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## **Lecture, travail and Croix according to Simone Weil**

**ABSTRACT:** *The article aims to analyze the concept of labor in the thought of Simone Weil from a perspective that places the labor of the human being within Weil's metaphysical scheme. The perspective also takes into account the possibility for human beings to accomplish an authentic presence in the cosmos through the waiting for the divine grace. Labor activity can be interpreted as lecture, i.e., the human capability to understand and modify nature by navigating the hermeneutic dimension of meaning. Alienated and alienating labor, ruled by the cadence of the machine and marked by the orders of superiors, tends to remove meaning from its intermediate position, which connects the human being with the natural environment. This kind of deracinating labor entails a situation of malheur, a moment in which the divine grace is revealed in a pure manner within the cosmos. Hence, alienating labor is an image of the Cross. The human being striving to hold an authentic position within the divine grace has to accept the subtraction of meaning entailed by machine labor, realizing the shift that separates lecture from non-lecture. In the thought of Simone Weil, accomplished labor is that activity which places the human being in the condition of malheur, at the point when such activity is accepted as a manifestation of the divine grace in the same way as the metaphysical event of the Cross.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Malheur; Mysticism; Hermeneutics; Labor; Work.*

### **1. A metaphysics of love and Cross**

This article analyzes the concepts of reading (see Zani 1994, 90-92; Fulco 2002, 93-128 and 169-174; Vogel 2010; Chenavier 2012; Dall'Igna 2021b) and labor (see e.g. Weil 1988; Weil 1989; Weil 1991; Pétrement 1973, 90-92; Vetö 2014, 155-165; Gabellieri 2003, 83-103 and 183-187; Vv.Aa. 2009; Vv.Aa. 2010; Kahn 1978; Little 1979; Fogarty 1979; Chenavier 2009; Devette 2016) in the latest works of Simone Weil, more precisely in the part of Weil's speculation where the mystical element is predominant. The mysticism of Simone Weil is characterized by three main features.

1. The first feature is the radical presence of divinity inside the human being. Inside the human being, i.e., a particular being, lies an element of identity with God, which is conceived as a simultaneously transcendent and immanent grace. Such an element, a sort of unextended point, represents the human being's most authentic core of human creature. It is an impersonal and sacred point, expressing a divine gift devoid of personal power: "ce qui est sacré, bien loin que ce soit la personne, c'est ce qui, dans un être humain, est impersonnel. Tout ce qui est impersonnel dans l'homme est sacré, et cela seul" (Weil 2019, 216).

The divine-human impersonal is both an original component, from which the rational and volitional faculties derive, and a movement that makes the presence of divinity effective by directing the human faculties towards the divine level. The impersonal represents a rigorous process and a perfect relation: by accepting its articulation (i.e., the dynamics of grace), the original component of supernatural love becomes a directive principle of the human complex. It is a pure and insuppressible root, a necessary starting point in order to direct the soul in the descending direction of the divine grace.

Or il n'y a qu'une faculté de l'âme humaine que la force ne peut pas toucher, ni pour la contraindre à s'exercer, ni pour l'en empêcher. C'est la faculté de consentement au bien, la faculté d'amour surnaturel. C'est aussi la seule faculté de l'âme d'où ne puisse procéder aucune brutalité d'aucune sorte. C'est donc le seul principe de justice dans l'âme humaine. L'analogie nous oblige à penser que c'est aussi le principe de la justice divine. Mais comme Dieu est parfaitement juste, il est entièrement Amour (Weil 2009, 194).

2. The quoted passage proceeds by stating the duty to consent to the supernatural love in order to achieve the divine *quantum* in the human space: "cet Amour qui est Dieu lui-même agit pourtant, puisqu'il est Dieu, mais il agit seulement pour autant qu'il obtient un consentement. C'est ainsi qu'il agit sur les âmes des hommes" (Weil 2009, 194). The second feature lies in the possibility, ascribed to the human being, to achieve knowledge and experience of the divinity. The divine gift represents also a metaphysical and moral task. In such a case, by emphasizing the divine component of love, it is possible to state that, in the culminating moment of the encounter with the divine, experience exceeds knowledge, thus accomplishing the divine love inside the human being. "On ne contemple pas sans quelque amour" (Weil 2008, 307): the perfection of intellect is included in the faculty of supernatural love; the utmost goal of the intellect is an apical opening to divine love. The gift of grace created the human being, conferred him substance with the impersonal, and confirmed his humble consent – according to the principle that "*on ne peut qu'y frapper* [on the door of the supernatural]. *C'est un autre qui ouvre*" (Weil 2002, 98).

