness to God and separation from God), she makes the claim at the same time that: "(Il s'agit donc de tout autre chose que d'une conception abstraite de Dieu à quoi l'intelligence humaine peut parvenir sans la grâce, mais d'une conception expérimentale.)" (SG, p. 82)

40. To submit to the full extent of the evil that is inflicted upon one without inflicting this evil on others in turn is to imitate the 'powerlessness' of God in this world; it is to imitate God's specific mode of operation with respect to the Creation, i.e. the divine Non-Action which is plenitude of Action. This notion, which is discussed specifically in the next chapter, arises in relation to Weil's thinking about Providence. What she is saying, in essence, is that God does not command everywhere where He has the power to do so; indeed, that He does not intervene in this world at all (Christ's abandonment on the Cross), for otherwise neither the universe would exist, nor would good be present within the universe. The point that we wish to make here is that good, like God, should not be seen in terms of action, in terms, for example, of someone who does good. Good should be seen in terms of non-action, or non-active action, for an act which is good is an act which only God can accomplish, for only God is good. Any act which is good is thus an act from which the 'I' is absent, from which the 'someone' in the phrase 'someone does good' is absent. God can only be present in the form of absence. Therefore not to command everywhere where one has the power to do so (non-active action), which is to submit to (to be absent from) the evil (the absence of good) which is inflicted upon one, is, paradoxically, the way in which good is manifested in this world. In other words, as Weil says: "Un acte bon, c'est ce qui dans une situation donnée serait fait par Dieu incarné." (III, p. 138)

41. See II, p. 124.

42. Weil's reactions against the Redemption being reduced to the temporal plane take many forms. They can be found in those places where she speaks of 'chronology' (especially in relation to the Redemption itself), where she speaks about incarnations of Christ

prior to and following his death, and where, as well, she specifically attacks the notion of progress. See, for example, En, pp. 289-290; LR, pp. 16, 18, 50; I, p. 144; II, pp. 115, 123, 261; CS, pp. 23, 290-291. See also the comments in relation to Weil's placing the good outside of history made by Richard Rees in the Introduction (p. x) of First and Last Notebooks (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), his translation of the first part of Cahiers I and of La Connaissance surnaturelle.

43. As Weil says: "Il est impossible que la vérité entière ne soit pas présente en tous temps, en tous lieux, à la disposition de quiconque la désire", and "Tout ce qui n'a pas toujours été en tous lieux à la disposition de quiconque désire la vérité est autre chose que la vérité." (CS, p. 270) This means, in turn, that "L'esprit de vérité, de justice et d'amour n'a absolument rien à voir avec un millésime; il est éternel." (En, p. 289)

44. What is being said here is implied in a passage of the Cahiers where Weil says: "Aujourd'hui, si les forces aveugles parvenaient à détruire l'existence temporelle du christianisme, on peut fort bien se représenter la possibilité, après plusieurs générations, d'une révélation nouvelle." (II, p. 261) The same implication is also made in another passage where she says: "S'il y a une autre espèce pensante, il y a pour elle toujours le même Dieu, mais un autre Verbe." (II, p. 123)

45. "On admet qu'il y a eu du surnaturel avant le Christ. Pourquoi donc pas dans tous les peuples? Ce qui impliquerait dans toutes les religions, car elles sont toutes antérieures, sauf la musulmane, qui est fort contaminée de christianisme." (II, p. 115)

In relation to Incarnations other than Christ, see also LR, p. 18; CS, pp. 290-291.

46. It is implicit in what Weil is saying here that pantheism is true only in terms of an incarnation of God. This means, for her, that a saint, or a man who has become perfect, is God, i.e., an incarnation of God. She makes this point manifestly clear in La Connaissance surnaturelle, in a passage which is quite similar in content to the one just quoted.

Une homme parfait est le nom de Dieu. (Microcosme.)
Sa manière d'être sanctifié, c'est d'être fait malédiction en étant pendu à la croix.

La notion même de Microcosme implique l'Incarnation. Un être humain qui a pour âme l'Ame du Monde.

Dans l'ordre de la matière, des choses n'ayant aucune différence entre elles peuvent être autres. Par exemple on peut concevoir abstraitement deux cailloux identiques.

