

From the Banality of Evil to Spiritual Attention: Emancipation from Hatred and Rehumanization

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Abstract: This paper examines hatred and rehumanization through the perspectives of Hannah Arendt and Simone Weil, both of whom were profoundly influenced by 20th-century totalitarianism. Arendt examines hatred through its political and systemic expressions, notably her concept of the banality of evil, which links widespread complicity to thoughtlessness—a failure of critical and empathetic engagement. She presents peace as an active, public state that requires plurality, political action, and ongoing judgment to oppose ideological suppression. Conversely, Weil investigates the metaphysical and spiritual aspects of hatred, viewing it as a "fundamental distortion of the human spirit" connected to the dehumanizing effects of force. Her approach to peace involves inner spiritual liberation achieved through attention (a selfless openness to reality), decreation (the dissolution of the ego), and acceptance of necessity (surrender to universal laws). Together, Arendt's call for vigilant public engagement and Weil's focus on deep inner transformation provide a comprehensive framework for understanding and overcoming hatred, indicating that true rehumanization requires both external political action and profound internal change.

Keywords: totalitarianism, evil, freedom, Hannah Arendt, Simone Weil, rehumanization

Both hatred and peace possess deep and complex philosophical and theological dimensions that extend beyond mere psychological experience. Philosophers broadly approach hatred from two perspectives: one views it as the absence of love, reason,

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and goodness—qualities that foster peace—while the other argues that hatred is a fundamental and active destructive force inherent in human nature. Regardless, both perspectives agree that hatred is a multifaceted phenomenon encompassing ontological, epistemological, ethical, political, and existential aspects of human life.

The three totalitarian regimes and two world wars of the 20th century prompted deep reflection on the nature of hatred and the pursuit of peace. Among many thinkers, Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) and Simone Weil (1909-1943) stand out, as their insights and analyses of hatred both differ and overlap. Arendt primarily examines the political, social, and phenomenological aspects of hatred, whereas Weil focuses on the metaphysical, spiritual, and mystical dimensions of hatred and peace. Together, they offer a nuanced and complex understanding of hatred, which threatens both personal and social freedom and peace. Achieving peace and freedom requires not only political action but also a profound inner transformation and the active cultivation of humanity within oneself and in relationships with others.

Transformation of Human Nature in Totalitarian Regimes

Hannah Arendt, a profound political philosopher of the 20th century, did not approach “hatred” as a primary psychological emotion in the way a psychologist might. For her, hatred is less an individual’s passionate hostility and more about its structural, ideological, and systematic manifestations, present particularly in totalitarian regimes. Her pivotal book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*,² first published in 1951, examines the roots of Stalinism and Nazism, and claims that totalitarianism was “a novel form of government”³ that differs from other forms of political oppression, such as despotism, tyranny and dictatorship. Wherever it rose to power, it developed new political institutions, destroyed all social, legal, and political traditions of the country, transformed classes into masses, supplanted the party systems by a mass

² Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Mariner Books, 1994).

³ Ibid., 460.

movement, shifted the center of power from the army to the police, and established a foreign policy openly toward world domination.

Arendt's reflection is too lengthy and complex to analyze the historical contexts in which totalitarian regimes emerged. Our reflection will focus on totalitarianism as an ideology, including the nature of evil and hatred as deeply embedded within totalitarian regimes. Consequently, we discuss peace and freedom not merely as the absence of war, but as specific conditions of human interaction within a political realm.

Following Arendt's interpretation, totalitarianism tries "to transform the nature of man."⁴ This view differs from August Comte's positivism, rooted in the conviction that, once discovered, some objective laws of power will help us scientifically predict the future. Similarly, modern utilitarianism bases its principles on the objective interest, prioritizing human welfare as the ultimate objective, which becomes the rule that can never fail.⁵ Both positivism and utilitarianism believe that human nature remains constant; what varies is human history, objective circumstances, and human reactions to those, but not human nature, as totalitarianism claims.

The key factor in transforming human nature lies in the superiority of totalitarian propaganda.⁶ This propaganda does not objectively present issues that people might have opinions about; instead, it frames its issues as real and untouchable, not allowing any critical conversation or argumentation. What matters is not conversation or discussion in search of objectivity, but the movement and ongoing flow of new issues of totalitarian propaganda, which covers the fact that their arguments are feeble, weak, and unreliable. With the ongoing flow and growth of totalitarian propaganda, the power of a totalitarian regime grows. The force of this movement keeps the beliefs of the members of the totalitarian movement alive. What is decisive in totalitarian regimes, bolstered by their propaganda, is the consistent assumption that they will eventually achieve their ultimate goal, regardless of how distant it may seem or how many conflicts it may

⁴ Arendt, *The Origins*, 347.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 363.

necessitate. This movement does not limit itself to a specific country but considers every country as a potential territory for its further action.⁷