Such an embodiment of divine grace is possible because the human being carries with him the faculty of supernatural love; "nous n'avons pas à chercher comme mettre en nous l'amour de Dieu. Il y est. Il est le fond même de notre être" (Weil 2009, 209). Excising the personal from the inner space of soul implies not only shedding light on the divine component, but also becoming a temple of divine love, since "nous ne sommes pas autre chose qu'un endroit par où passe

l'Amour divin de Dieu pour soi-même" (Weil 2009, 290). Thus, the human being allows the divinity to manifest and to affirm itself on a further metaphysical level in comparison to the trinitary perfection: God loves Himself inside the human soul, and such love is affirmed as pure grace when the human being excises every determination dominating his desires, and distracting him from God.

As in the platonic tradition, a *stasis* exists inside the human soul, an inner "conflit entre la partie de l'âme qui désire la présence de Dieu et la partie qui en a horreur" (Weil 2006, 349). The divinity inside the human soul provokes a continuous desire, which is usually engaged in the *lecture* of a part of reality, and in the use of things of the world. "La présence réelle de Dieu est constatée par la révolte de toute la partie médiocre de l'âme" (Weil 2006, 349), i.e. such a revolt implies a perspective error (on the side of knowledge) and an erroneous orientation (on the side of experience) opposing the mystical recognition of the supernatural faculty.

The faulty desire, i.e. a love of God which is unrecognised, uncomplished and unaccepted, leads to a kind of selfishness: "ce qu'on nomme généralement égoïsme n'est pas amour de soi, c'est un effet de perspective [...] Pour échapper aux erreurs de perspective, le seul moyen est de choisir son trésor et de transporter son cœur hors de l'espace, hors du monde, en Dieu" (Weil 2009, 211). Obviously, this does not imply the destruction of the *determinatio*, which can be considered as the nucleus of the spatio-temporal fabric; on the contrary, it means to eliminate the influence of *determinatio* on human intellect and love. If the authentic self-love is not *filautia* (entailing a withdrawal from divine grace), but it is the choice of one's own divine component, then "l'égoïste ne s'aime pas soi-même. S'aimer soi-même, seul le sage ou le saint y parvient. L'égoïste est celui qui croit que sa perspective propre est le monde même, et non une perspective, et qui conçoit le bien en fonction de cette perspective" (Weil 1994, 410), as stated in Weil's annotations on the concept of reading. Therefore, sin consists in applying the unlimited to a limited perspective: instead of opening to the impersonal divine of grace, such perspective is deformed into the frenzied form of the human personal. The recognition of this perspective as limited, being subordinate to divinity, and therefore the practice of humbleness and learned ignorance<sup>1</sup> imply the orientation of the soul according to the limit of divine love, because "le péché n'est pas une distance. C'est une mauvaise orientation du regard" (Weil 2008, 352). On the contrary, the deformation of this perspective implies the practice of unlimited power and the oblivion for the limit of love. When a single perspective is claimed as universal and dictated as a universal good descended from above, it removes the harmony of differences, dissolves the abundance of formal limits and absorbs the rich variety of reality in a wicked *reductio ad unum*.

The personal – a concept that in the mysticism of Weil is opposed to the impersonal – is the all-too-human attempt to apply the unlimited to a limited perspective. On the other hand, the impersonal derives from the practice of humbleness, which recognizes the human limit, and brings the upper limit of divine love inside the

1 As far as the presence of these concepts in Cusanus' thought is concerned, see e.g. Cuozzo 2012.

human perspective. There exists a metaphysical conflict, corresponding – inside the human being – to the inner *stasis*. A conflict between the authentic verticality of limit and the horizontal extension of unlimited; between the practice of power and the control of love; between the disorder caused by the separation of the human sphere and by the practice of an misinterpreted freedom, on the one hand, and the recognition of a hierarchical bond of submission between divine and human, on the other hand. According to Weil, the authentic good cannot be restrained in a limited perspective that claims to be unlimited, but “Dieu est le Bien. [...] L'Amour consent à tout et ne commande qu'à ceux qui y consentent. L'Amour est abdication. Dieu est abdication” (Weil 2006, 350).

