

**SIMONE WEIL: THE DEVELOPMENT OF HER PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY
THROUGH A STUDY OF HER LIFE AND THOUGHT**

Helen E. Cullen

A dissertation submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy
University of Ottawa
Ottawa, Canada
January 1995



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ISBN 0-612-15604-4

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UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA
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ABSTRACT

This thesis develops a consistent view of Simone Weil's philosophical anthropology through a study of her life and thought, and how one informs the other.

I demonstrate that there is a change in Simone Weil's conception of human nature from her early thought to her later thought. However, my thesis shows that this change is a development rather than a divergence in her thinking. The thesis demonstrates that Simone Weil's philosophical anthropology remains consistently dualistic throughout her writings. This dualism changes from a mind-body dualism to a dualism that places mind within a carnal part of the soul, and establishes an eternal part of the soul as the essence of human nature.

My exposition demonstrates the conception of human nature developed in her early work. Then I show how this conception forms the basis of a critique of Marxism. I present her position that a liberated society for the workers must be organized around the dualistic conception of human nature. Work with a method is conceived as an intellectual, physical, and ultimately, spiritual practice that restores labour to a principal place in a free society.

I demonstrate that a free society based on Simone Weil's philosophical anthropology came to mean to her a redirecting of Western culture so as to include the other dimensions of human nature: the continuity of time transmitted through tradition of identical thought; an understanding of our place in the order of the universe; and a true conception of our relation to God.

The fully developed vision of the human being in Simone Weil's later work includes a conception of the State as a metaxu (intermediary). The function of the State as metaxu is elaborated in an inquiry into the uprooted human and political conditions of her time.

This thesis maintains that Simone Weil holds, throughout her work, to the ideal of a society that enhances human nature by making manual labour its spiritual core.

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INTRODUCTION

Simone Weil lived and wrote in this century, and grappled with many of the problems that are peculiar to our age. She enjoys a reputation as one of the most insightful thinkers of our time. T.S. Eliot characterized Simone Weil as "a woman of genius." But he also cautioned that she required patience of her readers. I would add that her thought requires a special type of attention, the terms of which will be defined in the following thesis.

Most of her work has been published posthumously, beginning in the 1950s. Its increasing availability at that time provoked the interest of French and English intellectuals. In France, philosophers to whom she had been personally known, such as Gustave Thibon, Gilbert Khan, Maurice Schumann — and her biographers Simone Pétrement and Jacques Cabaud — gave her thought serious consideration. Others, such as Albert Camus and André Devaux also found much to reflect on in her philosophical work.

Her work made the transition to the English-speaking intellectual sphere through literary circles that included people such as T.S. Eliot, Dwight MacDonald and Richard Rees. Philosophical interest began to follow. However, her thought has still not been included in the scrutiny and expanded audience given that of Sartre, Raymond Aron, Camus or others among the generation that moved through the Ecole Normale, studied with Alain (Emile Chartier), and gained prominence in the post-Second World War period.

This relative neglect may be due in part to the fact that she did not live long enough to produce a large and refined body of work. Most of her writing was in the form of essays, on diverse subjects, working out and reflecting on the meaning of ideas in philosophical, scientific, and religious thought, and in literary works rather than elaborating a system. Weil saw philosophy as a search for the truth which led her in many directions and to many levels of thinking. She was passionately involved in the kind of thinking that demanded that one be "engagé" in the world of political and social events; thus, in this sense, she was very much a pioneer in the kind of thinking which became popular with the existentialists and phenomenologists after the Second World War. She had the perspicacity to perceive

how profoundly one could be influenced by the modes of thinking about concrete problems of those around one. Thus, Weil was at once engaged and of independent thinking. This, I think, was partially the secret to her brilliance.

Perhaps another obstacle to greater inquiry has been the reverence of those to whom she entrusted her work. Gustave Thibon says, in his introduction to *Gravity and Grace (La pesanteur et la grâce)* that: "Simone Weil's writings belong to the category of very great work which can only be weakened and spoilt by a commentary." This sentiment captures some of the difficulty of writing on Simone Weil, but does not justify the lack of application among scholars to date. Weil grappled with some of the most difficult problems of our time; thus, to get a grip on what she saw and her analyses, it serves us not to see her ideas as untouchables. Weil's analysis of the human condition speaks to us in two ways: on the one hand, it speaks to what we know to be in keeping with our experience of political and social events, as well as of our scientific and historically grounded mode of "being-in-the-world"; and on the other hand, her analysis speaks to that in us which transcends all of this and can appreciate the sameness which makes us human. Weil transcended the other thinkers of her time by rejecting this overpowering tendency to see the human being as nothing but change; in this sense, she was not an existentialist nor a phenomenologist, but rather a classical thinker. Weil seemed to have rooted herself in the Renaissance; but then, being dissatisfied with humanism, she found it necessary to go deeper into the past to do some sorting out of how the Western civilisation ended up cutting itself off from ancient knowledge which Weil found not to be alien to Christ's Incarnation and Passion.

I argue that Weil's research and analysis of Western civilisation centres around trying to find the reason for the schism between religion and science. It was this schism and how it led to the re-defining of nature and human nature that she takes to be the sign of uprootedness. My argument is that she found in Descartes' thought contradictions that had their source in the two different conceptions of Christianity and the relation between science and religion. She perceived that Descartes, on the one hand, had seen in Greek science a thorough understanding of necessity and that this study of necessity was intended to direct the soul towards the truth; but, on the other hand, he had not perceived the importance of the

"image" which could only be known by reflecting on each geometrical image constructed from his or her ideas of the world. Thus, I argue that Weil saw how this lack of attention to the image led Descartes and the other thinkers of the 17th and 18th century to miss the connection between the scientific study of the Order of the World and the Beauty of the World which was at the heart and soul of 4th and 5th century B.C. Greek science, philosophy, and culture.

My analysis of her philosophical anthropology intends to bring to light how Weil took her point of departure from what she perceived to be the link between Descartes' dualistic view of human nature and epistemology and a dualistic religious metaphysics that she intuitively adopted in her early thought. In this broad interpretation, I agree with Eric. O. Springsted's claim that one can find implicit in Weil's early thought a conception of Platonic Mediation. However, as will be seen, I do not entirely agree with the details of his analysis. I claim that for Weil human perception and the mathematical imagination play a much greater role in her epistemology than he sees; and I argue that for her this connection to necessity that we have by sight leads us by desire from the beauty of the world to the recognition that God's Love is at the source of the Order and Beauty of necessity. This means to say that I disagree with Springsted's interpretation of Weil's conception of necessity. My general disagreement is that analysis of her conception of necessity obscures the whole point of the mystery of our dualism and tends towards missing the point of Weil's insight into the idea that our power over necessity is an "imaginary power" which we can only realize if we see that there can only be one necessity with different manifestations. My argument is that it is important not to see the manifestation of it in our minds as the truth itself as it is only a way of orienting the soul towards the truth.

At the heart of Weil's search for the truth concerning the human condition, I claim there is a very broad and yet very specific critique of the choices made by Christians throughout history and that it was these choices that led to the West's mistaking of scientific truth for the truth itself. I argue that Weil sees these choices as leading to an uprooting of Christianity from its source in an "identical thought" which she found to be all-pervasive among the ancient "millenary traditions" and which defined "true" religious thought. However, the links are still there in Christ's Life and Passion as

recorded in The New Testament. I show that Weil's passionate and yet always lucid study of the human condition has led her by way of St. John of the Cross, St. Francis of Assissi, and Plato to a study of the relation between the Christian Revelation and its connection to the Greek Revelation, particularly, but also to those Revelations had by Egypt and India (Weil included many others as well). I argue that it is from the tradition of identical thought that she sees what becomes her conception of the virtues of humanity -- unchanging moral values. My analysis intends to show that it is with this conception of the virtues of humanity in her mind that Weil carries out her critique of Western history and of how it played a significant role in determining our choice to be an uprooted civilisation, the signs of which she sees in modern times.

Simone Weil wrote in search of a comprehensive view of the human condition and an understanding of our destiny. Such an approach led her to make very bold criticisms of Western civilization, struggling against what she felt to be oppressive methodologies of investigation and inquiry. Her approach can be jarring in an analytic age dominated by science. But this jarring was her intention because she sought to dislodge us from some of the constraining presumptions under which we, in the Western world, operate.

In sympathetically analysing her thought and the philosophical reasoning that underlies her sweeping judgements, I have not tried to disguise or apologize for her unsystematic style nor for her daring to tread where our historicist modes of thought claim we should not tread. I argue that in paying attention to the neo-Platonists who were also neo-Pythagoreans she finds the source of a link between Christianity and the Greek mystery religion and the mysticism of the East. Such a link was certainly not easy to establish; but, like others of her time, such as Jean Guitton, there seemed to be this real questioning of wherein lie the differences and similarities between the religious thought of the West and the mysticism of the East. Thus, Pythagoras became the source of much discussion and it was this philosophical reflection that Simone Weil participated in and that led her to see this link in the identical thought that she saw as the truth that pervaded all.

One of the goals of this thesis is to show the development of Simone Weil's philosophical

anthropology. I do not try to reduce it to a formula, but attempt to render its complexity by following it carefully through its many expressions. Simone Weil does not write a specific treatise (as does, for instance, Max Scheler in *Man's Place in Nature*) on human nature. Her thought on this subject is scattered throughout her writings. Thus, a major aim of this thesis is a reconstruction, devoted to explicating her ideas on what informs our conception of ourselves – and how, in her view, we are being misinformed by the dominant tendencies which since the 17th century have fluctuated between a generally materialistic or generally idealistic conception of human nature due to their theories of the relation between humans and nature which take the human purpose on earth to be to master nature or necessity. I argue that Weil's critique of these theories leads to her understanding that our dualistic nature which came about as a result of the original sin does not permit us to release ourselves from that "ancient curse" called "work". The relation to necessity that we have by means of work connects us to the duality which afflicts us and defines our separation from God; Weil saw that if we lose this connection which we feel with our bodies and souls, we lose the meaning of the mystery involved in our dualistic nature.

Simone Weil's conception of the human being is very broad. All that relates to the human being – science, society, history, and religion – is included. Science informs us about our relation to the material world. Society generally conditions how we regard science, religion, our collective past, and in what direction the future lies; however, for Weil, the intellect's capacity, if properly directed, to grasp the truth by the grace of God, is always excepted.

What examination there has been of Simone Weil's philosophical thought has often concentrated on her mystical or political thought: thus analyzing her later or earlier thought according to a particular focus. In my view, much can be gained by choosing a theme that runs throughout her life and thought; this allows us to see the relations between Simone Weil's mystical thought and her social and political theory, her historical analyses, and her criticism of the philosophy of science. In this thesis, I will demonstrate that all of these aspects of Simone Weil's thought converge in her philosophical anthropology. I think that Simone Weil's struggle throughout her life and thought centred

around the conviction that the conception a particular culture, and more importantly a particular civilization, has of our place in the universe and in relation to God defines how human beings in general will view themselves and act in the world.

As I examine the span of her thought from the very early philosophical essays to her last work, *L'engracinement*, I will attempt to show how Simone Weil thinks the various activities (and thought which informs them) of Western civilization affects our conception of the human condition. I do not mean to suggest that Simone Weil's philosophical anthropology is in any way relativistic. Rather, my thesis will demonstrate that she consistently holds one view of human nature and defends it against opposing views which she finds entrenched in science, politics (the labour movement), history, and religion.

Other analyses of Simone Weil's philosophical anthropology have either characterized her conception of it by synthesizing her early thought, or by focusing on her later tendency towards Plato. Neither approach necessarily distorts her view of human nature, but both miss important aspects of its development, and fail to acknowledge some of the significant modifications it undergoes.

This development, and these modifications, can only be understood by a careful analysis of the early essays and later works, where she treats specific instances of how scientific, historical, social, or religious influences have formed -- or deformed -- human understanding and being.

I am convinced that Simone Weil developed many of the themes she writes about in relation to the environment and time in which she grew. (This claim must not be taken to suggest that I think her thought was determined by her environment.) This is especially true of her early conception of the human being, as I hope to demonstrate in the biographical first chapter, and then in the specific discussions of her early work in the second chapter. It is also true of her later thought, but in a different sense. In her later development, Simone Weil realized that her philosophical convictions and intentions in being involved with the labour movement were at odds with those in her environment -- the Marxists, socialists, and unionists. In Chapter Two I have located this difference in her conception of human nature.

My analysis in Chapter Three shows how her philosophical anthropology led her to include a conception of morality which roots us in the past and more importantly in an identical thought of the truth of our eternal destiny. This led to a subtle change to her early view of human nature, as her understanding of the human condition made her re-think the role of the intellect. I argue that Simone Weil discovered that there is a proper way for the intellect to work with the imagination in its attempt to discern the alignment between the unity of the unity and duality which defines necessity in our minds and its mysterious relation to how this can be actually taken to define the laws of nature. The mystery of this relation always brings us back to our duality because the intellect can also mistake this relation to be an indication of its power over nature and in this case the imagination misdirects the intellect; the true relation as defined in conceiving necessity is one of meeting her in her truth as a perfect equilibrium the terms of which have been inscribed in the Universe at Creation. This truth issues from "divine love"; thus, grace permits a human being to see the relation between necessity in the mind and necessity in the world.

In conclusion, I discuss how Simone Weil brings together all the elements of human nature to form her ideal State. Part of this discussion is an examination of how far most Nation-States, fail to serve their proper function as *metaxu* for the human beings that constitute it. I show that Simone Weil makes physical labor the spiritual core of society because this kind of work feels daily the truth of our duality. I argue that for Weil it is best if work provides the worker with the kind of relation that can only be had by means of an understanding of the laws of nature that they are engaged in working with; thus, Weil takes work with a method to be an encounter par excellence with necessity. This does not mean to suggest that the encounter with necessity that oppressed workers have is not of equal spiritual value if they are capable of loving God or desiring to love in spite of their affliction. In fact, I argue that for Weil these people have the privilege of being the way of Christ if they could realize this.

CHAPTER ONE

OUT OF A LIFE UNFOLDS A VIEW OF THE HUMAN BEING

La philosophie concrète existera dans la vie publique parce que c'est la seule façon pour elle d'avoir réellement accès à l'existence. C'est seulement si elle empoigne publiquement l'existence, dans son être quotidien, dans la sphère où elle vit réellement, qu'elle peut conduire à sa vérité un mouvement de cette existence Pour illustrer ce phénomène, considérons l'ultime évolution de Kierkegaard, en tant qu'elle montre comment une philosophie concrète devient publique. Peu de philosophes ont creusé un gouffre plus profond entre l'éternel, l'absolu, le divin et l'existence historique de l'homme; peu de philosophes se sont placés aussi consciemment que Kierkegaard sous l'idée de l'éternel et, de ce point de vue, ont dénoncé plus vigoureusement comme une lâche désertion et un manque de responsabilité toute tentative d'appréhender l'historicité, de concevoir propre de l'homme....¹

As did Soren Kierkegaard, Simone Weil passionately defended the view that the human being is first of all a "concrete individual". And also like Kierkegaard, she was convinced throughout her life that there was something "sacred" about this individual human being and that it was this sacred part of our nature which must be guarded against corruption. This corruption was most likely to come from some "established institution" which was intent upon absorbing the individual, thus robbing him/her of that sacred part. For Kierkegaard the "established institution" was the "Church", but for Simone Weil there were many different institutions: "the scientific community"; "the Capitalists"; and "the partys which dominated unions".

In spite of their differences, Kierkegaard and Weil both thought that it was only the individual who could answer the most important question: "What is the meaning of human existence?" It is by answering this question and the more fundamental question "What is the human being?" that each of these philosophers sought to give prominence to the dictum so important to Socrates and Plato: "Know thyself".

Although Simone Weil passionately pursued the Kierkegaardian goal of making philosophy concrete, she was faced with another problem, paramount in the France of her time, especially in the 1920's and 1930's. She was confronted with the problem of poverty among the workers in the factories and the unemployed. Simone Weil had also inherited another tradition: the French, German and

¹Herbert Marcuse, *Philosophie et révolution* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968) 147-148.

Russian revolutionary traditions. Salvation was more than rejecting the "established Church" and allowing the divine to live through the individual -- it was first of all freeing the workers from slavery so that they could discover themselves as human beings having a sacred part. Thus, Simone Weil appreciated yet another definition of human nature: Karl Marx's view of man as the producer. She understood from this definition that part of "knowing thyself" was making one's thoughts exist in the world by physically transforming the material reality. (Although this may not be how Marx understood this, it was how Weil did.)

What I wish to emphasize in this first chapter is the aspect of Simone Weil's life which I see to have been influential in bringing about her unique conception of human nature. I do not claim that what I emphasize are the only significant aspects of her life. Nevertheless I do think that the influences I show to be important to Simone Weil's philosophical anthropology are integral to her life and thought. In other words, in as much as she has learned that one's thought should direct one's action in the world, she makes this idea a moral principle for her own life and thought. She is one of those characters in the history of philosophy whose thought and action tend to go hand in hand. We might be able to study Kant giving very minimal reference to his life but we cannot do this with Simone Weil. Her very philosophical method was not just to think about a problem and come up with a solution -- a strategy, but also to enact this strategy in the world. For example, one might define the human being as a "free agent" but it is quite another thing to be a "free agent" in a particular social and political realm. It was this conviction that philosophical method subsumes testing one's theories and concepts and enacting this conviction herself, that makes Simone Weil's life integral to her thought. As Simone Pétrement expresses this point:

Parler de sa vie implique qu'on parle aussi de son oeuvre. Car le lien de la vie et de la pensée fut chez elle le plus étroit qu'on puisse concevoir. Personne n'a plus héroïquement mis ses actes en accord avec ses idées.²

The second aim of this first chapter is to show this relation between her thought and action.

²Simone Pétrement, *La vie de Simone Weil*, Tome I (Paris: Fayard, 1973), p.10. Hereafter: *Vie*.

Many political philosophers and thinkers in France after the Second World War felt compelled to engage in political activity and to seriously test their thought in the public domain. But few thinkers in Simone Weil's day, who hold her unique concern for the combination of the human spirit and the material conditions of the workers, have felt the need to engage in politics. Thinkers like herself, such as someone like Rosa Luxembourg, were much more absorbed in Marxist thought and revolutionary action. There were many more thinkers like Rosa Luxembourg or Trotsky, although not all as great, than like Simone Weil. She was unique in the way that she maintained a critical distance (an independence of mind) from the marxists that surrounded her. Simone Weil cared just as much about the human condition of the workers in the factories as the marxists/socialists, but this did not mean that she should stop thinking and judging/analysing. It is independence and persistence that led her to resist what she recognized as 'totalitarian ideologies' and systems. As Richard Rees points out: "Simone Weil had developed a social and political awareness which it took the war and the German occupation to awaken in many French intellectuals and beyond which many of them, including Sartre, have never progressed."³ Not only Simone Weil's political activity and insightful analyses make her a unique character in the history of philosophy, but also her impassioned action was prompted by a deep sense of the meaning of human dignity and the conviction that every individual deserves respect. These notions are integral to Simone Weil's philosophical anthropology and it is hoped that the study of her very active life and its socio-historical context will serve to introduce her thought and indicate how her view of the human being unfolds from all that comes together to make up her life.⁴

³As quoted in Mary G. Dietz's *Between the Human and the Divine* (Rowman and Littlefield: 1988), XIII

⁴I take Simone Pétrement to be the definitive biographer on Simone Weil because she was asked to write this biography by Simone Weil's mother. Also, she knew the period often referred to as "entre-les-deux-guerres" very well. Mme. Selma Weil provided Simone Pétrement with most of the material and the memories which make up the first chapter of her biography *Famille et enfance*. Pétrement was given access to many unedited texts that André Weil had in his care. See pp. 9-13 for all the works that she had available to her for the first time and the acquaintances and friends of Simone Weil's that Simone Pétrement was able to consult. It seems to me that she incorporated Weil's first biographer, Jacques Cabaud's books *L'expérience vécue de Simone Weil* (Paris: Plon, 1957) and *Simone Weil à New York et à Londres* (Paris: Plon, 1967) so well that commentators rarely consult these texts any more. For instance one of the most recent books which is an intellectual biography, *Utopian Pessimist:*

Simone Weil's philosophical anthropology will not be examined as such in this chapter. True to the spirit of her philosophy, we shall try to follow the method she recommends for the study of a thinker such as Karl Marx:

(...) On pourrait concevoir une manière d'étudier la vie des grandes hommes consistant à y chercher les signes de cette grandeur qui ne se manifeste pleinement que dans les oeuvres; les petites choses ne seraient pas dissimulées, mais apparaîtraient comme constituant la limite et non pas le facteur essentiel du génie.⁵

A. FAMILY AND FORMAL EDUCATION

Simone Weil was born in Paris on February 3, 1909. Weil's family background helped her to develop a deep sense of culture without any specific culture being imposed on her. This occurred, perhaps, because her parents, unlike her grandparents, broke with the Judaic religion. M. Bernard Weil, Simone's father, was an agnostic with anarchistic leanings.⁶ His parents, on the other hand, were very pious Jews. Mme. Weil's parents were cultivated, musical, and artistic. Adolph Reinherz, Mme. Weil's father, wrote poetry in Hebrew and collected Hebrew books. Simone Pétrement, in *La vie de Simone Weil*, says that, although Mme. Weil's parents were not religious, they were most likely deists, thus "liberal Jews who did not observe any of the religious practises." Simone and her elder brother, André, never knew their grandfathers, however, they knew both their grandmothers.

Although influenced by the Jewish tradition, Simone Weil was not instructed in Jewish religious practices. It seems, rather, that she was more profoundly influenced by her father's beliefs and by the secular cultural activities of her parents. Early in her teens, Simone began to manifest political sympathy with her father's anarchistic leanings. M. Weil was a doctor, and spoke within the family about his patients and medicine; thus, Simone was, very early in her life, exposed to the scientific discourse of medicine.

Simone's mother and grandmother were both excellent pianists and music was an integral part

The Life and thought of Simone Weil by David McLellan relies heavily on Simone Pétrement's biography and admits to this in his Preface but he does not mention Cabaud's books.

⁵Pétrement, *Vie*, op. cit., p.399.

⁶I take Pétrement's words on the issue of Simone's parents religious practices mainly because, as I pointed out above, Simone's mother and father were the ones to recount the story of their own beliefs and practices to Simone Pétrement. See footnote # 4 on page 6 above.

of her childhood. Mme. Weil is described by Simone Petrément as being at once self-effacing and having a deep influence on her daughter:

... respirait l'intelligence et énergie, ainsi que la passion de la vie, un intérêt pour tout, un désir de bonheur.... Très généreuse, elle se dévouait, se dépensait pour sa famille et ses amis, combinant sans cesse des plans pour eux, conseillant, aidant, agissant, infatigable.... Son autorité s'exerçait malgré une réelle volonté d'effacement.⁷

M. Weil served in the First World War as a doctor. He was stationed at Neuf-Château to work in a typhoid hospital. Mme. Weil, although forbidden to move with her husband, took the children and her mother to Neuf-Château anyway. Deeply moved by the suffering around her, Mme. Weil tried to alleviate some of it. On December 14, 1914, Mme. Weil writes in a letter to her friend:

Les hôpitaux regorgent de malades et de blessés, et bien que mon mari ne m'ait pas permis jusqu'à présent d'aider à les soigner, je consacre tous les instants qui ne me sont pas pris par les enfants à la confection de vêtements chauds, au raccommodage de draps et de chemises, etc. Presque tous les jours aussi, nous allons dans les hôpitaux porter des oranges, des madeleines, des journaux. Et avec ça, on est honteux de faire si peu en face d'une misère si grande !⁸

Thus, Simone and her brother André were introduced to the horrors of war at an early age. They both corresponded with soldiers who had no families. Simone was particularly sympathetic. People were encouraged by the government to "adopt" these soldiers and send them packages of food and clothing. Simone gathered wood to earn the money she spent to buy things for her adopted soldier. In May, 1917, Simone's soldier came to visit the Weils to spend his leave with them. Simone was delighted: "La petite fille et son grand filleul se promenaient toute la journée en se tenant par la main."⁹

Unfortunately, soon after he left the Weils he was killed in action. Perhaps it was the development of these sympathies for the suffering soldiers and the influence of her father's political views that prompted Simone to declare in 1919 to her classmates at the Lycée: "Moi, je suis bolcheviste," and to say that the Versailles Treaty seemed to her to express "...la volonté

⁷Pétrément, *Vie*, op.cit., p.19.

⁸Pétrément, *Vie*, op. cit., p. 28.

⁹Pétrément, *Vie*, op. cit., p.38.

d'humilier l'ennemi vaincu."¹⁰ Already, at the age of ten, Simone had developed a sympathy for the victimized.

It may seem strange that Simone Weil could be aware of Bolshevism and the terms of the Treaty of Versailles at such an early age. But Simone and André were exceptionally advanced in their education. At the age of eight André began to read geometry books for the pleasure of it. (Today he is a world-renowned mathematician.) Simone was not as quick to begin to read as her brother, perhaps because she was rather ill as an infant. All the same, she was not far behind her brother. By the age of six, Simone was reading and reciting by heart passages from *Cyrano de Bergerac*. The war-time period saw the Weils moving around frequently and Simone's education was restricted to learning from André and reading the literature they loved together. Simone loved patriotic poetry by *Déroulède*, plays by *Corneille* and *Racine*, and she especially loved *Camille's* imprecations against Rome. Her formal education was somewhat irregular at first, moving between different *Lycées* and private tutoring at home.

Despite the sporadic nature of her early education, she learned her lessons well and the study of Greek and Latin proved to be an excellent preparation for her later studies in philosophy. Yet, the fact that she was not as successful and quick to learn as her brother André did cause her some despair. She describes in retrospect her feelings at the time:

Je ne regrettais pas les succès extérieurs, mais de ne pouvoir espérer aucun accès à ce royaume transcendant où les hommes authentiquement grands sont seuls à entrer et où habite la vérité. J'aimais mieux mourir que de vivre sans elle. (...)Après des mois de ténèbres intérieures, j'ai eu soudain et pour toujours la certitude que n'importe quel être humain, même si ses facultés naturelles sont presque nulles, pénètre dans ce royaume de la vérité réservé au génie, si seulement il désire la vérité et fait perpétuellement un effort d'attention pour l'atteindre.¹¹

In this account, we are struck by the curious mixture of childhood feeling and Simone's early sensitivity to what she then perceived to be the injustice that truth seemed reserved for a few geniuses. She was clearly questioning, in her own life, why some people receive the gift of truth and others do not. However, we see that Simone Weil's despair did not get the better of her. She was able to rise

¹⁰Pétrement, *Vie*, op. cit., op. cit., p.48.