Mais dans l'ordre du bien ce qui est identique est un. Deux choses sont deux seulement si elles diffèrent.

Dès lors un homme parfait est Dieu.

Mais dans l'ordre du bien il n'y a que descente et non pas montée. Dieu est descendu habiter dans cet homme. (CS, p. 263)

47. Weil identifies the sun with the Good, i.e. with God.
48. Plato, The Republic, VII, 519c-520e. It should be noted that what is being said here implies a very strong condemnation of suicide.
49. Miklos Vetö, La Métaphysique religieuse de Simone Weil (Paris: Vrin, Bibliothèque d'histoire de la philosophie, 1971), p. 145.
50. Simone Pétrement, La Vie de Simone Weil, 2 (Paris: Fayard, 1973), p. 460.
51. "Le ne-devant-pas-être" (and also "le ne-pas-devant-être") is a term that is constantly employed by Vetö. It refers to 'that which should not exist' and in terms of Weil, 'that which should not exist' is essentially the 'I', the self, i.e., that which is the source of evil. In La Métaphysique religieuse, Vetö relates "le ne-devant-pas-être" to evil (pp. 24 and 146); to the self or the ego (p. 28); to autonomy as evil, i.e. to that which has no true place in the real, and also to that whose origin cannot be traced to being, but which reveals an absolute independence (p. 41); to that which is bound up with the concepts of duty and ethics, to the moral imperative, i.e. to an imperfect will acting according to impure motives (p. 55); to something which should not exist (p. 69); to the imperfect self (p. 71); to the autonomous ego (p. 81). He also relates "le ne-pas-devant-être" to evil in "Le Mal selon Simone Weil", Akten des XIV. internationalen Kongresses für Philosophie, III (Vienna: Herder, 1969), p. 632.
- Like Vetö, Michel Narcy (Simone Weil: Malheur et beauté du monde (Paris: Editions du Centurion, 1967), p. 47) also sees Weil as attaching evil to autonomy and therefore to existence. In fact, evil is identified by him with the experience of existence itself. As he says: "Le mal n'est rien d'autre que l'expérience de l'absence de Dieu, c'est-à-dire de l'existence même." The only problem in relating evil to existence, that is, in relating "le ne-devant-pas-être" to both evil and existence (the 'I', autonomy), is that the distinction between sin and evil is lost sight of. On the other hand, because sin and evil are linked together through suffering, the distinction between them is not always clear in Weil herself. And besides, it would seem self-evident that if we did not exist, and thus the state of sin did not exist, evil itself would not exist. Apart from the objective distinction that can be made between sin and evil in terms of suffering, existence (and thus sin) and evil are inseparable. The ultimate distinction that has to be made, of course, is that the suffering of man and the suffering of God are not the same. The evil which causes one to suffer to the extent of

losing one's existence, so long as one still loves God, so long, that is, as God loves God -- predestination -- is an evil which is purified in the experience of the absence of God. This evil is an 'absence' which is felt, and in this sense it is a good.

52. See Chapter Three, pp. 98-99.

53. Simone Pétrement, La Vie de Simone Weil, 2, p. 461. As Weil says herself in this context:

Comment la pensée humaine aurait-elle pour objet autre chose que de la pensée? C'est là une difficulté tellement connue dans la théorie de la connaissance qu'on renonce à la considérer, on la laisse de côté comme un lieu commun. Mais il y a une réponse. C'est que l'objet de la pensée humaine est, lui aussi, de la pensée. Le savant a pour fin l'union de son propre esprit avec la sagesse mystérieuse éternellement inscrite dans l'univers. Dès lors comment y aurait-il opposition ou même séparation entre l'esprit de la science et celui de la religion? L'investigation scientifique n'est qu'une forme de la contemplation religieuse. (En, p. 329)

54. Simone Pétrement, La Vie de Simone Weil, 2, p. 461.

55. Miklos Vetö, La Métaphysique religieuse, p. 145.

56. See CS, p. 280.

57. Weil does not think that "aucune définition précise du fait, appuyée sur une analyse, ne peut être énoncée, qui puisse s'étendre à une chose telle que l'incarnation ou l'eucharistie." (II, p. 143) She thinks, like Kant, that fact belongs to the domain of time, but also that "le domaine de la réalité déborde infiniment celui du fait." (II, p. 143)

58. See IP, pp 142-143; S, p. 165. On the idea of the cube, see also IP, pp. 169-170; CS, pp. 16, 32, 36; I, p. 146; II, pp. 271, 273-275; III, pp. 112, 147, 261; LP, p. 46.