3. The third feature of the mysticism of Simone Weil derives precisely from the concept of divinity meant as abdication of sovereignty, subtraction of power, metaphysical descent, on the one hand, and triumph in subjugation, affirmation of love, fulfilment of grace, on the other hand. This feature is *malheur*.

Affliction can be defined as a metaphysical situation implying the co-presence of three elements: physical pain, deracination of the soul and social marginalization. “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” (Weil 2008, 348). Affliction can be considered as the constitutive condition of all human beings<sup>2</sup>; indeed, “le malheur est suspendu sur tous” (Weil 2008, 350), as Weil affirms regarding the present age, but the impending affliction can be extended to every time and place, to the metaphysical situation of human beings in general.

Every human being is placed within divine grace and every human being is subject to affliction. This seemingly paradoxical co-presence of grace and affliction represents the coincidence of God's manifestation as pure grace devoid of power (which corresponds to the rigorous mechanism of creation) and affliction as a sign of divine presence placed at the furthest metaphysical distance. Creation is a metaphysical process involving the subtraction of divine power and the affirmation of divinity as pure love. According to the finite human perspective, such a process can be described as a dynamics unfolding according to an impersonal necessity, which creates the realm of limits when the divine love (i.e., the supreme limit) is released from the limitlessness of power: “création ; l'intelligence humaine ne peut concevoir le mouvement vers le bas sans quelque chose de semblable à une nécessité” (Weil 1997, 404).

Creation itself produces the distance separating the divine center of reality – i.e., the trinitary perfection in which divine love and power are in unity and harmony (see Dall'Igna 2021a, 7-93) – from *nécessité*, i.e. the realm of becoming or determinate nature. Such distance is not only the distance of creation, but it is the unfathomable and contradictory distance characterizing the manifestation

2 “Il ‘*malheur*’ è la vera condizione dell'uomo”, “condizione strutturale dell'uomo è quindi il *malheur*” (Castellana 1979, 25 and 48) and “tutta la sventura è su tutti” (Putino 1997, 50). See also Gabellieri 2003, 187-204.

of divinity within history and nature in the form of Christ: “mais par la Création, l’Incarnation, et la Passion, il y a aussi une distance infinie. La totalité de l’espace, la totalité du temps, interposant leur épaisseur, mettent une distance infinie entre Dieu et Dieu” (Weil 2008, 353). This passage indicates three forms of *malheur*, i.e., a metaphysical situation in which the human being is placed by God, because the human being inhabits the creation, because an incarnate divine spark lies in him, and because he is subject to impending forms of deracination.

*Malheur* in the strict sense represents for the human being the moment in which the powers of deracination are concentrated in the endured force, the vector of prevarication turning the human being into an object: “le malheur est un déracinement de la vie, un équivalent plus ou moins atténué de la mort, rendu irrésistiblement présent à l’âme par l’atteinte ou l’appréhension immédiate de la douleur physique” (Weil 2008, 347).

The Cross, i.e., the metaphysical moment in which divinity dies by means of wood and nails and by human hand, represents the model of *malheur*, a crucial event in the metaphysical and historical-atemporal development of divinity. The Cross is an event from which the furthest distance proceeds and, therefore, a catastrophic event that yields and rules the margins of reality, through the absence of power and the theophany of grace: “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” (Weil 2008, 351; see e.g. Castellana 1985a; Castellana 1985b).

The task of the human being is to shape his existence after the Cross, that is, to direct his intellect and will towards the symbol of absence (the defeat of God as unlimited power) and triumph (the affirmation of grace in the marginal space), and to fulfill his desire in the form of the pure divine love of the Cross. This can be achieved through the sacrifice of the personal tendency to the unlimited (the creatural component that spreads the influence of *determinatio* and that hinders the propagation of divine love), a sacrifice that occurs through the realization of impersonal humbleness. Such an attitude redirects the soul towards the divine descent and reconnects the human to the divine by overcoming the diaphragm of the creatural curtain of *proprium*. It represents an imitation of creation and crucifixion (i.e., the extreme margin of creation) that the human being achieves by means of de-creation, a process that recalls, among others, the concepts of detachment and abandonment in the thought of Meister Eckhart (see e.g. Klein 1978). Simone Weil uses this memorable image:

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. [...] 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 (Weil 2008, 358-359).