¹¹Pétrement, *Vie*, op. cit., p.54.

above her negative envious feelings to a more mature sense that all was not as it appeared; she was not prepared to believe that born geniuses had a monopoly on the truth. In other words, in the depths of her despair she obtained the realization that no one who desired and truly attended to the truth would be excluded from it.

From 1923-25, Simone Weil was preparing for her baccalauréat. In this period she studied with René Le Senne, a philosophy professor at the Lycée Victor-Duruy. Le Senne (1882 - 1954) "was educated in the grand tradition of French academic philosophy." This means that he was profoundly influenced by some of France's greatest thinkers of the time, such as, Lachelier, Bergson, Hamelin, and Brunschvicg.¹² Jacques Cabaud says, in *Simone Weil: A Fellowship in Love*,¹³ that Le Senne's teaching was not important to her intellectual development, even though Le Senne claims that Simone Weil was his best pupil at the lycée that year. Simone Pétrement, on the other hand, suggests that Le Senne may have influenced Simone Weil because Le Senne, being a student of Hamelin, professed an absolute idealism with which Simone Weil seemed to agree.

Simone Weil passed her baccalauréat in June, 1925 at the age of 16. She obtained high honours. She then entered the Lycée Henri IV to prepare for the entrance exam for the Ecole Normale and the "agrégation" entrance exam for the teaching profession. It was at Henri IV that she encountered Alain, who was perhaps to have the greatest influence on the development of her philosophy. Alain's teaching evoked the philosophy of Plato, Descartes, Kant, and Lagneau, whose works became constant reference points for Weil. Alain's methods of teaching, and his "doctrine," had a profound effect on Simone Weil's style of writing and on her own method of teaching in the lycées. Simone Pétrement,

¹²Le Senne is well known for having founded, with Louis Lavelle, the *Philosophie de l'esprit* movement in 1934. This movement encouraged Le Senne's special way of developing Cartesian thought. As Bernard Dauenhauer points out in his introduction to *Obstacle and Value*, Le Senne describes the movement as being based on "two central theses of Cartesianism: (1) The Cogito. The primary is not an axiom but is "an experience or, further, the experience, whose peculiar property is that it is to be found in every experience: the experience of thought is thinking." (2) The human mind, in making an inventory of its contents, discovers God as the source and guarantee of our knowledge." René Le Senne, *Obstacle and Value*, trans and introduced by Bernard P. Dauenhauer (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972.) , XII.

¹³Jacques Cabaud, *A Fellowship in Love* (New York: Channel Press, 1964).

also a student of Alain, describes the "doctrine" thusly:

C'est surtout en exposant le vrai qu'il réfutait le faux, et la grandeur de son enseignement se trouve dans ce qu'il avait de positif: une analyse profonde de la perception, d'admirables leçons de lecture des grands philosophes (et en général des grands écrivains), une méthode d'apprendre à penser par l'attention sévère portée à l'art d'écrire.¹⁴

In Alain's study of Descartes, published in *Introduction à la philosophie: Platon, Descartes,*

Hegel, Comte, this obligation to think while following the example of certain philosophers is evident:

En de tels passages, où l'on soupçonne que l'esprit humain s'empêche lui-même, comme dit Montaigne, on connaît le prix d'un auteur auquel on puisse se fier tout à fait. J'en connais deux, Platon et Descartes. Prenons donc de Descartes le courage qu'il faut pour tenir ensemble et fermement deux idées, sans voir d'abord comment elles s'accordent, sans se hâter d'en sacrifier une. Commencant par l'entendement, je crois bon pour chacun d'éprouver encore une fois les meilleures preuves, soit d'arithmétique, soit de géométrie, soit de mécanique, et de suivre même dans l'Analytique de Kant tout le système de l'entendement, d'où l'on éprouvera que l'entendement est quelque chose. Et il est très important que le mélange d'imagination, que l'on trouve toujours en telle ou telle preuve, ne nous impose point ce qu'on pourrait appeler un doute d'humeur, ou un doute de fantaisie. Il y a une sorte de honte à combattre l'entendement en restant au-dessous de l'entendement, ce qui est prendre la difficulté de comprendre pour un raison de douter. Le vrai doute, comme on l'a dit plus haut, n'est pas au-dessous de l'entendement, mais au-dessus. Enfin l'on ne mérite jamais de douter. Descartes savait déjà plus de choses qu'homme au monde, lorsqu'il s'avisa de douter de tout. Dans le fond, il se peut bien, comme Jules Lagneau le donnait à entendre, que la notion de liberté soit manquée en presque tous, par une notion paresseuse de la nécessité antagoniste, de même qu'il est déjà clair que la liberté pratique est souvent sans prises, faute d'un obstacle premièrement estimé selon son invincible résistance.¹⁵

Simone Pétrement outlines what she describes as Alain's "doctrine," ideas that Simone Weil

develops in her own thought:

- les degrés inférieurs de la conscience n'existent que par les degrés supérieurs;
- l'inconscient n'existe pas en tant que phénomène psychologique; ce qui est inconscient est du corps seul;
- la conscience psychologique ne peut être séparée de la conscience morale; il n'y a qu'une conscience, et elle naît lorsqu'on se pose la question morale; il n'y a pas de conscience sans scrupule; l'idée du bien est l'idée suprême, ce qui fait naître toutes les autres.¹⁶

The similarity between these ideas and those that Simone Weil affirms and attributes to Kant and

Descartes are remarkable. In *Lectures on Philosophy*, Simone Weil says:

Kant: Un 'je' unique est le sujet de toutes les pensées. Cependant, il y a lutte. On peut l'expliquer soit en divisant l'elle-même, soit divisant l'âme et le corps. Il est absurde de diviser l'âme, car il y a un seul être qui dit 'je.' Quand il y en a plusieurs, il y en a un qui dit 'tu' à l'autre, et cet autre est un objet pour le 'je.' ('Tu trembles, carcasse.') Et cela ne se passe pas comme dans une discussion entre camarades. Il n'y

¹⁴Pétrement, *Vie*, op. cit., p.72.

¹⁵Alain, *Idées - introduction à la philosophie* (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1964), p.166-167.

¹⁶Pétrement, *Vie*, op. cit., p.73.

a pas réciprocité entre le 'je' et l'objet. C'est un fait que, toutes les fois qu'on s'adresse à soi-même, c'est la partie supérieure. Dans le cas de Turenne, c'est le courage qui parle à la peur. C'est le je qui est nous, et non pas la partie tutoyée. Le sujet qui est nous est un par définition. Il est donc faux de se représenter l'âme comme un théâtre. A chaque moment, il y a une volonté qui rencontre des obstacles, et une seule volonté. C'est ce que montre bien Descartes dans le *Traité de passions*....¹⁷

Pétrément points out that for Alain "la volonté n'existe que dans l'action." Simone Weil argues a similar idea in "Science et perception dans Descartes," that the mind and the will are the same in action, for in order for the mind to act the will must overcome the passions by controlling them so that the mind can direct.¹⁸

Alain, in his interpretation of Descartes, taught that man begins in error and as a slave to his passions — but that this is the material from which freedom is wrought. Similarly, Simone Weil begins "Science et perception" with the assertion that man begins in error: "Ce qui explique que la recherche de la vérité ait pu et puisse présenter quelque intérêt, c'est que l'homme commence, non pas par l'ignorance, mais par l'erreur."¹⁹

Alain also taught that perception and thought are one, but he was careful to point out that our perceptions were not like the image one sees in a photograph. In fact, what we call an image and "imagine" produced by sensation is in fact our consciousness of certain bodily movements. For Alain, the existence of the exterior world is evident because the mind always thinks about something; the problem is rather the nature of the representation of the world.

Premièrement, la situation de l'esprit humain est telle qu'il exprime d'abord et toujours les changements et vicissitudes du corps humain., et qu'il n'enchaîne d'abord que selon le mouvement des humeurs, ce qui est imaginer. Mais, secondement, l'esprit humain exprime aussi la nature des choses, pourvu qu'il se délivre, autant que cela se peut, de cet empêchement qui résulte des affections du corps humain, et c'est entendre....Toutefois il faut comprendre, et c'est le troisième point, que cette purification ne se fait pas seule, et comme par un mécanisme qui serait bien monté en Descartes et moins bien en presque tous; mais au contraire que toute la puissance du vouloir est à l'oeuvre dans la connaissance, ce qui est juger.....²⁰

Also, Simone Weil argues that the existence of the external world is phenomenologically present.

¹⁷Simone Weil, *Leçons* 118-119.

¹⁸Simone Weil, "Science et Perception dans Descartes," *Sur La Science* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966) 76. I will show how Alain has influenced Simone Weil in her interpretation of Descartes in the first part of Chapter Two, when I analyse this essay.

¹⁹Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.12.

²⁰Alain, *Idées*, op.cit., p.170.

She argues in "Science et perception" that the mind and body are not independent of one another; the mind does not observe while the body feels. She argues that the mind and body are intimately related to one another because our first grasp on the world comes to us through what we call the imagination; however, it does not tell us about the world but simply represents our response to it:

Si je n'étais qu'entendement et sensible... Je serais toujours comme on est au spectacle quand la mise en scène est mauvaise, et que la tempête, l'émeute ou la bataille sont ridiculement imitées. Mais cette supposition est absurde tant elle est contraire à la réalité... je ne suis d'abord qu'imagination.... Or sur le monde l'imagination ne peut me renseigner... l'imagination représente bien, ou plutôt constitue, la prise que j'ai sur le monde, la correspondance qui se trouve être, par l'union de l'âme et du monde... mais cette correspondance ne constitue pas une action, je puis seulement en user pour agir.²¹

In both "De la perception ou l'aventure de Protée" and "Science et perception dans Descartes", Simone Weil describes how the human mind experiences the three phases that Alain refers to in the above quoted passage. Thus, the movements from what she calls 'pure imagination' to judging and doubting, the mind's power to act, are, for Simone Weil as for Alain, essential phases of human existence.²²

Finally, Simone Weil writes "Science et perception" with the intention of proving exactly what Simone Pétrement claims was Alain's view of science: "les formes et les principes de la science ne sont pas autres que ceux de la perception, et la science ne vaut que jointe à la perception...."²³

Also, through Alain, Simone Weil was influenced by Lagneau's thought, especially by Lagneau's unique ideas on how perception forms our thought. In the essay "De la perception ou l'aventure de Protée", Simone Weil draws from one of Lagneau's texts, "Cours sur la perception" in *Célèbres leçons et fragments*.²⁴

There is another very important concept that Simone Weil learned from Alain; (one might even say that this concept is the main concept in a method of thinking which Simone Weil adopted wholeheartedly) the concept is "attention." Simone Pétrement summarizes Alain's teaching on the concept

²¹Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.71-74.

²²See Alain, *Idées*, op. cit., p.163-164. See "De la perception ou l'aventure de Protée", *Oeuvres Complètes*, Tome I, *Premiers écrits philosophiques*, op.cit., 121-126. And "Science et perception", op. cit., p.185-199. Both of these essays will be analysed in Chapter two of this thesis.

²³Pétrement, *Vie*, op. cit., p.73-74.

²⁴Weil, "De la perception", op. cit., p.123. Also see footnote #37 of "De la perception ou l'aventure de Protée", op. cit., p.123.

of "attention":

- l'attention n'est pas, comme on la décrit d'ordinaire, le fait d'être rempli et comme hypnotisé par un seul objet, une seule pensée; mais au contraire, la véritable attention est pleine de doute et de liberté;
 - l'attention est contemplation et s'exerce avant tout quand on ne peut pas changer l'objet; on ne connaît pas, d'ordinaire, l'objet sur lequel on peut agir; l'esclave connaît le maître, non le maître, l'esclave; la science n'est pas venue principalement des métiers, de l'action extérieure, mais plutôt de la contemplation religieuse....²⁵

This meaning of "attention" as religious contemplation will become crucial to Simone Weil's mature philosophical anthropology. In her *Cahiers*, Simone Weil often refers to Maine de Biran's concept of "attention." Maine de Biran states clearly that it is by directing one's attention towards the void that one encounters God.²⁶ Thus, although Alain had certainly directed Simone Weil's philosophical orientation, her quest for a deeper understanding of the concepts and ideas caused her to rely more and more on the original sources of Alain's teaching; such is the case for Maine de Biran's concept of attention.²⁷

Alain not only influenced Simone Weil's thinking in philosophical matters, but he was also her exemplar in social and political thought. She gained a more critical perspective on Communism and Socialism from Alain. For, as Pétrement points out, Simone Weil – without Alain – "...aurait peut-être gaspillé son dévouement au service de quelque parti."²⁸ He opposed both the systematic formulation of political theory and the idea of violent revolt. He maintained that revolt usually ended by reinforcing the ruling powers and further enslaving citizens. Rather, he believed that citizens could keep the ruling powers within their just limits by exercising their judgment freely to form a forceful public opinion. Simone Weil agrees with his point of view, but: "Pour elle cependant, il s'agit moins de résister au pouvoir que d'obtenir des améliorations sociales."²⁹

Given Simone Weil's already developed sympathy for the less fortunate, it is not surprising that

²⁵Pétrement, *Vie*, op. cit., p.75.

²⁶See Endnote #2 on Maine de Biran and the concept of attention.

²⁷Alain borrowed his 'concept of attention' from Maine de Biran. Both Alain and Maine de Biran thought of this concept as a form of religious contemplation. Compare page 14 above, Simone Pétrement's characterization of Alain's teaching on the concept of "attention" and Endnote #2 on Maine de Biran and the concept of attention as a form of 'religious contemplation'.

²⁸Pétrement, *Vie*, op. cit., p.64.

²⁹Pétrement, *Vie*, op. cit., p.64

she should deeply respect the teachings of a professor who seemed to share her concerns and that her sympathetic understanding should be extended to include some of Alain's precepts in her own political philosophy. Not only did he instill in her a healthy scepticism and a critical attitude towards party life, but she also followed him in his pacifism. As I pointed out above, he volunteered for war having decided that, once it had begun, there was no longer any point being a pacifist and that it was more important to share the misfortunes of his people. The war only increased his fervour for pacifism and, for him, the chief goal of political action was the preservation of peace. Alain's opposition to revolution found its source in this deep antipathy towards war.

Simone Weil entered the Ecole Normale Supérieure at the end of 1928. She continued to attend Alain's classes at Henri IV. At the Ecole Normale Supérieure she was less receptive to the influences of her professors. However, she seems to have made a lasting impression on C. Bouglé, the Director of school studies, and Léon Brunschvicg, who supervised her dissertation.

C. Bouglé disliked Simone's radical spirit because of the attention it drew to the Ecole. Once he summoned a group of students who were circulating a petition in order to reprimand them (Simone was among them). At the end of the disciplining lecture, he told them that if they were to repeat any of what he had said to them, he would deny it. Simone Weil was indignant that he would openly deny what he said and was intent upon taking another opportunity to let him know it. Cabaud recalls that subsequently:

....when she came begging for funds (for the unemployed), he [Bouglé] gave her twenty francs with a warning that the donor must remain anonymous. Some days later, he saw a sign on the bulletin-board: 'Follow the example of your Director. Be an anonymous donor to the unemployment benefit fund.'³⁰

Simone Weil was always forthright and not prepared to accept less from others. For some, this is a difficult quality.

In order to receive a diploma so that one could teach in the lycées or in the university, a student of the Ecole Normale had to do a dissertation. As we saw above, Simone Weil chose as her subject, "Science et perception dans Descartes," and Léon Brunschvicg as her supervisor. Brunschvicg

³⁰Cabaud, *Fellowship*, op. cit., p.38.

was severe in his marking of Simone Weil's dissertation, giving her only ten out of twenty, barely a passing grade.

Simone Weil argued in her dissertation that if contemporary scientific discourse claims to be founded on Cartesian principles, then it may have misinterpreted some aspects of Descartes' thought. In the first part of her thesis, Simone Weil demonstrates that Descartes' idealism correlates to his realism. In the second part, she constructs her own meditation using the methodology and even the style of Descartes' meditations to argue that it is through the analysis of perceived objects that scientists have made so much progress. She demonstrates that the difference between a worker and a scientist (a savant) is not in their manner of perceiving, but in the conceptual awareness of the method used in contact with the world.

Brunschvicg was known for his studies of Descartes, Pascal, and Spinoza, and for his work in epistemology. For Brunschvicg, scientific progress not only demonstrated the importance of the intellect, but also man's growth in self-understanding. Thus, he defended a spiritual conception of science rather than a positivistic or conventionalistic conception of science.

There are two reasons why Brunschvicg may have been so hard on Simone Weil. Firstly, Alain and Brunschvicg disagreed on their respective methods of teaching philosophy. André Sermin in his book, *Alain: un sage dans la cité* quotes Brunschvicg revealing his disrespect for Alain's style of teaching his students to interpret great thinkers:

Écartons les textes et toute vaine érudition. Parlons de tel sujet (par exemple Descartes) comme si nous l'ignorions tout à fait." Et là - dessus, ils récitaient l'interprétation d'Alain.³¹

No doubt, Brunschvicg found Simone Weil's interpretation of Descartes' thought and her own method to be the result of Alain's instruction, for as Gilbert Kahn says: "...son diplôme d'études supérieures sur "Science et perception dans Descartes" est encore directement inspiré par les idées et la méthode de son maître..."³² Alain himself complained about the way some of the Professors at the

³¹A. Sermin, *Alain: un sage dans la cité* (Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 1985), p.290.

³²G. Kahn, "Simone Weil et Alain", *Alain*, Bulletin No. 66 (Juin 1988), p.5-6.

Sorbonne mistreated his students. Sermin quotes Alain complaining about this in a letter to Elie Halévy:

Je suis de temps en temps à l'école, où l'on raconte qu'il s'agit très probablement de Léon Brunschvicg] massacrer mes élèves. Je n'y puis rien. C'est à eux de manoeuvrer selon l'incrédule [sic]. Malheureusement ils ont un peu de fanatisme.³³

But besides Brunschvicg's annoyance about the way Alain's students adopted his method, there were also differences between the two men with respect to their attitudes towards contemporary science. As Sermin points out, Alain found it difficult to tolerate Brunschvicg's way of regarding contemporary physicists such as Einstein:

Alain ne lui pardonnait pas ses génuflexions devant les physiciens et en particulier devant Einstein, et moins encore de prétendre que la "raison définie en fait que cadre de l'esprit évoluait avec les siècles."³⁴

What Alain could not accept was that Brunschvicg was willing to accommodate the Einsteinian view of "space." Alain, for his part, could not accept this view of space -- he maintained instead the Kantian view of space.³⁵ In her dissertation "Science et perception dans Descartes" Simone Weil also described space in a Kantian way.³⁶

From this discussion I think we can quite safely conclude that Simone Weil was not significantly influenced by Brunschvicg. Rather, Alain stands out as her most significant teacher and as the one who most thoroughly influenced her philosophical outlook.

Simone Pétrement shows, in an article called "Remarques sur Lagneau, Alain et la philosophie allemande contemporaine," that Lagneau and Alain had some ideas similar to German thinkers following Kierkegaard's existentialism and certain aspects of Husserl's phenomenology.³⁷ I will show in Chapter two that Simone Weil was also influenced by the phenomenological way of thinking.

Lagneau, Alain, and Husserl emphasized the primacy of perception in science and a similar method of expressing this -- Husserl developed the phenomenological method and Jules Lagneau and

³³Sermin, *Alain: un sage dans la cité*, op. cit., p.291.

³⁴Sermin, *Alain: un sage dans la cité*, op. cit., p.268.

³⁵See Gilbert Kahn, "Alain et Brunschvicg", *Alain*, Bulletin No.66 (Juin 1988), p. 22-24 for a more detailed account of the differences between Alain and Brunschvicg on "space".

³⁶See "Science et perception", op. cit., p.213-214.

³⁷Simone Pétrement, "Remarques sur Lagneau, Alain et la philosophie allemande contemporaine," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 1970, p.292-300.

Alain developed the 'reflexive method.' Simone Weil adopted some of both. As Simone Pétrement points out, they all struggled against the idea that philosophical and scientific truth are relative to history, as she says:

...je rappellerai que la philosophie de Husserl n'a pas moins été, au début surtout, un anti-historicisme qu'un anti-psychologisme. Elle l'est toujours restée dans une grande mesure, car même dans un écrit tardif comme "L'origine de la géométrie", Husserl montre en somme que ce n'est pas principalement l'histoire qui peut expliquer l'origine et la transmission de la science, mais que c'est surtout la vérité, la signification vraie, qui explique la découverte et la tradition des vérités. Dans "La philosophie comme science rigoureuse", c'était la philosophie dont il affirmait qu'elle doit et peut avoir un sens au-delà du relativisme historique. Or on sait que Lagneau et Alain ont résisté à l'historicisme; ils ont toujours refusé la méthode d'expliquer par des causes historiques les pensées des grands philosophes. De même l'histoire ne peut expliquer l'objectivité de la science, de même elle ne peut expliquer, selon eux, la forces des grandes philosophies....Ils croient en effet, comme Husserl, que la philosophie peut atteindre la vérité.³⁸

However, there was a difference between Alain, Lagneau and Husserl. Simone Weil sided with her professor on this issue as her dissertation clearly shows. Again S. Pétrement shows what distinguishes the French thinkers of the period often referred to as "entre-les-deux-guerres" and Husserl, the German thinker they closely resembled:

La différence est que pour Husserl les philosophes du passé, bien que certains d'entre eux aient entrevu des vérités importantes, n'ont pas réussi à fonder sur une base solide l'ensemble de vérités certaines que doit être la philosophie; il pensait qu'un tel ensemble de vérités pourrait enfin être établi grâce à la méthode phénoménologique; tandis que pour Lagneau et Alain, la vérité philosophique a été connue des plus grands philosophes du passé autant qu'on pourra jamais la connaître.³⁹

For Alain, what was most difficult was to understand the great thinkers; however, once one had understood one had done enough - to criticize was not necessary, as he says:

Longtemps avant de pouvoir critiquer, il faut passer des années à comprendre. Et dans le cas qui nous occupe, il apparaît clairement que dès que l'on a compris, il n'y a plus rien à critiquer ... Je suis assuré qu'il en est de même pour tous les auteurs qui méritent d'être lus.⁴⁰

Alain thought that the purpose of education was to obtain culture and what that means is to become familiar with what the great thinkers and authors say:

La culture ne se transmet point et ne se résume point. Etre cultivé c'est, en chaque ordre, remonter à la source et boire dans le creux de la main, non point dans une coupe empruntée. Toujours prendre

³⁸Pétrement, *Vie*, op. cit., p.299-300.

³⁹Pétrement, "Remarques sur Lagneau, Alain et la philosophie allemande contemporaine", op. cit., p.300.

⁴⁰As quoted in Foulquié, *Alain* (Paris: Éditions de l'École, 1952.), p.86-87.

l'idée telle que l'inventeur l'a formée.⁴¹

Simone Weil agreed with Alain that it was of first importance to reflect on primary sources, as she did with Descartes, Kant, Marx and Plato, but she also seemed to think it was necessary, especially in the case of Marx, to be critical as she was in *Oppression et liberté*. Of all the influences Alain had on Simone Weil's thought perhaps the most profound for the direction her life subsequently took had to do with Alain's idea that "L'esprit se fortifie au contact des choses (...) is se maigrit de ses pures pensées."⁴² It was important to Alain that philosophy be concrete, thus, he thought that one had to reflect on actual every day human problems, for as Gilbert Kahn points out; "... son intérêt principal se portera rapidement, à travers les questions posées par l'actualité sur l'élaboration d'une doctrine concernant la situation de l'individu en face des systèmes politiques, économiques et éducatifs qui prétendait gouverner ses actions et même ses pensées."⁴³ So, to be a philosopher is to be engaged in the world and to reflect on what one finds there. Simone Weil took this very seriously, for as Thomas Nevin says: "This trumpet call to certify reality for oneself took Weil far from the classroom, to Alsthom and Renault, to Germany in 1932 and Spain in 1936."⁴⁴

In the philosophical works written while still at the Ecole Normale Simone Weil searched for a definition of "work". Throughout the period 1929-1932 Simone Weil had a very general definition of work, which she identified with the effective action of any human being whatsoever.⁴⁵ She already had a certain ideal about what was essential to the human being. As Simone Pétrement points out, "elle considérait dès cette époque que l'homme le plus accompli, le plus vraiment humain, est celui qui est à la fois travailleur manuel et penseur."⁴⁶ This ideal of the human being is very marxist, but I think Simone Weil learned it from Alain, as he thought that the human spirit is strengthened through its relation to things and weakened

⁴¹Foulquié, *Alain*, op.cit., p.87.

⁴²Quoted in Foulquié, *Alain*, op. cit., p.78.

⁴³Kahn, *Alain*, Bulletin No. 66 (Juin 1988), p.21.

⁴⁴Thomas R. Nevin, *Simone Weil: Portrait of a Self-Exiled Jew* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p.41.

⁴⁵ A deeper analysis of this identification will be done in chapter two within an analysis of Simone Weil's philosophical anthropology.

⁴⁶Pétrement, *Vie*, op. cit., p.109

if it only has ideas; manual work is where the mind is really exercised according to Alain. Thus, he fostered this "conception" of the ideal human being as one who is both thinker and manual worker:

Un jardin n'instruit pas le promeneur, remarque -t-il...; mais, il instruit le jardinier. Si les pensées du jardinier s'envolaient de son râteau assez loin pour encercler tous les mondes, le jardinier serait un grand philosophe.⁴⁷

What distinguishes Simone Weil from her Professors is that from her very early works to her last book of 1943, she searched for a way to understand both philosophically and physically the plight of the workers. Le Senne wrote about the 'unity of experience' and the 'concrete' and Alain was an activist in a journalistic sort of way, but only Simone Weil took her desire "to find out" the reality of the worker's condition to the point of actually working in the factories along side them. She embraced 'the unity of experience' in her own life.