59. We know that Weil sees God as both personal and impersonal. In the example that is used here where God is seen in the form of a limit, one would expect that the impersonal aspect of God would be emphasized by Weil. We must remember, however, that the affliction of men is something which requires a solution that is not solely impersonal. To give the afflicted their humanity back requires a compassion which is personal; it is a compassion which requires that God be stripped of His divinity: Incarnation. Christ represents God in the form of Person. For Weil, Christ also represents the soul of the World: "Un être, l'ordre du monde, qui a pour corps le monde et pour âme la perfection." (CS, p. 78) See also II, p. 302.

60. See En, p. 94; CS, p. 84.
61. See II, pp. 304-305.
62. Weil defines faith in exactly the same terms.
 La foi. Croire que rien de ce que nous pouvons saisir n'est Dieu. Foi négative. Mais aussi, croire que ce que nous ne pouvons pas saisir est plus réel que ce que nous pouvons saisir. Que notre pouvoir de saisir n'est pas le critérium de la réalité, mais au contraire est trompeur. Croire enfin que l'insaisissable apparaît néanmoins, caché. (II, p. 108)
63. Our existence would represent this conditional or semi-reality. The love of God in affliction, on the other hand, would represent innocence or perfection (reality), that which is constituted by a contact with necessity.
64. What we are about to explicate has already been dealt with, although in lesser detail and in a somewhat different form, in our discussion of freedom in Chapter Two, pp. 66-68.
65. See S, pp. 160-176.
66. See S, p. 166.
67. See II, p. 302.
68. This point is made very clear by Philip Sherrard, The Greek East and the Latin West, pp. 34-36.
69. In other words, we must be careful not to entirely dissolve the reality of God in the universe's favour (pantheism), or entirely dissolve the reality of the universe in God's favour (monism). See David Anderson, Simone Weil (London: SCM Press, 1971), p. 100.
70. Weil also mentions the cube analogy as ruling out pantheism in IP, p. 169. On Weil's rejection of pantheism, see also IP, p. 38; II, p. 303.
71. This is quoted by Weil from Nicomache de Gerasa, Arithm., II, 19.
72. The Incarnation is as unintelligible as the Eucharist. As Weil says in the Cahiers: "L'éternité qui descend s'insérer dans le temps. L'incarnation est le maximum de cette insertion. Des rapports entre l'homme et Dieu, entre le temps et l'éternel, le relatif et l'absolu, sont de toutes manières inintelligibles. Il n'y a pas de degré d'inintelligibilité; tout en cette matière est aussi inintelligible que l'Eucharistie." (II, pp. 108-109)

73. In relation to the descending movement of God in terms of the Incarnation, see also II, pp. 108-109, 136.
74. See II, p. 205.
75. See II, pp. 110, 118, 143; CS, p. 264.

Chapter Five

1. E.W.F. Tomlin, Simone Weil (Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1954), p. 50.
2. The link which ties together the affliction of men and the perfection of God is the same link which ties together the necessary and the good, and therefore we will be looking at this link in terms of both of these above relationships.
3. The idea that God has withdrawn Himself in creating, permitting a part of being to be other than Himself, is by no means an uncommon way of thinking about the Creation. The same idea is found in ancient Cabbalistic thought under the name of tsimtsum, and it has come down to us through the work of Isaac Luria (16th century), as well as through the work of Luria's disciple, Chaim Vital. Parallel conceptions can also be found in Schelling and Hamann, as well as in Moltmann, Paul Althaus, and Urs von Balthasar. See Maurice Blanchot, "L'Affirmation (le désir, le malheur)" in L'Entretien infini (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), p. 169; Leslie A. Fiedler, "Simone Weil: Prophet out of Israel, Saint of the Absurd", Commentary, XI, 1 (Jan. 51), p. 46; Alain Goldschläger, "Remarques sur la notion de Dieu chez Jules Lagneau et Simone Weil", Pensée et les Hommes (Bruxelles), Vol. 20, No. 9, (1977), p. 255; Miklos Vetö, La Métaphysique religieuse de Simone Weil (Paris: Vrin, Bibliothèque d'histoire de la philosophie, 1971), p. 20, footnote 8; Jürgen Moltmann, The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology, translated by R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1974), pp. 205-206.

