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## EMPTINESS IN A HUMAN SOUL: SIMONE WEIL'S ANTHROPOLOGY

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*To see a landscape as it is when I am not there...*

*Weil, Gravity, 42.*

**Abstract.** The article is an attempt to interpret the concept of the human soul on the basis of the writings of Simone Weil. The method chosen for the study is to combine ontological and theological remarks, that is, those regarding the world and God, in order to present the argument that to be liberated, the human soul should become empty. Therefore, classic theological problems are raised: those relating to the world (its creation, essence, destiny), those relating to truth (its understanding and finding), and those relating to goodness (the question of the human way of life that allows one to get closer to God). The relational approach to man—considering him in connection with God and the world—refers primarily to the medieval Christian tradition that views man in relation to God and to the world created by Him. In this way, the original concept of man is reconstructed whereby man is not only a creation of God, but also a participant of the cyclical appearance and disappearance of the world.

**Keywords:** Simone Weil, theology, soul, suffering, emptiness, good and evil, God.

**Streszczenie. Pustka w duszy człowieka. Antropologia Simone Weil.** Artykuł stanowi próbę wyinterpretowania, na podstawie pism Simone Weil, koncepcji ludzkiej duszy. Obraną metodą jest zestawienie uwag o charakterze ontologicznym i teologicznym.

nym, czyli tych dotyczących świata i Boga, aby na ich tle ukazać tezę mówiąca o tym, że dusza ludzka by się wyzwolić powinna stać się pusta. W związku z tym poruszone zostają klasyczne dla teologii problemy: te dotyczące bytu (jego stworzenia, istoty, przeznaczenia), te dotyczące prawdy (jej rozumienia i poznania) oraz te dotyczące dobra (rozpatrywana jest kwestia sposobu życia, które pozwala zbliżyć się do Boga). Relacyjne ujęcie człowieka – w związku z Bogiem i światem odnosi się w pierwszym rzędzie do średniowiecznej tradycji chrześcijańskiej ujmującej człowieka w odniesieniu do Boga i stworzonego przezeń świata. W ten sposób zostaje zrekonstruowana oryginalna koncepcja człowieka, który nie tylko jest stworzeniem Bożym, ale bierze udział w cyklicznym pojawianiu się i znikaniu świata.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Simone Weil, teologia, dusza, cierpienie, pustka, dobro i zło, Bóg.

The reader of Simon Weil's writings may have the impression that her thoughts are focused on issues that belong only to the domain of religion and not to philosophy. It may seem that the main issue that interests the author is the issue of love for God, longing for him, rather than, for example, the possibility of getting to know him or the concept of the soul and its cognitive powers. Statements of this type do not reflect the essence of Weil's thinking.

It should be emphasized, however, that the impression that the philosopher focuses on issues important to believers (Christians) is not wrong and is reflected in the remarks that she left behind. Her works abound in emotional descriptions of the states of the human soul in search of God, which seems to satisfy the intellectual appetites of practitioners much more than those seeking solutions to philosophical problems. This is why philosophers who comment on Weil's thought usually present it as a kind of existentialism, a philosophy related to human existence in the world of moral choices. Such an approach – let us emphasize it once again, is certainly not a mistake and is justified in the writings of the philosopher. However, when it comes to the possibilities of interpreting what constitutes Weil's philosophical thought, it seems to be too narrow. First of all, it does not allow to notice the originality of the thinker's message, as well as the contribution to the field of philosophical anthropology. And that is why our claim is that in Weil's deliberations there is an answer to the question: who is man. Her comments about God and the world in which man lives, as we also claim, make up this concept and create a coherent whole.

In this article, we will try to interpret the meaning of the above thesis. According to the supposed intention of the philosopher, we will do it by combining remarks of an ontological and theological nature, i.e. those concerning the world and God. Weil shows the thesis that man is essentially nobody against the background of the image of God understood as the creator, his relationship to the world, ruled by the laws which are not according to his will. All her efforts are crowned with the conclusion about the role of man in the plan of God's creation (the human self is to disappear).