Arendt provides a thorough analysis of the nature of this movement and its ideological reasoning.⁸ This movement promotes ideologies, i.e., beliefs that everything can be deduced and explained from a single premise, thereby emancipating it from reality and experience. An ideology is literally what its name predicts: the logic of an idea. These beliefs claim to possess a scientific character; they combine the scientific approach with philosophical results of relevance and purport to be a form of scientific philosophy. So, they assume their ideas are the subject matter of a science, equivalent to all other sciences. For example, as animals are the subject matter of zoology, ideologies are the subject matter of a science, which is history, to which its ideas are applied. The result of this application is not a body of statements about something that is, but the unfolding of a process that is in constant change. The ideology treats the course of events as though it followed the same 'law' as the logical exposition of its 'idea.' Consequently, this ideology assumes it knows the mysteries of the entire historical process, encompassing the past, the present, and the future, as dictated by the logic inherent in their respective ideas. They are not interested in the miracle of being or explanations about what is; what concerns them is only the movement of history. When adopting ideological interpretations, we face a tremendous intellectual change in our way of thinking, refusing "to view or accept anything 'as it is' and in the consistent interpretation of everything as being only a stage of some further development."⁹ Ideologies claim to explain all historical events; hence, ideological thinking becomes independent of experiences that do not fit the original idea.

There might be no end to this movement. Whatever is opposed to this movement should be eliminated, which opens the door to terror. "Terror is the realization of the law of movement; its chief aim is to make it possible for the force of nature or of history to race freely through mankind, unhindered by any spontaneous

⁷ Arendt, *The Origins*, 415.

⁸ Ibid., 468-71.

⁹ Ibid., 464.

human action.”¹⁰ Consequently, guilt and innocence become senseless notions. Whoever stands against this natural and historical process is automatically guilty. Those who murder are innocent because they only execute a death sentence pronounced by a higher tribunal. Similarly, the rulers are innocent because they only execute historical or natural laws.

This terror seeks total domination and erodes all human spontaneity and the very existence of individuality. The model citizen under a totalitarian regime is only allowed the most private moments and basic reactions, which can always be replaced by other responses. What is paradoxical, ridiculous, and dangerous at the same time is that a totalitarian regime takes immense pride in having no need for its members or any human help. The goal is not to rule over people, but to create a system where men are no longer necessary. Individuality is unacceptable; all traces of human dignity should be eradicated; every person should be deprived of spontaneity, reduced to a mere specimen of the human animal. In other words, totalitarian ideologies do not aim to change the external world or society but to transform human nature itself. The concentration camps are the laboratories for this transformation of human nature, where suffering is not an issue, nor the number of victims.¹¹ Creation of a system in which all men have become equally superfluous is the place where “radical evil” has emerged.¹²

Arendt’s analysis of the ideology of totalitarianism and the question of evil reveals a new dimension in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem, A Report on the Banality of Evil*.¹³ German Nazi official Adolf Eichmann stated at his trial in Jerusalem that he was not guilty for his actions, nor did he bear any responsibility because he was doing his job, his duty as a Nazi officer, obeying orders and the law. He defended himself as a mere functionary, whose functions could easily have been carried out by someone else. He did what was

¹⁰ Ibid., 465.

¹¹ Arendt, *The Origins*, 456-58.

¹² Ibid., 459.

¹³ Hannah Arendt, *Eichman in Jerusalem, A Report on the Banality of Evil* (The Viking Press, 1994).

statistically expected, a mere accident; he was only a “tiny cog” in the machinery.¹⁴

After observing Eichmann’s rather unusual testimony, Arendt made crucial observations for our reflection. In his defense, Eichmann often repeated the exact stock phrases, slogans, and self-invented clichés, continually reiterating the same interpretations, regardless of the topic. His clichés were very similar to those of other ordinary Germans at the end of the war, after being exposed to Nazi propaganda for twelve years. Eichmann’s self-fabricated clichés and stock phrases were devoid of reality, uncritically accepted by his leaders first, and then deeply internalized. His memory proved unreliable regarding what actually happened, filled with contradictions and inconsistencies; however, he did not forget his clichés, which he often used as solutions for his situation. His persecutors had difficulty seeing him as either a monster or a clown. His inability to speak or adequately perceive reality was closely linked to his inability to think, especially from somebody else’s perspective. His unrealistic worldview and poor communication skills made him an ideal subject for adopting special language rules, full of codes necessary for the implementation and protection of Hitler’s policies. For example, “final solution” was a code name for “extermination”, “liquidation”, and “killing” of the Jews. Those who were involved in this operation were called “bearers of secrets.”¹⁵

To the surprise of many, Arendt, in her interpretation, claimed that Eichmann did not exhibit any insane hatred of Jews, antisemitism, or indoctrination.¹⁶ His identity was shaped by his constant search for a way to join an organization to establish himself. His personal decisions were driven not by malice but by unwavering dedication to the regime and his need to belong. He struggled to finish high school, started with insignificant jobs, and saw an opportunity to become a member of the SS intellectual

¹⁴ Ibid., 134-35.