It is, of course, beyond the scope of this study to examine other conceptions of the Creation which are parallel to that of Weil's, or to examine whether or not Weil's conclusions are the same as those worked out in relation to these other conceptions. It may be said, however, that Weil seems to have come to this idea of Creation directly, as a result, that is, of her thinking about Christ's cry of dereliction, and that she was not aware of earlier formulations, found, for example, in the work of Isaac Luria or his disciple, Chaim Vital.

Weil speaks of the Creation in terms of abandonment, renunciation, abdication, etc., throughout her writings. See, for example: AD, p. 106; LR, pp. 68-69; IP, pp. 44, 161; PS, pp. 35-36, 92; II, pp. 67-68, 70, 104, 120, 137, 140-141, 159, 171, 183-184, 206, 216-217, 241, 297, 303; III, pp. 11-15, 33, 98, 112-114, 176, 182, 249, 260, 263; CS, pp. 14, 26, 38, 42, 49-50, 67-68, 70-73, 78, 82-83, 91-93, 131, 164, 168-170, 176, 196, 222, 238-239, 262, 264, 281, 298-299.
4. In another sense it can be said that evil is this distance, for everything that we call evil can be seen in terms of this mechanism which governs matter. See PS, p. 96.

5. See II, pp. 241-242; IP, p. 44.
6. If, as we mentioned earlier, this is at all intelligible. We cannot speak of God in terms of temporality, any more than we can speak of man 'becoming' God.
7. See II, p. 165; IP, pp. 128, 150-151; CS, pp. 34, 232-233.
8. In reality 'we' could not conceive of God alone, for we would not exist.
9. The suffering that results from separation must be seen in relation to both Creation and Incarnation. As Weil says: "L'homme fait de chair, comment ne souffrirait-il pas quand il s'unit à la nature divine? Dieu souffre en lui d'être fini. Souffrance impliquée par la création." (II, p. 116)
10. See also III, pp. 175-176.
11. See III, p. 200.
12. Weil frequently refers to the ancient Chinese tradition, and more often than not to Taoism in this respect, when she is thinking about the idea of non-action. See AD, pp. 148-151; SG, p. 77; IP, pp. 30-31; I, pp. 129, 138-139, 176, 234, 254-255. The idea of 'non-action' is also discussed in PS, pp. 37-38; IP, pp. 58-59; CS, pp. 26, 58-59, 73-74, 113, 162, 229-230, 257-258, 306; I, pp. 166-172, 219, 222-223, 252; II, pp. 24, 50-51, 60, 123, 153-155, 159, 160; III, pp. 178-179.

It will be useful in this context if we look briefly at what Lao Tzu meant by wu wei (non-action), as it will give us a glimpse of several aspects of the question of Providence which are reflected in Weil's thought, and in terms of which her thought was undoubtedly influenced. It should be noted that the numbers in brackets refer to the chapter numbers in the book of Lao Tzu, and that quotations are from Wing-Tsit Chan's translation, The Way of Lao Tzu (Indianapolis, New York: The Library of Liberal Arts, Bobbs-Merrill Co., Ltd., 1963).

Lao Tzu described the nature of Tao as Non-Being, as having no name. He saw its function or activity in a like manner; it is characterized as taking no action (wu wei). Lao Tzu also described Tao as the order of the universe. In this context wu wei embodies the added meaning of taking no artificial action, non-interference, or letting things take their own course. "Tao invariably takes no action, and yet there is nothing left undone." (37) The sage takes no action and yet supports all things in their natural state. (64) When kings and barons take no action, all things transform spontaneously. (37)

Wu wei is also described as the function or character of Te (virtue) in the book of Lao Tzu. A symbol which is often used in connection with the character of Te is water.

