

Review

Some reflections on Simone Weil's Mystical Response to Beckett's Absurdism

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Nihilism as appropriated in existentialist-absurdist thought appears as a stubborn problem and consequent absurdism of such writers as Beckett follows which is a very unsatisfactory position from a philosophical or metaphysical viewpoint. Mysticism as articulated in such writers as Simone Weil offers an alternative approach to tackle the problem of nihilism and critique existentialist thought and its appropriation for absurdist response. The present paper, building on the works of Simone Weil, presents the version of religion that appropriates absurdist challenge in a novel manner. Her metaphysical/mystical reading of Christianity is largely immune to existentialist-absurdist critiques as she does not invoke problematic conceptions of divinity, hope, consolation and soul or self that have been criticized by absurdist like Beckett.

Key words: Nihilism, transcendence, attention, perennialism, absurdism.

INTRODUCTION

Beckett's extremely influential *Waiting for Godot* has been much heard and commented upon but there has been paid only relatively little attention to another master piece *Waiting on God* by his contemporary which challenges and moves beyond the impasse in Beckettian depressing or nihilistic work. Simone Weil, one of the most significant names in the history of modern mysticism and mystical philosophy, has dealt with the unique problems that modern man faces vis-à-vis his faith. Weil encounters similar problems that occupy absurdist writers but her response and conclusions are very different. In this paper it is proposed to compare and contrast Beckett and Weil to show how transcendence as it figures in Weil's mysticism dissolves the problems associated with nihilism in modern thought that plague Beckett's depressing work. Robert Cohen has read *Godot* as a "dramatic companion-piece" to Simone Weil's *Waiting for God*, without, however, the postulation of

faith. Both situations are set upon the site of the crucifixion where, in Simone Weil's belief, man was farthest from God. Salvation is possible only through extreme affliction. But if Weil shows and not merely believes in the eventual coming of God, Beckett gives no answer. Where Beckett ultimately depresses Weil shows grace ultimately irresistible by man leading him to the other shore where time's reign is no more. Nihilism is overcome successfully in Weil but unconvincingly in Beckett's works. This work proceeds by brief introductory and critical remarks on Beckett while proceeding to show Weil's interventions along the way.

Beckett's Nihilism

Beckett darkens more than illuminates the problems and dilemmas man faces. Obsessed with the failure he loses

sight of the great vision that more adventurous explorers of consciousness called mystics have unearthed though starting from his assumptions and adopting thoroughgoing empiricism. He presents a worldview that must be interrogated for its grand claims regarding grand failures of man. It is existence that victimizes Beckett's characters and thus nothing can be done against its absurdity and injustice. Against this the mystics discover life as a festival of lights, a perpetual wonder, an expression of the great Beauty, something for which the giver of life needs to be praised and man needs to be eternally thankful. Developing a new way of perceiving life, a new method of tapping the fountains of joy that lie concealed in it, a reorientation of our habitual or ordinary modes of reacting and responding to the world, a changed attitude towards the revelations of experience, sharpening of our intelligence and strengthening of character, mysticism offers something that all those interested in life and its glories and joys and its mystery and wonder need to seriously consider, especially at the time when man finds himself defenceless against the corrosive effects of nihilism that modern thought has brought into the world through its questioning of traditional philosophy and religion. There is no such thing as ennui, boredom, frustration, alienation, no asylum, no schizophrenia, no crippled, maimed,* shocked, people and sighs and tears in the mystic's view because they have got access to the *rasa*, the juice of life. One powerful presentation of the mystical viewpoint that takes care of key claims that Beckett buttresses and uses quite similar language is in Simone Weil.

Beckett darkens more than illuminates the problems and dilemmas man faces. Beckett is obsessed with the failure. Weil would ask him not to lose sight of the great vision that more adventurous explorers of consciousness called mystics have unearthed though starting from his assumptions and adopting thoroughgoing empiricism.

On the one hand, we have the unanimous verdict of prophets and sages that God or Truth or Self is knowable, the real is knowable, there is an end to sorrow, time is conquerable, nothing really decays (all things in God are ever there), life ever moves while as for Beckett all these assertions are questionable, on the other hand. According to traditionalists with whom we can largely identify Weil God has always spoken to men in all climes and all places and traditional man had no difficulty in communicating with heaven and accordingly in giving meaning to life. It is modern man's misfortune that he has chosen not to heed to God and it is only God who can save him as Heidegger maintained.

Hardly any of Beckett's characters is heartily reconciled to the world or finds peace and joy. Love of God is understandable as the love of life. This love of life is not the message of Beckett. The mystic goes on despite all the tragedies and pains that life offers. And he goes on serenely. There is no such thing as frustration, resentment, anger, lamentation. He has discovered the

art of detachment from the sound and fury of the world. Beckett's characters do not move one step above the ground.