¹⁵ Arendt, *Eichmann*, 26-30, 43,

¹⁶ This statement will become later the point of disagreement and critique of Arendt’s position. Despite Eichmann’s attempts to portray himself as a detached bureaucrat during his trial, the overwhelming historical evidence reveals his profound antisemitic belief that fueled his devastating role in the Holocaust.

elites.¹⁷ Once in the prison in Jerusalem, six psychologists examined him and found no signs of mental illness or personality disorder. They saw him as more normal than an average person. While some argued that Eichmann is an example of how the most normal people under a totalitarian regime can commit horrific crimes, Arendt disagreed. Eichmann should not be excused from his moral choices, and his responsibility for the Holocaust should not be reduced. One remains morally responsible even under totalitarianism. What remains crucial for Arendt is understanding what kind of Germany produced the Holocaust. The answer is moral collapse and a lack of opposition to a new, immoral order that allowed for the Holocaust.¹⁸

The observation of this trial inspired Arendt to elaborate on the concept of the banality of evil, which will become one of the most memorable phrases of the past century.¹⁹ This profound concept has often been misunderstood and calls for further elaboration. In Arendt's eyes, Eichmann was not a fanatic or a sociopath, but an average person who relied on clichéd interpretations, motivated by professional promotion and success, which are the main standards of a good society.²⁰ He acted not as a demonic or sadistic monster, but as an ordinary bureaucrat, primarily concerned with his career advancement, willing to follow people in authority blindly, able to carry out unimaginable atrocities with calm efficiency. Stanley Milgram's experiment in 1974 proved that ordinary people would inflict pain on others if instructed by an authority.²¹ Arendt argued that Eichmann's evil stemmed from a fundamental "thoughtlessness," i.e., an inability to think critically, reflect on the moral implications of his actions, and see things from the

¹⁷ Arendt, *Eichmann*, 32-3.

¹⁸ Sheldon Goldfarb, "Arendt Speculates on the Banality of Evil," *EBSCO*, 2023. <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/arendt-speculates-banality-evil>.

¹⁹ Luke Russell, *Evil: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2023), 53-69.

²⁰ Arendt, *Eichmann*, 112.

²¹ Goldfarb, "Arendt Speculates on the Banality of Evil."

perspective of someone else.²² Eichmann repeatedly stated that he was doing his duty and obeying the law, which he considered his moral obligation. He and people like him fulfilled simple tasks without confronting the full moral weight of their actions. From here, Arendt suggested that under certain conditions (like totalitarianism), ordinary people can become complicit in immense evil through a lack of independent moral judgment and a failure to think. "There's simply the reluctance ever to imagine what the other person is experiencing. That is the banality of evil."^{23 24}

As an alternative to hatred and ideological thinking, Arendt introduced the idea of peace, which isn't just the end of fighting, the absence of war, or a passive state. Peace is an active, vibrant condition connected to human diversity, political action, and the maintenance of the public sphere. It's less about achieving a final goal and more about the ongoing potential for genuine human interaction. This concept of peace is deeply intertwined with Arendt's understanding of what it means to be human. Humans have a unique ability to start new things and show their individual identities to others through words and actions. This occurs in the public sphere, where people come together to act and speak in

²² Jerome Kohn, *Evil: The Crime against Humanity*, Library: Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/collections/hannah-arendt-papers/articles-and-essays/evil-the-crime-against-humanity/>.

²³ American Masters, "How Hannah Arendt Developed the Concept of 'the Banality of Evil,'" *PBS*, <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/hannah-arendt-banality-evil/36147/>.

²⁴ Once this totalitarian movement is defeated, the inherent weakness of the ideological propaganda becomes visible, the fictitious world of the totalitarian regime is destroyed, its members revert to isolated individuals waiting for a new function in a new world, or sink back to their old desperate superfluity. In Arendt's words, "the members of totalitarian movement, utterly fanatical as long as the movement exists will not follow the example of religious fanatics and die the death of martyrs (even though they were only too willing to die the death of robots). Rather, they will quietly give up the movement as a bad bet and look around for another promising fiction..." (Arendt, *The Origins*, 363).

unison.²⁵ This is also the space where people exercise freedom, meaning they are free to do something new, act, create something unforeseen, or insert themselves into the world of novelty. This capacity is called *natality*, or the source of all newness and change.²⁶

The concept of peace is deeply intertwined with Arendt's idea of *human plurality*, which is the condition for political life. All men are equal in their capacities for action but distinct in their perspectives and identities. Peace fosters the common world, i.e., public institutions, shared stories, laws, and cultural artefacts that provide stability and meaning.²⁷ In addition, genuine peace requires mutual respect for the perspectives of others, especially when they differ. People are willing to engage in deliberation and persuasion out of respect, rather than coercion or manipulation. Peace is preserved through the active exercise of judgment and critical thinking about what is right or wrong, a necessary tool for resisting ideological manipulations.

Arendt developed this concept in response to the devastating experience of totalitarianism, which, through its dehumanization and homogenization, suppressed individuality, spontaneity, and the ability to start anew, reducing people to interchangeable cogs in a system. With its violence, totalitarianism eliminates plurality and destroys human agency. On the other hand, natality represents birth as the radical beginning, full of potential and the promise of continuous world renewal through the unpredictable arrival and creativity of each new generation.