## 2. The work of reading

In such a metaphysical context, yielded by the descent by subtraction of divinity, the human being is placed in a space-time fabric of limits. The realm of *nécessité* (i.e., the temporal unfolding of becoming and the spatial coordination of nature) is characterized by two contrasting aspects, kept together by the concept of limit. On the one hand, the space of becoming is theophany, because the limits manifest divinity: every determinate limit is created by the infinite and indeterminate limit; every finite limit is an image of divine and infinite love. On the other hand, nature is marked by discontinuity whereas finitude means multiplicity: the vector of dispersion, which marks the becoming with the signs of decay and disintegration and defines the limit with the sharpness of death, is the *pesanteur*. Like grace, gravity pulls downwards; however, the descending movement of powerless divine love overlaps and restrains the unlimited pull of gravity. The fullness of the limit, establishing a firm horizon of righteousness, encompasses and captures the limitlessness of gravity, which pulls men towards sin: “[...] but, where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more” (Romans 5,20). The disintegrating tension of gravity is a corrosive and obscuring extremity, the limit of creation: the downside of the edge of reality. Natural beings, i.e., formed forms, are the result of the manifestation of divinity and of the action of gravity; in other words, the result of the necessary action of grace that restrains and guards the powers that oppose the limit. Divine love is a radical relinquishment of power. It creates a space (included in the same divine love) both for the action of gravity, which fosters the unlimited, and for human autonomy, which does not choose humbleness and transcendence.

The existence of the human being in the world, in the natural and social environment, involves an inevitable and continuous encounter with limits. This situation also entails a collision, when limits are perceived as asperities, as in the case of force and affliction, the moments in which becoming shows a catastrophic side. The encounter with limits, through the meaning deriving from themselves and from the hermeneutic activity of the subject, involves a condition of permanent reading of reality. Therefore, *lecture* represents a crucial concept in the thought of Simone Weil and can be associated with the concept of *travail*. If reading is an activity of comprehension of the limits, it can be considered as one aspect of the human intervention in the world. The complementary aspect is represented by labor as a modification in the sphere of limit. However, under a certain respect, reading and labor can be brought to coincidence, because reading corresponds to a working activity within the complex of limits, and because the activity in the

dimension of meaning is a kind of work on the self. Reading is, therefore, an inner hermeneutic work that is reflected in the outer work, i.e., in labor as modification of a section of reality.

In Weil's fragments on reading, it is stated that the starting point for describing the situation of the human being in the world is sensation: "en un sens il ne nous est donné que des sensations" (Weil 1994, 411). Through sensations, the dimension of meaning is produced, and the activity of reading takes place: indeed, "nous pensons seulement quelque chose à travers elles. Nous lisons à travers elles. Que lisons-nous ? Non pas n'importe quoi à notre gré. Non pas, non plus, quelque chose sur quoi nous n'ayons aucun pouvoir" (Weil 1994, 411). The encounter with sensation shows the duplicity of meaning. On the one hand, meaning is independent from the subject because it comes from outside. On the other hand, it is also radically dependent on the subject because it derives from the human encounter with the limits of reality: the work on meaning (or, rather, within the dimension of meaning) is the practice of reading.

Through meaning, sensation is also the way in which the limits of becoming are ingrained in the human soul because, in the encounter with reality, "quelque chose me saisit. C'est ainsi que l'univers me traite et je le reconnais à ce traitement" (Weil 2008, 74). The asperities plunge in the flesh, hence the importance of physical pain and body in the experience of affliction: "le malheur est inséparable de la souffrance physique, et pourtant tout à fait distinct" (Weil 2008, 347); "si la douleur physique est tout à fait absente, il n'y a pas malheur pour l'âme, parce que la pensée se porte vers n'importe quel autre objet" (Weil 2008, 347-348). When sensation prevails with lacerating force, as during wartime or in the alienated labor of the assembly line, physical pain petrifies the thought through the wavering of meaning. This happens when human beings face incomprehensible circumstances that grip the entire human creature; as Weil states, "il n'y a ici-bas que la douleur physique et rien d'autre qui ait la propriété d'enchaîner la pensée" (Weil 2008, 348).