My analysis of how Simone Weil was influenced by her Professors, especially Alain but more indirectly from Le Senne, is by no means exhaustive. Nevertheless, I think we can now draw up some generalizations about what philosophical conceptions and orientations she inherited or absorbed through her formal education. First of all, from both Le Senne and Alain, Simone learned an appreciation for a kind of spiritual thought which is at once psychological and moral - the common link being a thought rooted in a Cartesianism modified by Maine de Biran's idea of the 'cogito'. Secondly, although in different ways, Le Senne and Alain encouraged Simone Weil to have a taste for "concrete philosophy" -- that is a need to test her ideas through work. These broad orientations profoundly affected Simone Weil's philosophical anthropology. In the subsequent chapters, I will return to relations between her early philosophical training and her philosophical anthropology.

In 1929, Simone Weil began teaching with an association called the Social Education Group. It was set up by Lucien Cancouet, one of Alain's war comrades, who worked for the national railways. He was also an active member of the United General Confederation of Labor railroad worker's union (C.G.T.U.). Cancouet introduced Simone Weil to political activity and from 1929 until the Second World

⁴⁷As quoted by Foulquié, *Alain*, op. cit., p.78-79.

War she continued to be an activist. The Social Education Group was organized to educate the working people. Simone Weil first encountered here a worker who lived up to her ideal conception of the human being as thinker and worker. He had been reading Plato and Descartes and had acquired a grasp of their thought; he reinforced her conviction that philosophical ideas were as accessible to workers as to any other person.

The final requirement at the Ecole Normale to receive the Agrégation was to pass an oral exam. Simone Weil set herself a formidable program of study for this exam; this perhaps explains why she began to have terrible migraine headaches the same year.⁴⁸ Simone Weil passed her competitive exams in the middle rank (seventh) and was now ready for a teaching position in the Lycée for the year 1931-32.

B. LA RÉVOLUTION PROLÉTARIENNE

From 1931-1934, Simone Weil involved herself in trade union politics. Her experience with a local union led to her reflections on many philosophical and political problems. She saw that trade unionism was more than a way to deal with the workers' economic and social problems in France; it was bound ideologically to the international nation of the U.S.S.R. The major philosophical problem she raised was: What is the goal of the worker's movement? Answering this question gave direction to Simone Weil's political activity. When she travelled to Germany in 1932 she saw how Hitler and the Nazis used the Communist ideology towards their own ends and how the goal of the worker's movement could get lost in and confused with the lust for power. This happened both in the case of Russia and Germany. She directed her efforts towards making the Socialists and Communists aware of the necessity of joining forces against the Nazis in order to squelch Fascism. Unfortunately, as we know and as we will see in the following pages, her insightful analyses went unheeded.

Throughout her years at the Ecole Normale, Simone Weil came into contact with a group which became the basis of a movement called "La révolution prolétarienne". This group was closer to her in spirit than any of the political parties that she had come across previously. It allowed her to express her rather

⁴⁸Pétrement, *Vie*, op. cit., p.165.

unique attitudes towards the workers and to be a part of the syndicalist and revolutionary movements of the time. Trade Unionism in France was politically directed by two central organizations: the CGT (Confédération Générale du Travail), whose members were generally not Communists, and the United CGT or the CGTU, dominated by the Communist party. Although the members of the CGT were generally not communists, orthodox communism (that which came from Russia) was its dominant political ideology. For the CGTU the situation was different. Orthodox communists were in a minority and the Trotskyites were the majority. But they were so divided among themselves that they could not exercise any influence proportionate to their numbers. There was also a second minority group in the CGTU: the revolutionary syndicalists. They were not ideological communists; in fact, they were opposed to the very notion of a political party. Their concern was specifically with syndicalist trade-union action.

Simone Weil's first encounter with trade unionism began in 1931 when Cancouet asked her to attend the Twenty-seventh National Congress of the CGT. This Congress devoted most of its time to discussing the problem of trade union unity. Since she knew that for her first teaching position she was being posted to Le Puy she got the names of some trade-unionists in the region. She was given the names of Claudius Vidal, the secretary of the Confederated Union of Teachers in the Haute-Loire, and Urbain Thévenon, a teacher and a member of the administrative council of Labour Exchange and assistant secretary of Confederated Union's Loire section. Since Saint-Etienne was an industrial town and Le Puy was not, Simone Weil had to travel to Saint Etienne to be involved in union activity. Once she established these relations she became deeply involved in trade union activity and herself became a member of the National Teacher's Union.

Throughout the year 1931-32 Simone Weil worked incessantly for syndicalist unity. She saw how the discord between the different political factions within the unions merely weakened the working-class movement as a revolutionary force. She argues in an article "Reflection on the Economic Crisis", published in the bulletin of the National Union of Public School Teachers in France and the Colonies, that collaboration between syndicalist leaders and government organizations does not further the cause of the

workers.⁴⁰ What it does is better their situation in times of prosperity instead of trying to change the system to make it less exploitative in its workings. In this article she relies on a Marxist analysis to show that collaboration between the classes disguises the exploitation of the proletariat, as she argues: "Nothing could be less natural than that the abundance of useful products should bring about poverty."⁴¹

Although Simone Weil used a Marxist analysis, she did not envision a society in which the workers would have economic power on their side. Her idea of a worker's revolution had more to do with acculturating the workers so they could think out a system that would allow them to accomplish the work that must be done without undue suffering. Towards this purpose Simone Weil continued giving classes to the workers in Saint-Etienne on her days off from her regular teaching job in Le Puy. The most important result of a real revolution was for the worker to receive the wealth of culture that is a part of their heritage as human beings, as Simone Weil says:

Ce respect accordé au langage et aux hommes qui sont le mieux capables de s'en servir a été indispensable au progrès humain. Sans ce respect, les hommes en seraient restés à la pratique aveugle et routinière des travaux indispensables à la vie. C'est à partir de la religion que s'est développée toute la pensée humaine, y compris la science la plus positive. Aussi n'est-ce pas en leur inspirant le mépris de la culture, qualifiée à cet effet de bourgeoise, qu'il faut libérer les travailleurs de la domination des intellectuels. Certes cette supériorité accordée jusqu'ici aux intellectuels sur les producteurs, par une convention qui a été indispensable au développement humain, doit leur être à présent absolument refusée. Mais cela ne signifie pas que les travailleurs doivent repousser l'héritage de la culture humaine; cela signifie qu'ils doivent se préparer à en prendre possession, comme ils doivent se préparer à prendre possession de tout l'héritage des générations antérieures. Cette prise de possession, c'est la Révolution elle-même.⁴¹

Simone Weil considered herself to be in line with Marx because he argues in *Capital* that the Revolution must overcome the "degrading division of work into intellectual work and manual work". She thought that the way to do this was to teach the workers how to use language. No doubt, this latter idea is in keeping with Marx; however, I do not think Marx would agree that learning how to handle language entails taking possession of the heritage of past generations. Rather, he argues in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* that the most important result of the Revolution is for the proletariat to take control of

⁴⁰Pétrement, *Vie*, op. cit., p.89.

⁴⁰Cabaud, *Fellowship*, op. cit., p.49.

⁴¹Pétrement, *Vie*, op. cit., p.201.

their material conditions to the point of abolishing class distinctions. This, he argues, would necessarily involve a complete rupture with the past, with all the heritage of previous generations. For, according to Marx's perspective on history, all past ages were fraught with class antagonisms and culture was class driven (i.e. the ruling class decided what counts as culture).⁵²

Marx thought of the revolution as a complete levelling of classes and the beginning of a new form of culture. What exactly this new form of culture was to be cannot be considered here. But what is certain is that Simone Weil did not share Marx's view that the Revolution should bring about a complete break with all past tradition. As we will see in Chapter four of this thesis, Simone Weil provides many arguments against this kind of "uprootedness".

Simone Weil realized that it would take time to educate the workers. Perhaps out of impatience and the belief that she could do more, she spontaneously spoke out on behalf of a group of unemployed workers in Le Puy. Claudius Vidal describes the incident in an account published in the Bulletin of the Haute-Loire section of the National Teacher's Union:

Les chômeurs du Puy ne touchent aucun secours. Ceux qui veulent sont employés à casser des cailloux (sur la place Michelet, devant le lycée de filles). Comme ils sont payés au mètre cube et que ce ne sont pas des gens du métier, ils arrivent, en travaillant toute la journée, à gagner six francs par jour, et de plus, n'ayant pas l'habitude, ils s'esquintent. Ils ont fait une réunion à laquelle Simone assistait. On lui a demandé de faire partie de la délégation qui devait aller chez le maire. Elle y est allée, et à un moment donné, comme elle a vu que les chômeurs se laissaient intimider, elle a pris la parole. Le soir, elle est retournée avec eux à une séance du conseil municipal; là encore, à un moment donnée, elle est intervenue.⁵³

The mayor and the people of Le Puy were alarmed by Simone Weil's intervention and they tried to have her dismissed from her position at the lycée. Throughout the following months, various presses reported the event and depending on their tendencies the reports were favourable or against Simone Weil's actions. However, the scandal produced some results for the unemployed. They were to receive a wage of sixteen francs per day just for signing up to do the work. Simone Weil did not lose her position at the lycée, not only because she was very capable of defending herself but because so many groups came to her

⁵²Karl Marx, Manifesto of the Communist Party, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, edited by Robert C. Tucker (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1972), p.489-490.

⁵³Pétrement, *Vie*, op. cit., p.211-212.

defense. For instance, the League of the Rights of Man took up the problem because the freedom of opinion of State employees was at stake and, as well, the French League for the Rights of Women defended her and many other groups.

The irony is striking: many groups came to the defense of Simone Weil's rights, yet Simone Weil had thought to speak out on the real problem — a decent living wage for the unemployed. This situation helped her to recognize that resolving the workers' problems demanded much more than raising their level of culture and knowledge, it demanded finding a means of organizing work in a way that did not subordinate those who performed it. Simone Weil began to look towards Russia and how they managed this problem. She found there a series of political and social problems that took her into international politics. Russia under Stalin was more than a 'think-tank' for the international worker's movement; it had its own imperialistic ambitions. These ambitions seemed to loom large; thus, she decided to investigate this.

Simone Weil began by learning about Russia's relationship with the capitalist countries in international politics. She found a kind of doublethink in Russian policies. On the one hand, the U.S.S.R. presented itself as a state among other states by proposing non-aggressive pacts with the capitalist countries, as Litvinov had proposed at a conference on disarmament in France in 1932. On the other hand, the U.S.S.R. claimed to represent the proletariat around the world in their struggle to overcome capitalist oppression. Simone Weil saw these policies as conflicting, and feared that, in times of crisis, the latter policy would be subordinated to the former. In view of this she wrote an article called "The Conference on Disarmament", in which she warns that the leaders of the proletariat in these capitalist countries should be aware of such inconsistencies and should distance their movement from the bureaucracy of the U.S.S.R.. As she says: "Let the hopes of all proletarians still be turned towards the U.S.S.R.. But let the sincere defenders of the working class in the capitalist countries beware of putting the revolutionary movement into the hands of the Russian bureaucracy."⁴⁴

⁴⁴Cabaud, *Fellowship*, op. cit., p.70.

Having reflected on the inconsistency in the U.S.S.R.'s policies, Simone Weil began to pay closer attention to the thoughts and actions of the Russian leaders. She criticized Stalin's admiration for American "efficiency" in industry and technique in an article called "The U.S.S.R. and America", which was published in *L'Effort* on July 2, 1932. She claims that America had pushed the "subordination of the worker to the conditions of work" further than anywhere else. This, she concludes, shows that Stalin had abandoned Marx's point of view and had let himself be seduced by capitalism in its most perfect form. This criticism seriously threw into question Russia's authority in orthodox communism and for the revolutionary movement of the working class. In a search for other points of view on the U.S.S.R.'s role in the worker's movement, Simone Weil turned to Trotsky's analysis in his book *The Third International after Lenin, The Permanent Revolution*.

In a draft of a letter to R. Louzon, editor of "La Revolution prolétarienne" (a version of which was published in the April, 1932 issue of the magazine), Simone Weil found Trotsky's position on "socialism in a single country" and the U.S.S.R. She criticizes the position Trotsky took in *The Third International after Lenin, The Permanent Revolution*. She argues that it is impossible to construct an independent socialist society in any single country. Trotsky related the theory of socialism with the failings of the Third International. Simone Weil challenges Trotsky's position, arguing that Trotsky does not demonstrate clearly enough why the U.S.S.R. could not just close its borders and build socialism in a "test tube." She says that Trotsky does not state the problem correctly and she then analyses what she takes to be the real problem. If the U.S.S.R. had succeeded in setting up a socialist state, then the International could have been used as a propaganda organization for the Soviet State, and it would not have mattered that the Third International had failed. The Soviet State could, by organizing the Unions of the capitalist countries, direct the transition from capitalism to socialism. If the U.S.S.R. were to fail in its efforts to set up a socialist state, then all the concessions that the U.S.S.R. had made to the capitalist countries would have been crimes committed against the proletariat.

Simone Weil concludes this analysis by pointing out that the problem of "socialism in a single country" needs to be defined more specifically because it determines how the communist parties of the

capitalist countries act; either in accordance with the U.S.S.R. thus making concessions to the capitalists or resisting capitalism and eventually revolting. In her letter, Simone Weil suggests that Trotsky does not take a hard enough line with the U.S.S.R.. She expresses a position which later became the pivot of her arguments against the practices of the Communist party, against the splits in leftist parties and unions in the face of Nazism, and against the U.S.S.R.'s foreign policy as a State. For Simone Weil the actual conditions of the workers must not be ignored in the process of working out the ends to be achieved and it is not enough to follow the solutions of the authorities, i.e., of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky, one must do one's own analysis.

After finishing her teaching year at Le Puy, Simone Weil decided to take a trip to Germany in 1932 to try to understand what the strength of Nazism was based on. Hitler had not yet usurped power, although the atmosphere was tense: "Rien ne dénote une situation particulière, sinon ce calme même, qui est, en un sens, tragique."⁵⁵ She describes what she saw to be the problems that the German workers and the German Communist party were facing: a National Socialist government would oblige the unemployed workers to go into concentration camps and the Communist party would be prohibited and the leaders massacred.

Simone Weil saw very quickly that the Communist party could have played a crucial role in preventing the Nazis from coming to power. Thus, she began her critique of the Communist party with the idea in mind of making the communists in Germany and France aware of this possible goal. She noticed that the demoralization of the people increased daily, and in spite of that, the Communist party was infected with nationalism and stubbornly criticized the Social Democrats. As she pointed out, the lack of unity between the two parties could only have serious consequences:

Les communistes et les social-démocrates accusent chacun (et très justement) le parti adverse de ne mériter aucune confiance - et cela aussi chez les plus honnêtes militants de la base (exemple : l'ouvrier communiste chez qui j'habitais et qui est contre le front unique). Division d'autant plus grave que les communistes sont des chômeurs, au lieu que les social-démocrates travaillent. A cela s'ajoute que ceux qui chôment depuis deux, trois, quatre, cinq ans ne sont plus capables de l'énergie que demande une révolution. Des jeunes gens qui n'ont jamais travaillé, las des reproches de leurs parents, se tuent ou s'en vont vagabonder, ou se

⁵⁵Pétrement, *Vie*, op. cit., p.280.

démoralisent complètement. On voit des enfants d'une maigreur effrayante....D'autre part cette question terrible de l' "Arbeitsdienst" ne touche pas les ouvriers qui travaillent -et chez les chômeurs même, sans doute ce régime d'esclavage militaire est-il le seul que puissent supporter les plus démoralisés...Au contraire ceux qui font des sports, de la propagande politique, etc., ne pourront pas le supporter....⁵⁶

In another letter to Thévenon, Simone Weil points out the inconsistency in the Party's revolutionary goals and its total lack of action in dealing with the problem of Nazism:

Le contraste entre ses phrases révolutionnaires et sa passivité totale est trop scandaleux. Réellement il me paraît à peu près aussi coupable que la social-démocratie. Je pense à présent que toute compromission avec le Parti, toute réticence dans les critiques, est criminelle. Trotsky lui-même me paraît garder une timidité qui lui donne une part de responsabilité dans les crimes de la Troisième Internationale en Allemagne. Il est vrai qu'une autre attitude lui serait assez difficile.⁵⁷

In a stinging indictment of the German Communist Party, Simone Weil concluded with very dark predictions about Germany's future. She saw in the German Communist Party's refusal to ally itself with the German Social-Democrats against the Nazis an opening being left for Hitler and National Socialism to pour through. Her criticisms were published in a series of articles between Dec. 4, 1932 and March 5, 1933 in *L'Ecole émancipée*. Before her last article was published, Hitler had become Reich Chancellor. Her own commentary on the German Communist Party was protested against in *Le Travailleur de L'Enseignement*, a monthly paper put out by an orthodox Communist group in the United Federations of Teachers (M.O.R.).

Nos frères d'Allemagne déploient des efforts surhumains pour dresser le prolétariat allemand contre le fascisme. Ils tombent par dizaines au premier rang du front de bataille. C'est le moment choisi par notre direction fédérale pour laisser insérer dans *L'Ecole émancipée* une série d'articles de Mlle Simone Weil où l'action du parti communiste allemand est odieusement défigurée.⁵⁸

In spite of these and other more doctrinaire and virulent attacks, Simone Weil remained adamant, maintaining what she considered the necessary response to such a crisis of solidarity:

C'est le moment de s'entendre tous: syndicalistes, communistes oppositionnels, et même orthodoxes sincères de la base....C'est le moment surtout - et surtout pour tous les jeunes - de se mettre sérieusement à réviser toutes les notions, au lieu d'adopter à 100% une quelconque des plates-formes d'avant-guerre (C.G.T. d'avant-guerre ou parti bolchevik), alors que toutes les organisations ouvrières ont à présent fait complètement faillite.⁵⁹

⁵⁶Simone Weil, *Ecrits historiques et politiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p.124-125. Hereafter: *Ecrits*.

⁵⁷Pétrement, *Vie*, op. cit., p.289-290.

⁵⁸Pétrement, *Vie*, op. cit., p.306.

⁵⁹Pétrement, *Vie*, op. cit., p.309.

Simone Weil summarized her criticisms of the Communist Party and of the Trotskyites in a declaration she drew up to show that the group she belonged to differed from both of the others on specific issues. She noted how both the Trotskyites and the Stalinists gave first importance to questions of leadership and of the internal regime. She asserts that her group had judged it impossible to consider the Russian State as a workers' state moving towards socialist emancipation, that the political and economic structures supposedly controlled by the workers were in reality controlled by a Bureaucratic State, whose interests lay in increasing its power. Thus, the worker continued to be dominated by the means of production, just as in capitalist countries. Similarly, Simone Weil maintained that, insofar as the Third International no longer represented the interests of the proletariat, it was the duty of conscientious militants to break with the Third International — judging it to be too bureaucratic, as they had broken with the Second International, in judging it to be bourgeois: "...qu'il faut dès maintenant travailler à préparer un regroupement des révolutionnaires conscients, qui se fasse en dehors de tout lien avec la bureaucratie d'Etat russe."⁶⁰

In July, 1933, Simone Weil attended a meeting in Paris of a committee formed by the C.G.T.U. to find methods of protesting against fascism and war. The communists present prevented her from speaking, aware of her anti-Stalinist opinions. Nevertheless, she finally got a hearing from the United Federation of Teachers (M.O.R.) at a three-day congress. The M.O.R. had brought along a Soviet delegate to answer questions. On the third day of the congress the debate over Germany was brought up. Marie Reese, the Communist deputy to the Reichstag, gave a speech in which she rejected all criticisms of the policy of the Third International. Simone Weil was allowed to follow her and speak from the floor. She began by posing some precise questions about the U.S.S.R.'s relations with Hitler. Then, she read an article from *Neue Weltbühne* in which a German communist stated that the U.S.S.R. had closed its borders to persecuted German communists who were seeking refuge. Finally, she read the reply to this statement as it was published in the *Gegenangriff*. The reply made a clear admission that the U.S.S.R. borders had been closed to German emigration and justified the action by saying that "les questions de stratégie ne peuvent

⁶⁰Pétrement, *Vie*, Tome I, op. cit., p.323.

tout de même pas se résoudre par de la sentimentalité humanitaire."⁶¹

Much of Simone Weil's free time the year she was at Roanne (1933-34) was spent writing articles for the various magazines. In "Reflexions sur la guerre" published by Boris Souvarine in *La critique sociale*, of November 1933, she attacked the position popular among the Communists, that certain wars could serve the Revolution. She argued that a country cannot have a war without renouncing its revolutionary ideals. Even if their end is to liberate their people, war as a means leads to the opposite result. She reminds the communists of what the materialist consists: "...avant tout à examiner n'importe quel fait humain en tenant compte bien moins des fins poursuivies que des conséquences nécessairement impliquées par le jeu mêmes mis en usage."⁶² Although Simone Weil speaks only about how France could have given work its true dignity, it is clear that, with some adaptations, her suggestions could be applied to most Western Nation-States.

In "Le problème de l'U.R.S.S.," Simone Weil outlined what she saw to be the consequences of war, that is, putting into practise the goals of the principle of sacrificing the individual to the collectivity: "Ce principe se ramène en définitive au sacrifice du peuple tout entier à l'intérêt de quelques individus privilégiés (...) L'intérêt collectif signifie toujours et sans aucune exception l'intérêt des puissants."⁶³ The following letter to one of her students from Le Puy more or less concludes her assessment of the International political situation of the 1930's. In it she expresses the general view that she holds the Communist Party responsible for Hitler's victory. "La corruption du régime russe a entraîné celle des partis communistes, qui sont entièrement entre les mains de Moscou. Le parti communiste allemand a de grandes responsabilités de la victoire d'Hitler. Le parti français recommence les memes betises criminelles."⁶⁴

⁶¹Pétrement, *Vie*, Tome I, op. cit., p.347.

⁶²Pétrement, *Vie*, Tome I, op. cit., p.367.

⁶³Pétrement, *Vie*, Tome I, op. cit., p.370.

⁶⁴Pétrement, *Vie*, Tome I, op. cit., p.406.

C. FACTORY WORK

There was a sense of defeat in Simone Weil's tone in the article, "Le Problème de l'U.R.S.S.". It seemed as though she thought that the worker's movement, controlled by the Communist Party internationally, had lost sight of its responsibility towards the workers. What she questioned was the Communist Party's capacity to rationalize any "means" for the sake of the Revolution.

For Simone Weil and perhaps even for Marx, at least in *Capital*, the actual everyday living conditions in a factory were the means and that was what must be alleviated. Marx may have given us ambiguous messages concerning how the materialist method was to be applied in relation to the end goal of the Revolution, but Simone Weil, on the other hand, learned through her political activity that the actual material conditions of the workers of Stalinist Russia or of any other country was more important than the end goal of the Revolution. In fact the means of exploiting the workers, as it was done in Stalinist Russia, led the U.S.S.R. to take up goals such as Nationalism which as Simone Weil pointed out above may have appeared to be a means to an end but had become an end-in-itself. She thought the oppression of the workers in the factories of the U.S.S.R. was criminal. She could not accept the idea that nationalism was one of the stepping stones to socialism. Thus, in order to set the worker's movement back on track, Simone Weil decided to go to work in the factories so that she, herself, could assess the oppression suffered by the workers. She needed to know whether it was truly possible to be a manual labourer in a factory and a thinker, who can take possession of the use of language. If this were not possible, she questioned how the technology could be changed to make it possible. The real living conditions (the 'conditions of existence') of the labourer were important to Weil. In this Simone Weil was truly an existentialist — the means makes the individual. She was also the follower of Alain⁶⁵ insofar as she insisted on giving priority to the conditions of existence of the individual and not sacrificing the individual to the end goals of the collectivity — even for the Revolution of the Proletariat. Simone Weil formed her request for a leave of absence from teaching for a year, to work in a factory, as follows: " Je désirerais préparer une thèse de

⁶⁵See Foulquié, *Alain*, op.cit., p.134, where he quotes Alain saying that "L'individualisme est le fond du radicalisme" and "c'est un homme qui aime le droit et l'égalité."

philosophie concernant le rapport de la technique moderne, base de la grande industrie, avec les aspects essentiels de notre civilisation, c'est-à-dire d'une part notre organisation sociale, d'autre part notre culture."⁶⁶

Thus, Simone Weil's work in the factory was to be done with the full intention of studying the mechanism of oppression of man by man and particularly the form it had taken in the modern world: the oppression of man by man using the machine. Without this clear understanding she did not see how it could be alleviated.

In a letter to a student from Le Puy, Simone Weil said about the "real life" she was about to enter:

Vous m'écriviez que vous avez hâte de sortir de cette vie sans réalité, et de vous trouver aux prises avec les nécessités matérielles de l'existence. Mais, hélas! rares sont ceux qui peuvent aujourd'hui se heurter à ces "nécessités", surtout dans votre génération. Car, à part ceux qui trouvent leur pain tout cuit, la plupart sont livrés à la détresse du chômage, à une dépendance avilissante où n'apparaît aucune "nécessité", mais une fatalité écrasante contre laquelle on n'essaie même plus de lutter.⁶⁷

Both Simone Weil's biographers, Jacques Cabaud and Simone Pétrement divide her life up into two periods, the second period beginning with the year of factory work. Simone Pétrement points out that Simone Weil herself says, later in her life to Father Perrin, that this period had profoundly changed her: Ce contact avec le malheur avait tué ma jeunesse. Jusque-là je n'avais pas eu l'expérience du malheur, sinon du mien propre, qui, étant le mien, me paraissait de peu d'importance, et qui d'ailleurs n'était qu'un demi-malheur, étant biologique et non social.⁶⁸

As Simone Weil explains in the next sentence, she had known affliction existed but it was something else to be subjected to it oneself:

Je savais bien qu'il y avait beaucoup de malheur dans le monde, j'en étais obsédée, mais je ne l'avais jamais constaté par un contact prolongé. Etant en usine (...), le malheur des autres est entré dans ma chair et dans mon âme. Rien ne m'en séparait, car j'avais réellement oublié mon passé et je n'attendais aucun avenir, pouvant difficilement imaginer la possibilité de survivre à ces fatigues.⁶⁹

Simone Weil had known all along also that manual labour as it was done in the factory did not

⁶⁶Pétrement, *Vie*, op. cit., p.413.

⁶⁷Pétrement, *Vie*, Tome I, op. cit., p.439.

⁶⁸Pétrement, *Vie*, Tome I, op. cit., p.430-431.

⁶⁹Pétrement, *Vie*, Tome I, op. cit., p.431.

correspond to her ideal of work as thought in action. But experiencing manual labour for herself, losing sight of her identity in time and her social rank, not being able to think because of fatigue - all this was more devastating than her intellectual understanding had prepared her for.