For our reflection, Arendt offered profound insights into the past century, which was marked by two world wars, three totalitarian ideologies, and a surprising willingness to abandon human thinking. Hatred is not a hot emotion but a cold, ideological, and often thoughtless mechanism that leads to dehumanization and destruction of the public space. As a way forward, Arendt proposed a concept of peace, not as a detailed conflict resolution plan but as a profound reflection on the essential conditions for human

²⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (The University of Chicago Press: 2018), Chapters 2 and 5.

²⁶ Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future; Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (Penguin Books 2006), 142-69.

²⁷ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 50-8.

flourishing in a political community that fosters the public sphere, political freedom, public discourse, respect for human diversity, and the ongoing practice of thinking and judging. Such a political community must be continuously renewed and protected, allowing the further development of plurality and not ideologies with their totalitarian interpretations that reject and destroy critical thinking. Arendt calls for a renewed commitment to active citizenship, critical thought, and the preservation of public spaces, which will lead to the defense of peace and the defense of human freedom itself.²⁸

Hatred as the Fundamental Distortion of Human Spirit

Unlike Arendt, Simone Weil emphasized the spiritual and metaphysical dimensions of freedom, which liberate individuals from hatred and man's confinement in the material and ego-driven world. As a French philosopher, mystic, and activist, Weil explored human suffering, the corrupting power of force, and the potential for spiritual liberation. Her concept of freedom is deeply spiritual and metaphysical, emphasizing liberation from force and fostering attention and decreation. Her understanding of peace evolved throughout her life, closely tied to her philosophical and spiritual journey. She shifted from being a pacifist and Marxist to criticizing the Marxist tradition because any use of violence corrupts even the noblest goals. Likewise, she abandoned pacifism when she saw the rise of Nazism and its threat. Weil recognized that evil, embodied in totalitarian regimes like Nazism, could not be ignored or wished away; therefore, she joined an anarchist brigade in the Spanish Civil War, willing to act against overwhelming force and engage with violence to defend against a greater evil.

Hatred is a fundamental distortion of the human spirit, revealing the soul's involvement with force and self-interest and reducing human beings to mere objects. Weil's seminar essay, *The*

²⁸ Shai Tubali, "Why Hannah Arendt Left Philosophy Behind to Face the World," *BigThink*, April 24, 2025. <https://bigthink.com/thinking/why-hannah-arendt-left-philosophy-behind-to-face-the-world/#:~:text=She%20warned%20that%20the%20true,that%20leaves%20individuals%20vulnerable%20to.>

Iliad, or the Poem of Force,²⁹ analyzes how physical or psychological force is connected to dehumanization. While Homer in his *Iliad* describes important events during the final weeks of the Trojan War, with the renowned warrior Achilles in a conflict with his king, Agamemnon, as the main figures, Weil asserts at the beginning of her essay that force is the true hero, the real subject, and the focus of Homer's *Iliad*. "Force is that which makes a thing of whoever submits to it."³⁰ Anyone subjected to physical and emotional force becomes a corpse. The victims lose their identity, voice, and humanity, turning into objects of the oppressor's control. Their suffering turns them into a corpse before actual death, a non-entity. Their dehumanization facilitates further harm by the oppressor.³¹ If they survive, they carry a consuming hatred, seek revenge, and inflict similar suffering upon former oppressors. However, force is dangerous to those who control it as well because it intoxicates and blinds them. This intoxication causes a loss of reason, neglects the suffering of others, and deepens the self-delusion of being invincible and in control. Their senses and judgment become dulled, making it hard to see the humanity of their victims. This creates a moral vacuum where hatred can flourish. Force, therefore, turns the wielder into a thing, an unthinking automaton driven by rage or lust. This is why Weil suggests that even victors in war are ultimately dehumanized and trapped by the very force they wield. This is evident in Homer's *Iliad* where even the mightiest warriors eventually fall or suffer at the hands of force turning against them. Thus, the truth is that nobody really possesses force; instead, force possesses us. It intoxicates, destroys, instigates conflict, creates conflicts between the weak and the strong, and finally strikes with the intensity of what Weil calls "blind destiny,"³² i.e., the unyielding and dehumanizing effect of force, highlighting the profound vulnerability and limited self-determination of human beings in the face of overwhelming power.

²⁹ Simone Weil, *The Iliad or the Poem of Force*, trans. James P. Holoka (Peter Lang 2003).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

³² Weil, *The Iliad*, 53.

In Rick Rozoff's interpretation of Weil's analyses of war, hatred can also arise from a fundamental lack of meaning and purpose, particularly in the context of war. For example, when the objective of a war is unclear or morally bankrupt, or the war is fought over symbols without content, or the goals of conflict are hollow and abstract, the objectives are empty, then something irrational must fill the void and drive the conflict. In Weil's reflection, this is the raw emotion of hatred, which becomes the substance or motivation for a war. The simple desire to destroy others becomes an end in itself. "The nothingness of national, class, or racial myth must receive an apparent substance, not from intelligible content but from the will to destroy and be destroyed."³³ The will to destroy gives substance to what is otherwise objectively void.