Finally, it is worth noting that the *relational* approach to man – in relation to God and the world – is nothing new in philosophy. It refers in the first place to the medieval Christian tradition that describes man in relation to beings “beyond his being” (the creator and the totality of that which was created). The intention of presenting man as a being related to God and the world results directly from the thesis that he is nobody. As such, he “needs suspension” on other beings. They also serve as a “context” for saying something about a human. That is why the image of man as a being related to God and the world, dictates the structure of this article.

## 1. GOD

Medieval philosophers and theologians, when creating the concept of God, set out to distinguish him from the being he created. They built their concept on the difference. And so does Weil. The difference between God, the world (and man who is in the world) remains, in her conception, the difference between what is real and what exists. The things in the world that make it up – exist. God does not exist that way, he is not existence but reality. Since creation (including a man) is not real, Weil calls it illusion. God is not. But what does it mean that he is real (reality)? What is real, in terms of the philosopher, is good. Being real relates to goodness: only what is good is real.

Therefore, the world that is not real is not good. Does that mean it is evil? According to Weil, the issue is not that simple. From the real good, the good itself, one must distinguish relative good. The latter is

good because it is not evil, and therefore acquires its value in relation to its opposite.<sup>1</sup> Good in the world has this form: relative good.

The word good has not the same meaning when it is a term of the correlation good-evil as when it describes the very being of God.<sup>2</sup>

The value of one thing in the world depends on others which are also there. Therefore, it can be said that in the world we are dealing with a certain continuum: from evil to good, the latter – due to its referential nature – not being a real good.<sup>3</sup> Earthly good should therefore be distinguished from divine and called relative. What exactly is it?

Here comes an anthropological accent. The relative good is what a man considers as good. Therefore, good is what a person – who is looking for contentment, satisfaction, and happiness (variously understood in life) – desires. The good for man will be, for example, wealth, health and fame. It is worth noting that all such goods are constituted on the basis of their opposite: poverty, disease, rejections, etc. They also have their degrees: one can be more or less rich, more or less sick, more or less famous. God who is a good that has no opposite to it, has no degrees and is not the object of desires of a man who seeks satisfaction, contentment and happiness in life.<sup>4</sup> Our desires, which we would define as spiritual, if they are a search for what will fix our miserable life, must end in nothing.

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<sup>1</sup> In Weil's philosophy, there are also other pairs of opposites, such as light and gravity, or purity and licentiousness. Like the Heraclitan opposites, they are framed as those that do not stand alone. According to Littele, what binds them together is the struggle, the conflict in which they remain. On this basis, he concludes that the world according to Weil has a Manichaean face. This interpretation seems to be wrong. According to Weil, good is associated with evil because only in this way each of them matters. They don't fight because they need each other. By providing each other with meanings, they remain in harmony. That is why Weil claims about the created world that it is beautiful and despite the presence of evil, it is an object of love. Janet P. Littele, „Heraclitus and Simone Weil: the Harmony of the Opposites.” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 5, no. 1 (1969): 72–79.

<sup>2</sup> Simon Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, transl. Emma Craufurd, and Mario von der Ruhr (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 99.

<sup>3</sup> Weil, *Gravity*, 70.

<sup>4</sup> Simon Weil, *On Science, Necessity and the Love of God*, transl. Richard Rees (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 169.

Therefore, God understood as the *panacea* of evil in the world, does not exist.

God could create only by hiding himself. Otherwise there would be nothing but himself. Holiness should then be hidden too, even from consciousness in a certain measure. And it should be hidden in the world.<sup>5</sup>

God does not exist as as man does – that is, not as a person.<sup>6</sup> A man imagines God as a person, because only then can he have a certain attitude towards him. He can – for example – love him, ask for something, fear him. Or you can put it this way: when a man claims that God exists, he – inevitably – takes the form of a person. The linguistic custom also dictates it when we try to define what it does for the creature. Weil herself personalizes it in this context. Writing about his attitude towards the world, she mentions silence, hiding and suffering because of unrequited love.