Commentators also tended to divide Simone Weil's life and thought into a "first and second period". Generally, they claimed that her factory work experience marked the dividing point. The first period was dominated by social and political activity and philosophical reflection on this activity and the second period was predominantly reflective, i.e., reflections on religious and spiritual matters.⁷⁰ However, recently, commentators have become more sensitive to the idea that there may be a stronger relation than is at first evident between Simone Weil's activist period and her more spiritual period. For instance, Eric O. Springsted argues that the theme of 'platonic mediation' provides Simone Weil's thought with a 'constant' that weathers the very real changes her ideas go through from the early years to the later years. Thus he argues: "There are, therefore, I claim, not 'two Simone Weils', nor a syncretistic, superficial one, but rather a profound one that can be seen to remain constant, although not stationary, through remarkable changes."⁷¹ Mary G. Dietz also rejects this "two Simone Weils" view. Dietz uses a psychoanalytic approach to show that Simone Weil struggled all her life with the conflict between the "I" and "We" and between "worldliness" and "worldlessness". Keeping these personal conflicts within Simone Weil's identity in the forefront, Dietz argues that:

"Weil's thought, like her life, cannot (...) be adequately interpreted as a simple move from the "political" to the "spiritual". Drawing upon the tensions within her identity, we might best understand her thought not in terms of two discrete "stages" in separable moments in time, but instead as a *mélange* of themes of "impulses" that surface, recede, and resurface within her thinking, never fully abandoned or completely reconciled. These themes, in turn, coincide with certain aspects of her psychological crisis.... The point, then, is not to reduce Weil's thought to "early human" and "late divine", but rather to see how the struggle "between the human and the divine" reveals itself within her writings, and over time."⁷²

⁷⁰See Mary G. Dietz's *Between the Human and the Divine: The Political Thought of Simone Weil* (New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1988), 30, where she outlines those thinkers who take this two-phase view of Simone Weil's life and thought. Hereafter: Mary G. Dietz, *Between the Human and the Divine*.

⁷¹Eric O. Springsted, *Christus Mediator: Platonic Mediation in the Thought of Simone Weil*, American Academy of Religion Adademic Series 41, (Chico, California: Scholar Press, 1983), p.8.

⁷²Mary G. Dietz, *Between the Human and the Divine*, op. cit., p.32-33.

Other commentators who emphasize Simone Weil's political thought, Lawrence A. Blum and Victor J. Seidler argue in *A Truer Liberty: Simone Weil and Marxism* against the division of Simone Weil's life and thought into two stages. They claim that:

She never abandoned a concern for political and social questions; they remained at the heart of her thinking through her turn to Christianity. She never wavered from her central preoccupations: the problem of the dignity and spiritual condition of the most vulnerable and powerless in society, particularly the manual worker; the question of work and its place in society; and the role of science and technology in shaping the moral character of a civilization.⁷³

I agree with Springsted, Dietz and Blum & Seidler that there are not "two Simone Weils", however I will take as my theme her philosophical anthropology which as I will argue in chapter two, three, and four did develop but did not radically change from her early thought to her later thought. In other words the changes are developments and not divergences.

Through her education, as I have shown above, Simone Weil had come to appreciate and reflect on many spiritual problems and she merely returned to these later. Even throughout her work with the unions, as I have attempted to show above, Simone Weil held her central preoccupations of the conditions of existence and the level of culture of the workers in the forefront. She was not attached to the Marxist idea of a Revolution if it meant a break with our human heritage, i.e. with past culture. Simone Weil took from Marx the idea of the Revolution that best suited her early ideal conception of the human being as at once a thinker and a manual labourer. What Simone Weil learned from her factory experience was how thoroughly our human morale depended on there being a relation between one's thought and action.

Simone Weil realized that being a manual labourer in the factory system of her time excluded the possibility of being a thinker at almost any level. She suffered this herself, but most of all Simone Weil suffered from the idea that the workers she had devoted her life to helping would perhaps never experience any of the beauty of their human heritage. This was what seemed most intolerable to her. Thus, in search of some way to return to those people at the bottom of the social ranks some of those spiritual treasures she turned at first to Christianity. After all, Christ had shown favour to those who were engaged in manual

⁷³Lawrence A. Blum and Victor J. Seidler, *A Truer Liberty: Simone Weil and Marxism*(New York, London: Routledge, 1989), XVI.

labour; many of his parables spoke directly to them.

Simone Weil's philosophical anthropology provides an anchor to her movement of attention from political and social questions to more spiritual preoccupations. She never abandons her concerns for the problems of the social and political realm, as Blum and Seidler rightly point out; that is, for Simone Weil, we are bound by society. For this reason, society must be set up for the human being rather than against the human being. As her thought matures, the elements that coincided to form her early philosophical anthropology⁷⁴ continue to be the main elements of her later philosophical anthropology. After her work experience, she developed a greater concern for how all of these elements come together to form a morally healthy human being or a morally impoverished human being.

Thus, the reason Simone Weil turns to the Christian tradition and other religions in search of ideas and ways to help relieve the workers of their burden is more likely a result of her investigation of and exhaustion of all the possibilities in French syndicalism, Communism, Socialism, and Marxism. She sought to repair a lack in their methods and in the cultural values with which they approached the problem of human oppression — she clearly distinguished this amid economic, political, and social oppression. Simone Weil recognized that the workers lacked something more than what a materialistic culture could provide them with. She began to see in the Christian tradition a rich source of support for the besieged humanity of workers.

Through a good friend, Boris Souvarine, the publisher of *La Critique sociale*, Simone Weil met Auguste Deteouf, the managing director of the Alsthom Company (a company that built electrical machinery). Deteouf, apparently shared Simone Weil's belief that the workers should have the possibility to do both intellectual and manual work. Thus, he appreciated her project and agreed to have her work in

⁷⁴Such as: the way our "emotions" tell us about ourselves and how the world affects us; the way work is intrinsic to human nature because we can only act through our bodies; how action involves perception and perception involves different levels of thought; how thought involves the use of language and language is what we inherit from our human society; and how human society transmits higher levels of thought either through science or religion.

one of his factories, located on rue Lecourbe in Paris. This allowed Simone Weil the opportunity to get a work certificate, which was like a ticket into factory work. She was hired as a power-press operator and started working on Tuesday, December 4, 1934. With the exception of Mouquet, the foreman, all of the other workers were given to believe that she was just an ordinary worker. During this period Simone Weil kept a journal. In it, she recorded how difficult it was to reach the speed that was demanded of the worker. She worked very slowly and because she was paid on a piecework basis her salary was very low. In a letter to a student (subsequently published in *La condition ouvrière*) she says:

...le tragique de cette situation, c'est que le travail est trop machinal pour offrir matière à la pensée, et que néanmoins il interdit toute autre pensée. Penser, c'est aller moins vite, or il y a des normes de vitesse, établis par des bureaucrates impitoyables, et qu'il faut réaliser, à la fois pour ne pas être renvoyé et pour gagner suffisamment (le salaire étant aux pièces). Moi, je n'arrive pas encore à les réaliser, pour bien des raisons : le manque d'habitude, ma maladresse naturelle...les maux de tête, et une certaine manie de penser dont je n'arrive pas à me débarrasser....⁷⁵

Simone Weil realized that, no matter how hard she tried, her own experience was not like that of the other workers.

This first factory job was not a steady job, because she was laid off between Christmas and New Years. She returned on January 2, 1935, only to fall sick on January 10 with otitis. This kept her away from work for more than a month. During that time, she continued to struggle with her essay, "Réflexions sur les cause de la liberté et de l'oppression sociale." She sent it to Alain for his opinion and he wrote back with a very considered critique, including the following encouragement: " Your example will give courage to the generations disappointed by ontology or ideology."⁷⁶

During her rest, Simone Weil wrote to one of her union friends in St. Etienne with some reflections on the work, describing it as inhuman and wondering how it could be made human, as she says:

...si le travail parcellaire n'était pas à la tâche, l'ennui qui s'en dégage annihilerait l'attention, occasionnerait une lenteur considérable et des tas de loupés.⁷⁷

She questions whether Trotsky or Lenin had ever been in a factory so as to get an idea of the real

⁷⁵Simone Weil, *La condition ouvrière* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), p.32.

⁷⁶Pétrement, *Vie Tome II*, op. cit., p.29. Simone Pétrement *Simone Weil: a life* Translation by Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976).

⁷⁷Pétrement, *Vie Tome II*, op. cit., p.30.

conditions that make for servitude or freedom for the workers. Simone Weil returned to work at the factory on February 25, 1935 and was laid off after two weeks. Her last period of work at Alsthom was from March 18 to April 5, 1935. She quit Alsthom in part because she had injured her hand, but also to find a job where no one knew her reasons for working.

Simone Weil found her next job within a week at J.J. Carnaud et Forges de Basse-Indre factory at Boulogne-Billancourt, where she started on Tuesday, April 11, 1935. Her first day was a disaster and made her very angry. Her experience at this factory must have been more devastating and fatiguing because she does not write about it at all and in less than a month she was fired with no explanation. By May 7th, Simone Weil was again unemployed. This time she did not find employment so quickly and she began to run out of money. She also found her job search quite unpleasant. The only good thing she saw about it was that she could speak to the unemployed as more or less their equal.

A month later, on June 5, 1935, Simone Weil got a job at the Renault factory. She had learned from the other unemployed waiting in line that the man hiring took on mainly pretty women. So perhaps for one of the few times in her life, Simone Weil took the trouble to put on makeup to look pretty and dress "for success." She got the job that day.

Simone Weil worked at the Renault factory from June 6 to August 22, 1935. Her experience in this plant was less devastating than the previous ones, perhaps because she tolerated it better or maybe it was less difficult. Rather than describe her experiences in any detail here, I will reserve discussion for the second chapter where I will examine more exactly what she had learned about human oppression and the human being throughout this period. But a brief mention of her general feeling will suffice to suggest how deeply her working life affected her: "Le sentiment de la dignité personnelle tel qu'il a été fabriqué par la société est brisé. Il faut s'en forger un autre (bien que l'épuisement éteigne la conscience de sa propre faculté de penser !). M'efforcer de conserver cet autre.... Le fait capital n'est pas la souffrance, mais l'humiliation."⁷⁸ The continual humiliation of the worker does not leave them the strength

⁷⁸Weil, *La condition ouvrière*, op. cit., p.107.

to rebel against oppression. This realization made Simone Weil doubt that liberty for the workers was near at hand because of the enormity of the task of making changes in the system that oppresses them. She did not think that the Marxists were leading the workers in the right direction to change the system.

Before returning to her position as a professor of philosophy at Bourges in September, Simone Weil went with her parents to Spain and Portugal for a rest. This was significant to Simone Weil's life because it was in Portugal that she had her first mystical vision. It was through this experience that the relationship between Christianity and human oppression became clear to her. In a letter to Joe Bousquet, written 12 May 1941, Simone Weil relates her experience of factory work and that of this first mystical experience:

Peu de temps auparavant, étant déjà depuis des années dans cet état physique, j'avais été ouvrière d'usine, près d'un an, dans des usines de mécanique de la région parisienne. La combinaison de l'expérience personnelle et de la sympathie pour la misérable masse humaine qui m'entourait et avec laquelle j'étais, même à mes propres yeux, indistinctement confondue, a fait entrer si avant dans mon coeur le malheur de la dégradation sociale que depuis lors je me suis toujours sentie une esclave, au sens que ce mot avait chez les Romains.

Pendant tout cela le mot même de Dieu n'avait aucune place en mes pensées. Il n'en a eu qu'à partir du jour, il y a environ trois ans et demie, où je n'ai pas pu la lui refuser. Dans un moment d'intense douleur physique alors que je m'efforçais d'aimer, mais sans me croire le droit de donner un nom à cet amour, j'ai senti, sans y être aucunement préparée — car je n'avais jamais lu les mystiques — une présence plus personnelle, plus certaine, plus réelle que celle d'un être humain, inaccessible et aux sens et à l'imagination, analogue à l'amour qui transparait à travers le plus tendre sourire d'un être aimé. Depuis cet instant le nom de Dieu et celui du Christ se sont mêlés de plus en plus irrésistiblement à mes pensées.⁷⁹

She began to see Christianity as the religion of the oppressed, or as she says, of slaves. For Simone Weil to be a slave meant, as it did for the men of antiquity, that one lost half of one's soul; one was afflicted. She claimed that affliction always involved an 'uprooting of life' which meant that one's life was attacked from all angles, social, psychological, and physical. But the essential factors of 'real affliction', in Simone Weil's view, were physical pain and social degradation. These two factors were present in Christ's suffering and that was why she saw Christianity as the 'religion of the slaves'.

In Simone Weil's view, Christianity gave the oppressed a way of expressing themselves. Although she comes to the awareness of this relation in 1935 in Portugal, it took her some time to figure out how

⁷⁹Simone Weil, *Pensées sans ordre concernant l'amour de Dieu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), p.80-81.

to express this in her own thought. Nevertheless, in her courses in philosophy at Bourges she began to direct the attention of her students to the French spiritualists and to indirectly relate her factory work experience. For example, in her lecture notes she writes : "Seuls les malheureux ont le bonheur de connaître le prix de la fraternité humaine....Ce qui fait éprouver la valeur humaine : humiliation, dégradation, esclavage, péché, erreur. Grande idée qui est au fond de la religion catholique (Pascal)."⁸⁰

Outside of teaching, she continued her study of the modern factory techniques and organization. Through one of her students, Simone Weil was able to obtain the authorization to visit a factory called the Rosières Foundries. There she met M. Bernard, an engineer and the technical manager of the factory. He had started a small magazine for the workers in the plant, called *Entre Nous*. M. Bernard told Simone Weil that he would consider her articles for publication in his magazine.

The first article she wrote, "Appel aux ouvriers de Rosières," did not impress M. Bernard, because in it she invited the workers to write her anonymous letters relating their bitter experiences in the factory. M. Bernard rejected this article. Also, he could not condone Simone Weil's enthusiasm over the sit-in strikes of May 1936. Despite M. Bernard's anger, he agreed to publish a story that she wrote with the intention of relating Greek poetry to the workers. This was the story of Sophocles' *Antigone*, which appeared in *Entre Nous* on May 16. She thought that the workers might be able to relate to Antigone's cry for justice. Simone Weil wrote directly about the sit-in strikes in an article entitled, "La vie et la grève des ouvrières métallus," published in *La révolution prolétarienne* mid-June of that year.

D. PROBLEMS IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS: WAR

Throughout the years 1936-1941, Simone Weil was predominately preoccupied with international problems of war and peace and reflections on the spiritual side of human nature. It was also during this period that she had two of her three mystical experiences which made her more inclined to attend special

⁸⁰Pétrement, *Vie*, Tome II, op. cit., p.61.

religious ceremonies. Although these were her main preoccupations, she still engaged in union activity and reflected on how factories could be changed to improve the life of the workers. I will deal with each of these three main areas of concern in turn.

What plagued Simone Weil after her factory experience was the horror of the conditions in the factories themselves. Thus, she turned her attention to whether it would be possible for a factory to be organized in such a way as to "balance the rights that the workers can legitimately demand insofar as they are human beings and the material interests of production. She still hoped that the Popular Front government and the strikes of June 1936 would give some attention to the real needs of the human being in the factories and she continued to direct her study towards that purpose. She appealed to the French Confederation of Christian Workers Union to join the C.G.T. hoping to moderate the dominance of the Communist party. At the same time, Simone Weil studied the Taylor system to understand the system in the factories.⁸¹

While Simone Weil was teaching at Saint Quentin in 1937, she attended meetings each week with the *Nouveaux cahiers* group. This group had no defined doctrine. It was formed around Auguste D  teouf, the director of the Alsthom Company, where Simone Weil had done her first factory job. It began with a few industrialists, who tried to pool their ideas on necessary social reforms. In March 1937, the group founded a magazine, also called *Nouveaux cahiers*. In this magazine Simone Weil published many of her articles on Hitler and the upcoming war.

In February 1936, the Popular Front party in Spain had won the elections. On July 17 and 18, the Spanish generals revolted against the Popular Front government, beginning the civil war in Spain. By the end of July, the fascist government in Italy was sending planes to help the revolt. The Spanish government turned to the French for support. Prime Minister L  on Blum was put in a difficult situation. The communists were pressuring him to send support while the Radical party rejected the idea flatly. They argued that intervention could lead to a war with the Axis powers. Also, the English government made it

⁸¹The Taylor system is a method for maximizing production by increasing the speed of work.

clear to Léon Blum that they would not support a French intervention in Spain. Simone Weil agreed with Blum's decision not to intervene in order to avoid a world war.

Although she felt that France as a nation should not intervene, she saw no reason why individuals should not volunteer to help the side they supported. Early in Simone Weil's Ecole Normale days, she had declared herself a pacifist and although she wanted liberty for the workers, her idea of how to get liberty had never been a violent one. But she felt that the situation of the Spanish civil war was different, since she could not prevent the war from carrying on she preferred to share the misfortune of the people of the side she sympathized with rather than remain in Paris. In this, she followed Alain's reasoning for entering the First World War. She obtained a certificate from a Paris trade union to act as a journalist in Spain. Simone Weil left for Spain at the beginning of August, 1936 with the intention of joining up with one of the leftist groups and, as it turned out, connected with the anarchist-syndicalist group, the C.N.T. (La Confederación Nacional del Trabajo).

Simone Weil's time in Spain was short-lived due to an accident she had while cooking. The accident occurred while her group was preparing for battle. She was ordered to remain in camp as cook and spilt scalding oil over her left leg. She was hospitalized 18 August in Spain. She spent enough time in Spain to come face to face with the horrors of war. In a 1938 letter to George Bernanos, she related some of what she witnessed in Spain, commenting on the attitude towards death, which seemed to her shockingly sadistic:

Je n'ai jamais vu, ni parmi les Espagnols, ni même parmi les Français venus soit pour se promener - ces derniers le plus souvent des intellectuels ternes et inoffensifs - je n'ai jamais vu personne exprimer même dans l'intimité de la répulsion, du dégoût ou seulement de la désapprobation à l'égard du sang inutilement versé. Vous parlez de la peur. Oui, la peur a eu une part dans ces tueries ; mais là où j'étais, je ne lui ai pas vu la part que vous lui attribuez. Des hommes apparemment courageux - il en est un au moins dont j'ai de mes yeux constaté le courage - au milieu d'un repas plein de camaraderie, racontaient avec un bon sourire fraternel combien ils avaient tué de prêtres ou de "fascistes" - terme très large. J'ai eu le sentiment, pour moi, que lorsque les autorités temporelles et spirituelles ont mis une catégorie d'êtres humains en dehors de ceux dont la vie a un prix, il n'est rien de plus naturel à l'homme que de tuer.... Il y a là un entraînement, une ivresse à laquelle il est impossible de résister.... Une telle atmosphère efface aussitôt le but même de la lutte.²²

²²Weil, *Ecrits*, op. cit., p.223.

Weil's reflection on this experience showed her bitter knowledge that in war the human being ceased to have value. Not only was the purpose of the struggle lost in the intoxication of murder, she realized, but the Spanish civil war was not a war for the peasants but a war between States, between Russia, on the one side, and Germany and Italy, on the other side. Having seen for herself that this civil war was not different from any other war made her a more adamant pacifist and favour negotiations rather than war.

Simone Weil's health did not permit a return to teaching in the year 1936-37: the burn on her leg continued to bother her and her customary headaches began to be more violent than ever. Most of the year she spent writing articles about the workers' condition and about the international situation. Simone Weil exercised her reconfirmed radical pacifism in two articles arguing that there would be no reason to defend any state invaded by Germany. In the first article, "La politique de neutralité et l'assistance mutuelle," she claimed that in the Spanish civil war the French government decided to remain neutral even though there was common cause to defend against fascism. Thus, what France had not done for Spain, it should not do for Czechoslovakia, Russia, or any other state. In a second article, "Non-intervention généralisée,"²³ she challenges Léon Blum to explain why his reasons for not intervening in Spain would not have the same force when considering Czechoslovakia.

Simone Weil argued against the use the Communist party in France made of strikes. She claimed that the party was using strikes more as a tool for blackmailing the government on questions of foreign policy than as an effort to help the workers in any way. The Communist party wanted the government to send help to the Popular Front government in Spain, and with their power to push the workers to strike, they used strikes as a threat. In an article called "La déclaration de la C.G.T.," published in *Le libertaire* of October 23, 1936, she points out the dangers of using strikes in this way: workers may become discontent with the constant disorder and turn towards Fascism. Yet, in the same article, she shows her dislike for the idea, proposed by the C.G.T., of replacing strikes altogether by procedures of conciliation and arbitration. Her solution to the problem of balancing the rights of the employers with the

²³Both essays are published in Simone Weil, *Ecrits historiques et politiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960).

rights of the workers was to have "action syndicale énergique, prudente, méthodique, coordonnée, en vue d'un objectif bien défini: le contrôle ouvrier."⁸⁴

After June 1936, the C.G.T.U. and the C.G.T. joined to form one nationwide trade union in France. After the merger it was called the C.G.T.. Simone Weil still worked for the union and wrote articles for its weekly newspaper, *Syndicats*. But, in a sense, she was less involved than in previous years because international affairs took more of her attention. She was, however, deeply concerned over the possibility that the Communist party might completely dominate the Union. When the Union had its election for the executive it became clear that Simone Weil's concerns were warranted. Only thirteen "ex-confédérés" (former C.G.T. members) were elected against twenty-two "ex-unitaires" (former C.G.T.U. members). In a report on a trade-union congress of February 1937, she notes the danger of this domination: "Il est hors de doute qu'une C.G.T. soumise au parti communiste serait un simple appendice de l'Etat russe, un instrument de chantage vis-à-vis du gouvernement(...); que la C.G.T. deviendrait alors dans le pays le principal facteur d'union sacrée, de chauvinisme, de guerre...."⁸⁵

In international affairs, Simone Weil gave close attention to Germany's movements and wrote many articles throughout the year 1936-37, mostly arguing against retaliation on France's part to any of Germany's provocations. Her belief that war could be avoided brings her up against problems that up until then had not drawn her attention. The landing of German troops in Spanish Morocco and the threat to French Morocco caused Simone Weil to wrestle with France's colonial history. She had never respected France's Foreign Policy since the Versailles Treaty and she demanded the French admit to the inhumaneness of their own imperialistic tendencies. At this time, she wrote two articles arguing that France had no right to Morocco anyway and there was no reason to defend non-existent rights. Her analysis of imperialism leads her on to a study of western civilization and a continual reproach of the Popular Front government and the French people for ignoring the misery their imperialism caused in the colonies. She concludes one of these articles, "Le sang coule en Tunisie," by saying:

⁸⁴Pétrement, *Vie*, Tome II, op. cit., p.116.

⁸⁵Pétrement, *Vie*, Tome II, op. cit., p.127.

Quand je songe à une guerre éventuelle, il se mêle, je l'avoue, à l'effroi et à l'horreur que me cause une pareille perspective, une pensée quelque peu réconfortante. C'est qu'une guerre européenne pourrait servir de signal à la grande revanche des peuples coloniaux pour punir notre insouciance, notre indifférence et notre cruauté."⁸⁶

Also during this period, Simone Weil wrote one of her more insightful articles on war, "Ne recommençons pas la guerre de Troie".⁸⁷ It was published in two parts (April 1st and 15th, 1937) in *Nouveaux cahiers*. It was in this article that she first developed the idea that human nature itself leads us to engage in the most absurd wars. At this point, her position on pacifism had become somewhat ambiguous. This very ambiguity suggested that she was willing, in 1937, to accept that a second world war was a threat. She would once again face the bitter side of the human being - the one she had seen in the factories and again in the Spanish Civil War.

In spite of this pessimistic analysis, Simone Weil continued to hope that, by some miracle, and in some person, the more balanced, insightful, and intelligent side of human nature would awaken to what was happening and would act in such a way as to prevent the catastrophe of war. The Greeks and Trojans massacred one another for ten years over Helen. But for most of the soldiers, Helen was only a symbol - the real issue did not exist. Simone Weil points out that when a war is being fought over symbols or intangible objects, the importance of the battle begins to be measured by the sacrifices it demands. And each sacrifice is an argument for new ones.

Poincaré, she claimed, used this claim of escalating sacrifices to destroy the proposal for a negotiated peace during the First World War. She equated the belief of her contemporaries that economic interests were at stake with the belief that the real cause of useless wars is the gods. Helen was the symbol and the gods were the underlying cause of war for the Greeks of Homer's epic. Words with capital letters, "Capitalism," "Fascism," "Communism," - words empty of content - were the symbols, and economic oligarchies the underlying cause, for the Europeans of the 1930's. Simone Weil develops this analogy to make the point that the emotional side of human nature prevents recognition of their irrational beliefs

⁸⁶Weil, "Le sang coule en Tunisie," *Ecrits*, 338.

⁸⁷Subsequently published in *Ecrits*, 256-272.

and behavior. Her arguments, at this time, show that she still hoped war might be averted by more rational thought and discussion with the Germans.

Although Simone Weil was disappointed when she heard about the taking of Balboa by Franco's army on June 19, 1937 and of Léon Blum's resignation as Prime Minister (only to become vice-president under Chautemps), she continued to hold her pacifist convictions. Blum's resignation marked the end of the Popular Front government for Simone Weil, as she clearly signalled by an article called, "Meditations sur un cadavre." In this article, she analyzed the role of the imagination in social life. Simone Pétrement claims that it was about this time, the summer and autumn of 1937, that Simone Weil wrote one of the essays that make up *Oppression et liberté*, "Méditation sur l'obéissance et la liberté". Again, in this essay, she develops the idea that the imagination plays an important role in the gaining or the collapse of power.

Simone Pétrement suggests that it was in answer to a questionnaire put out by the magazine *Essais et combats* that Simone Weil wrote two more of her theoretical works, which are now collected in *Oppression et liberté*. "Sur les contradictions du Marxisme" and "Examen critique des idées de révolution et de progrès".⁸⁸ In these articles she tried to answer the question "Does Marxism have to be Revised?" In spite of the fact that she had to stop teaching in January of 1938, she still felt compelled to make her arguments and thoughts known on specific issues. Her headaches, and the war, prevented her from ever returning to teaching.