Weil's reflection on hatred and peace reaches new depths in her *Gravity and Grace*,³⁴ a collection of intense, aphoristic notes and fragments, with which she analyzes how human existence is exposed to spiritual and physical laws. Gravity symbolizes the downward pull of evil and the human tendency toward despair; it is the force of necessity, compulsion, mechanism, self-interest, and the ego. Gravity manifests in several ways. Just as physical objects are drawn to the earth, human desires, habits, and psychological impulses often pull us toward self-serving behaviors. Our attachments to possessions, social status, reputation, and personal opinions bind us to the material world, preventing genuine connection to the divine. In the social sphere, gravity can dehumanize individuals, turning them into mere cogs in a machine and stripping them of their dignity.

On the other side is grace, symbolizing the supernatural, transformative power that enables liberation and spiritual ascent. As such, it represents divine intervention that allows for spiritual uplift and freedom. It is a gift from God, originating beyond natural

³³ Rick Rozoff, "Thomas Merton: Simone Weil and Why Nations go to War," *For Peace, against War: Literary selections*, June 9, 2021. <https://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2021/06/09/thomas-merton-simone-weil-and-why-nations-go-to-war/>.

³⁴ Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Craufurd (Routledge and Kegan Paul 1972).

causes and human effort. Therefore, it is connected to divine love, beauty, moments of pure affection, and acts of true compassion. Grace introduces an element of genuine freedom and spontaneous action, permitting choices and movements that oppose natural tendencies. Ultimately, grace is the foundation of all that is truly good, beautiful, and true.³⁵

Within the framework of gravity and grace, and based on her understanding of human psychology in the face of suffering, Weil explains the role of imagination, illusion, and delusion in perpetuating hatred and war.³⁶ When facing life's harsh realities, the human mind creates illusions and imagination to give a sense of order or meaning justification. When facing a lack, suffering, or a difficult truth that the ego cannot accept, the imagination creates fantasies to fill the void. Every unaccepted void breeds hatred, sourness, bitterness, and negative emotions like hatred.³⁷ Imagination inherently distorts reality, simplifying complex realities into flat, two-dimensional images and simplistic, often self-serving narratives. Imagination is essentially a liar.³⁸

The imagination is deeply connected to the ego's self-preservation. It creates illusions that uphold the ego's false position as the center of the world, promoting a sense of importance, control, and moral superiority. If the ego is challenged or threatened, the imagination can generate new ways to survive without change. It allows an average human being to "become prisoners, slaves, prostitutes, and pass through no matter what suffering without being purified."³⁹ Illusions also create attachments to things, people, or outcomes, creating comforting fictions justifying these attachments. Similarly, human illusion attributes false and exaggerated values to the things of the world, even though they are shadowy imitations of good. Weil suggests illusion and evil are profoundly connected. "When we are the victims of an illusion, we do not feel it to be an illusion but a reality. It is the same, perhaps, with evil. Evil, when we are in its power, is not felt as evil but as a

³⁵ Weil, *Gravity*, 1-4.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 45-52.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Weil, *Gravity*, 17.

necessity, or even a duty.”⁴⁰ Evil blinds us to the true nature of reality, including the reality of evil, making it seem necessary or even good.

As a radical countermovement against the natural tendencies of the imagination, Weil suggests attention, decreation, acceptance of necessity, and encounter with reality as the ways to peace. These ideas cannot be separated because they are naturally connected and intertwined.

Attention is more than an intellectual focus; it is a spiritual and active opening of the soul to reality, including a focused effort, a passive waiting, a renunciation of the superficial illusion of will and choice to pursue a selfless and receptive disposition toward truth, beauty, and goodness.⁴¹ It involves emptying the self and directly perceiving reality as it is, without the ego’s compensatory fictions. “Attention, taken to its highest degree, is the same thing as prayer. It presupposes faith and love.”⁴² Weil considers attention the purest form of love, especially toward those who suffer, because it involves setting aside one’s own desires, opinions, and projections to see the other as they truly are. True attention dissolves ego’s biases and self-protective mechanisms; it involves a suspension of thought that allows for a direct, unmediated apprehension of truth, beauty, and goodness. Weil further claims that extreme attention constitutes the creative faculty in man; creative genius is proportional to the amount of extreme attention.⁴³

Decreation is the spiritual process of unmaking or undoing the ‘created’ self or ego, a key concept in Weil’s mysticism. She defines decreation as “to make something created pass into the uncreated.”⁴⁴ This is unlike destruction, which makes the created pass into nothingness. Decreation is an imitation of God’s creation. God created the world out of love by withdrawing from His divinity so that humans and the world could exist. Just as God empties Himself for humans and the world to exist, in decreation, humans

⁴⁰ Ibid., 64.

⁴¹ Simone Weil, *The Notebook of Simone Weil*, trans. Arhtur Wills (Routledge, 2004), 449.

⁴² Weil, *Grace*, 105.