Adopting God's perspective

Simone Weil in her philosophical essays on "Human Personality" and "Decreation" has hit at the core of what we may identify as an anthropocentric or subject-centric view that believes man to be the measure of all things and judges all things from this narrow self-centric perspective. Her sole objective is to substitute the impersonal for the personal and locate sacred in the former. This has daring consequences as regards appropriating absurdist position that underscores man's inability to find essence or truth or overcome death, temporality and finitude and all the evils and pain that accompanies. It undercuts subject that seeks meaning in phenomena or immortality of psychosocial being or good/truth/essence in the world of manifestation. Weil is explicating the dialectic of absence and presence of God to ultimately wean us away from personality centric worldview often wrongly attributed to theology. Her theology appropriates the insights of mysticism best formulated in other traditions and takes God as the One and Only reality. It sees Him as the Impersonal Ground of Value or Transcendent Good that cannot be located anywhere in the world of phenomena or psyche. Absurdist view is parasitic on rejection of traditional picture of reality centred on God as the Real or Reality and Weil, standing for the rights of the Absolute against that of man (who ordinarily identifies with a narrow view of personality or ego that screens the light of the Impersonal Sacred grounding consciousness/intelligence /knowledge/joy) questions absolutizing certain man-centric view of cosmos. Against humanism that straightway leads to the abyss of nihilism or absurdist position that follows from recognizing limitations or inadequacy of rationalist or sensate epistemology or personalist theology Weil asks for adapting the perspective of God or the non-perspective of supra-individual faculty of intellect (*nous* as distinct from *ratio* or discursive reason). For attaining this perspective one has to die first. One starts from the Absolute and from the perspective of the Absolute man, his free will, his dreams, his autonomy, present as anomalies, as a state of disequilibrium. If individual is engulfed in the Absolute as critics of perennialists point out or as existentialists argue against Unitarianism (as distinguished from philosophical monism), it is something for which nothing can be done. If we are concerned with truth and not sentimentalism there is no escape from the tragic fact that individual or ego does not count in the face of the Absolute. Are we seeking truth as such or truth as it appears to our subjective predispositions, to our heart? God is Truth and man may be in need of

consolation though truth need not be necessarily consoling. From perennialist/Weil's perspective the need for consolation is a weakness and a species of bad faith. We need to be iron-willed, capable of facing utter solitude or Void (*Neant*). It is only the strong man, the superman, who can unconditionally affirm and love fate – a fatalist in this higher sense is a man of strong character – or consent to eternal recurrence. Weil's position converges with Keatsian negative capability, Nietzsche's perspectivism and Jainism's *syadvada* as all these imply openness to infinitely nuanced and multidimensional character of reality or truth.

Mantra of Decreation

Sophocles has famously said that it is best not to be born and the second best is to leave early. To Abul Ala Maari, famous ascetic and blind poet is credited the statement "your being is your greatest sin." Esoterically read, the doctrine of the Fall hints at a similar point. Eastern traditions have concurred with this point. Beckett's oeuvre is to bring this point painfully into focus (and advise ironical contemplation of the same). So what is to be done? Weil's answer is decreation.

To quote her,

Every man, seeing himself from the point of view of God the creator, should regard his own existence as a sacrifice made by God. I am God's abdication. The more I exist, the more God abdicates. So if I take God's side rather than my own. I ought to regard my existence as diminution, a decrease.

As regards myself, I ought to repeat in the opposite sense the abdication of God, I ought to refuse the existence that has been given me, to refuse it because God is good. As regards other people, I ought to imitate God's abdication itself, to consent not to be in order that they may be; and this in spite of the fact that they are bad (Weil, 1970:213).

Here is her insightful theodicy that absolves God of evil and puts finger on creatures. Nothing comparable is found in modern attempts at theodicy.

Adam made us believe that we had being; Christ showed us that we are non-beings.

To teach us that we are non-beings, God made himself non-being.

For God, sacrifice consists in letting a man believe that he has being. For a man, sacrificed consists in recognizing that he is non-being.

God entrusts evil the work of teaching us that we are non-being.

The desire of creatures to be, and their illusion

that they are, stirs up evil; and evil teaches them that they are not. God takes no part in this elementary stage of teaching (Weil, 1970:218).

She makes an observation on hell that expresses the crux of mystical view of it and that puts blame on man. This remark answers all critics of hell who find it morally unjustifiable belief of religions. She says: "Hell consists in perceiving that one doesn't exist and refusing to consent to this fact" (Weil, 1970:218). Beckett has similarly presented one of the most convincing (mystical) pictures ever penned down of fallen man's condition as purgatory or hell and no escaping it because man insists to be, to "claim his own portion." Modern man having chosen to be excluded from the vision of God has placed himself in hell and Beckett masterfully shows the misery of man in hell. He has portrayed purgatory and hell in his works and if we find this depressing it is no fault of Beckett who has only portrayed the mess and chaos he found around. He shows destitute, crippled, God forsaken man in the midst of hell who is however still expecting grace and not abandoning all hope and thus provides one of the most compelling vindication of religious diagnosis of man's condition, his fallen state and need of grace though this grace is often absent in the world imagined by Beckett. For Weil this state of affairs is attributable to the fact that man does not know how to seek it, how to be worthy recipient of it as he refuses what mystics call self naughting and Weil calls decreation.

Weil's following prayer carries this theme of decreation forward. "Father, since thou art the Good and I am mediocrity, rend this body and soul away from me to make them into things for your use, and let nothing remain of me. Forever, except this rending itself, or else nothingness" (Weil, 1970:244). According to her, our sin consists in wanting to be and our punishment in believing that we exist. Expiation is wanting not to be, and salvation for us consists in seeing that we are not (Weil, 1970:218). When one encounters pain or privation, the subtle mechanism of our autonomy starts to hide it with a consolation. For Weil even belief in the immortality of the soul is a mechanism of filling the void and can be only a sublime consolation devised by our autonomy giving meaning to a phenomenon of which the very essence... is the absence of meaning (Weil, 1956:492). One should stand completely stripped of everything, every mask, every protective mechanism and face the void and absence of all meaning and not encourage the reappearance of supplementary energy by supplying oneself with a new motive. One should suffer without intent on a reward or ultimate goal which all pertains to the realm of time so that one in a way lives always in an eternal present. Weil expresses it thus: "I must not love my suffering because it is useful to me, but because it is" (Weil, 1956:266).