In the extreme case of *malheur*, human being finds himself in a situation in which meaning wavers; on the contrary, when human being encounters limits, but these do not violently dominate him, the dimension of meaning holds and mediates the sensations: "des sensations en elles-mêmes presque indifférentes nous saisissent [...] par leur significations" (Weil 2008, 74). Meaning is the authentic interface between sensation and the human being: as far as the human creature is concerned, "ce n'est pas la sensation, c'est la signification qui a saisi la première, en atteignant l'esprit immédiatement, brutalement, sans sa participation, comme les sensations saisissent" (Weil 2008, 74). The interface lies between the insertion of sensation in the subject and the hermeneutic activity of the subject: "c'est ainsi qu'à chaque instant de notre vie nous sommes saisis comme du dehors par les significations que nous lisons nous-mêmes dans les apparences" (Weil 2008, 74). Meaning grasps the human being from the outside, but the subject reads internally the signifying *quantum*. The reading of meaning is indeed a perpetual activity, since "quant à ne pas lire, c'est impossible" (Weil 2008, 75). The subjective activity, in turn, determines the perception, since "c'est qu'on nomme une illusion des sens

corrigée, c'est une lecture modifiée" (Weil 2008, 75). In a passage, Weil emphasizes the importance of the hermeneutic work of the personal perspective by stating "qu'il ne nous est pas donné des sensations et de significations ; ce que nous lisons nous est seul donné" (Weil 2008, 75).

This oscillation between the pole of sensation and the pole of reading reveals the ancipital nature of meaning. On the one hand, meaning comes from a region of becoming that seems to prevail, sometimes even vigorously, on the reading subject. On the other hand, meaning is determined by an activity of the subject that involves a section of the world<sup>3</sup>. Meaning comes from outside, it is external to the subject and grasps it with force, going so far, in extreme situations, as to deracinate the soul and deform the body; however, meaning is, at the same time, internal to the practice of reading of the subject, which is a necessary action for the human being to exist in the domain of *nécessité*. The importance of the dimension of meaning, moreover, is reflected in the labor as a modification of the world, if one considers that in action "la faute n'est pas dans l'action, c'est une faute de lecture" (Weil 1994, 309), joining reading and labor.

In the activity of reading, of which both the active side and the passive side can be emphasized, the determinate, finite and limited perspective of the human being undergoes a continuous alternation of meanings. "Mais toute notre vie est faite du même tissu, de significations qui s'imposent successivement, et donc chacune, lorsqu'elle apparaît et entre en nous par les sens, réduit toutes les idées qui pourraient s'y opposer à l'état de fantômes" (Weil 2008, 78). From the continuous *Mobilmachung*<sup>4</sup> of meanings, it is possible to state that the world appears both absent, because it is subjected to a kaleidoscopic fluctuation bordering on the phantasmal, and present, insofar as it is charged with a constraining or questioning power over the subject. The whirl of meanings presses vortically upon the human soul, causing a bewilderment that anticipates the deracination of meaning inherent to *malheur*: "ainsi les significations, qui examinées abstraitement sembleraient de simples pensées, surgissent de toutes parts autour de moi, s'emparent de mon âme et la modifient de moment en moment, de sorte que, pour traduire une locution anglaise familière, je ne peux pas dire que mon âme est à moi. Je crois ce que je lis, mes jugements sont ce que je lis, j'agis d'après ce que je lis, comment agirais-je autrement ?" (Weil 2008, 77). The swirling of meanings calls into question both the status of the level of reality from which they originate, and the identity of a soul forced to actively read such meanings.

According to Weil, the subject can act in the region of meaning constituting the background of its actions. Weil affirms that "je possède aussi peut-être un pouvoir de changer les significations que je lis dans les apparences et qui

3 "Lire, c'est donc produire et subir une action qui est à même d'opérer une modification brusque" (Vogel 2010, 204).