⁴³ Ibid., 106.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 28.

must also empty themselves of what has been given to them so they can participate in creation as God intends. Decreation is much more than imitating God's detachment from His divinity; it is a passive process that requires waiting after surrendering all attachments and fantasies. Decreation is a profound process of self-emptying, whereby the created ego relinquishes its self-driven imaginations, ultimately purifying the soul from its illusions and the lower, earthly realm. It involves conscious acceptance of the void. This is not about self-annihilation, but about the dissolution of the ego's false sense of self and its attachments. Once emptied of the self, one waits for grace to fill the void.⁴⁵

Acceptance of necessity is another key idea of Weil on the path to freedom and connection with the divine. This isn't passive resignation, but a deep spiritual discipline that recognizes and accepts the unchangeable laws that govern the universe. True acceptance of necessity means accepting these laws and not fighting against them with the ego's futile desire for control. The laws of the universe affect both the just and the unjust equally. Because it is impartial, this mechanical indifference reflects a divine trait that exceeds human notions of good and evil.

Acceptance of necessity fosters a form of passive action, where one behaves not out of personal desire but from a deep understanding and obedience to nature. Human activity shifts from forcing our will to becoming an agent for the natural flow of events. Through acceptance of necessity, human desires are refined, detached from false outcomes, and directed toward what is truly possible and good, existing outside of ourselves. "... real good can only come from outside ourselves, never from our own effort. We cannot under any circumstances manufacture something which is better than ourselves."⁴⁶ In other words, the impersonal and sometimes brutal mechanisms of the universe are not opposed to God's love or presence; they are the very ways in which God demonstrates His complete impartiality, His perfect order, and His creative act of self-withdrawal. The primordial act of self-withdrawal is God's incarnation in Christ, who became a human to experience all human afflictions, including suffering and death.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 28-34.

⁴⁶ Weil, *Grace*, 41.

To understand Weil's concept of necessity, we must also consider her concept of affliction.⁴⁷ Affliction is more than suffering; it is a profound assault on the soul that reduces a human being to a thing, reveals the inherent misery and vulnerability of the human condition, and makes God seem absent. These afflictions do not create human misery but reveal it. Extreme affliction is the space where necessity is felt most acutely. By remaining attentive and accepting necessity, one creates a void within the soul that can be filled by grace. Human afflictions are the path to God's love. To truly accept necessity means to love the order of the world as an expression of divine love.

Encounter with reality is another key concept in Weil's philosophical and spiritual quest. Our reality is characterized by necessity, by what is, regardless of our desires. By accepting these brutal facts, without resorting to imaginative escapes, one can begin to dismantle illusion. Encounter with true reality is often harsh, painful, and involves loss and suffering. However, after accepting this reality, one can begin to dismantle illusion, which is at the same time the condition for one's awakening and spiritual growth.

Weil did not remain with abstract philosophical speculation; she proposed and lived the philosophy of radical presence. She intentionally sought immersion in the harsh realities of the working class to encounter the brutality in modern industry in terms of the dehumanization of labor. The repetitive, grueling, and mind-numbing nature of the work reduced individuals to mere cogs.⁴⁸ This kind of work is another type of affliction, encompassing psychological and social degradation. Weil embraced it as an attempt to grasp the truth of the human condition, revealing human vulnerability and misery. This devastating experience is, at the same time, an opening to truth, stripping away illusions, the false self, the ego, all attachments and desires, including autonomy and control. Perfect detachment, achieved through decreation, lets us

⁴⁷ Ibid., 72-6.

⁴⁸ Bernard E. Harcourt, "Factory Work: Simone Weil & Immersive Philosophical Praxis," *The 13/13 Essays – The Journal of the 13/13 Seminars at the CCCCT*, Nov. 27, 2023.

<https://the1313.law.columbia.edu/2023/11/27/bernard-e-harcourt-factory-work-simone-weil-immersive-philosophical-praxis/>.

see things in their naked reality. This rather uncomfortable extreme position have triggered wandering among Weil's scholars. Is Weil's aspiration for utter transparency possible or is it inhuman?⁴⁹

To sum up, Weil's view on peace is not simplistic or a utopian ideal, but a hard-won spiritual state achieved through profound inner transformation. Weil's life journey led her to a tragic acceptance that some engagement with violence might be unavoidable to resist greater evils. However, her ultimate vision of peace remained rooted in a radical opposition to the dehumanizing effects of force. For Weil, authentic peace stems from liberation from the ego's attachments. She advocated for internal, spiritual liberation through attention, compassion, and the stripping away of the ego, rather than merely engaging in external political actions. Hatred, fueled by the ego's illusion and the void of meaning, becomes the default motivator when true objectives are absent. The path to peace, therefore, lies in a radical *decreation* of the self, a spiritual emptying that mirrors God's self-withdrawal in creation.⁵⁰ This is facilitated by *attention*, or spiritual opening to reality that dissolves egoic biases, and the *acceptance of necessity*, a profound surrender to the impartial laws of the universe, even in the face of affliction. Ultimately, Weil's vision of peace is not merely the absence of conflict, but a profound and transformative reorientation of the human soul, a relentless pursuit of truth through self-renunciation, opening the door for divine love to permeate a world often consumed by the intoxicating and destructive nature of force.

⁴⁹ Robert Zaretsky, "The Decreationist – Simone Weil's thoughts on the unmaking of the self," *The American Scholar*, August 23, 2023. <https://theamericanscholar.org/thedecreationist/#:~:text=The%20Decreationist%20%2D%20The%20American%20Scholar>.