During this period, Simone Weil continued to be a pacifist. It was not until after the Munich agreement was signed on 30 September 1938, that she recognized war as the inevitable next step. In an article called "Désarroi de notre temps," she expresses her pessimism: "Les grandes espérances héritées des trois siècles précédents, et surtout du dernier, espoir d'un bien-être général, espoir de démocratie, espoir de paix, sont en train de s'effriter à une cadence rapide."⁸⁹ In spite of her disappointments over the political events of 1938, she was determined to find a more balanced perspective from which to examine

⁸⁸Simone Weil, *Oppression et liberté* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955).

⁸⁹Weil, *Ecrits*, op. cit., p.290.

the situation of the coming war. Towards this end she read prodigiously -- history, ancient history, middle ages history, and history of religions and religious texts, such as Egyptian Book of the Dead, and the New and Old testaments of The Bible.⁹⁰

On April 27 of 1939, England adopted conscription and this meant that France, too, would soon have to begin preparations. Thus, she wrote "Réflexions en vue d'un bilan" to discuss how France could best respond to the situation.⁹¹ Simone Weil claimed that France's continued existence as an independent nation was being threatened and that two courses of action presented themselves: France could prepare for war or she could submit to the enemy and lose her independence as a nation. She argued that the second possibility would be an extremely bad choice. War and domination of civilian life may seem like evils as great as enslavement by foreigners, but it was not actually so. Often, the enslaved country is subjected to a military regime and compelled to participate in its conqueror's wars. Although she presented pacificism as a third way to avert war, in this essay she dismissed the possibility by saying that it was rare and too little heeded to count as a political factor. In 1939, Simone Weil, for the first time, renounced her previous pacifist political stance. She argued that the only reason that a contemporary nation ceased to defend itself would be due to military impotence. She acknowledged Hitler's apparent strength of method, supported by a "will-to-power mysticism," and knew that it could take Germany a long way towards "universal domination." Nevertheless, Simone Weil astutely perceived a fatal weakness in it:

Ce qui rend ces régimes terrifiants est aussi ce qui les affaiblit avec les années, c'est-à-dire leur prodigieux dynamisme. Dans ces régimes, tout ce qui assure la permanence de la force est sacrifié à ce qui en procure le progrès ; ainsi, quand le progrès a atteint une certaine limite, la paralysie survient.⁹²

Such prophetic statements on the limit of Hitler's strength could have, if they had been given attention, lent an air of optimism to those involved in the struggle against Germany's "universal domination".⁹³

⁹⁰Pétrement, *Vie* Tome II, op. cit., p.216-217. Pétrement lists other texts that Simone Weil was reading at the time.

⁹¹Weil, *Ecrits*, op. cit., p.296-312.

⁹²Weil, "Réflexions en vue d'un bilan", in *Ecrits*, op. cit., p.306.

⁹³It is these kinds of statements, quite frequent in Simone Weil's thought, that make me wonder why some commentators refer to her as a pessimist. See for instance, Gilbert Kahn "Simone Weil et Alain"

About the end of the spring of 1939, Simone Weil fell ill with pleurisy. Dr. Louis Ramond, who insisted that she take a convalescent vacation. At the end of July, she left with her parents for Genoa for fifteen days. Then, they planned to go to Péra-Cava, a town in the mountains above Nice, where they intended to stay for the winter. War was declared in the first days of September and the family cut short their plans and returned to Paris.

War inspired in Simone Weil the desire to work out strategies to resist Hitler. Thus, she worked on putting together another project, "the parachute plan," in which she suggested that France parachute troops and arms into Czechoslovakia in order to encourage the people to rise up against the Germans. Also, she worked on two long essays, "Quelques réflexions sur les origines de l'Hitlérisme,"³⁴ and "L'Iliade, ou le poème de la force."³⁵ It is the second essay, "L'Iliade," that more directly takes the nature of human beings as its central theme. she maintains that the concept of "force" must be considered if one wants to think clearly about human relations. This very pessimistic view may well have its roots in her experience of war, but we will see that it is balanced by another view, that humans can indeed choose another way.

When she heard that the parachute project was rejected, she began to work on another project called, "A formation of front-line nurses." This project was developed before the German offensive of 1940. In it, she proposed that there be a small group of nurses organized to treat and help the wounded and dying in the midst of combat.

Due to the circumstances of war, André Weil, en route to France from Russia, escaped from Germany only to be imprisoned in France for failing to report for military duty. While he was at the military prison in Rouen, Simone wrote him many letters about mathematics and science. These letters continue Simone Weil's reflections on the state of modern science and she wrote more essays on this

op.cit. 11 and David McLellan, *Utopian Pessimist: The Life and Thought of Simone Weil* (New York: Poseidan Press, 1990).

³⁴Weil, "Quelques réflexions sur les origines de l'Hitlérisme," *Ecrits*, op. cit., p.11-60.

³⁵Weil, "L'Iliade, ou le poème de la force," *La source grecque* (Paris: Gallimard, 1953), p.21-34. In the first essay she once again raises the problem of whether humanity should accept universal domination. People at the time actually considered this as a solution -- an attitude that will be discussed more completely in the last chapter of this thesis. Then she does an in-depth analysis of the analogy between Hitler's regime and the Roman empire.

problem while she was in Marseille.⁹⁶

On 10 May 1940, the Germans began the assault on France. Paris was declared an open city on 13 June, and the following day, the German army entered the city. Until the declaration, Simone Weil had hoped that Paris would be defended. When it was not, the family fled. They went as far as Nevers hoping that there would at least be a line of defence formed along the Loire, but again it was not to be. Simone Weil and her parents proceeded to Vichy, then unoccupied, and stayed there from the beginning of July 1940 to mid-August 1940. From Vichy, they went to Toulouse for two weeks and then to Marseilles, where they stayed from mid-September 1940 to mid-May 1942.

In Marseilles, Simone Weil continued trying to find ways to resist the Germans and defend her country. What she found most painful was to be held prisoner of her imagination, knowing that the follies of the imagination could be more dangerous to the soul than the trauma of reality:

Mon imagination fonctionne toujours d'une manière bien pénible pour moi. La pensée de malheurs ou de dangers auxquels je n'ai pas de part me remplit d'un mélange d'horreur, de pitié, de honte et de remords qui m'ôte toute liberté d'esprit ; la perception de la réalité me délivre de tout cela. Par exemple, les morts causées par le bombardement de Paris ne m'ont donné aucune émotion, simplement parce que j'y étais. Au contraire les journées pendant lesquelles s'est déroulée la bataille des Flandres ont été atroces pour moi.⁹⁷

She always believed that if one was where the killing was being done and did all that could be done to alleviate the situation, it would be far healthier for the soul than to be left to one's imagination. Thus, Simone Weil wished to be sent to North Africa to teach or to find her way to England to work for the Resistance. She wrote a series of letters to the Ministry of National Education to request a post, preferably in Algeria. Apparently she had been appointed a position at a girl's Lycée in Constantine starting on October 1, 1940. But she never learned about this appointment, nor did she ever receive any reply from the Ministry, perhaps because they did not know how to reach her. She thought it was for anti-Semitic reasons that she had not heard from the Ministry. She wrote another letter about the "Statutory Regulations

⁹⁶This aspect of Simone Weil's thought will be thoroughly dealt with in the second and third chapter of this thesis. The relation between the philosophy of science and human nature will be more fully explored.

⁹⁷Pétrement, *Vie*, Tome II, op. cit., p.283-284.

on Jews." In the letter she argues that anti-Semitism rests on confused ideas. She points out that Judaism is her heritage but she was not raised a Jew; rather, she received a French Christian education.⁹⁸

In Marseilles, Simone Weil met a group of intellectuals who were connected to the publication, *Cahiers du sud*. Through her meeting with Ballard, the editor-in-chief of the *Cahiers du sud*, one of the few literary magazines that continued to publish material from Jewish writers, she was able to publish her essay "L'Iliade". It appeared in the December 1940 and the January 1941 issues under Simone Weil's pseudonym, Emile Novis. Also, she met Jean Lambert and Gilbert Kahn at the *Cahiers du sud* office. (Gilbert Kahn later wrote many articles commenting on Simone Weil's life and works.)

E. MYSTICAL EXPERIENCES: Consideration of Religions

The years following Simone Weil's factory experience, 1936-1941, were filled with a mixture of preoccupations. In the preceeding section we showed that she continued to follow her political concerns and activity. In the following section, I will point to how Simone Weil's spiritual development through these same years also contributed to the development of her philosophical anthropology.

During March 1937, Simone Weil received treatment for her headaches in Montana. As Montana was on the way to Italy, she decided to take a rest by travelling in Italy. On this trip she really began to appreciate spiritual music and Christian art. She spent much time musing over "The Last Supper" by Leonardo in Milan -- but, of course, she made her usual investigations of working-class conditions elsewhere in the city. In Rome, she heard the Pentecostal Mass at St. Peter's, sung by a choir of young boys from the Sistine Chapel. She was deeply moved by the beauty of the Catholic liturgy. She described Mass as the "comprehensive art that Wagner was seeking." Assisi, however, impressed her most. Later she described Assisi as the place where she first felt the impulse to pray. Simone Weil describes the second

⁹⁸Jacques Cabaud, *A Fellowship in Love* (New York: Channel Press, 1964), p.202.

of her three mystical experiences:

Etant seule dans la petite chapelle romane du XIII^e siècle de Santa Maria degli Angeli, incomparable merveille de pureté, où Saint François a prié bien souvent, quelque chose de plus fort que moi m'a obligée, pour la première fois de ma vie, à me mettre à genoux."⁹⁹

Also, at Assisi, she encountered what she thought were the kind of human beings that could act as a model of what being human should be: "...ces nobles exemplaires de l'espèce humaine que sont les paysans ombriens, cette race si belle, si saine, si vigoureuse, si joyeuse et si douce."¹⁰⁰

In the early part of 1938, Simone Weil had other experiences that furthered her greater awareness of the spiritual side of human nature. For Easter of that year, Simone Weil decided to visit Solesmes, where she knew she could hear the Gregorian chants. This was a very popular occasion among music lovers. Later on, she would tell Father Perrin¹⁰¹ about how she came to have a better understanding of the possibility of feeling the presence of "divine love" in the midst of affliction at Solesmes. She was suffering from severe headaches while she was listening to the Gregorian chants and yet by an extreme effort of concentration, she was able "to find a pure and perfect joy in the unimaginable beauty of the chanting and the words". Her concern for Christianity was certainly growing and she was prepared to open herself to other spiritual influences. For example, at Solesmes, an English Catholic had introduced her to the 17th century English metaphysical poet, George Herbert. Again to Father Perrin Simone Weil recounted how "chance" made this English Catholic a messenger to her. Once, when she recited George Herbert's poem *Love*, as she often had, she claimed that "Christ himself came down and took possession of me."¹⁰²

In the same way as Simone Weil's factory experience brought her into contact with real experience, her mystical experiences brought her in contact with the 'love of God' through joy. She learned for herself that if one waits with attention and an open heart, one will receive God's love, especially in the midst of affliction. What Simone Weil learned about human nature through these two kinds of experiences -- suffering and joy -- was that it is in our essence to receive God's love. Her own experience taught her that

⁹⁹Pétrement, *Vie*, Tome II, op. cit., p.152.

¹⁰⁰Pétrement, *Vie*, Tome II, op. cit., p.152.

¹⁰¹See p. 100 as to who Father Perrin is.

¹⁰²Simone Weil, *Waiting on God* (Glasgow: Fount Paperbacks; 1977.), p.35.

one cannot receive God's love by way of joy alone. She argues that although the human being knows God's love through joy because through joy the 'beauty of the world penetrates our soul,' joy is not sufficient because the body must have through suffering its part in the apprenticeship. Only through suffering can the human being become sensitive to the "necessity" of obeying God's ORDER – the order of the world. Simone Weil uses an analogy to make this point: "We could no more become friends of God through joy alone than one becomes a ship's captain by studying books on navigation."¹⁰³ What this analogy means is that joy is the higher order experience of God's love but one can only get to this through the lower order experience of 'necessity'. Thus, she claims:

In order that our being should one day become wholly sensitive in every part to this obedience which is the substance of matter, in order that a new sense should be formed in us which enables us to hear the universe as the vibrations of the word of God, the transforming powers of suffering and of joy are equally indispensable.¹⁰⁴

The same Englishman had spoken to her about Shakespeare's play, *King Lear*. She wrote to the latter about *King Lear* and affliction. In the letter about *King Lear*, she begins to define what she understands by the word "affliction". She says that affliction occurs when a human being is broken by the external world. Christ, she claims, suffered affliction on the cross and is one of the paradigm cases – Job is another. She claims that the poetry expressing real affliction is when the immortal cry of Christ sounds through every word. She cites *The Iliad*, certain works of Aeschylus, most works of Sophocles, and *King Lear* as examples of poetry expressing real affliction. Also in this period, Simone Weil says what her creed in life is: "...the feeling that every human being is all-important."

Throughout the first year of the war Simone Weil studied the history of religions. For example, she was reading Dhorm's translation of the Assyro-babylonians religion and the Bhagavad-Gita. She felt that the Bhagavad-Gita was extremely pertinent to her questions about war. In it, Arjuna, the main character, faces the problem of not knowing whether a man who has pity for others and whom war fills with horror should nonetheless fight. Krishna answers Arjuna that one must fight, but suggests that it can

¹⁰³Simone Weil, *Waiting on God*, op.cit., p.90.

¹⁰⁴Simone Weil, *Waiting on God*, op. cit., p.91.

be an action accomplished with purity. Simone Weil felt that the spirit of the Bhagavad-Gita and the Christian spirit were remarkably close.

A very important meeting took place in Marseille through the sister of a mathematician friend of André Weil, Pierre Honnorat. Hélène Honnorat, a teacher at the girl's Lycée in Marseilles, was a fervent Catholic; she discussed religion with Simone and introduced her to Father Perrin on June 7, 1941. Father Perrin and Simone Weil had many long discussions about religion and Catholicism, many of which were published after the war as *Simone Weil, telle que nous l'avons connue*.¹⁰⁵

In Marseilles Simone Weil also discovered that she admired the Cathar religion and philosophy, especially for their judgment of the Old Testament. She criticized a decision that the Catholic Church made in history in favour of the Roman tradition and against the Cathars. In a letter to Déodat Roché, who wrote a book on Catharism, she wrote:

Depuis longtemps déjà je suis attirée vers les Cathars, bien que sachant peu de choses à leur sujet. Une des principales raisons de cette attraction est leur opinion concernant l'Ancien testament, que vous exprimez si bien dans votre article, où vous dites si justement que l'adoration de la puissance a fait perdre aux Hébreux la notion du bien et du mal. Le rang de texte sacré accordé à des récits pleins de cruautés impitoyables m'a toujours tenue éloignée du Christianisme, d'autant plus que depuis vingt siècles ces récits n'ont jamais cessé d'exercer une influence sur tous les courants de la pensée Chrétienne; si du moins on entend par Christianisme les Eglises aujourd'hui classées dans cette rubrique...L'influence de l'Ancien Testament et celle de Empire romain, dont la tradition a été continuée par la papauté, sont à mon avis les deux causes essentielles de la corruption du Christianisme.¹⁰⁶

An idea that she explores in this letter helps us to understand the meaning she gives to organized religion and how this differs from a philosophy. Simone Weil claims that a "lived religion" is thought incarnated in a human environment, thought that influences everything, whereas thought that remains in the minds of only a certain number of individuals is philosophy.¹⁰⁷ Simone Weil admired the Cathars because they had a religion and not simply a philosophy. She thought that in Plato's time the highest thoughts did

¹⁰⁵J.-M. Perrin et Gustave Thibon, *Simone Weil: telle que nous l'avons connue* (Paris: Fayard, 1967). The substance of these reported conversations are discussed later in this chapter.

¹⁰⁶Simone Weil, "Lettre à Déodat Roché," *Pensées sans ordre concernant l'amour de Dieu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), p.63-64.

¹⁰⁷Simone Weil, "Philosophy," *Formative Writings, 1929-1941*, edited and translated by Dorothy Tuck and Wilhelmina Van Ness (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), p.283-289. (Originally published in *Cahiers du Sud*, no. 235, May 1941, under the pseudonym "Emile Novis."

not permeate the whole human environment around him; thus, he developed a philosophy. She also sensed in Plato's work a regret that this was so. Catharism, she says, was the last living expression in Europe of the spirit of pre-Roman antiquity.

The Cathars held the gnostic view of radical dualism which claims that God is completely hidden and alien from the Cosmos. The cosmos is the realm of darkness.¹⁰⁸

What attracted Simone Weil to the Cathars was not their gnosticism, as I will argue in Chapter 3 of this thesis "Simone Weil is neither an anti-cosmic or radical dualist."¹⁰⁹ She admired Catharism because

¹⁰⁸To help explain the doctrines of the Cathars I am using with his permission an unpublished paper by Larry Schmidt, "Simone Weil's Attraction to Catharism". This paper was presented to the Tenth Annual Colloquy of the American Weil Society, April 28, 1990. Hereafter: "Simone Weil's Attraction to Catharism". Michel Roquebert explains how the Cathars articulated this: "On the one hand (there are) spiritual realities, invisible and eternal; this is the kingdom of the good God, of the 'legitimate God', of the 'living and true God', of the 'God of justice and truth', whence souls emanate 'just as rays emanate from the sun' ... On the other hand there is the visible world, an ensemble of material and temporal realities, therefore transitory, doomed to corruption and destruction" [As quoted in "Simone Weil's Attraction to Catharism", 44. from *Cathar Religion*]. The Cathars believe that there is a principle of the world which is 'not created' but is coeternal with God. This principle is "the Prince of the World, the Prince of Darkness, the Wicked Enemy", and is sometimes referred to as the 'unknown God' as opposed to the 'True God'. Because the Cathars were "anti-cosmic dualists", they rejected the Old Testament. For them the God of the Old Testament was just, but not Good. The God of the New Testament, on the other hand, was the good God and the Father of Jesus. The Cathars were Christian gnostics as they believed that "God's messenger, the author of the book of Revelation, is Christ and he alone" [As quoted in "Simone Weil's Attraction to Catharism", 44. from *Cathar Religion*]. However, they thought that Christ was completely pure and therefore was not incarnated — Jesus was thought to have had only the appearance of a body. The Cathars did not believe that Christ died on the cross and so it was not an object of worship for them.

Thus the way towards salvation is, for the human being, to learn that he/she has a divine origin in a 'Transcendent God' and for this, revelation is needed. This knowledge cannot be learned through our engagement in the world, for "The goal of gnostic striving is the release of the 'inner man' from the bonds of the realm of light" [As quoted from Hans Jonas' *The Gnostic Religion* in "Simone Weil's Attraction to Catharism", 5]. The Cathars have only one sacrament, baptism, which can only be given to adults after a lengthy preparation. Those who go through this preparation are called *parfaits* and they live a very restrictive life-style:

"Fasting three times a week, abstaining from foods of animal origin at all times, a commitment to non-violence, were all demanded of the Cathar *parfait*. Because the family was condemned as a cause of earthly attachments, renunciation of marriage and any sexual relations which entangled men and women in the life of the flesh was also required" [Larry Schmidt, "Simone Weil's Attraction to Catharism", 6]. As Schmidt points out the discipline was so rigorous that many Cathars did not receive the sacrament of baptism until they were on their deathbeds

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 8. I will return to Simone Weil's form of dualism in Chapter three of this thesis. For now, I simply wish to point out what her attraction to the Cathars is.

it carried the last living expression of the spirit of pre-Roman antiquity. What the Cathars inherited from the Greeks through Christianity was, as Larry Schmidt points out, called 'Parage': "...it combined the recognition that force is "almost absolutely supreme in the world" with the loathing and contemptuous rejection of it. This rejection of force expressed itself personally in chivalrous love, "a patient attention to the loved person and an appeal for that person's consent".¹¹⁰ Thus, Simone Weil admired the Cathar's purity and their absolute rejection of force. In the third chapter of this thesis I will further explore how Simone Weil's encounter with the thought of these different religions influenced her philosophical anthropology.

F. RELIGIOUS DIALOGUES

The years of the war were difficult. She was accustomed to being an activist. There was, however, little she could do at this time. Thus, she took the opportunity to learn about the life of an agricultural worker by being one herself. She saw this as one way to help the people at war; that is, by providing food for them. She found work as a farm labourer through Father Perrin, who introduced her to Gustave Thibon, who was both a farmer and a writer.¹¹¹ While she was waiting to go to work in the fields she spent many hours discussing religion with Father Perrin. Although Simone Weil did many other things during her time in Marseilles¹¹², I will restrict myself to relating her discussions with Father Perrin and Gustave Thibon and their impressions of her. . Simone Weil had decided that a revival of the spirit of antiquity, out of which she thought Christianity had grown, was needed. Her dialogue with Father Perrin and Gustave Thibon, I believe, helped her to understand the point of view of the Catholic Church in the eyes of a devoted priest and a devoted follower and gave her the chance to formulate her own thoughts and

¹¹⁰Ibid., 13.

¹¹¹Gustave Thibon was also a member of L'Académie Française and connected to the Personalist movement.

¹¹²She wrote many letters and essays that reveal her concerns about the problem of the colonies and how historical decisions did in a way allow for the war. Also, she tried to help the Indochinese refugees who were gathered into the camps at the beginning of the war. Also, she tried to help the Indochinese refugees who were gathered into camps at the beginning of the war.

feelings.

My rendition of the dialogues between Simone Weil, Father Perrin and Gustave Thibon means to show that Simone Weil seriously considered the problems she saw in the Catholic Church. In Chapter three of this thesis, I will further develop the relation between Simone Weil's religious metaphysics and her philosophical anthropology. In this chapter, I simply wish to introduce the reader to how religion became for Simone Weil a lived reality through these dialogues.

In *Simone Weil, telle que nous l'avons connue*, Father Perrin and Gustave Thibon relate their personal feelings about Simone Weil and how they understood her religious concerns, especially her concerns with the Catholic Church. Father Perrin describes Simone Weil's account of her contact with misery in the factories. She claims that the only way she could find to explain this misery was through Christianity, "the religion of slaves." Her contact with divine love usually happened in the midst of affliction. For this reason and because she thought this was Christ's experience, she thought there was an intimate link between intense physical suffering and the presence of divine love. Father Perrin says that Simone Weil thought that divine mercy was a conception that would always be and would remain the same no matter what destiny brought to human beings. He says that "L'impartialité de Dieu, dont le soleil se lève sur les bons et les méchants, retenait souvent son attention..." She emphasized the fact that the things of this world can never be satisfying as ends. Father Perrin quotes her from *La pesanteur et la grace*: "Toutes les choses créées refusent d'être pour moi des fins. Telle est l'extrême miséricorde de Dieu à mon égard. Et cela même est le mal. Le mal est la forme que prend en ce monde la miséricorde de Dieu."¹¹³

Father Perrin interprets the above quoted passages to mean that Simone Weil rejected the idea of Christian Hope. He quotes her as saying: "Ne pas parler aux malheureux du Royaume de Dieu, car cela leur est étranger, mais seulement de la croix."¹¹⁴ He says that in some senses she is right because there is always the danger of an imaginative representation of divine blessings being corrupted by resentments and the lowest cravings for compensations. But, he argues, our Lord has invested too much in his

¹¹³Perrin et Thibon, *Telle que*, op. cit., p.36.

¹¹⁴Perrin et Thibon, *Telle que*, op. cit., p.36.

"promises" for us to ignore them. Father Perrin thinks that Simone Weil is too rigorous, like a logician, she is merciless and he used to say to her: "It is a good thing that you are not God."

Another area of difference between Simone Weil and Father Perrin was over the question of baptism. In *Attente de Dieu* Simone Weil states why she could not accept baptism, which for her was the sacrament of faith, entailing the recognized acceptance of the teaching of Christ presented by the Catholic Church.¹¹⁵ At first, it seemed to Father Perrin that she was ignorant, but even after she learned the meaning of prayer and caught a glimpse of the mystery of the eucharist and had begun to understand Catholicism, she still had problems with the Church. The first problem she had was with the body of dogmas that the Church held up for faith. Simone Weil thought that the Church should not command faith, rather it should bring these truths to the attention of the individual. She thought that faith, and therefore baptism, was merited only if one had perceived the light that the dogma tried to contain. If one had not seen the light, then there should be no obligation to accept these dogmas; one should only pay them more attention. The thing that concerned her was, that by demanding faith, the Catholic Church risked leading many to believe imaginary ideas about God. It is a human tendency to imagine. Simone Weil thought the Church should encourage people to control – not be controlled by – the imagination. She argued that she had seen the human imagination exploited by institutions intent upon obtaining power and she feared that the Church might not have escaped the same practice.

Father Perrin, on the other hand, thought that Simone Weil was being overly cautious with respect to joining the Church. He thought that her cultural experience and her philosophical training contradicted her revelation, that "God is the measure of all things." His own understanding of Platonism and of Stoicism, with which he identified her philosophical ideas, led him to think that she should see being religious as a way of living happily and serenely. Instead, Father Perrin saw in Simone Weil someone for whom human life was like a prison. The revelation she had had should have given her the means, the faith, to come out of her prison, he thought. Father Perrin claims that there is a certain amount of conflict between her faith

¹¹⁵Simone Weil, *Attente de Dieu* (Paris: Fayard, 1966).

and philosophy. He objected to Simone Weil's suggestion that "belief" should come after "receiving the light." He argued that belief came first, and then understanding.

...dans l'église il y a une théologie, une sagesse qui, dans le balbutiement de l'intelligence humaine, s'applique à rester ouverte à la Sagesse divine. La foi totale qui aurait fait de Simone la disciple du Christ lui eût donné accès à cette sagesse : "Crois pour recevoir l'intelligence." (saint Augustin).¹¹⁶

Out of Simone Weil's discussions with Father Perrin, her own research into the dogmas of the Catholic Church, and her attendance at the ritual services, she came to love many things about the Church. She expressed this in a letter to Father Perrin, which he later published in *Attente de Dieu*. I will quote this passage to show why it is that she wanted to point out what she thought the Church needed to reconsider, rather than dismissing it altogether, as many had done before her.

J'aime Dieu, le Christ et la foi catholique autant qu'il appartient à un être aussi misérablement insuffisant de les aimer. J'aime les saints à travers leurs écrits et les récits concernant leur vie, à part quelques-uns qu'il m'est impossible d'aimer pleinement ni de regarder comme des saints. J'aime les six ou sept catholiques d'une spiritualité authentique que le hasard m'a fait rencontrer au cours de ma vie. J'aime la liturgie, les chants, l'architecture, les rites et les cérémonies catholiques.¹¹⁷

What Simone Weil feared was the Church as a social structure. She says that this social structure has been so powerful that even saints were deceived enough to approve of the Crusades and of the Inquisition. She says that these saints must have been blinded by a very powerful force in order to make such a drastic error in judgment.