There is nothing softer and weaker than water.
 And yet there is nothing better for attacking
 hard and strong things. . . .
 All the world knows that the weak overcomes the
 strong and that the soft overcomes the hard. (78)

In general wu wei means refraining from going against the grain of things, either by attempting to make materials perform functions for which they are unsuitable, or by exerting force in human affairs. It means letting things alone to take their own course; and in this way the desired result is attained.

See Wing-Tsit Chan, The Way of Lao Tzu, p. 8; Joseph Needham, History of Scientific Thought, Vol. 2 of Science and Civilization in China (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 68, 71; Holmes Welch, Taoism: The Parting of the Way (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), pp. 18-34.

13. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

14. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, the enlarged edition edited by Eberhard Bethge (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1972), pp. 360-361. In quoting from this letter of July 16, 1944, we are in no way suggesting that Bonhoeffer's thought is in any other way in agreement with the thought of Weil.

In this same context, it is interesting to note what Iris Murdoch says in The fire and the sun. Why Plato Banished The Artists (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 52. "To suggest that God is not omnipotent has always been a prime Christian heresy. The image of a morally perfect but not all-powerful Goodness seems to me better to express some ultimate (inexpressible) truth about our condition."

15. See Matt. 5:45.

16. See CS, p. 262.

17. Vetö, in La Métaphysique religieuse, p. 21, is very clear in relation to the Platonic and Kantian elements involved in Weil's thought in this context.

Platon dans le Timée (48a) parle de la cause bonne et de la cause nécessaire, tandis que Kant distinguera causalité nouménale et phénoménale. Sous la plume de Simone Weil la cause nécessaire du Timée sera comme subsumée et fondue dans la causalité des phénomènes: sa violence, son opacité, sa résistance aveugle seront intégrées à la grande clarté mathématique de la structure des apparences. Par contre, quant à la cause bonne de Platon c'est elle qui accueillera et recouvrira la causalité kantienne des noumènes dont la rigueur parfaite et la sévérité seront comme adoucies par l'amour s'exprimant à travers la 'persuasion' dont parle Platon.

On this same point, see also Simone Pétrement, La Vie de

Simone Weil, 2 (Paris: Fayard, 1973), pp. 455-456.

18. -- The sovereign presence of that which is absent.

19. We will look at what she is saying on the plane of good and evil immediately following the present discussion.

20. See II, pp. 164-165, 175, 222; En, p. 340.

21. See II, p. 149; GS, pp. 83, 307; En, pp. 358-361; IP, pp. 39-40; and Chapter Two, p. 42.

22. Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co. Inc., 1962), p. 91.

23. Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy, p. 92.

24. Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy, p. 92.

25. See also II, p. 163; III, p. 15.

26. That is, the universe in its totality is in conformity to the will of God on the plane of good as well as on the plane of evil.

27. As Mr Raven says to Mr. Vane (two of the main characters in George MacDonald's novel Lilith): "for love, not hate, is deepest in what Love 'loved into being'." See George MacDonald, Phantastes and Lilith (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), p. 272.

28. See Plato, The Republic, VI, 493c.

29. See II, p. 149.

30. The reality of the universe -- the order of the world -- is nothing less than the limits that have been imposed by God in creating.

31. To put this in another way, it can be said that evil cannot take away the presence of God in the souls of those who have already experienced His reality through actual contact. It can, however, take away the feeling of His presence, as it was taken away from Christ. See III, p. 203.

32. This, at least, is one way that we might represent Heaven to ourselves.

33. A beacon of light which corresponds in number to the number of innocent who die, although in essence there is only one beacon of light, for there is only one source of light: God.

34. See En, pp. 340-341, 356-357.

35. There would be no incompatibility between facts which are considered miraculous and the laws of nature if it were admitted in theory that these facts could be accounted for by a sufficiently advanced form of science. See LR, p. 55.

36. On the question of miracles, see also IP, p. 153; En, pp. 334-342; LR, pp. 50-60; CS, p. 34; II, pp. 137, 161, 204.

37. This is an easy enough thing to do, as Weil says, for those who are hidden away in the depths of a cloister, or for those in the world who live from within restricted circles. See LR, p. 59.