⁵⁰ Ivan Platovnjak and Tone Svetelj, *Listening and Dialoguing with the World: A Philosophical and Theological-Spiritual Vision* (University of Ljubljana Press, 2024), 21-42.

Hannah Arendt and Simone Weil Against Totalitarianism and Dehumanization

It would be an oversimplification to claim that Arendt's and Weil's philosophical reflections are entirely overlapping; their reflections and conclusions overlap and diverge at the same time. In his book *The Origin of the Political*, Roberto Esposito argues that bringing Arendt and Weil into a dialogue yields a reciprocal complication.⁵¹ However, reading them together allows us to reflect on the unthinkable events of the past century, as well as our own time, specifically the rise of various forms of totalitarianism, accompanied by an unprecedented amount of suffering and pain.⁵²

Although they never met in person, they paradoxically inspired each other and developed strikingly similar insights into the human condition, particularly in response to dark times such as totalitarianism, two world wars, and widespread suffering.⁵³ As Jewish women and intellectuals, they were deeply aware of firsthand experiences of human fragility, the erosion of dignity, and the unprecedented scale of political violence. Their philosophical reflections serve as powerful responses to these dark periods. While Arendt's thought is often called secular humanism and Weil's is rooted in spiritual mysticism, they both strongly engaged with the ethical and political crises of their time. What connects them is a perspective centered on a world that looks very different from the one they knew as young women in Germany and France. Roberto Esposito argues that, as women and Jews, they have always been potential targets of violence. With their heightened awareness, they

⁵¹ Roberto Esposito, *The Origin of the Political*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Gareth Williams (Fordham University Press, 2017), 2.

⁵² Joshua Livingstone and Kathryn Lawson, "Introduction: Unprecedented Conversations in an Unprecedented Time," in *Hannah Arendt and Simone Weil – Unprecedented Conversation*, eds. Kathryn Lawson and Joshua Livingstone (Bloomsbury Academic, 2024).

⁵³ Joshua Livingstone and Kathryn Lawson claim that "the silence that lies between them represents a missed opportunity on a grand scale. One can only imagine what might have transpired, what insights might have been gleaned, what disputes might have given way to new trains of thought, and what possibilities might have been unlocked had this silence been replaced with fruitful dialogue." Lawson and Livingstone, 2.

were able to tell the story of the origins and destructive rise of totalitarian power more clearly than many other thinkers of their era. Despite differences in thought and language, they share the same core outlook premises.⁵⁴

Against totalitarianism and dehumanization: Arendt and Weil saw that totalitarianism, with its force and violence, carries a corrosive effect on the human condition and the possibility of a just society. For this reason, both of them elaborated a strong critique of totalitarianism and its inherent tendency to dehumanize by force and violence. While Arendt was familiar with the duration and full extension of totalitarianism, Weil experienced only its Nazi-fascist variant, they came to a similar conclusion that the totalitarian machine tends towards the annihilation of the human presence via derealization of that which exists, and via ideological construction of a world that is so false that the real appears to be unbelievable. Once deprived of any notion of reality, “men are ready for the experience of uprooting and subsequent deportation that consequently allows totalitarianism to reach its ultimate goal; that is, to treat them like things in order to render them ‘superfluous.’”⁵⁵ This can happen with the arrest of thought. As previously discussed, Arendt examined how totalitarian regimes can turn ordinary people into parts of an oppressive machine through a lack of critical thinking and blind obedience to authority. Deep thoughtlessness, emphasized in the “banality of evil,” leads to widespread dehumanization. Totalitarianism creates isolated and atomized individuals who are susceptible to mass movements and live within a false, coherent reality. Similarly, Weil’s essay *The Iliad, or the Poem of Force*, claims that force is the true hero of Homer’s epic, “making a thing of whoever submits to it.”⁵⁶ Both victims and perpetrators are robbed of their humanity; victims become corpses before death, and perpetrators become intoxicated and blinded, losing their reason and judgment. Force reduces humans to objects either through direct violence or the psychological pressure of an oppressive system. Force, once unleashed, has an almost irresistible temptation to excess, which

⁵⁴ Esposito, *The Origin*, X.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁶ Weil, *The Iliad*, 49.

possesses us rather than being truly possessed. Force destroys us physically, spiritually, and morally. This can happen with the arrest of thought. When we stop thinking, the boundary between good and evil collapses, and evil becomes banal, in Arendt's words, or superficial, dreary, monotonous, barren, and tedious, in Weil's reflection. It becomes normal, responding to a norm or a law that evil itself has posited. No wonder why Weil talked about *attention* and *acceptance of reality* as the way out of evil, which is much more than an intellectual exercise; it is a spiritual activity. Similarly, Arendt describes Eichmann's willingness to embrace Nazism without any critical reflection.

Attention and acceptance of reality is another key point of agreement among our philosophers. Both emphasize the importance of an engaged inner life in resisting authoritarianism and preserving individual freedom. Maintaining freedom depends on cultivating active, discerning engagement with reality. For Arendt, attention is a specific form of interaction between will and intellect through which the self comes to properly connect with sensations and reality, which opens the door to a joint understanding of past, present, and future. Attention establishes a meaningful relationship between the inner human and the object of their consideration. Once established, the agent is able to take a critical distance from the object, and their will is prepared for an appropriate action.⁵⁷ Arendt believed that attention, merged with thinking, is crucial for resisting conformity and exercising independent judgment, particularly in political matters. The failure to think results in thoughtlessness that enables complicity in evil. Only attentive thinking counters the banality of evil and keeps a connection to reality.