The need for decreation is premised on her view of creation. As such it needs to be discussed.

View of creation

For both Weil and Beckett creation as it appears independent or cut off from transcendence is a sort of abdication of God and bedeviled by evil. Creation is in a state of disequilibrium. It is the fallen world in need of redemption for both of them identifies creation with the world of autonomous beings and creature with autonomous being as appears in *First and Last Notebooks*. "God created because he was good, but the creature itself be created it was evil. It redeemed I by persuading God through endless entreaties to destroy it" (Weil, 1970: 123). Material things, by the presence in them of necessity, are in perfect continuity with God. This continuity will be broken only at the moment when autonomous beings assume an independent, and thus separate existence: it is a crime to be other than God, a crime shared by all those who will use their free will, thereby dissolving the bond Creator-creature (Weil, 1956: 539). "Evil is the distance between the creature and God, and if it disappears, creation itself will disappear also" (Weil, 1956: 342). Creation is anomaly as it involves separation from the Good and thus a sort of sacrifice of God and it is transgression as it involves rights and existence apart from God, claims of fragments to be much more than fragments. As Weil puts it: "'Give me my portion,' that is the original sin. Give me free will, the choice between good and evil.

Is not the gift of free will the creation itself?" (Weil, 1970:211) And further: "God's sacrifice is creation; man's sacrifice is destruction. But man has the right to destroy only what belongs to him; that is to say, not even his body, but solely and exclusively his will" (Weil, 1970:212).

Awareness of Reality as Joy

In mystical perspective God is joy and awareness of God is joy and thus awareness of reality in which all association with the self is put aside. If it is possible to access Reality or God nihilism is overcome. Weil has an ingenious argument to show that awareness of reality is joy and despair or sadness is a loss of contact with reality. This is her expression of old mystical/metaphysical viewpoint which identifies God as *ananda*, bliss. Weil expresses the identity of joy with the awareness of reality. Since beauty is manifest appearance, the striking sign of reality, joy can only be a feeling, an awareness of reality. Weil describes sadness as a loss of contact with reality. Through sadness we cannot fulfill our vacation – to understate misery of our condition and to accept our reduction to what we truly are: nothing. The memory of the revelation of reality through joy keeps us from plunging into despair, and the joy felt in our nothingness can be inscribed in our sensibility only by suffering. "Joy and pain are equally precious gifts both of which must be savoured fully, and

each in its purity..." (Weil, 1951: 132). In Beckett there is nothing of this sort. For him pain may have some positive function of making us aware of reality – Void or Nothing that Self is but joy has no such role. In fact he has little place for any awareness of joy leading to awareness of reality. Encounter with reality is terrifying and Reality is not of the substance of Joy though this statement needs certain qualification as occasionally his characters attain great joy in experiencing a sort of Nirvana.

Weil privileges suffering over joy as the former is more effective in removing the obstruction to our contact with reality. Here Beckett will agree though he has other reasons to believe that it is suffering all the way that constitutes human vacation on earth. Suffering, for Beckett, is not, generally speaking, a means to joy but to the blankness of Nothing. Man needs something painful to shun his complacency in self-forgetfulness. Beauty will not perform this miracle so efficiently. In awareness of the beautiful the self is only forgotten and suspended, whereas in suffering it is tormented until death. It therefore appears that suffering has prominence over joy (Weil, 1956: 222).

View of Time

It is the question of time that forms key to the thought of both Beckett and Weil. Some important theological concepts of Weil revolve around her conception of time. For Beckett time has nothing positive about it. Life in time is suffering, bondage, exile. It is punishment for being born. There is no use of life in time. Time is not the moving image of eternity; it knows no stop. No perfection in virtue, no goodness comes out of living in time. Monotony has nothing to recommend itself. Eternity in Beckett is not the same as in traditional mysticism, it is bad eternity. Monotony is simply a sign of our life in time: "we have been thrown out of eternity, and we must really go through time painfully, minute by minute." Monotony can also be beautiful if it is a reflection of eternity. Nihilism presupposes the world of time is the only world we are condemned to live in. As the world of time is the world of suffering there is not therefore any redemption possible. Weil shows how transcendence breaks through the phenomenal and is accessible always and ever retrievable from the abysses of evil and absurdity. Time crushes and nothing can be done against its rule. We are, as creatures, subject to time and there is no escaping that. Even the Buddha must suffer the pain because he is a creature, living in time. According to Weil it is not possible to escape time and creaturely limitations. No wish to be spared the ravages of time could be granted. We are here to live under the dominion of time so that decreation occurs and we consent to return to God that which is not ours that is, our being, our "I." For Weil no saint can ask God to get time move faster or slower and no miracle can do anything against time

(Weil, 1970:141).

Weil has a time tested mystical mechanism of ending of time called decreation. Decreation, according to Weil, means the “end of time.” There is an eternal and hidden part of soul which has the reservoir of energy “beyond time.” Through it one lives beyond time. Nihilism is overcome by those prepared to live it to hilt by annihilating oneself, by eliminating the seeking self which lives in time and rising above the mind which lives in past and future and never beyond time, in the moment. Cultivating the faculty of undistracted attention and intelligence one breaks through the prison of time. Weil is convinced as is Beckett that there is a timeless dimension which is our home. However for Beckett this timeless world, this Self that transcends the phenomenal world is not easily accessible or not accessible without great agony. Difficulty of salvation is a perennial theme of religious traditions. On the issue of difficulty in achieving salvation, Beckett and Weil agree. However, they differ in providing the pictures of salvation. In Beckett, there is only dubious salvation and it is very difficult to find even one case of complete success in dealing with the forces of destruction or nihilism. If for Weil one is saved in a generation for Beckett even this figure is perhaps exaggeration and there is not a single case that could be characterized as truly liberated, as *jivan mukta* in the Beckettian world. Beckett is not incorrect in lamenting that, generally speaking, to live beyond time is impossible.