As absent in the world – paradoxically – God exists in some way – as precisely as absent<sup>7</sup> He makes himself known as the one who wants to remain hidden. Contrary to the Christian tradition, God does not appear in the world as good. God has nothing to do with the one in the world. It makes itself felt through beauty. It is, as Weil says, the visible side of God.

In everything which gives us the pure authentic feeling of beauty there really is the presence of God. There is as it were an incarnation of God in the world and it is indicated by beauty.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Weil, *Gravity*, 38.

<sup>6</sup> Writing about God in Weil's concept, Kuchta points to the tradition of apophatic philosophy, which gives him features by contradicting those attributed to creation. She comments: „Apophatic philosophy can be rather described as rejection of the human qualities of God. It means that God cannot be described using human features and with words that belong to earthly space and every-day order.” Anna Kuchta, „The Space of Transcendence: Simone Weil and her Art of Mystical Paradoxes,” *Maska* 17 (2013): 95.

<sup>7</sup> Kotkowska, writing about the absence of God in the world, refers to a parallel between: the creator (which is God) and his work (as the created word). According to her „[...]the presence of God is the same as the presence of creator in the piece of work which lives its own life after it came out of his hands. Looking at the created universe one can say that there is no creator in it in the literal sense. [...]” Elżbieta Kotkowska, „Simone Weil's Questions about God.” In *Phenomena of Crisis. The Paschal Dimension of Suffering*, edited by Elżbieta Kotkowska, 85–102. Poznań: Wydział Teologiczny UAM, 2006, 91–92.

<sup>8</sup> Weil, *Gravity*, 150.

Beauty remains the only attribute of God, it also confirms the fact that the world was created by God. Weil's theodicy is not needed: it does not have to defend the perfection of God's creation due to the existence of evil in the world. The beauty that we feel without contrast to the ugliness proves that God is the creator of the world. And here the question arises: why in the world that is his own creation he is absent?

Weil's answer relates to the cosmological myth that she tells. In her story God who created (creates) the world "moves away" from it. The reason he does so is not to be everything in the world, not to fill it with himself. God moves away from the world to make room for it.<sup>9</sup> Weil, writing about this act, describes it as renunciation, resignation, withdrawal. Having abdicated he does not rule the world. What does then? Necessity. This is described by the laws governing nature (more about it in the part about the world). God created the world as a fabric woven consisting of with causes and effects.

By abdication, by withdrawing from the world, God established a non-accidental distance. It is such that it prevents him from interfering with the world, but allows him to return. Because he wants to return to the world. And here arises the question (important for our anthropological-oriented considerations): what prevents God from doing that? The answer allows us to refer directly to the topic of our article. The obstacle is the man who has not yet become nobody. And he is not, if he is outside his essence. And here's an important comment.

In Weil's writing two images of man appear: a man as someone – a person, a sinner, one who has not been freed from his sin, and a man as nobody – an image of a liberated man, liberated from a self. In the concept of a God who has withdrawn from the world but wants to return to it, man as "someone" is understood as an obstacle. He is between God and the world, it "prevents" God from returning to his creation. This very act becomes possible only by removing the human self.<sup>10</sup> The sense of these images is the essence of Weil's theology and also anthropology.

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<sup>9</sup> Weil, *Gravity*, 89.

<sup>10</sup> Weil, *Gravity*, 41.

## 2. WORLD

According to Weil, the world is governed by two forces: light and gravity. The former relates to the mental sphere, the latter to the physical. Contrary to Descartes, Weil argues that they are of the same nature: physical phenomena are ruled by severe necessity, and in spiritual matters there is even less coincidence. It can therefore be said that all phenomena – be they physical or spiritual – remain mechanical.<sup>11</sup> Mechanism – as it has been said – is a veil of God, it hides it. It becomes, as it were, an expression of his absence in the world, an expression of God's indifference to what is happening.

