



Force in Simone Weil (1909 – 1943)

Sandra Lehmann
University of Vienna

Force plays a key role in Simone Weil's understanding of both human life and nature. Regarding nature Weil combines a mechanistic approach and a classical Greek view of the world as a cosmos, i.e., arranged in harmonious order. Thus, on the one hand, nature is determined by blind forces. On the other, under the dictates of necessity, the blind forces add up to a coherent whole. Nature thus demonstrates its obedience to God as its Creator. Herein also lies nature's beauty (1959: 128-129).

Like all material things, human beings are subject to the forces of nature. What sets them apart, however, is their specific relationship with God and with themselves. There is a fundamental desire of the human soul for the supernatural Good, or God. This desire for the supernatural has a natural counterpart, which is the will to assert one's own mundane existence. Again, Weil describes this as a tension of forces. They are spiritual in kind, yet they have their analogy in the forces of nature. In *Gravity and Grace*, Weil distinguishes between two main forces, light and gravity (2002: 1).

Weil regards gravity as the force of mundane existence or force proper. It drags humans down to their selfish interest in themselves. Light, by contrast, or rather grace on the spiritual level, is the supernatural force. It permeates the cosmos, manifesting itself also in the human desire for God, which in fact is God's love for Godself (1959: 133). The Weilian light is a consuming light. It devours the self so that God may be. It is the light of decreation, the dismantling of all we are in earthly life.

In *The Iliad or the Poem of Force*, Weil discusses force from a slightly different angle. In this context, it appears to be the violence inflicted on humans, which they endure with fateful necessity. The actual horror of force lies in its dehumanizing power. Force turns anybody into a thing (1991: 3). This, however, does not only affect those who suffer, but also those who commit acts of violence. All human beings are likewise subject to reifying force. It is only when they understand this that authentic love and justice are possible (1991: 34).

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