Time is self's environment where it pursues its goals of self-expansion. Time is not only the essential element of personal existence; it can also serve as a chosen instrument for transcending it. Time is also the Cross, the weight of necessity making the soul feel how vulnerable and profoundly subject it is to mediation of time. The time shown to be the instrument of expiation (Weil, 1956: 268) is the consequence of original sin; by his disobedience to the will of God, Adam was excluded from eternity and imprisoned in time. As Milkos Veto puts it: “the eternal is reconciled with itself only by time that eliminates itself” (Veto, 1994). To quote Veto further: “The seed of eternity bears fruit in time, according to the “progress,” the flow,” of time. The earth in which this seed is planted is the uncreated part of the soul, but the rain and warmth that make it grow are time. Time is therefore in some way a party to eternity (Veto, 1994). The entire life of the self is directed towards the future because its substratum is supplementary energy, “produced” only by motives whose ends are in the future (or in the past) (Weil, 1956: 184). One should live in the present breaking the ties with the future and the past. Here Heidegger comes to mind who sees life as project into future. Being reduced to the present moment also implies a sinless state, since sin is essentially a claim to mastery over the future, the refusal of future love or suffering, or the refusal to repent of an evil act committed in the past: “If we contemplate ourselves at a specific moment – the present moment,

cut off from past and future – we are innocent... Isolating a moment in this way implies forgiveness. But this isolation is detachment” (Weil, 1956: 216).

Beckett finds circular activity intolerable but Weil does not. Amongst all sorts of movements, circular movement is the most perfect, because it is the spatial image of the motiveless state. If there must be a movement in the world, it must be the nearest possible thing to repose (N: 406). This is the case with circular movement, at the end of which one is precisely at the point of departure; it has no goal, unlike rectilinear movement that only exists with a view to its goal. Movement in a straight line is an image and expression of self-expansion, whereas an action closing back upon itself represents contemplation, which does not touch its object (Weil, 1956: 423). The beauty of circular movement is that it is directed towards nothing (Weil, 1956: 406).

Weil is at her best in showing how one creates the meaning in life by renouncing all personal meanings, by complete acceptance of submission to the order of the world. One loves the order of the world by renouncing all personal interests. This is, in practice, close to Spinoza's view of love of God by renouncing every vestige of personal interest. Freedom lies in recognizing our utter dependence on Totality, on God and in fact giving up sense of illusory autonomy or freedom that we associate with a separate individuality. We are not asked to do something against which our heart or head rebels but just shifting the perception in accordance with the nature of things. 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. “Where there is complete, authentic, and unconditioned consent to necessity, there is the fullness of love of God” (Weil, 1956: 267). Other texts identify the supernatural faculty in us as consent. For Weil that consent is always consent to the good, and, as such, it is the good itself. Faith is itself this faculty of submission or consent according to her. Absurdism rejects this notion of consent as a species of bad faith. Affirming the principle of autonomy and freedom in man independent of God it cannot but reject consent and consequently suffer alienation, angst and all those things with which absurdist literature is suffused.

We see a beautiful understanding of flesh in Weil. For Weil the search for pleasure is only a pretext to avoid meeting with God. “The soul, incapable of tolerating that lethal presence of God, that burning presence, hides behind flesh, uses flesh as a screen. In this case, it is not the flesh that causes God to be forgotten; it is the soul that seeks in flesh forgetfulness of God that hides there” (Weil, 1951: 92-3). The lethal presence of God is what

Beckett's characters resent. It means man is no more in the blinding light of God. Man cannot see God and live, as the mystics would say. Encounter with God is lethal in two respects: its dazzle is blinding and it annihilates all that man loves so dearly, his self or identity.

God as Attention without Distraction

Absurdist view is based on a particular construction of theological notions which are then questioned on various grounds but then this strategy leads to nihilism as God, the ground of values and meaning, is written off. In contrast to this mystics emphasize methods that actualize divine presence for us. One invites God, so to say. And one perceives even absence of God as mercy as Weil says. All traditions emphasize remembrance of God as a means of inviting Him. Modern mystic such as Krishnamurti translates it as attention or choiceless awareness. Weil has a similar understanding. Attention bridges division of subject and object, knower and known. Attention consists in suspending thought, in making it available, empty, penetrable by the object...Thought must be empty, waiting, not searching for anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object which will penetrate there (Weil, 1951: 92-3). For her God is attention without distraction. It is living as a witness, a detached subject or awareness that watches every moment, that lives in the present by transcending thinking which distracts one from the given, the present. Living beyond the mind, in what has been called as the space of no-mind where time does not enter and thus neither fear nor hope nor any need of consolation. God is what is in Krishnamurti's phrase and to live in God is to be aware of what is without judgment, without condemnation, disinterestedly.

Giving up the centre of one's own value system is harder, but when we succeed, the very sensibility changes and we become capable of a new way of seeing. We are able to "empty ourselves of little false divinity, deny oneself, to renounce being at the centre of the world, to discern all the points of the world as being centers in the same title and the veritable centre as being outside the world." For Weil God is "attention without distraction." Just to look and not judge, to transcend the subject and dissolve into the object. This constitutes true surrender and submission demanded by traditions.