Necessity – whether in the sphere of the spirit or in the sphere of physical phenomena appears in the form: this is so, it must be so. This is the form of evil – it has no excuse. A necessity that cannot be overcome by God's will reigns supreme in the world. Therefore, it can be assumed that Weil would support Arendt's thesis that evil has no mystery or depth.<sup>12</sup> However, his presence makes it difficult to bear what is happening in the world which is brutal but orderly. Being a fabric woven of cause and effect – is in order. Created things co-exist with each other in the manner dictated by necessity. That why we can say that necessity has no mercy, it is indifferent to the fate of people who feel the world as pain then. Despite of this the world – as has already been said – is beautiful. Beauty is expressed in its arrangement of it. In that sense, it is a work of art.

There is a separate social sphere in the world. As in the rest of the world, it is possible to distinguish both relative good and evil. It appears in the form of home, homeland and culture. It gives the impression of a certain reality, because it is constituted on the basis of what a certain number of people have agreed with each other as their proper form of life. In this way, it gives a sense of at home, shelter.

No human being should be deprived of his *metaxu*, that is to say of those relative and mixed blessings (home, country, traditions, culture, etc.)

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<sup>11</sup> Weil, *On Science*, 170–1.

<sup>12</sup> Weil, *Gravity*, 71.

which warm and nourish the soul and without which, short of sainthood, a human life is not possible.<sup>13</sup>

Without the social sphere, human life – apart from that of saints (which will be discussed later) – is impossible. You can hide in it, but you cannot achieve good. However, the evil of this sphere can (and should) be limited. Hence, the thinker treats denying herself comfort and satiety not as self-improvement or a gift to God, but as a strict social obligation.<sup>14</sup>

Social reforms do not contribute to the creation of a perfect society, but managed or composed of criminals does not give man a shelter. And not everyone is able to live „outside” of it. Weil is convinced that life outside of society, although very difficult, is possible. One can withdraw from it into what is transcendent and become a saint.

To become one, a human has to leave the world while you are still alive. This is the way to liberation. Man in the bosom of society always remains a slave.<sup>15</sup> This is due to his structure, which, regardless of the form that society takes, leads to oppression.<sup>16</sup> For just as nature is ruled by necessity, so is the social sphere by compulsion. It takes various forms, for example: the compulsion to distinguish oneself through abilities, origin, there is a compulsion to achieve prestige, success, successful family life, etc. Not to be compelled to do so is synonymous with marginalization. The compulsion, which the author writes about, is therefore explicit (if it occurs between people), but also latent (then it consists in self-coercion). All these forms are a torment for man, a misfortune against which ordinary people are defenseless. While living in society, they succumb to various forms of idolatry which are a defensive reaction. Therefore, for example, Weil considers greed or avarice to be a phenomenon of social life,

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<sup>13</sup> Weil, *Gravity*, 147.

<sup>14</sup> Weil, *Gravity*, 156.

<sup>15</sup> Weil, *Gravity*, 7.

<sup>16</sup> In light of these radical remarks, even issues such as human dignity and human rights cannot be defended in the traditional way. Amesbury writes about this issue as follows: „Talk of individual rights seems to function as a substitute for a shared moral understanding of the good. But in the absence of any overarching moral telos, the proliferation of rights discourse gives rise to irresolvable disagreement. To be taken seriously, rights claims must be backed by force, and thus they tend to exacerbate rather than allay conflict” Amesbury, „Beyond,” 12.



and not sins against God. Therefore, people should be helped, because for some it is not possible to break free from society.<sup>17</sup> Contrary to Hegel or Marx, Weil argues that social progress is an illusion.

According to the thinker, the world has its own transcendence. It is not a figment of human imagination, because man cannot create it intellectually. He may come into contact with her. How does this happen? The answer to this question determines the shape of Weil's anthropology.