4 As far as this concept in Ernst Junger's thought is concerned, see Jünger 2015a; Jünger 2015b. For a comparison on the concept of work between Simone Weil and Ernst Jünger, see Taïbi 2009; Dall'Igna 2023.



s'imposent à moi ; mais ce pouvoir aussi est limité, indirect et s'exerce par un travail" (Weil 2008, 78) and "l'action sur soi-même, l'action sur autrui consistent à transformer les significations" (Weil 2008, 78). As much as the background of meaning presses and prevails on the human being, the depth and the extent of reading can be regulated by the subject through an operation that Weil calls labor. Reading can be considered as a grasp of a portion of meaning according to a personal perspective, a grasp corresponding to a choice at the level of experience. The inner work of interpretation and research into meaning and the outer work of modification of the limits of reality, i.e., the labor, correspond to each other.

Reading, being related to the determinate perspective of every being, is generally situated between personal and impersonal. However, since it is impaired by determination, reading is a condition for the affirmation of the personal because, however in-depth the reading of a subject may be, it is not radically bound to divine love, it is not open to verticality, but tends to unfold its articulation on the horizontal level of a becoming that is considered non-subordinate and non-compliant to divinity. Only when, through the inner work of humbleness, reading recognizes the 'human' faculty of supernatural love and binds firmly, effectively and authentically to divinity, *lecture* turns into *non-lecture*, a concept that, in Weil's vocabulary, indicates the concentration and disappearance of reading, and the fulfillment of divine love within the human being.

The work of reading is a continuous work on the self, from which the outer work descends. Reading, although confined to horizontality, can attempt an in-depth analysis of a portion of meaning or read numerous meanings, so as to prepare a possibility of ascent. On the one hand, determinate reading is enclosed into a personal perspective that does not realize the impersonal. On the other hand, an effectively in-depth and consciously extended reading opposes the dispersion of gravity: "*lecture et pesanteur. Mélange des deux : vertige*" (Weil 1997, 274). An amended reading can be considered as a mystagogic moment, since "*cette lecture va contre la pensanteur, est surnaturelle*" (Weil 1997, 391).

Therefore, it is possible to state that *lecture* and the corresponding labor, as imperfect attempts to translate the impersonal divine – since their realization is achieved in the mystical moment of *non-lecture* – represent metaphysical situations of human beings in which the subject is animated by a divine desire, but this desire is not yet fully and consciously realized. The subject tries to stop the becoming of meanings and to affect the *nécessité* through the path opened by the meaning that he tries to grasp in a determinate and personal way. In individual attempts, a divine desire is expressed, but it is diverted and deformed by the fatal influence of *determinatio*. In this case, the human being stands in divine grace, but does not fully access it. His existence in the world is still inauthentic. In the extreme case of *non-lecture*, which provides for a conscious deracination of the structure of meaning through the acceptance of affliction, desire is fulfilled in divine love, an authentic access to grace is guaranteed by the conscious submission of the human to the divine, and the subject's authentic position in the world is correctly placed on its position within the horizon of grace.

### 3. Cross and labor

1. Thus, inner and outer work, as a reading of reality, enable a more or less conscious and thorough compliance with the order of the world, with the becoming of *nécessité*: “le travail est le consentement à l’ordre de l’univers” (Weil 2006, 388). Manual labor is the connection between man and world: it enables him to situate himself in space and, in particular, to experience the temporal variable, “*le temps qui entre dans le corps*” (Weil 1997, 62). Through the labor it is possible to read and interact with the dimension of meaning: it is possible to “sentir en tout soi-même l’existence du monde” (Weil 1994, 79).

Especially in the speculation prior to the period of mystical intensification, work activity is considered by Weil in a positive sense (because it allows to affirm the essence of the human being) and the factory can be experienced as a community complex of workers and machines – in the case of labor not marked by alienation (see e.g. Weil 1991, 289-307), a labor “qu’il soit régulier et inexorable. Mais varié, comme les jours et les saisons” (Weil 1997, 62). In *La personne et le sacré* it is stated that

le travail physique, bien qu’il soit une peine, n’est pas par lui-même une dégradation. Il n’est pas de l’art ; il n’est pas de la science ; mais il est autre chose qui a une valeur absolument égale à celle de l’art et de la science. [...] Exactement dans la même mesure que l’art et la science, bien que d’une manière différente, le travail physique est un certain contact avec la réalité, la vérité, la beauté de cet univers, et avec la sagesse éternelle qui en constitue l’ordonnance (Weil 2019, 220).