38. One who is very clear with respect to what is being said here is George Grant. See, for example, Lament For A Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., The Carleton Library, No. 50, 1970), pp. 88-89.

39. Weil's reluctance to place good in the world, and therefore her reluctance to identify necessity and good, is clearly perceived by Simone Pétrement in La Vie de Simone Weil, 2, p. 456.

Ce qui la [Weil] touche en particulier, c'est l'idée que mettre le bien dans le monde, 'devant le rideau' comme elle dit, ce serait manquer au respect et à la pitié qu'on doit aux malheureux; car ce serait penser que le malheur est toujours une juste punition. Enfin elle tient à sauvegarder la pureté de l'amour qui s'adresse à Dieu. Ce Dieu exilé du monde est le seul à l'égard duquel l'amour peut être vraiment pur. Un Dieu qui serait puissant dans le monde, on ne pourrait guère l'aimer d'un amour sans mélange de sentiments bas. Le mettre au-delà du monde, c'est comme ne vouloir l'aimer qu'à travers le Christ. Ainsi la science, en faisant concevoir le monde comme pure nécessité, non seulement n'est pas contraire au christianisme, mais lui est indispensable; elle fait partie de la vraie religion.

Another way of looking at Weil's position here, as Richard Rees points out in Simone Weil: A Sketch For a Portrait (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966), p. 107, is to see it in terms of her criticism of humanistic and evolutionary philosophies.

These philosophies have always propagated in one form or another the belief that matter is a machine for manufacturing good, or in other words that man is self-sufficient and has created his own values ex nihilo. It would be difficult to name any thinker of this century who has exposed this fallacy more convincingly or analysed its consequences more penetratingly than Simone Weil has done.

40. On the many facets of Weil's thinking about the question of Providence, see: AD, pp. 105-106, 134-136; SG, p. 77; PS, p. 93; EL, pp. 43-44; IP, pp. 30-31, 39-41, 150, 153; En, pp. 330-331, 334-342, 351-358; LR, pp. 50-60, 72-73; CS, pp. 34, 67-68, 70, 77-78, 82-83, 262, 306-307, 319; II, pp. pp. 66-68, 96, 109, 117, 137, 149, 161, 163-165, 170, 175, 184-185, 193, 204, 209, 222-223, 297; III, pp. 71, 114, 157, 175-179.

41. See also III, p. 11.

Conclusion

1. Paul Tillich, The Eternal Now (New York: Paul Scribner's Sons, 1963), p. 87.
2. Voltaire (François Marie Arouet), Candide, translated by Lowell Bair, with an appreciation by André Maurois, and illustrations by Sheilah Beckett (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), p. 81.
3. "Another shall gird thee and carry thee where thou wouldst not." (John 21: 18)
One of the many aspects of Weil's life and thought which Richard Rees has made his own is the idea that man is not his own. As he says in A Theory of My Time: An Essay in Didactic Reminiscence (London: Secker & Warburg, 1963), p. 232:
To know that I do not belong to myself may seem a rather meagre and inadequate creed, but it is at least a wholesome antidote to the Jeffersonian 'pursuit of happiness' (1776), and to the right to self-fulfilment and the right to develop my personality and all the rest of the modern psychological jargon. If it does nothing else, it inculcates a decent humility and sense of proportion.
4. To conceive of God as totally present in this world does not mean that God is thereby (totally) identified with this world (on the level of this world); He can only be present, rather, in the form of absence.
5. This description of man's nature is in reference to the passage quoted earlier from Voltaire's Candide. See p. 224 of the Conclusion.
6. As such, it is the incomprehensible (that which is absent) which is the standard for the known (that which is in appearance). As Weil says in the Cahiers: "L'impossibilité est l'unique porte vers Dieu." (III, p. 48)
7. Compassion, like anything else which is in accord with the Truth, is governed by the sovereign presence of that which is absent. "Est-ce ainsi", as Weil says, "que s'explique le mystère de l'absence du bien au-dedans de la société humaine? Un homme pur n'accomplit rien. Ou ce qu'il accomplit tourne en boue." (III, p. 112) See Chapter Four, p. 165.
8. Paul Tillich, The Eternal Now, p. 88.

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