### 3. MAN

A man is a created being. As a phenomenal being, it is a tiny part of the universe. It consists of a body and a soul. This is composed of the natural (mortal) and supernatural (immortal, eternal) part. Only the first relates to the body that Weil calls the tomb, due to the fact that the eternal part of the soul uses it to bury the natural part of the soul. The human ego, personality, will, and with it all earthly desires are located. Eternal part of the soul is empty, it is a place to meet God. Only this part of the soul can we keep from all evil. The natural part contains all the powers that enable the physical existence of man on earth, the supernatural part contains only one power – it is love. Therefore, only this part has to do with the good. And what is important, we are usually not aware of the existence of the eternal part of the soul.

Besides the natural and supernatural parts of the soul and the mind, there is also the will. And just as reason relates to both parts of the soul, the will relates only to the first part. Weil discusses this issue in relation to the theme of good and evil. She claims that what we achieve by our own will or what external circumstances give us is worthless, it may be bad or relatively good, but never good in itself.

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<sup>17</sup> Taking into account the author's biography, it can be said that this assistance takes the form of political activities. However, there is no belief in the durability of the social order in which evil would be eliminated. According to Weil there is only possible to balance evil with relative good. This is forgotten by commentators who want to see Weil as a saint or political activist – separately. Grace, „Edith,” 208–210.

Will, in the form of wanting, adheres to things that are not good – soul (in its natural part) does not recognize an eternal good and cannot want it. But when a supernatural part of the soul “wants it”, it cannot be ignored. The desire for good itself is outside of us, and in this sense it excludes all selfishness. What happens then?

According to Weil, a man who shed all his desire for good, wants nothing for himself, is capable of compassion. And only then does he do good. For whoever is not good cannot do good, he only causes “confusion” in the world. What can set him free from doing an evil?

Liberation is not a matter of our endeavor. According to Weil it is not man, but God is looking for a man. He has to be found. All upward movement is delusional (only downward movement is in our power). The thinker explains it this way that when it comes to matters of spirit there is a law that is opposite to that which describes the phenomenon of gravity. She calls it the mental law of gravity. It says that creatures endowed with a supernatural soul fall upwards, in order to ascend they must go down. For descending is a condition for ascending.

Weil’s comments on this subject fall into two groups. The first is about the joys that life in society offers, the second is about suffering. According to the thinker, one should realize that any search for pleasure is worth nothing (it is a vain effort). The first downward step it takes is realizing the misery of your own life. We should see poverty in us and contemplate it in others. One should perceive the fleeting nature of pleasure, see the pointlessness of what one strives for living in society. Weil puts it this way: you have to learn to endure emptiness, to live in it and not to seek consolation.

To explain suffering is to console it; therefore it must not be explained.<sup>18</sup>

Seeing the worthlessness of life in the world is only one aspect of liberation.<sup>19</sup> The second is suffering. For this frees a person, not in the

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<sup>18</sup> Weil, *Gravity*, 112.

<sup>19</sup> The worthlessness of what is in the world is related to Weil’s concept of good, which has no opposite. Recognizing it, as Wojtas rightly points out in his article, does not mean that we choose what is good in the world, but that we relate to it – as a whole – properly. T. Wojtas, „Simone Weil’s Views on Values,” *Edukacja Filozoficzna* 44 (2007): 157–169.

sense that it should cause himself suffering. Torment alone has no saving power. Therefore, it is not the mere presence of suffering in life that matters, but our attitude towards it. Suffering gives liberation when we are able to accept it.

Redemptive suffering is that which strips suffering naked and brings it in its purity right into existence. That saves existence.<sup>20</sup>

If we are able not to wish for any misfortunes to be spared, and if the torment is not directed to some hope, we suffer properly. Woe to those, says Weil, who have been comforted. You should not cry not to be comforted. One must endure suffering, that is, stay for a time without any reward, both earthly and supernatural. But it is not easy. Living in emptiness and the lack of opposition to suffering results in unspeakable consolation descending upon us. It is love.<sup>21</sup>

Noticing the misery of one's own life and consenting to suffering allow for undisturbed love for the world. There is reconciliation with the world in it. It is also a desire for a life in which we wish for nothing and fear nothing. Because of this attitude towards the world, no blow prevents us from stopping loving it. Desiring nothing, we want emptiness, and this is the condition for God's coming.