VIEW OF RELATIONSHIPS

In Beckett such important values of life as love and friendship are caricatured. There are two kinds of friendship, one which the world views as reciprocal relationship between two egos, two persons with mutual complementary interests. This friendship does not involve that love which is born of self-denial or transcendence of

ego and all its concomitants. This friendship is hurt when other party does not take enough care for other's dignity, self-respect, etiquettes. This is friendship not in God but outside God. This friendship is laughed away by Beckett and Weil. Beckett's caricatures of friendship are well known which however also reveal his cynicism as he is quite suspicious of love and its transforming power. Weil gives metaphysical reasons why friendship based on social expedients without being rooted in love of God, love of the One who is in my neighbor and in every "other" is not something to be cherished. Friendship "represents a false movement of the spirit from within to without" and is a "social expedient like upholstery or the distribution of garbage buckets."

If we compare Weil with Camus and Beckett we can well understand what precisely differentiates mystical from non-mystical responses to apparent absence of God, opaqueness or density, ravages of time and absurdity of the world. The facts are similar for all three. But the responses of Weil and Camus/Beckett are equally irrational or based on faith. Love and compassion towards other humans is the response of both of them. Personal God who takes care of our aspirations, our dreams and our wishes is absent from the world. God is not a party at all in the problem. He can't be libeled. For all practical purposes we see no reference to God as person in Weil. God is already dead for absurdists. And both face the problem of crushing weight of evil. Both squarely encounter the absurd and both preach the gospel of love (Sartre has hardly any space for love). But the crucial difference is that absurdists do not love the order of the world and this in turn creates hostility against the impersonal forces that brought him into existence. He sees no use for evil. For him it is all gratuitous. There is no soul-making involved. In fact there is only a certain kind of soul destroying involved in our encounter with the inhuman world. In either Camus or Beckett there is hardly any such thing as the Platonic Good or desire for the same which is such a dominating impulse in Weil. Absurdist feel that there is no cure for this exile and no grace to lift the weight of the world.

Weil argues that one shouldn't desire particular things or pray for particular things because that is slavery. Her argument practically converges with the formula of *amor fati* and loving everything as if there is eternal recurrence. This alone ensures unconditional love. Total renunciation is demanded for loving the order of the world or affirming everything unconditionally. To quote her:

Nothing can be produced unless the conditions for its production are brought together.

Such and such a thing calls for such and such a condition. But if one thinks: everything can be produced, given the conditions, and everything is equivalent...

If one desires a particular thing one becomes enslaved to the series of conditions. But if one

desires the series itself, the satisfaction of this desire is unconditioned.

That is why the one and only liberation is love of the order of the world.

Christ on the cross, the greatest harm inflicted on the greatest good [can anything be more absurd and more revolting]: if one loves that, one loves the order of the world (Weil, 1970:143-144).

Nietzsche suggests a similar way of overcoming nihilism. Affirming the order of the world, praying for nothing, or letting one consent to the order of the world, freedom from the self that seeks consolation and this or that thing – these are the strategies common to Weil and Nietzsche. Beckett, like Camus, finds the order of the world which allows much suffering and evil incomprehensible and even contemptible. And this contributes to unyielding despair that we find in them and in modernity as Russell has noted.

There is no room for the tragedy of unfulfilled intentions in Weil. There are no desires for particular things and thus there is not any need or expectation of fulfillment. Hardy's thesis of tragedy of unfulfilled intentions appears naïve sentimentalism in comparison with it. The absurdist's lament that individual's welfare is no concern of universe too is a species of anthropocentric sentimentalism. The universe is indifferent to man as an ego which is all delusion but not to his real welfare. The universe has ample mechanisms to force people to find God in which all questions – most of the questions and problems that trouble our absurdist – are dissolved and all worries about welfare and suffering settled for good. The following quotation answers fundamental questions that absurdist ask regarding how one cures exile and justifies the order of the world which involves so much suffering.

When once all my desire is directed towards the good, what other good have I to expect? I now possess all the good. That is what it is to possess all the good. How absurd to imagine any other happiness!

For the privilege of finding myself before I die in a state perfectly similar to Christ's when he said, on the cross: "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" for that privilege I would willingly renounce everything that is called Paradise.

Because all his desire is perfectly directed towards God, and therefore he perfectly possessed God.

He was enduring almost infernal suffering, but what does that detail matter (Weil, 1970:157).

The Christ's 'thy will be done' involves utter destruction of human will. Weil's favourite prayer from the Bible had the

clause 'thy will be done.' There is no will to will this way or that way. That kills the absurd. Camus too kills the absurd when he talks of unconditional love of what is. But inconsistently he is bent on keeping the absurd alive. Absurd arises when our will can't consent to do the cosmic will or divine will. Man has only two choices – to affirm his will, his autonomy or to affirm divine or cosmic will and his creatureliness, his nothingness. The first choice pits him against God and against cosmos and leads him to wail and despair for that which is thwarted, which is not honored in the scheme of things. When one renounces free will and thus choice between good and evil one no longer wishes good against evil to be done to him. Everything is justified because both good and evil are really one. (This relativist understanding of good and evil is to be distinguished from that supreme value which Plato calls Good which stands above all relative distinctions.) Camus finds Christianity based on great injustice as an innocent lamb was sacrificed. Weil leaves no scope for any such reading. We too are asked to consent to die, to be crucified, to love God in utter desolation of the Spirit when He seems absent as He was when the Christ cried. The only injustice enters in the world with man claiming his portion and affirms his separation or autonomy. Will has been unjustly taken; creation is in utter disequilibrium because of its separation from God. Justice could be done only through apocatastasis. To quote Weil:

In what sense did Christ make expiation for humanity? To expiate is to restore what one has unjustly taken. Humanity stole free will, the choice between good and evil. Christ gave it back, by learning obedience. To be born is to participate in Christ's restitution. But we are only saved by this participation if we consent to it. Salvation is consent to die (Weil, 1970:212).