Weil advances this idea by viewing attention as a spiritual discipline, leading to the emptying of the self—a passive waiting that allows for a direct, unmediated grasp of truth, beauty, and goodness, ultimately leading to a connection with God.⁵⁸ Attention is a selfless desire, a renunciation of constant engagement with immediate purposes and social attachments, an opening up to the highest values, essential for genuine prayer and love, particularly

⁵⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (Harcourt Brace, 1978), 101.

⁵⁸ Weil, *The Notebook*, 416.

for those who suffer.⁵⁹ Such attention opens the door to ethical and political deliverance, which cannot be achieved as a voluntary effort. When attention is suspended, it coincides with the triumph of unfreedom and underpins the roots of moral collapse and political tyranny. With this, Weil strongly opposes the assumptions of the Enlightenment. “Freedom without supernatural love – that of 1789 – is entirely empty, a simple abstraction with no possibility of ever becoming real.”⁶⁰

The identification and articulation of paths toward human freedom and agency during dark times is another common theme. Arendt emphasized the concept of natality, the human capacity to initiate something new and undertake unprecedented actions in the public sphere. Freedom is realized through collective action, creating a public space where individuals can express themselves, speak, and reveal their unique identities. While Arendt focused on freedom through the political creation of a shared world, Weil sought it through the spiritual transformation of the individual soul. She pursued inward and spiritual freedom, emphasizing decreation—emptying the ego and self-will to welcome divine grace. Genuine attention and a connection to the uncreated lead to deep reflection and gravity. Despite some differences, Arendt and Weil saw profound possibilities for human agency to become free even in the face of overwhelming adversity.

Rootless modernity. As the final point of our comparison, Arendt and Weil critically analyzed the dislocating effects of modernity, resulting in a sense of rootlessness and a crisis of meaning. Arendt argued that modern mass movements and atomized individuals produce a widespread sense of homelessness and alienation. This rootlessness made people open to the ideological fictions of totalitarian regimes. On the other side, Weil argued that modern industrial society stripped individuals of their spiritual and social roots, leading to a profound sense of uprootedness and alienation. This loss of rootedness creates a spiritual void that is filled by destructive forces.

⁵⁹ Ivan Platovnjak, “The ecological spirituality in the light of *Laudato si*,” *Nova prisutnost* 17, no. 1 (2019): 77-88.

⁶⁰ Weil, *The Notebook*, 466.

Conclusion

The 20th century, marked by the profound horrors of totalitarianism and global conflict, compelled thinkers like Hannah Arendt and Simone Weil to confront the fundamental nature of hatred and the elusive pursuit of peace. While approaching these phenomena from distinct philosophical vantage points, their insights converge to offer a comprehensive understanding of what it means to emancipate humanity from hatred and embark on a path of rehumanization.

Hannah Arendt, through her analysis of the "banality of evil," revealed how hatred, in its most insidious form, can manifest not as passionate malice but as a chilling "thoughtlessness"—an inability to engage in critical reflection, moral judgment, and empathetic perspective-taking. For Arendt, the antidote to such ideological dehumanization lies in the active cultivation of a vibrant public sphere, where human plurality is celebrated, political freedom is exercised through speech and action, and the continuous practice of thinking and judging serves as a bulwark against totalitarian control. Her concept of peace is therefore not a passive absence of war, but a dynamic condition of human interaction, constantly renewed by the "natality" of new beginnings and the respect for diverse perspectives.

Simone Weil, on the other hand, delved into the deeper, metaphysical and spiritual roots of hatred. She identified "force" as the primary agent of dehumanization, reducing individuals to mere objects and intoxicating those who wield it. Hatred, in Weil's view, fills the void created by a lack of meaning and purpose, becoming a destructive end in itself. Her radical counter-movement to this spiritual distortion emphasizes profound inner transformation. Through "attention"—a selfless, receptive opening to reality—and "decreation"—the unmaking of the ego and its self-serving illusions—Weil posited a path to spiritual liberation. Coupled with the "acceptance of necessity," a surrender to the impartial laws of the universe, these practices allow grace to enter, purifying the soul and fostering a genuine encounter with reality, even in the face of affliction.

In synthesizing their contributions, it becomes clear that Arendt and Weil, despite their differing emphases, provide a powerful dual framework for confronting hatred. Arendt calls for external vigilance and the continuous defense of political freedom and public discourse as essential safeguards against the structural and ideological manifestations of evil. She reminds us that the health of a political community depends on its citizens' willingness to think, judge, and act in concert. Weil, conversely, underscores the imperative of radical inner transformation and spiritual discipline as the means to liberate the soul from the ego's grip, which fuels hatred and illusion. She demonstrates that true rehumanization begins with a profound self-emptying and a receptive openness to truth and grace.

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