Pain makes us understand suffering as punishment or a sacrifice. Both of these understandings are a form of misunderstanding of what suffering is. What is it? Its meaning is emptiness. The experience of suffering is an experience of nothingness, the absence of any meaning. It has nothing to do with mortification, which is supposed to lead to something. Meanwhile, there is nothing in suffering, the total absence of all good, content, and hope. Pure pain that awakens us to life (eternal).

"Experienced" suffering causes a person to let go of everything that brings him relief, to break away from the roots. Paradoxically, it takes root in the lack of its own place. He becomes a refugee from every earthly homeland. Close people, goods, talents – all this loses its importance to him.

When the soul is cleansed, everything continues by itself. Like a seed that has been sown, it continues to grow by itself. A man only needs

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<sup>20</sup> Weil, *Gravity*, 70.

<sup>21</sup> Weil, *Gravity*, 29.

not to lie to himself and not lose his mind. He should not try to sneak out of loneliness. Then the mortal part of the soul dies in the living body (as if from starvation) – the corporeality goes into God’s service. This is the point at which holiness becomes irrevocable. True good can only come from outside, our effort cannot bring it. After a long and fruitless tension, this gift appears – when we no longer expect anything, the divine emptiness comes to dwell in us. God sows in us, and after the harvest, says Weil, it is not man who lives, but God in him. “I am” is absent from it. The self that disappears is the self of selfishness.

#### 4. RECONSTRUCTION OF THE CONCEPT OF MAN AS NOBODY

Having collected the appropriate material, it is time to try to reconstruct the image of a man. As it has been emphasized, Weil, following the example of Christian theologians and philosophers of the Middle Ages, creates concepts of man in relation to God and the world he created.

Let us start from the eastern element of Weil’s considerations: a pair of opposites – illusion-reality.<sup>22</sup> God represents what is real, creation is what remains an illusion. The world is also an illusion. The good is illusory in it. Weil captures the world as a reservoir of false goods. It can be said that the juxtaposition of the real good (eternal) with the relative (earthly) good, corresponds directly to the juxtaposition of what is real with what is deceptive. The human self as being in the world is such an illusory good. And yet, among many others, the most valued by us. In the world of false goods there is no God.<sup>23</sup>

The thinker presents God’s absence in the world as the lack of his will in the world. In this sense, the world remains independent of God. It has no influence on the world ruled by necessity (man sometimes interprets it as evidence of God’s non-existence or his ruthlessness towards people).

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<sup>22</sup> Many commentators of Weil’s thought perceive the presence of its ties with Eastern philosophy, and this is almost as much inspired by Christian philosophy. Doering made an interesting analysis of the writings of the philosopher in terms of the presence of the content from the Bhagavad-Gita. Doering, *Simone*, 151–182.

<sup>23</sup> Weil, *Waiting for God*, transl. Emma Craufurd (San Francisco–London: Perennial Library, 1997), 120–1.

It is reflected by the laws of nature in relation to the material sphere of the world, but it also appears – which is a very interesting conclusion of the author – in the sphere of the spirit. As has already been emphasized, our personality (which Weil refers to as the natural part of the soul) is as mechanical as nature, although we delude (as Descartes deluded himself) that we are free.<sup>24</sup> When thinking and desiring we delude ourselves that we are doing it as free beings. but this is only an illusion.

A man as a certain self, immersed in the social world, subjected to the constraints characteristic of society, due to the absence of God in the world, either lives without him (as an atheist) or imagines him as satisfying his own needs resulting from the imperfections of life in society (makes himself safe, is loved, needed, feels being important). In the latter case, he is idolatrous and his faith is less than a lack of faith. But God – anyway – reminds of himself.