The drama of birth and death, approached from Weil's Christian perspective, is perfectly understandable and there is nothing absurd in it unless we posit absurd before creation in the Principle itself. To call Existence or Brahman or Totality or What Is as absurd is, however, unwarranted as Pallis has argued in his *A Buddhist Spectrum*. For Weil man's tragedy follows from his own transgression and it is for him to expiate and win redemption. As Weil says: "Birth involves us in the original sin, death redeems us from it. The Cross of Christ, as the perfect model of death, death in itself in Plato's sense, has redeemed us all. But if we consent to being born and not to dying, we personally commit the sin of Adam, to our destruction" (Weil, 1970: 212).

MEANING OF PROVIDENCE AND LOVE

Nothing is gratuitous and nothing is meaningless and

nothing is out of God's control, care and mercy in God-centric view though nothing is respectful of human egoism which wants things according to the self's desire. Not a sparrow falls except by the writ of providence. There is no role for chance. God is equally present everywhere, in all circumstances. Even rain drops fall in a measured quantity and angel accompanies every drop. This is the conviction of all religions, even those who have no personal God to look into the affairs of the world. However these statements are best understood by those who are familiar with the strange language of God. One can approach such statements not as cognitive verifiable statements that positivist or empiricist could handle but only by being within a "form of life" and mastering the rules and conventions of the particular game. Despite the fact that God is "absent" for Weil there is providence, the mystery of which is not decipherable to the uninitiated, to those profane inquirers who refuse to be annihilated in God and insist on seeing things outside God. The following account is irrefutable on its own terms by outsiders.

All the events of life, whatever they may be, without exception, are by conventions or signs of God. God establishes a conventional language with his friends. Every event in life is a word of this language. These words are all synonymous but, as happens in beautiful languages, each of them has its completely specific nuance, each of them is untranslatable. The meaning common to all these words is: I love you.

A man drinks a glass of water. The water is God's "I love you." He is two days in the desert without finding anything to drink. The dryness in his throat is God's "I love you" ... Those who are beginning to learn this language think that only some of its words mean "I love you." Those who know the language know that it has only one meaning (Weil, 1970:128-129).

Here we notice the huge gulf between Weil and Beckett. For Beckett there is no such thing as 'I love you' and nothing like 'God loves us.' There is no providence except perhaps in some negative sense that every experience in the world of time goads one to the ultimate futility of pinning hope in this world and making one to turn inwards. All experiences are calculated to prove to man that he is nothing and thus be nothing. All experiences are outside God and thus meaningless and productive of pain.

There is no providence that pertains to our created nature which itself is a result of injustice because by definition it tends to be autonomous and in opposition to the whole, the totality that the term God designates. To be born is indeed sin according to both Christian and Eastern traditions because it involves separation from the ground and thus a kind of fall (Redemption consists in

according to Weil of consenting to return to God what is His, i.e. our very being or existence. Metaphysically our being is a non-being and God alone is truly real and the illusory dream of separate existence must be given up and this constitutes salvation). Providence has, as in Beckett, only a negative meaning, of ensuring decreation so that the dust returns to dust and the uncreated Spirit comes to its own glory. Because creation is abandonment it necessarily implies subjection to necessity and thus, in a sense, absence of providence in the usually accepted sense of the term.

God abandons our whole entire being – flesh, blood, sensibility, intelligence, love – to the pitiless necessity of matter and the cruelty of the devil, except for the eternal and supernatural part of the soul.

The Creation is abandonment. In creating what is other than Himself, God necessarily abandoned it. He only keeps under His care the part of Creation which is Himself – the uncreated part of every creature. That is the Life, the Light, the Word..." (Weil, 1970: 103).

One does not ask of providence to take care of this and that because if one loves the order of the world one transcends it with all its misery. Love is transcendence. It is we who are asked to redeem or justify ourselves in relation to the Totality. Love of the world takes all its pain. Love, in the final analysis, is the one thing needful that solves all problems. Here Rumi comes to mind who says love cures all ills. For Weil it is sufficient if we consent to the order of things. Faith is precisely this demand for loving the world which God has made and found good. Faith is trust in the order of things. It is gratitude towards Existence. It is self effacement before the whole, the Totality, the Tao. It is renunciation of all claims to a separate selfhood over and against the Whole.

Is God Absent?

Weil advocates the love of absent God. This alone would prevent what Camus would call lucidity. God as comforter, as consoler, as dilutor of misery, as refuge is not the absent God, the silent God of Jesus who forsakes him at the cross. "We must continually suspend the work of the imagination filling the void within ourselves (Weil, 1952). "We must not weep so that we may not be comforted" (Weil, 1952). Though Beckett has great love for the world and life like Camus, he primarily is obsessed with irremediable exile and alienation of man. Against this Weil allows for both absurdity and love of the world. If one can consent to the absurd world heartily as defiant ego is killed one can love it.

However, we need to note that God's total absence from the world is what cannot be accepted by religions. God is present in love, in beauty, in compassion, in

countless forms and ways. In fact all religions celebrate the positive divine and that alone justifies the world or gives it meaning. Religions differ in their different emphasis on positive or negative divine. Attributes of God are reflected in the phenomenal world. Weil affirms divine presence in her own characteristic way: "God is absent from the world, except in the existence of this world of those in whom His love is alive. Therefore they ought to be present in the world through compassion. Their compassion is the visible presence of God here below" (Weil, 1970:103). For Beckett also, as Altizer has noted insightfully in his *Descent into Hell*, compassion is the value that redeems everything. Weil and Beckett converge on this point.