In response to this criticism, Father Perrin points out that Simone Weil based this view on her idea that the Catholic Church inherited this weakness from the corruption of the Romans, the people who first developed the hierarchy of the Church. He, then, argues that her view of the history of Catholicism leaves out the fact that Rome is not the capital of Christianity because of Caesar or Augustus, but because it was there that Peter or Paul bore witness with their blood. Furthermore, he argues that blaming the Romans for the falling away from religious purity is to over-simplify the question. For, he says, this is a human weakness in general. This weakness may prevent the Church from being a perfect institution but that does not mean that it does not convey the truth and the grace of God.

¹¹⁶Perrin et Thibon, *Telle que*, op. cit., p.48.

¹¹⁷Weil, *Attente* 21.

If the human means utilized by the Church have their own nature or gravity - as the Incarnation limited God's human presence in space and time - this does not prevent them from having a divine value by virtue of the grace and truth of God which they convey.¹¹⁸

Father Perrin criticized Simone Weil's reservations towards the Church. Firstly, he claims that she was suspicious of all collectivities because some have a tendency to be oppressive. He argues that the Church is not oppressive to the individual and to demonstrate this he quotes Pius XII's encyclical: "Toute société humaine, pour peu qu'on fasse attention à la fin dernière de son utilité, est ordonnée en définitive au profit de tous et de chacun de ses membres, car ils sont des personnes."¹¹⁹ Secondly, Father Perrin says that Simone Weil judged the institutions or human beings that she felt close to very severely. He thinks she could not let go of her subjective representation of the truth. Furthermore, he claims that this difficulty is common among those who oppose dogma to "mystical intuitions." Father Perrin believed that the Church does speak to the soul and he could not understand how Simone Weil could say the following: "Le malaise de l'intelligence dans le christianisme qui dure depuis vingt siècles vient de ce qu'on n'a pas su établir un *modus vivendi* satisfaisant, basé sur une vue exacte des analogies et des différences entre le Saint-Esprit parlant au corps de l'église et le Saint-Esprit parlant à l'âme."¹²⁰

In *Attente de Dieu*, Simone Weil explains her problem with the Church as a collective unity. She argues that the Incarnation of Christianity implies a harmonious solution, in the Pythagorean sense, to the problem of the relation between the individual and the collective. By this she means that although the individual and the collective are contraries, they still must blend together. She claims that the only way this is possible is if the intelligence is totally free; this implies the right to deny everything and at the same time the intelligence should not dominate. What she was looking for is a balance:

Partout où elle usurpe un commandement, il y a un excès d'individualisme. Partout où elle est mal à l'aise, il y a une collectivité oppressive ou plusieurs.¹²¹

She argues, on the one hand, that the Church may chastise any excess – even of theoretical

¹¹⁸Simone Weil, *Waiting on God*, trans. Emma Craufurd (1951; Glasgow: Collins, 1977), p.48. Weil, *Attente*, op. cit., p. 56.

¹¹⁹Perrin et Thibon, *Telle que*, op. cit., p.57-58.

¹²⁰Perrin et Thibon, *Telle que*, op. cit., p.60.

¹²¹Weil, *Attente*, op. cit., p.56.

speculation — by saying that this is an error. But, on the other hand, human beings should be permitted to express their speculations because these speculations may not be sinful at all. The Church should not demand a disavowal of what is being said. Simone Weil interpreted Christ's words, "Whosoever two or three are gathered together in my name there I am in the midst of them," more literally than the Church. That is why she claims that the Church does not necessarily speak to the secret part of the soul of the individual. She thought that Christ used a different language when He spoke to the individual from the one He used with the collective. "...La parole est la parole secrète. Celui qui n'a pas entendu cette parole, même s'il s'adhère à tous les dogmes enseignés par l'Eglise, est sans contact avec la vérité."¹²²

One of Simone Weil's main deviations from and criticisms of the Church is her criticism of the Thomistic conception of the mystical body of Christ. She could not accept this view that Christ's body was sacred and was to be shared in the same way as His Word. She emphasized the willingness of Christ to suffer extreme pain and still have love for His Father. That is the role of the body according to Simone Weil; the body must be left to suffer and by doing so it demonstrates the willingness of the individual to choose the way of God. She claims that this image of the mystical body of Christ, which the Church includes in the ritual of the Mass, intoxicates the members.

Finally, she argues that Father Perrin's example of Pius XII's argument that the Church does defend the rights of the individual is not convincing enough to change the minds of those people who can point to the Inquisition and say: This is where your power has led us in the past. Why should we believe that this will change? What the Church would have to do, according to Simone Weil is to admit their wrong and "...say openly that she had changed or wished to change. Otherwise who could take her seriously when they remembered the Inquisition."¹²³ This tendency to abuse the faith of the people and to become like a totalitarian state was, in Simone Weil's eyes, inherent in the way the Romans used the Church to gain the trust of their people, so that they could build their Empire. She says that this tendency still exists in the Church and that it is evident in their use of the two words, *anathema sit*.

¹²²Weil, *Attente*, op. cit., p.58.

¹²³Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.47.

After Simone Weil's first mystical presence, she found many expressions of the grace of God in non-Christian writings. As noted, she praises the Cathars of the 13th century for their religious environment and inspiration and in her Notebooks she often writes that there may be other Incarnations of the Word besides that of Christ's, for example, she mentions Melchisedech, Osiris, and Krishna. Father Perrin found her syncreticism rather perturbing and he argues that she invented likenesses between religions without taking into account the historical context which made them very different. He says that she had a method of understanding images and symbols which prompted her to make associations regardless of the context of time or space and he quotes her description of this method in *La pesanteur et la grâce*: "Méthode pour comprendre les images, les symboles, etc. Ne pas essayer de les interpréter, mais les regarder jusqu'à ce que la lumière jaillisse."¹²⁴

He argues that Simone Weil chose to avoid the difficulties that more attention to history might have presented her. He says that she preferred to remain faithful to Plato and that she had two reasons for maintaining this perspective. The first reason was that she wanted to open a pathway for the afflicted to have the presence of Christ. The second reason is related to the first, she thought that there were many Christians who had turned their backs on the Church after the Inquisition - these people are the humanists - and she wanted to re-integrate them with the Christian ideals and she thought Plato presented the way. Father Perrin quotes her making this point : " L'humanisme n'a pas eu tort de penser que la vérité, la beauté, la liberté, l'égalité sont d'un prix infini, mais de croire que l'homme peut se les procurer sans la grâce."¹²⁵

Also, he says that she was struck by the spiritual impoverishment of the modern world; it was her dream to return to the source. She supposed that she would find the soul of secular life in the pre-Christian religious period. Although Father Perrin sympathized with her reasons he could not accept her syncreticism. He says that thousands of Martyrs had considered the views of other religions and rejected them for many good reasons. But, Simone Weil was sure that the Catholic Church should change its attitude towards other religions and would be the better for it.

Je dois à la vérité de dire que ... Plus j'y pense aussi, plus ce point me paraît important, car je crois que cette attitude traditionnelle de l'Eglise abaisse non seulement les autres religions, mais la religion catholique elle-même...Je crois, peut-être à tort, que l'attitude de l'Eglise en ce point n'est pas essentielle à la foi catholique, et que l'Eglise peut changer d'attitude à cet égard comme elle l'a fait à l'égard de l'astronomie, de la physique, de la biologie, à l'égard de l'histoire et de la critique. Il me semble même

¹²⁴Perrin et Thibon, *Telle que*, op. cit., p. 64.

¹²⁵Perrin et Thibon, *Telle que*, op. cit., p.74.

qu'elle devra changer d'attitude, qu'elle ne pourra pas s'en empêcher.¹²⁶

Father Perrin rejected syncretism because he says this does away with universality. Also, he claimed, God becomes the author of the most extravagant and conflicting teachings. Simone Weil argues, on the other hand, that if there is universality in a religion or a philosophy, then there would be no conflict between them. She argues that it does not make sense to talk about "syncretism" in relation to the different manifestations of the truth in the different religions.

Father Perrin, as I pointed out above, put her in contact with Gustave Thibon, a Catholic writer, who had his own small farm and helped her find work with one of the large landowners in the area. On August 7, 1941, Simone Weil met Gustave Thibon in Avignon and from there they travelled to Saint-Marcel where his farm was located.

From the letters Simone Weil wrote to Thibon explaining her reasons for wanting to work on the land, he detected two conflicting motives:

...d'un part un besoin d'effacement absolu, une ouverture sans limite à la réalité, même sous ses formes les plus dures, et, d'autre part, une terrible volonté propre au coeur même du dépouillement, le désir inflexible que ce dépouillement soit son oeuvre et se réalise par les voies qu'elle avait tracées, la tentation dévorante de tout vérifier du dedans, de tout éprouver - aux deux sens du mot - en elle-même et hors d'elle-même.¹²⁷

He says that because she had these two motives she experienced human misery and the cross without the serenity that makes it more bearable. He quotes another passage from her letter to make the point that she felt she had the responsibility to try to understand with her own body what these farm laborers experienced everyday out of necessity:

Je désire que mon temps et le corps de mes pensées, pour autant qu'elles dépendent du corps, soient soumis aux mêmes nécessités qui pèsent sur n'importe quel domestique de ferme ; je veux dire à la fatigue et aux tâches imposées....Je pense que la culture intellectuelle, loin de donner droit à des privilèges presque effrayants et comportant, en contre-partie, des responsabilités terribles....Je veux me rendre témoignage à moi-même que je pense ainsi, en me mettant, au moins pour un temps, sous le poids que supportent toute leur vie ceux qui n'ont aucune part à ce privilège....¹²⁸

Also, Simone Weil expressed to Gustave Thibon how she felt this hard experience would help

¹²⁶Perrin et Thibon, *Telle que*, op. cit., p.76-77.

¹²⁷Perrin et Thibon, *Telle que*, op. cit., p.131.

¹²⁸Perrin et Thibon, *Telle que*, op. cit., p.131-132.

maintain a healthy perspective. Here, Simone Weil expresses her view that work is necessary for the health of the soul: "Peut-être me sera-t-il donné par surcroît, au moins pendant quelques moments, la récompense attachée au travail de la terre et à aucun autre, le sentiment que le terre, le soleil, le paysage existent réellement et sont autre chose qu'un décor."¹²⁹

Gustave Thibon clearly had great respect for Simone Weil; however, he thought her need for self-effacement sometimes created more problems than necessary. For example, her insistence that she should sleep outdoors caused Thibon and his wife considerable worry. Simone Weil, on the other hand, was intent upon experiencing the hardships of the farm labourers. Thibon found it difficult to discern what was objective in her inspiration and what was subjective. By subjective, he meant self-preoccupied. Nevertheless, he says, she did have moments of supreme humility. Thibon argues that Simone Weil's dualistic religious metaphysics kept her from joining the Church. Although he did not agree with her metaphysics, he appreciated her view that human beings cannot be careful enough in making the effort to avoid attributing an absolute value to false gods, as he says: "...En brisant la barrière de l'idolâtrie, elle ouvre le passage à l'amour : 'Seul celui qui aime Dieu d'un amour surnaturel peut considérer les moyens seulement comme des moyens.'"¹³⁰

Both Father Perrin and Gustave Thibon respected Simone Weil's religious inspiration; however, they had reservations concerning her philosophical preoccupations. They seemed to agree that this preoccupation caused her an inner conflict which led her to choose to follow her intellect to the point of denying herself a faith which may have rendered her inspiration more complete. Simone Weil, on the other hand, thought that there was no contradiction between faith and following one's intellect as far as it could take one in understanding. However, she thought that once one came up against a contradiction which the intellect could not deal with, then faith should take precedence over the intellect. Thus, her philosophical preoccupations did not stand in the way of her faith. Quite the contrary, her faith was nurtured by

¹²⁹Perrin et Thibon, *Telle que*, op. cit., p.132. I will show how she defines work as action in the first part of Chapter Two of this thesis.

¹³⁰Perrin et Thibon, *Telle que*, op. cit., p.179.

philosophical reflections.

Simone Weil's discussions with Thibon and Father Perrin show that she is most certainly not an apologist for the Catholic Church. Simone Weil realizes that she could not ignore the Church completely since this institution played such a major role in the spiritual education of people in France and in the western world generally. But insofar as Father Perrin and Thibon were Catholics and committed to the dogma of the Church, it seemed they could not appreciate Simone Weil's philosophical perspective even though often times this perspective was as much theological as philosophical. Their judgements often reflected their role as defenders of dogma. For example, Father Perrin's insistence that Simone Weil was a 'syncretist' implied that there can only be one manifestation of the truth and that the Catholic Church was the sole possessor of this truth.

G. SIMONE WEIL'S LAST YEARS

In spite of Simone Weil's plans to work as a farm labourer for the fall and winter of 1941-1942, she was only kept on through the grape harvest. So she returned to Marseilles to live with her parents while they waited to go to New York. During this period Simone Weil wrote an extraordinary amount: the major part of her *Cahiers*; articles for the *Cahiers du sud*; five of the essays that appear in *Attente de Dieu*; the majority of *Intuitions pré-chrétiennes*; and some of *La source grecque* ("Le Dieu dans Platon"); four of the essays published in *Pensées sans ordre concernant l'amour de Dieu*; and finally, the essay, "Condition première d'un travail non servile," published in *La condition ouvrière*. Two of the articles written for *Cahiers du sud* are about science, the first was a review of a book called *L'avenir de la science*, a collection of essays on science. The second, "Réflexions à propos de la théorie de quanta,"¹³¹ deals with a book by Max Planck, *Initiations à la physique*.¹³²

As we have seen, Simone Weil's stay in Marseilles was a reflective period. In spite of the seriousness and depth of her reflections, if only evidenced in this first chapter by the accounts Father Perrin

¹³¹Simone Weil, "Réflexions à propos de la théorie de quanta," *Sur la science* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).

¹³²Max Planck, *Initiations à la physique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1941).

and Gustave Thibon gave of them, she felt that she was not adequately contributing to the efforts made to save France. So, although she was prepared to leave France to get her parents to a safe place, she also had strategic reasons for going to New York. She hoped somehow to realize her project for training front-line nurses, with the intention of being one of those nurses herself. On May 14, 1942 the Weils sailed on the steamship *Maréchal-Lyautey*. Simone Weil was very sad on leaving France, as she felt quite certain that she would not see her country again.

There was a 17-day stop over in Casablanca, from May 20 to June 7, before the Weils sailed on to America. They arrived in New York on July 6, 1942. It was not until they had arrived in New York that Simone Weil began to feel that she had made a terrible mistake in leaving France with the hope of carrying on to England. Many people told her, among them her brother, André, that entry into England was strictly controlled and limited. Deeply disappointed with this news that she may not be able to get to England to work with the Resistance, Simone Weil began to write letters to the people who she found out had been in England and might be willing to help her. She wrote to Jacques Maritain explaining her plans and she sent him her project for the front-line nurses. He replied promptly encouraging her to get in touch with Alexandre Koyré, the philosopher, who was about to leave for London and could take her project with him to show the leaders of the Free French movement. As well he told her to get in touch with Father Couturier, a Dominican, who was in New York, but about to depart for France. Her letters to Father Couturier have been published under the title, *Lettre à un religieux*.¹³³ In these she continues to discuss her views on religion

Simone Weil's stay in New York was overshadowed by this preoccupation of getting to London. Finally, she learned that a classmate of hers, Maurice Schumann, was working for the Free French movement in London. She sent him two letters on July 30, 1942. About mid-September she received a reply from him giving her hope that she might be able to go to London. Schumann had spoken to André Philip, Commissioner of the Interior and Labor in the National Committee of the Free French movement,

¹³³Simone Weil, *Lettre à un religieux* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951).

about Simone Weil and her project. Philip had judged her project as impractical but he thought that he could find some work for Simone Weil in London. On November 10, 1942 she sailed on a Swedish freighter to England.

In London, Simone Weil worked with the Free French. Although she wanted to engage in "dangerous missions" with the Resistance in France, Weil was given the projects, developed by the Resistance committees, for the "reorganization of France" after the war to examine. She did this work. No doubt it was in response to the ideas she was examining that led her to write *L'Enracinement*.

She also wrote "La personne et le sacré," a very important essay because in it she formally expresses and elaborates her conception of the uncreated part of the soul; she calls it the impersonal part of the soul as it is that part of the human soul which is other than the person because it is an opening to God's Love. In addition to these works, she wrote an enormous number of other essays, between 14 December 1942 and her death, 24 August 1943.¹³⁴

There remains some controversy over the death of Simone Weil, much of it stemming from an English newspaper's (*Tuesday Express*) report that death occurred from "a cardiac failure due to degeneration through starvation." The coroner issued a verdict of suicide.

Simone Pétrement doubts these accounts. She notes that Mme Jones, a friend of Simone Weil, had written a letter on the day of Simone Weil's death to Mme Closon, another friend, remarking that Weil had eaten "an egg yoke whipped in sherry and diluted with a little milk."¹³⁵ Mme Jones explains in this letter that Weil had been trying to eat all along, but that she was experiencing difficulty. Pétrement notes: "This letter seems to indicate that Simone was trying to eat and refused most foods only because she thought she could not tolerate them....The question of what she wanted to eat at the end remains obscure, and no doubt we shall never know."¹³⁶

¹³⁴These works are published principally as Simone Weil, *Ecrits de Londres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957); *Cahiers*, Vol. 3 (Paris: Librairie Plon: 1951); "Y a-t-il une doctrine marxiste?," *Oppression et liberté* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955) — as well as other essays collected in various texts.

¹³⁵Simone Pétrement, *Simone Weil: a life*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976), p.538.

¹³⁶Pétrement, *Life*, op. cit., p.358.

CHAPTER TWO

THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF SIMONE WEIL'S PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

PART ONE

PERCEPTION : THE IMAGINATION IN WEIL'S EARLY THOUGHT ON HUMAN NATURE

*La mort ne s'appesantit lourdement
Que sur celui qui, trop connu de tous,
Meurt ignoré de lui-même!*¹

Simone Weil's early conception of human nature was developed in relation to her reflections on how we come to know the world. In this she follows Alain and even Le Senne.² Simone Weil realizes that social and political reality also profoundly affects one's understanding of human nature. Thus, there are two phases to the development of Simone Weil's early philosophical anthropology. In this chapter I will discuss each of these phases in turn and show how the second phase is dependent on the first. For the first phase, I will rely on Simone Weil's two essays of 1929, "De la perception ou l'aventure de Protée", "Du temps", and her dissertation of 1930, "Science et perception dans Descartes" from *Oeuvres complètes, Tome I, Premiers écrits philosophiques*.³ For the second phase I will use mainly two texts: *Leçons de philosophie* and *Oppression et liberté*.⁴ In the first phase, I will analyze

¹The maxim is from the Temple of Delphi, quoted by Simone Weil in Latin from Seneca in "Science et perception dans Descartes," *Oeuvres Complètes, Tome I, Premiers écrits philosophiques*, ed. André Devaux and Florence de Lussy (Paris: Gallimard, 1988) 183. Weil quotes in Greek, Latin and French from original texts. For simplicity, all quotations will be in French, following the sources used by Devaux and de Lussy in *Oeuvres complètes*, and cited to that text.

²See Alain, *The Gods*, trans. by Richard Pevear (New York: New Directions Publishing Corp., 1973, 1974), Book I. Also see Renee Le Senne, *Obstacle and Value* trans. by Bernard P. Dauenhauer (Evanston, U.S.A.: Northwestern University Press, 1972). See especially chapter 7 on the principle phases of human experience where he describes how the human being can move from phase to phase throughout life, but for this movement to take place one must encounter an obstacle. I will return to Alain and Le Senne later on in this section to show how closely Simone Weil's description is to theirs.

³Simone Weil, *Oeuvres complètes, Tome I, Premiers écrits philosophiques*, ed. André Devaux and Florence de Lussy (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), p.121-221.

⁴Simone Weil, *Leçons de philosophie* (Roanne 1933-1934), transcrites et présentées par Anne Reynaud-Guérithault (1959; Paris: Union Générale D'Éditions, 1966). And Simone Weil, *Oppression et liberté* (1955; Paris: Gallimard, 1981).

Simone Weil's description of what is involved in human beings coming to consciousness. I will particularly emphasize the role she gives to the imagination in bringing about consciousness of self through perception; I have noticed that other commentators have not given this sufficient attention. I will argue that this oversight has led these commentators to misinterpret Simone Weil's view of perception. Finally, I will argue that although Simone Weil claims that consciousness is awakened in perception, a truer and more certain awareness of self, she thinks, is only attained from the higher perception of necessity obtained through action with method in mind—work with a method. Thus, for Simone Weil, as for Alain and Le Senne, the essential elements of human nature are revealed through this description of coming to consciousness.⁵

The second phase of the development of Simone Weil's early conception of human nature includes her understanding of how society can be set up either to oppress human beings in their very nature or provide the conditions for the human being to fully express that which is essentially human; the ability to relate thought to action, to be free. In this section I will show that Simone Weil maintains her early conception of human nature and uses it as a basis of her critique of: Lenin's materialistic conception of human nature; what language adds to human nature; Marx's thought; power relations; and finally, what would constitute a completely oppressive and a completely free society.

Throughout Simone Weil's short, but full life, she placed her trust in her own intellect. It should not be surprising, then, that the notion of intellect remains one of the central concepts throughout the development of her philosophical anthropology. This may be because, like her teacher Alain, she had a profound respect for Plato and Descartes. Both of these thinkers adopted the Socratic motto "know thyself" and Alain also emphasized this in his own teaching of their thought. In making the connection between Simone Weil's trust in the intellect and the Socratic motto "know thyself," I wish to show that although she gave the directive role to the intellect she always thought that the body was of undeniable importance in the process of becoming aware of one's thoughts through one's actions. In fact, it is through this relation between thought and action that we also come to have knowledge about the external world.

⁵Le Senne seems to differ from Simone Weil and Alain in his description of these phases of coming to consciousness because he does not give as much importance to work with a method, although he does consider the encounter with the obstacle to be an essential part of coming to consciousness.

Although Simone Weil maintained the mind-body dualism of Cartesian philosophy, she argued that both the separation of mind from body, and the constant relating of body to mind and of mind to body are necessary. Simone Weil showed how she understood the relation and separation of mind and body through an analysis of perception. Perception, when studied, allows one to have an understanding of the process of thought and its relation to the body in action. Thus, we will begin this chapter with an analysis of Simone Weil's study of perception, and I will show the importance of perception to her view of human nature. Finally in this first part of chapter two I will show how Simone Weil's analysis of perception led to a critique of the modern scientists' general judgment about perception.

In western society, where we have a scientific culture, the view we have of the human being subjects the individual to the collective because the individual is systematically taught to distrust her/his own perceptions and to trust science. According to Simone Weil, the role of science was not to replace perception; rather, it was to help each individual to continue to perceive correctly.

A. THE PROTEAN IMAGINATION IN PERCEPTION

In describing how the human being comes to perceive the world in "De la perception ou l'aventure de Protée,"⁶ Simone Weil begins with a description of what she calls pure imagination. She begins this way because, like Alain, she finds this state to be in perception itself.⁷ For Simone Weil, pure imagination is perception without any thought. She gives a descriptive account of this state of being because we are always prone to the folly of the pure imagination, or as LeSenne would say, to compulsion.

In this essay she called the imagination "Protée" (Proteus) in order to emphasize the integral and complex role that the imagination plays in perception. She showed how the imagination in its duality not only gives us the stuff of illusions but also that of perception. "Protée" in its wild state is what she referred to as the state of pure

⁶Simone Weil, "De la perception ou l'aventure de Protée," *Oeuvres complètes*, Tome I, *Premiers écrits philosophiques*, ed. André Devaux and Florence de Lussy (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), op. cit., p.121-139.

See Alain, *Histoire de mes pensées* (Paris: Gallimard, 1944), op. cit., p.151 where he says: "Sur l'imagination....Je la trouvais dans la perception même."

imagination, when there is only the bodily reactions:

Car, quand l'épine me fait ainsi violemment sursauter, tout ce qui, auparavant, imprimait en moi une autre manière d'être, ce que j'appellerai, par exemple, odeur ou couleur de rose, non seulement est vaincu et comme décoloré par la nouvelle impression, mais pour moi, soudain, cesse d'exister. Puis si quelque chose m'effraie, c'est l'épine qui cesse d'exister; une nouvelle danse, pour ainsi dire, me saisit, et cette nouvelle danse, tout mon être aussitôt l'apprend.⁹

This state of pure imagination, this dance, although always in response to something, is not experienced as something outside; it is a confused mixture of emotions and feelings.⁹ The woman alone in the darkness feels threatened by the sound; she does not hear the noise of the fridge.

...c'est un Protée indivisible, qui se presse sur mon corps, s'enroule pour ainsi dire autour de moi, sans être jamais, puisqu'il est sans parties, grand ou petit, proche ou lointain. De cet état qui précède la perception, nous ne pouvons nous faire aucune idée, sinon par le souvenir de nos rêves; car souvent, au réveil, nous nous rappelons avoir éprouvé de l'horreur ou une joie pure, sans qu'aucun sujet d'horreur ou de joie nous soit apparu.¹⁰

These emotions, these feelings, do not tell us anything about the world; they do not even separate us from the world:

Comme sans cesse le corps vivant, livré au monde, frémit démesurément à la moindre attaque, puis s'emporte, puis se fatigue, puis s'endort, pour s'éveiller tout frémissant d'une attaque nouvelle, toute chose est pour moi Protée. Par ces changements de régime, par ces sommeils, le corps des choses apparaît comme discontinu. Telle est donc la perception sans aucune pensée, ou, pour mieux dire, l'imagination pure; telle qu'on peut la reconstruire selon la structure du corps....¹¹

This separation occurs only when there is the realization that one's state does change: the woman's body reacts to the sound by which she feels threatened, but it is the awareness that this is a bodily reaction that is a change from her previous state of being. This recognition of the difference between these two states, the change, introduces the separation between the self and the woman's feelings.