The beauty of this world is the way God announces himself: he tells us that he is. Weil emphasizes that if relative good – as we know it – were to remind us of it – it would remain unrecognizable. Beauty, on the other hand, allows us to see God's work in it, despite all the misery of this world. It is worth emphasizing that when the thinker writes about beauty as God's incarnation in the world, she means nature and art, but she does not mean the social world (the one created by man, i.e. the one that reflects the mechanisms of the human soul). This sphere was, is and will remain – despite any social movements – immoral. The natural world does not need to be repaired. Meanwhile, the evil that happens between people requires our intervention. Acceptance that allows contemplation of beauty refers only to the natural world, the social sphere requires action. This issue is related to the division of people into saints and ordinary people.

According to Weil, not every human being can free himself, although to do so does not need – as he notes with relief – any intellectual abilities. What do you need then? The thinker does not specify this, al-

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<sup>24</sup> As Shah rightly points out, recognizing necessity in the world has its anthropological dimension: „One is just asked to accept or recognize the obvious fact that there is the order called necessity, which exists prior to us and which is there for reasons not necessarily understandable in human terms. Reality is there that transcends all our estimates, evaluations, desires and constitutes the given and man has no choice but to accept it by renouncing that which would have led him to rebellion – the sense of individuality and freedom outside God” Shah, „Some,” 553.

though she links the possibility of liberation with suffering. Most people, she points out, remain defenseless against it. When people suffer, they almost naturally seek solace. They don't realize that it makes them not free themselves from it, they only have a breath of it. What happens to such people after they die? Weil says it's a secret. Fortunately, as she points out – suffering for the saints – will never run out in the world. But why does a man suffer at all?

Evil in nature is a sign of God's absence in the world, evil in the human world remains a sign of human egoism. Suffering from an inexhaustible human ego that desires what is not true will never disappear from the world (no social reforms can remove it). Weil divides the evil which, due to selfishness, falls on people into culpable evil (related to what a person has done as a direct result of it) and non-culpable evil (resulting from the actions of other people). Suffering is, so to speak, the constant landscape of human life. All a man can do is... get to know it. For liberation is not about non-suffering, it is about knowing the nature of suffering.

As has already been emphasized, remarks on suffering occupy a lot of space in Weil's writings. She writes about it both in theory and in terms of her own experiences. Her way of life, an ascetic approach to it, invariably leads researchers to the conclusion that the thinker sees the inalienable value in suffering, that she wants it as masochists want it. Such an interpretation is possible when taking into account the facts from the life of the philosopher, and not her writings. For they "appreciate" suffering only as a way of reviving the supernatural part of the soul, which is not done when a person suffers – and seeks consolation in suffering – but when it gets to know it. And to get to know it a human have to agree with it being there.

The difference between knowing the nature of suffering and experiencing it is so subtle that it is easy to miss. Therefore, it is worth emphasizing: it is not the suffering that falls on a person, culpably or without fault, that is liberating – a person may not get to know the suffering. Seeking consolation, feeding on hope, feeling sorry for himself – a man runs away from suffering.<sup>25</sup> He suffers, but the supernatural part of his soul remains dormant. Its awakening is preceded by consent to suffering.

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<sup>25</sup> Weil, *Gravity*, 74.

I should not love my suffering because it is useful. I should love it because it is.<sup>26</sup>

When everything in the natural part of the soul rebels against suffering, the supernatural soul says: so be it. Only by accepting suffering allows you to face it, to endure it. It should be remembered, however, that such enduring is not suffering. You do not experience it if you do it for the sake of advantage – in the form of ennoblement, or the pleasure resulting from recognizing oneself as a martyr. In order to encounter suffering, one must maintain all sensitivity, because only then can you get to know its nature. What is revealed then?