God is wherever love is, beauty is, blessedness is and grace is. Seen with the eyes of love, trust and faith everything appears God. God is not the name of a person or entity but the very thingness of a thing, the beauty of beauty, the goodness in the good. As Weil puts it: "God 'not as I love, but as emerald is green. He is 'I love.' And I too, if I were in the state of perfection, would love as emerald is green. I would be an impersonal person (like God)" (Weil, 1970: 129). God speaks these words through all of us who love and more effectively through those who love so intensely and selflessly as to become love. Beckett's problems arise with the positive divine while as traditional mystics have often emphasized this love. What differentiates a *bhakti* mystic or Sufi from Beckett is their capacity to love and it is this love which redeems them. All positive experiences – aesthetic, moral, cognitive are bridges to God-realization. All phenomena reveal the One. All of nature is sign of God. Both within and without God manifests His Reality. In fact "God is Reality" as a chapter of the same title in Nasr's book *The Need for a Sacred Science* argues from the traditional metaphysical perspective.

Weil has expressed God's withdrawal from the world and relative autonomy of the later and consequent "impotence" of God with respect to what she calls Necessity where gravity reigns. She is expressing dramatically what the notion of All-Possibility and God's Infinitude practically implies. She appropriates much disturbing criticism from critics of theodicy in her illuminating rereading of traditional theology.

God himself can't prevent what has happened from having happened. What better proof that the creation is an abdication? What greater abdication of God than is represented by time?

We are abandoned in time. God is not in time
God emptied himself of his divinity and filled us with a false divinity. Let us empty ourselves of it. This act is the purpose of the act by which we were created

At this very moment God, by his creative will, is maintaining me in existence, in order that I may renounce it (Weil, 1970 140).

VIEW OF WAITING

Weil has a beautiful interpretation of the experience of waiting that sharply contrasts with Beckett's. Waiting in Weil's perspective is imitating God and not waiting for God. "Attention without distraction," choiceless awareness, absolute openness to experience, absolute vulnerability, waiting without expectation of anything happening in future, the pure experience of waiting for nothing. Humility is a certain relation of the soul to time. Waiting lacerates ego if it is waiting without any purpose. Contrary to what Beckett would have us believe waiting is key virtue that has great role to play in life. To quote Weil,

Art is waiting. Inspiration is waiting.

Humility partakes in God's patience. The perfected soul waits for the good in silence, immobility and humility like God's own. Christ nailed on the cross is the perfect image of the Father....

God is attention without distraction.

One must imitate the patience and humility of God (Weil, 1970:141).

CONVERGENCE IN PERSPECTIVES

Similarities are various and profound. Nihilistic diagnosis of human condition as ordinarily it appears caught up in the world of necessity the world of time, of appearances, evil and absurdity. If we take the world of time or creation apart from God the reality then they have similar diagnosis of its illness and similar remedy but while the one sees impossibility of cure for the sickness of existence and suggests some desperate half measures that give man a semblance or illusion of salvation the other asserts ultimate victory for man over himself and over time. They have no use for personality; it is *the* obstruction to our meeting the Beloved. Both are as far as possible from humanistic individualism, perfectionism, anthropocentrism, utopianism, rationalism, scientism, progressivism and the like. Both assert difficulty of salvation and pervasive power of gravity to drag man back to earth. Both see man and the world as fallen and pin no faith in it. For both our home is elsewhere and our destiny something very different than all this-worldly philosophies suggest. For both God is absent though so near at the same time. For both action doesn't save and man lives and dies alone. No human effort will carry man to the end that he seeks. Both laugh away man's stubborn will to live, will to be as an ego seeking and desiring this or that thing. Outside God man is in hell or purgatory. Life lived without transcendence is terrible weight. All the dreams, hopes, aspirations are vain. Both share the judgment of the author of Ecclesiastes "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." There is no providence which looks after individual's affair. Individuality is the one thing

that brings about suffering and that suffering crushes. Suffering is there for Beckett for no use though he hints that it is there to goad us to our true destiny, true home which exists in another dimension, in timelessness.

Weil squarely encounters limit situations in which Beckett was interested. She too has no faith in action or deed seeing it leading to bondage. *Jnana yoga* or *irfan* or *via contemplativa* does away with action. A mystic delights in no-action, in choiceless awareness. The mystic in Weil sees no "other" to complain to, to possess, to dominate or to conquer and then to suffer or make others suffer. She is as resigned as a tree or a stream. She does not desire to be. And that means she cannot suffer nausea or *angst*. Beckett's ironic vision calling for suspension of belief, laughter at the face of the incongruous elements of experience is also a kind of therapy against nausea or counsel for suicide.