Le corps n'est pas un appareil enregistreur. Non pas seulement parce que tout ce qui lui parvient, en agissant sur la chair et les muscles, forme, selon l'expression de Protagoras, un mélange avec cette matière vivante; mais surtout parce que ce corps est vivant, c'est-à-dire est capable de réagir.... Aussi parce que l'âme est jointe au corps de telle sorte que ce qui lui parvient, ce n'est pas ce que le corps subit, mais ce que le corps fait. Je ne perçois donc que

⁹Weil, "De la perception" 121-122.

⁹See endnote 1. Simone Weil follows Descartes and Alain in reducing the imagination to the movements of the body.

¹⁰Weil, "De la perception", op. cit., p.132.

¹¹Weil, "De la perception", op. cit., p.130. See endnote 2.

moi-même. Ainsi, entre ce premier état, où je suis mon seul objet, et la perception la moins relevée, où je pense connaître des objets hors de moi, il y a le même abîme, en un sens infranchissable, qu'entre la première et la sixième Méditation de Descartes.¹²

It is this consciousness of feeling which reveals the human being's ability to think; we see here that, according to Simone Weil, consciousness becomes aware of itself before all else. Thus, we are first of all subjective beings.

These vague feelings of self did not, according to Simone Weil's description, allow one to act or escape the pure imagination and that is why Simone Weil did not dwell on this point; that consciousness is first awakened by feelings. She was anxious to overcome the abyss that she had encountered between consciousness of self and consciousness of something external to the self. Thus, she argued that the way to escape the imagination and act in the external world is to believe that the emotions that the pure imagination brings to the understanding are a response of the body to things outside of us. We must take our emotions as signifying an external world:

Nous ne pouvons changer notre condition, qui est de ne connaître, comme disait Protagoras, qu'un mélange du senti et du sentant, de ne sentir les choses que par nos émotions; mais nous pouvons nous empêcher de croire que les choses reflètent nos émotions, et c'est tout ce qui importe. Il faut apprendre, en d'autres termes, à purifier l'apparence de tout mélange d'opinion.¹³

Alain made a similar point:

L'homme réel est né d'une femme; vérité simple, mais de grande conséquence.... Tout homme fut enveloppé d'abord dans le tissu humain, et aussitôt après dans les bras humains; il n'a point d'expérience qui précède cette expérience de l'humain; tel est son premier monde, non pas monde des choses, mais monde humain, monde des signes, d'où sa frêle existence dépend....le premier éveil de sa pensée est certainement...pour comprendre un signe.¹⁴

Simone Weil thought that in order to accomplish the task of taking our emotions as signs of the external world, we need to know space; we need to know that we can act on Proteus and that this will lead us to matter:

Il n'y a pas seulement, dans l'acte de percevoir, la connaissance des qualités, des formes, des distances; il y a aussi ceci, que je saisis l'espace....Percevoir l'espace, c'est saisir la matière...., toujours passive, toujours extérieure à soi; dès que l'espace est formé, Protée est vaincu.¹⁵

¹²Weil, "De la perception", op. cit., p.132-133.

¹³Weil, "De la perception", op. cit., p.134.

¹⁴Alain, *Etudes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), op. cit., p.142-143.

¹⁵Weil, "De la perception", op. cit., p.124-126.

We also need to know time which gives continuity - a certain identity between the sign of an object seen at one time and another time:

Protée ne se meut pas, il change, et toujours tout d'un coup; tous ces Protées que j'ai autour de moi sont immobiles et changeants. C'est qu'il n'y a aucun lien entre ce que je vois et ce que j'ai vu; et aucun non plus par suite entre une chose et une autre; car selon la belle vue de Kant, c'est du temps que la continuité descend dans l'étendue.¹⁶

Thus, in order to escape the imagination and act in the world, the mind must take what it receives from the imagination in perceiving "signs" of the external world. When one takes Proteus as the "sign" of an external world, Proteus is silenced, and the mind perceives space, extended material (i.e., matter which defines space, as Descartes said) and time. It is only when the mind takes Proteus as a sign of space and time that the mind perceives and is ready to act. According to Simone Weil's analysis thus far, we do receive thoughts about the external world in perception and it is only because of that that we are able to act in the world.

Alain argues the same point; that to perceive is to think the object, to know the world:

Il n'y a point deux choses, l'objet connu et la pensée qui connaît, mais seulement le fait de la connaissance, c'est-à-dire l'objet connu, le monde.... Ces prétendues sensations sont en réalité des perceptions, et portent déjà la marque de la puissance organisatrice de l'esprit.¹⁷

Thus, in perception, we get feelings from the imagination and thoughts for the mind. According to Simone Weil, who agreed with Alain on this point, we get both thoughts and feelings:

...dans la perception, non seulement l'imagination est jointe à l'entendement chaque fois que je me représente les figures, distances, grandeurs particulières, mais aussi, par des mouvements commencés et retenus, l'imagination me rend sensible la loi des travaux.¹⁸

At this point, Simone Weil did not express very clearly the idea that there are two roles played by the imagination.¹⁹ Instead, she chose to use the reflexive method to describe how it is that the mind receives ideas of space and time from the imagination which is in the body. It is the body that the mind submits to the laws of space

¹⁶Weil, "De la perception", op. cit., p.130-131.

¹⁷As quoted by Paul Foulquié, *Alain*, op.cit., p.96.

¹⁸Weil, "De la perception", op. cit., p.136.

¹⁹One role is to submit itself to the bodily movements, thus receiving all the emotions, needs, and desires of the body. The second role is to transmit the image it receives in the form of ideas to the understanding. To carry out the latter role, the imaginings of the first role must be silenced and the idea in the image must be sought. This aspect of the imagination works in conjunction with the understanding and the will.

and time when the mind wants to accomplish anything in the world. So it is because of the weight of the object which offers resistance to the body that the mind learns of space, extended material. Thus, Simone Weil's description of how we encounter objects in space is meant to emphasize the significant role the body plays in making us aware that we do actually encounter space:

...ainsi pour un homme qui, par exemple, abrité dans une caverne, veut en boucher l'entrée par une grosse pierre, la loi est d'abord que les mouvements qui lui permettront de le faire n'ont aucun rapport avec les mouvements spontanés que causait en lui, par exemple, la peur des bêtes féroces, et leur sont même directement contraires. Bien mieux, quand il a amené la pierre à moitié chemin, le mouvement qu'il doit faire est le même que s'il avait trouvé la pierre en cet endroit, le même que s'il touchait au but; et à tout moment de son travail, ses mouvements sont aussi étrangers aux mouvements accomplis, aux mouvements projetés, aussi bien qu'aux désirs. Certes, qualités, formes, distances, ces aspects ambigus de Protée sont mes guides en tous travaux; mais couleurs, sons, grandeurs, peuvent changer sans que change jamais la loi des travaux, qui est d'être sans cesse indifférents à ce qui a précédé comme à ce qui doit suivre. Protée peut, à son gré, revêtir telle ou telle forme, sans que l'esprit soit dispense, en ses actions, de subir la même loi, et de rencontrer, par suite, la même matière.²⁰

Simone Weil thinks that it is because of this very real experience that Descartes is opposed to conceiving of space as entirely empty.²¹ Also, her description of time is equally intended to demonstrate that it is something that really constrains us. We are limited by the fact that we can only act in the present. No matter how much we might desire for tomorrow to be now, it cannot be until we live through every moment which brings us to that time.

Simone Weil describes the constraint time imposes on us:

J'ai puissance pourtant sur cela même que je subis; ma définition en quelque sorte est d'agir; j'existe dans la mesure où je puis. Mais non pas immédiate puissance; si je souffre, je n'ai pas autorité sur ma souffrance, mais seulement pouvoir de la changer par intermédiaire d'autres changements qui par eux-mêmes me sont d'ordinaire indifférents. Je ne suis donc pas puissance sans limites, je me heurte à une existence étrangère; cette puissance indirecte, qui est mon lot, en est la preuve ou plutôt le témoin. Or, que je sois hors de moi-même, hors de ma portée directe, que je ne sois pas immédiatement en ma propre puissance, c'est ce qui pour moi définit l'avenir; demain n'est autre chose pour moi que ce qui ne m'est pas immédiatement donné, ce que je ne puis immédiatement changer, ou, pour mieux dire, demain est moi que je ne puis immédiatement changer. Ce rapport entre le présent et l'avenir est ce qui constitue le temps.²²

Like space, time is also defined as being full of material obstacles, which is described as the distance between

Weil, "De la perception", op. cit., p.131-131.

²¹Simone Weil refers to a letter Descartes wrote to Arnaud, 29 July, 1648, in which he says he could not conceive "qu'un espace soit tout à fait vuide". Weil, "De la perception", op. cit., p.126 and footnote #40, 408.

²²Simone Weil, "Du temps", *Oeuvres complètes, Tome I, Premiers écrits philosophiques*, ed. André Devaux and Florence de Lussy (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), p.142.

now and the future -- between a project and its accomplishment.

La distance est une idée qui n'appartient pas tant à l'espace qu'au temps, quoique l'étendue seule nous impose, entre notre objet et nous, une distance; d'où cette formule étonnante "le temps est la mesure de l'espace"....²³

Thus, when we are about to act in the world, we come to it with real knowledge of what it entails to submit our body to space and time and this is what we learn through perception.²⁴ For Simone Weil, as for Alain, Le Senne and Maine de Biran, it is through the resistance of the external world to our actions that we come to know external reality. We come to know this when we move out of pure imagination and into perception.²⁵

So, when the body feels, the mind is disturbed by that and struck with the idea that it is related to a thing outside of itself and that this thing moves. The mind, then, learns that its body is submitted to the laws of time and space, and that these laws allow us to order the material world so that we can act on it. The mind can then be directed by the body or direct the body. On the one hand, when the mind is directed by the body then, as Simone Weil shows us, Proteus reigns supreme and one remains in a state of 'pure imagination'. On the other hand, when the mind takes the feelings it receives from the imagination as signs, then it perceives, has thoughts, and is ready to direct the body. The mind is ready to encounter the obstacle using the body as its medium.

Although perception, which gives us thought and prepares us for action, is very important to Simone Weil's understanding of the relation between mind and body, she argues that it is not sufficient for to help us keep this idea of exterior relation in our minds. This, she says, seems easy, "...mais ne l'est point, et nul ne peut l'apprendre sans le secours ... des sciences."²⁶

²³Weil, "Du temps", op. cit., p.152. The idea comes from Jules Lagneau in *Célèbres leçons et fragments* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964), p.123.

²⁴I have left out of my presentation of perception Simone Weil's indication that perception naturally leads to "real action in the world" -- work. This will be discussed in the following sections.

²⁵See Alain, *The Gods*, op. cit., p.28-31; Renée Le Senne, *Obstacle and Value*, op. cit., p.154-165; for Maine de Biran see Endnote #2 of Chapter one of this thesis.

²⁶Weil, "De la perception", op. cit., p.34.

B. PERCEPTION IN SCIENCE

Again following her Professor, Alain, Simone Weil was influenced by the tendency, since the time of Descartes, to take science as an important subject of reflection for philosophers. However, as was also happening in her own time, philosophers, like her Professors Renée Le Senne and Alain, were beginning to question the idea of giving all of their attention to science. Human perception, they argued, should be seen to have a much vaster field than science could provide.²⁷

Already while she was at the École Normale, Simone Weil had this tendency to agree with Alain and Le Senne in their critique of science, as can be seen in her criticism of the way modern science was directing humanity. What she saw was that since the time of Descartes, human nature was defined in relation to how philosophers of science and the scientists claimed we know the world. Thus if they argued that human perception is not accurate, then we must doubt our perceptions of the world. Simone Weil dealt with this problem in her dissertation for the Ecole. She argued that perhaps modern science had gone astray in its insistence that science should distrust "human perception". By stubbornly holding this point of view, modern science has alienated human beings from their very nature. In an attempt to get at the source of this perspective Simone Weil proposed to study what Descartes, the founder of modern science, bequeathed to us in thought on the relation between science and human perception.

While dealing with the problem of the relation between science and perception, Simone Weil develops her early view of human nature. As Eric O. Springsted and Peter Winch point out, "Science et perception dans Descartes" is crucial to an understanding of her philosophical anthropology.²⁸ Through an analysis of Simone Weil's critique of Descartes' conception of the relation between science and perception, I will show that she further develops her view of how consciousness comes to awareness of self through its involvement with the world. Also, I will devote

²⁷See Alain, *Histoires de mes pensées*, op. cit., p.146-153 and Renée Le Senne, *Obstacle and Value*, op. cit., p.170-175.

²⁸See Eric O. Springsted, *Christus Mediator: Platonic Mediation in the Thought of Simone Weil* (Chico, Cal.: Scholar Press, 1983), p. 33-48. Since Springsted's theme is mediation and not Weil's philosophical anthropology, he does not claim that he has dealt thoroughly with her view of human nature. Peter Winch, "Introduction", *Lectures on Philosophy* by Simone Weil (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge U. Press, 1989.) I will return to Springsted's and Winch's views on Simone Weil's early conception of human nature later on in this chapter.

some attention to how Simone Weil's human being differs from and is similar to Descartes' conception of the human being. Finally, I will show that she closely follows Alain in her early philosophical anthropology.

Simone Weil thought, until the end of her life, that science as a discipline should be a part of human culture. Modern science is more than a discipline. To the degree that modern science teaches us what to think rather than providing us with a method by which each individual can teach herself/himself to think, it becomes a power over us. In becoming a power over us, modern scientists not only decide what human beings should think, but they also decide what it means to know the self and to be valued in society. In her critique of modern science, Simone Weil argued that the individual intellect should not be subservient to science. Human beings can correct their understanding of themselves and their relation to science by reflecting on the fact that morality depends on the individual's capacity to relate thought to action.

As the title suggests, the main problem dealt with in Simone Weil's dissertation is: Does Descartes base his view of science on perception? This problem, claimed Simone Weil, is one of the most essential problems for each and every individual to resolve because:

...il ne s'agit de rien de moins que de savoir si je dois soumettre la conduite de ma vie à l'autorité des savants, ou aux seules lumières de ma propre raison; ou plutôt, car cette question-là, ce n'est qu'à moi qu'il appartient de la décider, si la science m'apportera la liberté, ou des chaînes légitimes.²⁹

We must consider with a critical eye the epistemological formation of science and the philosophical anthropology underlying it, because, in recent history, science has replaced theology as the authority on knowledge. According to Simone Weil, since science has assumed this authority, there have been two conflicting theories on how human beings view their own nature. The first theory holds that human beings begin in error, and the second, that human beings are, by nature, ignorant.

If we begin in ignorance, then all knowledge about how to conduct our lives would come to us from those who already know, but if human beings begin in error, then learning depends more on paying attention to one's actions and reflecting on one's mistakes. Thus, for Simone Weil, how to learn and how to conduct oneself is a problem which can only be resolved by questioning how we do come to know/learn. Historically, this problem had been dealt with through two scientific revolutions. The first revolution took place in the time of the Greeks with Thales, and

²⁹Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.162.

the second took place at the time of Descartes. Out of these struggles the authority on knowledge and on how we come to know has shifted from the priests to the scientists: "Les savants ont donc bien succédé aux prêtres des anciennes théocraties, avec cette différence qu'une domination usurpée est remplacée par une autorité légitime."

According to Simone Weil, this raises the question of whether Descartes really intended his view of science to constitute a complete break with the past, i.e., with Greek science and religion as some thinkers claim.³⁰ She recognizes that Descartes' thought remains somewhat ambiguous on this issue. On the one hand, as she shows in part one of her dissertation, Cartesian science does constitute a break with the past, yet, on the other hand, Descartes does argue, like Plato, that man begins in error. Thus, what science can teach us is how to perceive correctly and it should provide us with a method to think well. Although Simone Weil does not deny the ambiguity in Descartes' thought, she, like Alain, insists on emphasizing that aspect of Descartes' philosophy which was in agreement with the Greeks rather than in disagreement.³¹

Weil argued that modern science had gone astray in interpreting Cartesian science. Modern science claimed to be an authority on knowledge rather than keeping to Descartes' idea that science should provide us with a method for thinking clearly. Thus, Simone Weil proposed to show that modern science had pushed their interpretation of Cartesian science too far in the direction of abstraction. What characterizes the break between Greek science and modern science is indeed the level of abstraction modern science brings us to:

La science, qui était au temps des Grecs la science des nombres, des figures et des machines ne semble plus consister qu'en la science des purs rapports. La pensée commune sur laquelle il semble que Thalès, s'il ne s'y bornait pas, du moins s'appuyait, est à présent clairement méprisée. Les notions de sens commun, telles que l'espace à trois dimensions, les postulats de la géométrie euclidienne, sont laissées de côté; certaines théories ne craignent même pas de parler d'espace courbe, ou d'assimiler une vitesse mesurable à une vitesse infinie. Les spéculations concernant la nature de la matière se donnent libre cours, essayant d'interpréter tel ou tel résultat de notre physique sans s'inquiéter le moins du monde de ce que peut être pour les hommes du commun cette matière qu'ils sentent sous leurs mains. Bref tout ce qui est intuition est banni par les

³⁰See Alain (Emile Chartier), *Introduction à la philosophie* (Paris: Union Générale d'éditions, 1939), notably the section on Descartes. See endnote 3.

³¹Simone Weil followed Alain's teaching very closely in her interpretation of Descartes. No doubt the substance of the 1939 text *Introduction à la philosophie* (Paris: Union Générale d'éditions, 1939) would have been familiar ground for Weil. During the period under examination, Descartes was enjoying a sort of Renaissance because of the new turn in science. For example, Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* were published in French in 1931.

savants autant qu'il leur est possible, ils n'admettent plus dans la science que la forme abstraite du raisonnement...³²

i. Descartes: A Turning Point -- Greek Science or Modern Science

Weil argued that Descartes was only partially responsible for the direction of Modern science. She pointed out that Descartes' *Meditations* appear to replace the sensible world by an intellectual world as the basis of science.³³ Furthermore, she said that this distrust of the senses was not, for Descartes, only provisional. She quoted another passage from *The Treatise on Light* to show that Cartesian physics was, in fact, based on what was well known as the *a priori* method: reason alone.³⁴ She continued to demonstrate this view of Cartesian science by showing that Descartes's disciples, Malebranche and Spinoza, interpreted his conception of extension as belonging to the mind rather than to the sensible world. She then quoted Descartes' letter addressed to Morus to show that, indeed, the idea of pure extension did seem to come from the Cartesian geometry of 1637.³⁵

Simone Weil then turned to show how Descartes deviated from the ancient geometers. She pointed out that, although the ancient geometers reasoned about the triangle and the circle in general, they were careful to base their reasoning on intuition, thus studying the figures as they were working in the world. Descartes, she said, was the first to deviate by realizing that the object of science is the quantities to be measured, or rather, the ratios that determine the measurement. So it was from Descartes onward that: "ses mathématiques étaient ainsi délivrées de la superstition par laquelle chaque figure avait comme sa quantité propre."³⁶ Thus, she claimed, the *Geometry* of 1637 did anticipate modern science, for it applied the general principle that "les rapports entre les quantités sont le seul objet du savant." She even speculated that Descartes might have taken the step that Fourier took; that is, applying analysis directly to physics, had he had a sufficiently elaborate instrument available.

After demonstrating how Cartesian science anticipated modern science, Weil related this change in

³²Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.163-164.

³³Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p. 166.

³⁴Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.168-169.

³⁵Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.170.

³⁶Both passages come from Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.170.

epistemological thinking to the Cartesian philosophical anthropology which underlay it. Descartes, she said, had scorn for knowledge which came from opinion or the imagination and that is why he wished to set mathematics free of the intuition. Descartes, "comme Spinoza, a rebaisé l'imagination à ne consister qu'en des mouvements des corps." She cited Descartes from the *Regulae* in support:

[Il faut se représenter] que cette imagination est une véritable partie du corps[...]Par là on peut comprendre comment peuvent s'accomplir tous le mouvements que font les animaux, bien qu'en eux on ne puisse admettre aucune connaissance des choses, mais seulement une imagination purement corporelle.³⁷

By severing the ties between ideas which come from the mind and ideas which come from the body via the imagination, Descartes removed the ambiguity which comes from basing science on perception. After Descartes, Simone Weil suggested, science became what Plato had had a premonition it would become, " an assemblage of ideas".

Clearly, Simone Weil supported the view that Descartes was the founder of Modern science because he transferred the knowledge of nature from the realm of the senses to the realm of reason, cutting all ties with Greek science. "And for the human being" , she says, "Descartes has rid our thought of imagination."

As I pointed out above, Simone Weil is intent upon showing that Descartes' thought remains ambiguous. In the second part of her interpretation of Descartes she shows that there is an aspect of his thought on the relation between perception and science which suggests that Cartesian science is in agreement with Greek science. This is the interpretation of Descartes' thought which Simone Weil obviously prefers and adopts herself.

Simone Weil discovered a discontinuity in the conventional interpretation of Descartes, however, one that she believed showed that Descartes did not totally support the complete abstraction of the sciences. She focused on a passage from *Discours de la méthode*:

"...Car elles (les notions générales touchant la physique) m'ont fait voir qu'il est possible de parvenir à des connaissances qui soient fort utiles à la vie, et qu'au lieu de cette philosophie spéculative, qu'on enseigne dans les écoles, on en peut trouver une pratique, par laquelle connaissant la force et les actions du feu, de l'eau, de l'air, des astres, des cieux, et de tous les autre corps qui nous environnent, aussi distinctement que nous connaissons les divers métiers de nos artisans, nous les pourrions employer en même façon à tous les usages auxquels ils sont

³⁷Descartes quoted by Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p. 171. Simone Weil quotes Descartes in latin, but I can only work with the French so I have quoted from the French translation by G. Le Roy in Notes for "Science et perception," op. cit., note #90, p.412.

propres, et ainsi nous rendre comme maîtres et possesseurs de la Nature."³⁸

If science had a more exalted purpose for Descartes, Simone Weil suggested it consisted in laying the foundations of morality. She cited Descartes from a letter to Chanut: "...ces vérités de Physique font partie des fondements de la plus haute et de la plus parfaite Morale."³⁹ When Descartes expected science to conform to the mind rather than to things, it was not, as it was for Poincaré, a matter of thinking conveniently, but rather of thinking well.⁴⁰ Thinking conveniently means to think with the idea that whatever is useful is good. This suggests that any means is good as long as it obtains the desired end. On the other hand, thinking well suggests that there is a correct way to think and that one should strive for this above all.⁴¹ Expanding on what it means to think well, Weil suggested it was because Descartes desired this that he became discontent with the way Greek geometry was being taught in the schools, although he was not at all discontent with the results of what they taught. Rather than separating himself from Greek science, Descartes' efforts went into trying to understand the Greek geometers' "method" of doing analysis. What Descartes discovered was that analysis was different from synthesis.

L'analyse montre la vraie voie par laquelle une chose a été méthodiquement inventée, et fait voir comment les effets dépendent des causes; en sorte que, si le lecteur la veut suivre, et jeter les yeux soigneusement sur tout ce qu'elle contient, il n'entendra pas moins parfaitement la chose ainsi démontrée, et ne la rendra pas moins sienne, que si lui-même l'avait inventée.⁴²

But Weil said science is not taught this way. It is taught using synthesis which, according to Descartes, does not help us understand how an effect follows from its cause. Descartes writes:

³⁸Descartes, as quoted by Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.173-174. I added the brackets for clarification. The passage comes from Descartes (A.T. VI, p.61).

³⁹Descartes, as quoted by Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.174. Descartes, (A.T. V, p. 290).

⁴⁰See Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.164 where Simone Weil claims that Poincaré is a conventionalist in his view of science. She claims that in *La Science et L'Hypothèse*, Poincaré argues that since mathematics is no more than the language of physics, then we can change the mathematical language to accord with what is most convenient to use. For example, if it is more convenient to use the language of Euclidian geometry rather than the language of Einsteinian mathematics, then that is what the physicist should use. According to Weil, Poincaré is suggesting that physics could use whatever language is convenient as if language could determine its own reality.

⁴¹ This idea of thinking well is, as I pointed out above, equivalent to thinking morally. I will return to this point later on in this chapter.

⁴²Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.175.

La synthèse, au contraire, par une voie toute autre...démontre à la vérité clairement ce qui est contenu en ses conclusions, et se sert d'une longue suite de définitions, de demandes, d'axiomes, de théorèmes et de problèmes, afin que, si on lui nie quelques conséquences, elle fasse voir comment elles sont contenues dans les antécédents, et qu'elle arrache le consentement du lecteur, tant obstiné et opiniâtre qu'il puisse être; mais elle ne donne pas, comme l'autre, une entière satisfaction aux esprits de ceux qui désirent d'apprendre, parce qu'elle n'enseigne pas la méthode par laquelle la chose a été inventée.⁴³

Simone Weil concluded that Cartesian science is nothing but order and Cartesian method concerns nothing but order — *Regulae* repeat it constantly. Thus, what the human being learns from the process of ordering is how to properly direct one's reason. Through Descartes, she found a way to establish her trust in the individual intellect: "Aussi un homme quelconque, si médiocres que soient son intelligence et ses talents, peut-il, s'il s'y applique, connaître tout ce qui est à la portée de l'homme...."⁴⁴

After making it clear what she thought Descartes' intentions were in putting his trust in his reasoning rather than his senses, Simone Weil then turned her attention to an interpretation of Cartesian epistemology. Her intentions were to establish that the science of mathematics, considered to rule Cartesian physics, did not, for Descartes himself, play the role of an abstract language; rather, mathematics constituted knowledge of the world. Weil found support for this position in a letter Descartes wrote to Mersenne in which he said geometry is a physics. She cited this passage:

"Je n'ai résolu de quitter que la Géométrie abstraite, c'est-à-dire la recherche des questions qui ne servent qu'à exercer l'esprit; et ce, afin d'avoir d'autant plus de loisir de cultiver une autre sorte de Géométrie, qui se propose pour questions l'explication des phénomènes de la nature".⁴⁵

Then she quoted two passages to show that he did carry out this plan. These suggested to her that he was an extreme idealist. As she remarked: "Il n'y pas d'exemple...d'un idéalisme aussi audacieux"⁴⁶

However, she pointed out, Descartes is known to be equally extreme in his realism, and she quoted Descartes from a letter to Morus stating his realist view of the world:

⁴³Descartes, as quoted by Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.175. Descartes, (A.T., IX, p. 121).

⁴⁴Descartes, as quoted by Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.177. Descartes, (A.T., IX, p. 122).

⁴⁵Descartes as quoted by Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.177. Descartes, Lettre du 27 juillet 1638 (A.T. II, p. 268).