If I thought that God sent me suffering by an act of his will and for my good, I should think that I was something, and I should miss the chief use of suffering which is to teach me that I am nothing.<sup>27</sup>

The nature of suffering is nothingness. Experiencing suffering is tantamount to knowing it. It is before it that the human ego is so afraid. This is because this knowledge is its doom. The very death of *me*.<sup>28</sup> Suffering, if experienced, is knowing the delusions of the self and what it produces around me. The human self turns out to be a shadow, even though it feels like it really exists. When a man sees that he is nothing, the goal of all his efforts becomes to stay nothing. He stops running from the inner emptiness.<sup>29</sup> What happens then?

The above question suggests some time sequence. Meanwhile, the essence of what becomes the participation of the awakening of the eternal part of the soul in man is the disappearance of time – participation in what is eternal. Weil's vision, as having no time course, is difficult to grasp.

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<sup>26</sup> Weil, *Gravity*, 79.

<sup>27</sup> Weil, *Gravity*, 111.

<sup>28</sup> Many commentators of Weil's writings notice the similarity of Weil's remarks to Heidegger's thoughts. Among others Kinsella does it. According to her „Simone Weil's writings movingly conjure an orientation akin to beingtowards-death, to gloss Martin Heidegger's phrase. It is true that, like Heidegger, she held that death reveals both life and time as finite, yet such recognition of one's own death is neither fatalistic nor morbid; rather, it frees oneself to authentically be.“ Helen M. Kinsella, „Edith Stein and Simone Weil, A Study in Commitment,“ *Teresianum* 44, no. 1 (1993): 78.

<sup>29</sup> Weil, *Waiting*, 121.

It is safe to say that it eludes any rational evaluation at all. If the reader of her writings has not experienced the suffering in the way described by Weil, he will either believe it or consider it the result of the author's psychological aberration. Like any mystical vision, it eludes unambiguous evaluation. What is its content?

This vision presents God as one who is outside the world. Writing about his attitude to creation, the author describes him as renunciation of him, abdication. This movement, the movement away from the world, has its opposite. It is the return that God wants. Thus, the story of the creation of the world, as interpreted by Weil, does not end with this act, but continues in its reverse. God creates the world, abandons it, and then returns to it, this time consuming it. The return, let's emphasize that, is the same as absorbing it. A man has a very important role to play in this story.<sup>30</sup> First, he separates creation from God, and second, it sets God back. Both tasks are closely related to the moral evolution that man undergoes on earth. Both are therefore directly related to the concept of man as someone and no one. The egoist – a man who cares for his own self – prevents God from returning to the world, and perpetuates God's absence in the world. Weil also writes about it as God's inability to see the world. By becoming a nobody, he participates in God's return to the world, which is absorbed by God (becomes one with God).

The disappearance of the self makes it impossible to think of a man as a certain individual. The disappearance of the ego is the disappearance of what sets it apart from others. In the personal dimension, it is the disappearance of an illusion. The one in whom this occurs ceases to be a representative of himself, and becomes a representative of the human mind. Therefore, God's return to the world depends on man, but not on him as a certain person who lives in a specific place and time. Man, becoming nobody, passes over to the side of eternity. Therefore, God's movement like that of an outgoing and incoming wave is not temporal. This brings to mind the mythical image of the Greek god Kronos, who gives birth to and devours his own children. Everything originates from deity and returns to deity.

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<sup>30</sup> Weil, *Waiting*, 127.



The meaning of man, which appears in connection with the cyclical process of the appearance and disappearance of the world, has no precedent in the history of philosophy. The commentators of her writings are also overlooked it. Meanwhile – taking into account only the Christian philosophy, it is an interesting (or perhaps the most interesting) justification of God's love towards a man. God loves us as a passage between himself and the world, therefore he loves our willingness to withdraw to make it pass, just as he has withdrawn so that we (and the world) can exist.<sup>31</sup> Move aside for God to come into contact with the world and others people – this is the purpose of our existence. So life is not about seeking God, but about letting God find you. Then the silence of heaven and earth will remain undisturbed.

When I am in any place, I disturb the silence of heaven and earth by my breathing and the beating of my heart.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Weil, *Gravity*, 41–2.

<sup>32</sup> Weil, *Gravity*, 42.

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