Divergences in perspectives

However, despite profound similarities, there are more profound differences which arise from positive appropriation of transcendence in Weil. Weil asserts, in contrast to Beckett, that we have access to God/Eternity/Self/Grace. Suffering is not gratuitous. It is God's lasso to goad soul to perfection. There is providence but that has to be understood not with respects to individual's welfare because the idea of individuality or personality is delusion. The world of manifestation has to be approached through the knowledge of symbolism to access the Good. The universe is a theophany. Weil is a true Platonist whereas Beckett criticizes almost every Platonic postulate. She qualifies as a mystic while as Beckett is far from being a mystic though he could be said to be a mystic in the making. She has role for sciences especially mathematics while as Beckett has no such faith in sciences. Beckett is an absurdist while as Weil is a philosopher and a mystic in the Christian mould. Beckett negates and negates but Weil in the end affirms everything. While Weil celebrates love and beauty as efficacious means to the supreme end of beatific vision Beckett has little faith in anything in the world. It is not clear if Beckett's ontology has the room for the supernatural part of the soul that isn't affected by evil or time. There is vague groping approximation to such an ideal but most of his characters are not seeking to cultivate this uncreated timeless entity; they are hardly conscious of such a thing. Almost all the works portray the dark night of the soul and there are few hints that this night is over in few cases. Beckett's art is about our failure to be mystics, our failure to find the essences. If there is an uncreate part of soul of which mystics like Eckhart have spoken a great deal Beckett's anxiety gets liquidated. We need to also note that time's providential functions are appreciated in traditions so it too is not vilified. The soul-making endeavour is possible through

the corrosive action of time. Time exposes the fillers of void that imagination contrives in order to escape confrontation with nothingness.

Conclusion

It is clear from the above observations that though there are important points of convergence between Beckett and Weil they ultimately differ and these differences result from their different understanding of what Stace calls positive divine. According to Beckett it is existence that victimizes man and thus nothing can be done against its absurdity and injustice. Against this, Weil, in line with the world fraternity of mystics, discovers life as a festival of lights, a perpetual wonder, an expression of the great Beauty, something for which the giver of life needs to be praised and man needs to be eternally thankful. Developing a new way of perceiving life, a new method of tapping the founts of joy that lie concealed in it, a reorientation of our habitual or ordinary modes of reacting and responding to the world, a changed attitude towards the revelations of experience, sharpening of our intelligence and strengthening of character, mysticism that Weil upholds offers something that all those interested in life and its glories and joys and its mystery and wonder need to seriously consider, especially at the time when man finds himself defenceless against the corrosive effects of nihilism that modern thought has brought into the world through its questioning of traditional philosophy and religion. There is no such thing as ennui, boredom, frustration, alienation, no asylum, no schizophrenia, no crippled, maimed, shocked, people and sighs and tears in the mystic's view because they have got access to the *rasa*, the juice of life. Both Beckett and Weil are more or less mystical thinkers but Beckett's reading of it is influenced by certain currents of thought which run counter to millennial intuitions of mystics of different traditions. Beckett is essentially a modern thinker who finds it hard to wish away the presence of other dimension that modern secularity rejects. However, he foregrounds the negative vision of mysticism which taken in isolation is distortion of different traditions of mysticism. Approaching mysticism from more or less secularist viewpoint which rejects positive acceptance and value of transcendence amounts to caricature of the former. Mysticism does not reject the phenomenal and all that stands for affirmation of positive values of life though initially it advocates ascetic discipline of detachment so as to wean man away from the lower self that obstructs his perception of larger rhythms and beauties of life. Asceticism is a means and not an end and it is even dispensable as in Tantra and certain other traditions. Beckett could better be called an ascetic and a cynic than a mystic. Weil takes full cognizance of the negative divine or absence of God from the world – absurdity and evil in all its terrifying forms – and this makes her so

relevant to contemporary experience which is suffused by these negative experiences. One can proceed beyond the Beckettian impasse through some sort of mysticism that Weil advocates. Beckett is an artist of failure and Weil is a mystic who finds in the abyss of absurdity, evil, gravity, time that which redeems the world. We cannot move forward with the vision that concludes with 'perhaps' and that finds it hard to go on in allegedly incomprehensible hostile world. One feels as if Beckett does only the first part of the job of the mystic which includes turning away from the illusory world of ego and desire. He sees *Maya* as *Maya* and abandons all hope of finding salvation in the world of time and space. He recognizes the necessity of non attachment, of *fana*, so to say. But he does not reach the other shore of nirvana or heaven and the Bliss Unspeakable that is only in the Infinite. Language gives no access to thing in itself or reality, to transcendence. No Beckettian hero or character is able to attain his essence or identity as access to reality is denied to thought. But the tragedy is that the demand for truth is the very *raison d'être* of man. Man is willy nilly a metaphysical animal. He is made for the Absolute and to know the Absolute as perennialists like Schuon would assert. He lives by it. But for Beckett the demand for truth becomes the more urgent the more clearly it appears incapable of fulfillment. It grows with the effort that wants to disprove it. Thus Beckett, with illusion of an arrival, at the same time destroys that other 'illusion' that the vain quest can end. He lacked that faith, that vision and that light of which mystics speak. We are condemned to be some sort of believing, trusting attitude that characterizes mystics if we are not to commit suicide. Camus and Beckett and all those who find life meaningless but continue to believe in some meaning that justifies their will to go on and not returning the ticket of life to God are mystics in a way. Weil shows how to find meaning in meaninglessness and move with "purposiveness without purpose."

Beckett's Godot never comes because life can never cease to unfold its creative possibilities. Life can never arrive; it is an eternity of travel, of the moment. This moment is eternity, eternally creative, eternally vibrant with fresh possibilities. Arrival is in a way death. There is not a full stop to the life of Ever-Living. Men need to arrive, to meet Godot because they have yet to travel within, yet to meet their own selves. For Weil the mystic, there is nowhere to go, no need to go, no need to seek. Men suffer because they don't know how to wait because

they have yet to renounce the self that seeks consolation, that refuses to face the void or nothingness, that seeks its own kingdom in defiance of the truth that there is no self to be sought or strengthened or salvaged from the wrecks of impermanence of all phenomenal things. There is no problem except for those who are problem to themselves, who have yet to know themselves.

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