However, this kind of non-alienating labor is still a form of personal reading, the level at which the human being navigates the realm of meaning, perceives the limits of nature, can deepen his knowledge of himself and the world, but does not reach the humility of emptiness and divine impersonality. The situation marked by the sacrifice of the personal perspective and the affirmation of divine love is reached when we are faced with the deprivation of meaning due to the supreme contradiction, the affliction of the Cross.

2. The manifestation of divinity across the different levels of reality is ruled by the idea of the Cross, that is, the gift of divine grace as subtraction of power, as creative descent and as contradictory theophany. The entire universe, as a result of the peculiar creation by subtraction of power, is a kind of crucifixion: “*création : Dieu s’enchaînant par la nécessité*” (Weil 1997, 267). This metaphysical dynamic of affirmation of divine love ends in the death on the cross because, “pour que l’amour soit le plus grand possible, la distance est la plus grande possible” (Weil 2002, 115), and the Cross stands at the furthest distance from divine perfection. However, in a seemingly contradictory way, the very end point of the Cross itself confirms, at the furthest distance, the divine perfection, since the fulfilment of God in the sacrifice of unlimited power is the fulfilment of love and limit: “Dieu n’est parfait que comme Trinité, et l’amour qui constitue la Trinité trouve sa perfection

seulement dans la croix” (Weil 2009, 265). If reality for Weil is constituted by overlapping levels, it is possible to affirm that within the metaphysical space between the Trinity and the Cross – a space of descent dominated by subtraction – a stratification of the crucifixion occurs.

Besides creation, since “l’univers entier dans la totalité de l’espace et du temps a été créé comme la Croix du Christ” (Weil 2009, 290)<sup>5</sup>, also the creatural complex of the human being represents a crucifixion of the divinity in different ways. When the human being complies with the personal in the manner of force, he crucifies God in an unholy practice of autonomy: “nous sommes ce qui est le plus loin à Dieu, à l’extrême distance d’où il ne soit pas absolument impossible de revenir à lui. En notre être Dieu est déchiré. Nous sommes la crucifixion de Dieu. Mon existence crucifie Dieu. [...] La crucifixion de Dieu est une chose éternelle” (Weil 2002, 279). Moreover, the human being is simply crucifixion because with his personal side he adheres to the cosmic curtain marked by gravity, translating into his creature the weight of the diaphragm that separates God from God, and forgetting the task of the *imitatio Crucis*. Such imitation shows the impersonal divine spark, because “on ne perd toute pesanteur que par la croix” (Weil 1997, 421). Furthermore, the human being is Cross on a deeper and more original level: in its impersonal core, i.e., the divine presence of love, the human being is identical to the central point of the Cross as pure grace without power.

3. Labor is capable of harmonizing man and world; however, at the same time, it binds human beings to *nécessité* through the temporal variable, since “celui qui doit travailler tous les jours sent dans son corps que les temps est inexorable” (Weil 1997, 63). In fact, “travailler [est] éprouver le temps et l’espace” (Weil 1997, 63), enduring the limits and asperities of the space-time fabric. In particular, time is the variable that captures the human being, subjecting him to the deadly tension of gravity: “sentiment d’abaissement, inséparable du travail [...] Le temps est la cause de ce sentiment d’abaissement” (Weil 1997, 237). Weil’s criticism to the soul-deracinating and body-deforming labor is not directly aimed at machines, but at the articulation of time which is typical of assembly production: “ce qui abaisse le travail, ce n’est nullement la machine elle-même, c’est le *travail en série*” (Weil 1994, 111-112). In this type of labor, time is fractioned, activity is marked by cadence, and means replace purposes. Cadence, in particular, is an articulation of time different from rhythm. Rhythm complies with the personal perspective of reading, enabling work in the dimension of meaning by recognizing a relationship between means and purposes. Cadence, on the contrary, is an impersonal articulation of time: its fractioning and regularity are not conceived for human beings, and the apparatus that is regulated according to cadence absorbs all determinate purposes into itself, standing as the supreme means. In addition to cadence, alienating labor is defined by the hierarchical structure of the factory: orders from superiors dictate

<sup>5</sup> “C’est le rapport avec l’espace et le temps qui constitue ce déchirement, qui est déjà une sorte de Passion” (Weil 2009, 290). See Sepsi 2017, 205-214.

the cadence from above, through a prevaricating action reminiscent of force, and bind the worker to the factory method, so that “contraindre l’attention à se maintenir constamment sur un geste machinal” (Weil 1994, 81). The deracinating articulation of time and the prevaricating force applied on the worker configure the assembly production as an example of *malheur*, as an image of the Cross.

The method dictating the machine labor is defined as “méthode retirée à l’homme, donnée à la matière (méthode = coordination des mouvements) [...] Une machine, c’est une coordination méthodique entre des mouvements confiée à la matière” (Weil 1994, 134-135). The main problem lies in the relationship between the method of thought and the method of labor (see e.g. Vetö 2014, 158-160; Pratt 1986), considering that method has to be understood as the coordinated development of a movement (“méthode = coordination des mouvements” (Weil 1994, 134)), whether gnoseological or ontological in nature, with reference to the two sides of reading and labor. In the case of translating the method of thought into the method of machine,

dès lors on se trouve en présence d’une situation paradoxale ; à savoir qu’il y a de la méthode dans les mouvements du travail, mais non pas dans la pensée du travailleur. On dirait que la méthode a transféré son siège de l’esprit dans la matière. C’est ce dont les machines automatiques offrent la plus frappante image. Du moment que la pensée qui a élaboré une méthode d’action n’a pas besoin d’intervenir dans l’exécution, on peut confier cette exécution à des morceaux de métal aussi bien et mieux qu’à des membres vivantes ; et on se trouve ainsi devant le spectacle étrange de machines où la méthode s’est si parfaitement cristallisée en métal qu’il semble que ce soit elles qui pensent, et les hommes attachés à leur service qui soient réduits à l’état d’automates (Weil 1991, 79).

The perfection of technology assimilates the human function of thought, transforming the stumbling progress of human reason into a method of thought articulated by perfection.

In order to regain awareness of the rhythm of labor, the method of thought must understand the method of labor, and subordinate the use of means to the knowledge of the purposes: such a situation of restoration of rhythm against the cadence does not place the human being outside the personal reading. In this case, the personal perspective can also encompass the labor horizon in depth and to such an extent as to encompass the entire dimension of the factory; however, the understanding of the means-purposes relationship does not reach the question of the supreme purpose, and the perspective develops on the level of a personal and determinate horizontality, not bound to the impersonal verticality of divine love.

On the other hand, it is possible to use alienating labor as an opportunity to accept affliction as a manifestation of divine grace in the form of the Cross. Alienating labor subtracts meaning with the power of means, confronting the human being with the progression of the *lecture* at the culmination of *non-lecture*. By accepting the deracinating cadence with humbleness and submission, the temporal horizon is revealed as a salvific margin of waiting for divine grace. *Consciously* accepting (therefore eliminating the influence of *determinatio* over intellect and will, and

choosing to anchor the soul to divine love) the disappearance of meaning implies the removal of the diaphragm of the mobilizing and distracting movement of meanings, and the surrender to contradiction and impossibility (thus to accept the Cross): “l'impossibilité – l'impossibilité radicale, clairement perçue, l'absurdité – est la porte vers le surnaturel. On ne peut qu'y frapper. C'est un autre qui ouvre” (Weil 2002, 98), indicating the action of the *gratia gratum faciens* which intervenes to ultimately confirm the inner human work of humbleness. In this way, the human impersonal is perfectly integrated with the impersonal articulation of divinity, which implies the subtraction of power and the realization of the Good in the affliction of the Cross. From the human perspective, the personal and horizontal connotation is abandoned to translate the vertical impersonality of grace: “il s'agit de déraciner les lectures, de les changer, pour parvenir à la non-lecture” (Weil 1997, 436). The human being remains a perspective on and of Truth, but it is a perspective that, with the sacrifice of the personal component, perfectly translates the impersonal divine.

From a metaphysical point of view, affliction itself is described as an impersonal mechanism, a method endowed with a non-human cadence that, while deracinating the human being, offers a *magna occasio* of knowledge and experience of the divine. Affliction is part of the divine technique of the impersonal descent: “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” (Weil 2008, 359).

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