⁴⁶Descartes, as quoted by Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.178. Descartes (A.T. V, p.268).

Mais prenez garde qu'en disant une substance sensible vous ne la définissez que par le rapport qu'elle a à nos sens, ce qui n'en explique qu'une propriété, au lieu de comprendre l'essence entière des corps qui, pouvant exister quand il n'y aurait point d'hommes, ne dépend pas par conséquent de nos sens.⁴⁷

This extreme realist position appears to contradict Descartes' extreme idealism, but Simone Weil intended to show that, for Descartes, these two positions were not only reconcilable, but correlative. She cited a long passage from a *Lettre sur Gassendi* in which Descartes stated that the mathematical extension which he posited as the principle of his physics was not an abstraction. Simone Weil interpreted this to mean that Descartes' geometry, although it seems to be abstract, is not because it always maintains a relation with the imagination; In this sense, Cartesian geometry is a physics. She cited Descartes in support of her interpretation: "L'étude de mathématiques, écrit Descartes à la princesse Elisabeth, exerce principalement l'imagination"⁴⁸ and again she quotes from the *Regulae*: "Nous ne ferons plus rien désormais sans le secours de l'imagination."⁴⁹ After quoting a number of passages from the *Regulae* concerning how the imagination plays a mediating role between the mind and the body, she stated that:

Aussi Descartes repousse-t-il, au nom de l'imagination les propositions telles que: l'extension ou la figure n'est pas un corps; le nombre n'est pas la chose nombrée, la surface est la limite du volume....Il veut que, s'il est question de nombre, nous imaginions un objet mesurable au moyen de plusieurs unités...⁵⁰

Simone Weil understood why Descartes did not consider it a contradiction to join his idealism with his realism. She concluded her argument by claiming that Cartesian science does not replace the sensible world with the intelligible world and she added that "it is packed with matter". Simone Weil quoted two long passages to prove that Descartes had every intention of submitting his scientific reasoning to the examination of the perceiver; however, I will quote only the most significant part of one of the passages:

...je ne compare que des mouvements à d'autre mouvements, ou des figures à d'autre figures, etc., c'est-à-dire, que des choses qui à cause de leur petitesse ne peuvent tomber sous nos sens à d'autres qui y tombent, et qui

⁴⁷Descartes, as quoted by Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.178. Descartes, (A.T. V, p. 268). Weil quotes Descartes in latin, but again I have quoted the French translation, p.414).

⁴⁸Descartes, as quoted by Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.179. Descartes, (A.T. III, p. 692).

⁴⁹Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.179.

⁵⁰Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.179.

d'ailleurs ne different pas davantage d'elles qu'un grand cercle diffère d'un petit cercle, je prétends qu'elles sont le moyen le plus propre, pour expliquer la vérité des questions Physiques, que l'esprit humain puisse avoir; jusque-là que, lors qu'on assure quelque chose touchant la nature, qui ne peut être expliquée par aucune telle comparaison, je pense savoir par démonstration qu'elle est fausse.⁵¹

Finally, Simone Weil argued that Descartes did not consider perception as the lowest form of knowledge — as did so many philosophers following him, but rather he considered perception to be of the same nature as science. She claimed that this point was made in the famous "wax" passage:

"Quel est ce morceau de cire qui ne peut être compris que par l'entendement ou l'esprit? Certes c'est le même que je vois, que je touche, que j'imagine[...]Ma perception n'est point une vision, ou un attouchement, ni une imagination, et ne l'ai jamais été, quoiqu'il le semblât ainsi auparavant, mais seulement une inspection de l'esprit[...]et ainsi je comprends, par la seule puissance de juger qui réside en mon esprit, ce que je croyais voir de mes yeux".⁵²

What Simone Weil took Descartes to be saying with this passage of the piece of wax was that the mind judges the wax to exist in spite of the changes it goes through. She interpreted Descartes to be claiming that to perceive was not only to feel or to see but also to think about the object and the fact that it persists. Simone Weil reinforced this interpretation of Descartes' idea of perception as being of the same nature as science by citing another example from the *Optics* which she claimed made the same point. She argued that, in this example, Descartes showed us that when a blind man uses his stick to make his way about the world, he directly perceives the objects at the end of his stick. First of all, he does not receive "the sensations that the pressure of the stick makes on his hand" and then form the idea of the object, rather, Simone Weil claimed that the blind man, according to Descartes, immediately formed the idea of the object at the same time as he felt its pressure at the end of his stick. Thus, Simone Weil interpreted Descartes to have developed from these two examples, a "theory of sensations as signs to be interpreted" and that perception is the immediate interpretation of these signs. As the above quoted passages point out, she obviously thought that, for Descartes, perception is at once an act of imagination and an act of the mind. She quoted another passage from the *Dioptrique VI* to support this view: "Aussi Descartes trouve-t-il dans la

⁵¹Descartes, as quoted by Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.180. Descartes, (A.T. II, p. 368).

⁵²Descartes, as quoted by Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.182. Descartes, (A.T. VII, p. 301). Alain makes this same point concerning the piece of wax in *Introduction à la philosophie* (Paris: Union Générale d'éditions, 1939), op. cit., p.141.

perception une:"

"géométrie naturelle" et "une action de la pensée qui, n'étant qu'une imagination toute simple, ne laisse point d'envelopper en soi un raisonnement semblable à celui que font les Arpenteurs, lorsque, par le moyen de deux différentes stations, ils mesurent les lieux inaccessibles".³³

Simone Weil learned of this interpretation of Descartes' theory of perception as taking 'sensations as signs' of the external world from Alain, who in turn learned of it from Jules Lagneau. Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception* referred to this view of perception as the intellectualist theory.³⁴ He, too, claimed that this theory of perception came from an interpretation of the example of the piece of wax in Descartes' second meditation. Also Merleau-Ponty quoted Lagneau and Alain extensively to show that they took this to be the only possible theory of perception and that this theory originated in Descartes.³⁵ Although Merleau-Ponty does not accept this view of perception, he does make it clear that what distinguishes the intellectualists from the empiricists on perception is the role played by the mind in judging:

Intellectualism set out, it is true, to discover by reflection the structure of perception, instead of explaining it in terms of a combination of associative forces and attention, but its gaze upon perception is not yet direct. This will be seen better by examining the role played in its analysis by the notion of *judgement*. Judgement is often introduced as what sensations lack to make perception possible.³⁶

This means that the intellectualists reject the empiricists' idea that sensations, or otherwise called impressions, are the immediate data of experience. Lagneau gives us a clear rejection of this view when he claims that sensations are conceptions of the mind rather than the immediate data of experience:

La sensation en elle-même est en dehors de l'étendue et du temps; elle est une pure conception de l'esprit, conception nécessaire par laquelle nous exprimons que la pensée ne fait pas la vérité par une action absolue qui n'aurait aucune condition en dehors d'elle-même.... La sensation n'est saisie que par la réflexion.... A vrai dire, la pure impression est conçue et non pas sentie.³⁶

³³Descartes, as quoted by Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.182. Descartes, (A.T. VI, p.138).

³⁴See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962.), Chapter 3.

³⁵See especially 31-34 of *The Phenomenology of Perception*, op.cit..

³⁶Ibid., 32.

³⁶ Jules Lagneau, *Célèbres leçons et fragments*, op. cit., p.157

Another difference between the intellectualists and the empiricists is in how they view the objective world. The empiricists rely on the objective world, but only as that which supplies the individual with the component parts of perception, i.e., the collection of stimuli and qualities which make up the immediate data of experience and from which comes perception. Thus, for them, the object can never really be known, but it must be assumed as the basis of perception. For the intellectualists, on the other hand, the objective world can be known through the act of perceiving. As Lagneau points out, extension is real:

On comprend alors qu'on ne peut pas non plus considérer cette intuition de l'étendue, dans laquelle la sensation nous est présentée, comme n'exprimant qu'une disposition de notre nature, une manière propre à nous de nous représenter les êtres, en un mot une forme subjective. Et Kant n'a pu s'en tenir là, puisque les propriétés de l'espace sont pour lui le fondement d'une géométrie qui a une valeur objective. L'étendue n'est pas une donnée de notre connaissance; pour mieux dire, elle n'est pas seulement cela; elle signifie la vérité des choses...⁵⁷

It will become even clearer in the next section that Simone Weil is trying to understand and work out for herself this intellectualist view of perception. Thus, after having followed the intellectualists by arguing that for Descartes perception is of the same nature as science, in the second part of her dissertation, Simone Weil does her own meditation in which she also develops this relation between science and perception and she further explains perception⁵⁸

ii. Dual Aspects of the Imagination: the Pure Imagination and the Simple Imagination bring the Mind its Confused and its Clear Ideas from the World

Simone Weil began her meditation, like Descartes began his, by showing that the feelings of pain and pleasure, being so mixed with one another, are not certain to be the effects of what the world causes in one. Even abstract truths, such as mathematics, she claimed, still offer no certain knowledge because they come to us through the imagination: "Ce que j'appelle le monde des idées n'est pas moins que le monde des sensations un chaos; les

⁵⁷Lagneau, *Célèbres leçons et fragments*, op.cit., p.158.

⁵⁸Simone Weil's idea of doing one's own meditation comes from Jules Lagneau — it is called "la méthode réflexive." Simone Pétrement compares this method to the phenomenological method developed by Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and others in her essay "Remarques sur Lagneau, Alain et la philosophie allemande." *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, 1970, pp. 292-300. Also see Lagneau, *Célèbres leçons et fragments*, op.cit., p.132 where he explains that it is part of the reflexive method to become more conscious of the unity of thinking and acting through a study of perception.

idées m'imposent leurs manières d'être, me tiennent, m'échappent."⁵⁹

This suggests she was aware that we receive ideas as well as feelings in our dealings with the world, but that both the feelings and the ideas, because they come to the individual through the imagination, are mixed, one with the other. Thus, neither the feelings we receive from the world, nor the ideas, give us knowledge about the world.

An example Simone Weil used was: "...ce que le nageur appelle l'eau, c'est avant tout pour lui un sentiment composé de la volupté que donne le nage, de la peine qu'amène la fatigue."⁶⁰ Actually, when the swimmer gives a name to that which resists him/her, he/she is saying more than he/she knows, Weil suggested: "Dès que je donne un nom à ce que je ressens, je dis, comme l'avait vu Protagoras, plus que je ne puis savoir."⁶¹ At this point, Simone Weil admitted, in contrast to her essay on "Protée", that this is the state of doubt: "Tout est livré à ce malin génie de Descartes, qui n'est autre chose que le hasard."⁶²

In this state, thoroughly described in "Protée", only one thing is revealed to the individual: "Voilà donc une chose que je sais: j'ai conscience, je pense."⁶³ And although my thoughts may be the thoughts of an Evil Genius, an Evil Genius cannot make me think them.

Et par cette puissance de pensée, que ne se révèle encore à moi que par la puissance de douter, je sais que je suis. Je puis, donc je suis. Et en cet éclair de pensée se révèlent à moi plusieurs choses dont je ne savais auparavant ce qu'elles étaient, à savoir le doute, la pensée, la puissance, l'existence et la connaissance elle-même.⁶⁴

In the sense that Simone Weil's "Cogito" makes the subject aware of itself and that the 'I think' is also the 'I doubt', 'I know' etc., it is like Descartes' "Cogito"; however, the fact that Simone Weil rephrases the "Je pense, donc je suis" as "Je puis, donc je suis", means that she, unlike Descartes, characterizes it as the power to act. Simone Weil's view of the "Cogito ergo sum" comes originally from Lagneau. He interprets the "Cogito ergo sum"

⁵⁹Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.187.

⁶⁰Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.185.

⁶¹Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.186.

⁶²Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.187-188. In this essay Simone Weil moves more slowly and seems to be in no rush to get to the knowledge of the world. She lingers in the doubting state, as Descartes had, much longer.

⁶³Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.188.

⁶⁴Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.189. See endnote 4.

to be primarily a statement about how the subject is defined by its ability to think and that this power to think is what defines its existence. Lagneau argues this in *Célèbres leçons et fragments* when he claims that the "Cogito ergo sum" is at the basis of modern thought and that it begins with the subject as the power to act:

Le subjectivisme de Berkeley, le phénoménisme de Hume, celui de Kant, sont en germe dans le Cogito ergo sum....Toute la métaphysique de Descartes et de son école est destinée à créer ce passage: C'est la conséquence du dualisme, et suivant Descartes la science objective n'aurait pas été fondée, si l'entreprise n'avait réussi....Il(Descartes) nie qu'on puisse substituer dans son axiome à l'acte de penser un acte quelconque du corps, parce que cet acte appartiendrait au monde extérieur, dont l'existence est encore problématique; à moins, dit-il, qu'on n'entende la seule pensée de cet acte, rentrant ainsi dans la vraie forme de l'axiome: Je pense (que je fais tel ou tel acte), donc je suis⁶⁵

Simone Weil follows Lagneau by arguing that the self is a being which acts and she claims that thinking is acting:

Exister, penser, connaître ne sont que des aspects d'une seule réalité: pouvoir. Je connais ce que je fais, et ce que je fais, c'est penser et c'est exister; car du moment que je fais, je fais que j'existe. Je suis une chose qui pense⁶⁶.

But this power to act, to doubt, is only negative. It does not allow one to feel whatever one wants. Simone Weil maintained that although there is a difference between the desire to feel and feeling, there is no difference between the desire to reject a thought and the rejection of it:

En un mot, autre chose est désirer sentir, autre chose est sentir....Au contraire, au sujet de toutes ces choses, vouloir me retenir de juger témérairement, c'est me retenir de juger témérairement....Vouloir et agir ici ne font qu'un.⁶⁷

This means that one's feelings are not of the same nature as one's doubts: when one is only in doubt, one may reject whatever thoughts one finds in oneself; on the other hand, one can desire to feel warm without feeling warm. Thus, doubt gives one power over one's thoughts and it is this active power that defines the subject. Desire on the other hand, offers no power; thus, one cannot be defined by one's desires. The only proof one has of one's existence comes from the act of thinking:

Sinon par ce pouvoir librement, autrement dit réellement exercé, l'être que je nomme moi n'est rien....Ce pouvoir ne comporte pas de degrés plus que l'existence même, que j'ai reconnue être identique avec lui. Je puis, comme

⁶⁵Jules Lagneau, *Célèbres leçons et fragments*, op. cit., p.37

⁶⁶Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.189.

⁶⁷Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.191-192.

j'existe, absolument... Tout pouvoir réel est infini. S'il n'existe que moi, il n'existe que cette puissance absolue; je ne dépends que de mon vouloir, je n'existe qu'autant que je me crée, je suis Dieu.⁶⁸

There is no question that, for Simone Weil, consciousness is acting, but, unlike Descartes, as Peter Winch points out in the "Introduction" to *Lectures on Philosophy*, she does not claim that the "I" stands for a "substantial subject of consciousness."⁶⁹

Winch makes a comparison between Simone Weil's and Wittgenstein's philosophies. He claims that in *Science et perception dans Descartes*, Simone Weil had attempted to begin with a phenomenological language as a starting point and to show from there how the conception of such a world can develop from it. He then summarizes her meditation by claiming that she tries to show how the distinction between 'I' and the world which confronts me and to which I belong, arises through an ordering of this phenomenological world. After which he claims that Simone Weil's main divergence from Descartes consists in "an insistence that the word 'I' does not stand for a substantial subject of consciousness, but is simply the expression of such methodical activity." And this, he claims, leads her into tangles, one of which is not being able to give a clear account of the relation between 'I' as expressing pure activity and the role of the human body in activity.⁷⁰

Winch sees Simone Weil's idea of the relation between the mind and the body, as she works it out in "Science et perception dans Descartes", to be, as he says "something like this":

My activity is constituted by everything that I completely control: everything, and only that, which is completely expressive of myself. This includes only what is completely transparent to my understanding, since anything in my experience that I do not understand is something that I undergo or am simply confronted with - all this belongs to the realm of what she calls 'hasard' or contingency. The movements of my body, therefore, cannot be exclusively an expression of my activity, since those movements depend on contingent factors which I have to accept for what they are, which are not themselves a product of my activity.⁷¹

I think the operative term in the above quotation is in the last sentence when he says that "The movements of my body cannot be *exclusively* (my italics) an expression of my activity...." The term *exclusively* is accurate,

⁶⁸Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.192-193.

⁶⁹Peter Winch, "Introduction," *Lectures on Philosophy*, by Simone Weil. Trans. by Hugh Price. (1978. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.4-5. Hereafter: Winch, "Introduction," *Lectures*.

⁷⁰Winch, "Introduction," *Lectures*, op. cit., p.4-5.

⁷¹Winch, "Introduction" *Lectures*, op. cit., p.5.

because as I have already shown through the essay on *Proteus*, Simone Weil thinks that there is a state of "pure imagination" when the body or the "emotions" can be in control and in this state the bodily reactions are all that is. The criticism he raises in the following passage is I think not valid because I do not think that Simone Weil intends to say that someone could describe an emotional state of being without being actively aware of that emotional state. However I think the point of the description is to show that it is in fact emotions which first awakens consciousness to itself. Winch also claims that:

...in *Science et perception* it is implicitly presupposed that a primitive, passively undergone, phenomenology of sensation can be described before the notion of 'activity' is introduced: for activity needs something to work on. Yet in reality the internal logic of both positions demands that activity is involved in the possibility of having thoughts about anything whatever.... in the impossibility of describing one's experience in *Science et perception*. That is to say, the difficulty in offering an intelligible account of the relation between thought and action ... is not a local one; it is a difficulty for the whole account of thought being offered.⁷²

Thus, the important point of the description is not that the mind is aware in the act of describing, but rather that such states of pure imagination do exist and that consciousness is first awakened by such states. I will argue in the following pages that through Simone Weil's intellectualist account of perception in the two early essays, *Proteus* and *Science et perception*, and her notion of work that follows from it, she does introduce activity into her thought early enough. Thus, Winch's critique misses both the point of Simone Weil's whole description of the two functions of the imagination in perception and her point that perception does include the activity of the mind by actively taking clear ideas rather than confused ideas and acting through the body with these latter ideas. Thus, there is no *unbridgeable gulf*, to use Winch's words, between our passive side and our active side, as they are, I will show, united in perception.

Winch does not pay attention to Simone Weil's view of perception as she works it out in *Science et perception*, rather he takes what she says in *Lectures* about perception to be her definitive view on the issue. Although it is not totally clear what view of perception he is attributing to her, he seems to be suggesting that for Simone Weil perception is no more than our bodily reaction to the world.⁷³ Eric O. Springsted agrees with Winch on this view of perception; however, Springsted makes more of the role of the imagination in his account of Weil's view of

⁷²Winch, "Introduction", *Lectures*, op. cit., p.6.

⁷³See Winch, "Introduction", *Lectures*, op. cit., p. 12-13.

perception. In *Christus Mediator: Platonic Mediation in the Thought of Simone Weil*, he argues that for Simone Weil human beings are first of all material beings. He claims that for Weil it is the imagination that performs acts of perception and that the imagination "is defined as a function of human activity which by itself does not imply mind."⁷⁴ In other words, Springsted and Winch are claiming that, according to Weil, when we perceive something in the world we do not use our minds. Springsted adds that in perception we only exercise our imagination and he clearly states that, for Weil, the imagination is simply a reflexive action which provides us with perceptual consistency. Furthermore, he claims that "there is no logically necessary relation between the regularity of perception and the constitution of the physical world since other equally consistent perceptions are conceptually possible. Therefore no definite conclusions about the physical world can be drawn from perception."⁷⁵ It seems to me that in claiming that, for Simone Weil, perception involves no use of the mind and gives us no definite conclusions concerning the external world, Winch and Springsted attribute to Simone Weil an empiricist view of perception. I will argue in the following pages that Simone Weil consistently holds an intellectualist account of perception, thus, she rejects the empiricist view that sensations are the unreflective data of experience through which our body perceives the world and that "no definite conclusions about the physical world can be drawn from perception."⁷⁶

⁷⁴Eric O. Springsted, *Christus Mediator Platonic Mediation in the Thought of Simone Weil*, op.cit., p.36. Hereafter: Springsted, *Christus Mediator*.

⁷⁵Springsted, *Christus Mediator*, op. cit., p.36.

⁷⁶Both Springsted and Winch make much of the following statement on perception in *Lectures*: "The very nature of the relationship between ourselves and what is external to us, a relationship which consists in a reaction, a reflex, is our perception of the external world. Perception of nature, pure and simple, is a sort of dance; it is this dance that makes perception possible for us." (As quoted by Winch, "Introduction" *Lectures*, op. cit., p.12.) First of all, given that in Weil's early works she consistently holds the intellectualist view of perception, I can only surmise that she may have been adopting a sympathetic attitude towards the empiricist conception of perception and that she did not necessarily intend this statement to be taken as encompassing her definitive view of perception. Furthermore, the last sentence of the passage quoted above does seem, to my mind, somewhat inconsistent which is another reason why this passage does not give us, in a nutshell, Weil's conception of perception. The first part of the sentence claims that perception is a sort of dance. The sort of part already adds uncertainty to the claim but even if we give it the strongest interpretation - 'perception is a dance' - she seems to backtrack in the second part of the sentence. There she says "it is this dance that makes perception possible for us." We could read this latter claim to mean that the dance and perception are not exactly the same thing. We could interpret the latter claim to be a return to her intellectualist view of perception; then perception would show an awareness of the dance.

Simone Weil never intended the 'I' to be equated with 'pure activity', for then, the 'I' could think what it wants and affirm what it wants. But, said Simone Weil, it is not so, the 'I' is not God and the 'I' has some limitations. The 'I' cannot give itself things to think about, things to act on; thus, something other than the 'I' exists and limits the 'I': "Si nul pouvoir n'est limité par lui-même, il me suffit de connaître que ma puissance n'est pas tout-puissance pour connaître que l'existence de moi n'est pas l'unique existence."⁷⁸ According to Simone Weil's analysis in "Science et Perception", consciousness is limited to the degree that it needs thoughts to think or to doubt, thus consciousness is bound up with the thoughts which come from the world. The 'I' does have the freedom to disengage itself from the world, but not from the thoughts which come from the world. Only when the 'I' does this is it 'pure activity'. As she explicitly said:

Il serait absurde de supposer d'un côté ma liberté intacte, et de l'autre les choses que je pense semblables, selon une parole célèbre, à des tableaux muets; du moment que mes pensées sont autre chose que mes vœux, elles m'engagent....Ma croyance est engagée en effet, je ne m'en aperçois que trop à la difficulté de douter; mais plus simplement les choses que je pense m'engagent, moi, c'est-à-dire ma volonté....je ne suis libre qu'autant que je peux me dégager.⁷⁹

Simone Weil introduces the imagination into her meditation. at this point. For Weil, the imagination is in the body, as it is for Descartes and it is connected to the mind. It transmits messages of pain and pleasure, thoughts from the body to the mind. Also, the imagination introduces the mind to the obstacle, the resistance of the external world through thoughts. It does this because consciousness has two kinds of reactions to its thoughts. Consciousness can accept and reject the feeling of pain and pleasure that thoughts transmit. It is the imagination, the body that reacts this way and sends this contradictory message to the mind, i.e., that it can reject or accept these thoughts. When the mind chooses to reject thoughts, it exercises its own power and reads the obstacle, the external world resisting it in its thoughts:

Tout ce qui apparaît d'une manière ou de l'autre à mon imagination, rêves, objets ou formes, m'est rendu présent, je l'ai reconnu, par un sentiment mêlé de plaisir et de peine, c'est-à-dire par ceci, que je l'accueille et le repousse à la fois. C'est par cette répulsion et cet accueil, qui me semblent constituer l'imagination, que mes pensées m'engagent; je ne suis libre qu'autant que je peux me dégager. Autrement dit, autant l'autre existence, par l'intermédiaire de mes pensées, peut sur moi, autant moi, par l'intermédiaire, je peux sur elle. Aussi ces pensées dont je ne puis créer une seule sont-elles toutes, depuis les rêves, les désirs, les passions jusqu'aux raisonnements, autant qu'elles dépendent de moi, signes de moi, autant qu'elles n'en dépendent pas, signes de l'autre existence.

⁷⁸Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.193.

⁷⁹Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.193.

Connaître, c'est lire en une pensée quelconque cette double signification, c'est faire apparaître en une pensée l'obstacle, en reconnaissant dans cette pensée ma propre puissance....⁸⁰

The idea that the imagination brings this resistance from the external world and that consciousness becomes aware of its power to act by reading in its thoughts this sign of the external world does not come directly from Descartes but rather it comes from Alain and Maine de Biran.⁸¹ We will return to the role of the imagination and the problem of perception shortly.

Simone Weil claimed that the understanding is the name of the consciousness who thinks and that it teaches nothing except "Je pense, donc je suis". She argued in her meditation that all thoughts that have "Je pense, donc je suis", "I think, therefore I am", as their model are infallible because God guarantees their infallibility. For Simone Weil, this idea of the All Powerful God is needed to account for existence: "l'idée de Dieu seule a pu porter témoignage d'une existence."⁸² The power of the "I" to act, to exist, comes from participating in the All Powerful, the true power, and this cannot be imaginary: "Si la toute-puissance pouvait être une fiction de mon esprit, je pourrais être moi-même une fiction, car je n'existe qu'autant que je participe à la toute-puissance."⁸³ Thus, all thoughts, as certain to me as that I exist because I think, are guaranteed by the All- Powerful God: "Ainsi, Dieu même me garantit que, dès que je pense comme il faut, je pense la vérité."⁸⁴ Only an All-Powerful God would be able to guarantee the truth of such thoughts because the criterion of truth could not have its source in the world which, by itself, presents us with confused ideas; thus, the source of the truth must be the source of the means by which we can escape confusion. The way to escape confusion, as we have discovered, was for the mind to actively disengage itself from its feelings of pain and pleasure and at the same time recognize that it has this power and that

⁸⁰Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.193-194.

⁸¹See Alain, *The Gods*, op.cit., p.28-29. There are perhaps many other places where Alain makes this point, but I have first found it in this book. Also see Weil's Appendix VI, pp. 374-376, *Premiers écrits philosophiques*, op.cit., where she works out Maine de Biran's idea of obstacle and how it awakens consciousness to the power to act.

⁸²Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.194.

⁸³Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.194.

⁸⁴Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.194.

it is disengaging itself from something, i.e., from its thoughts. Two ideas emerge from this whole process: the idea of the self as activity and the idea that something else exists and causes the thoughts for the self to act on. Like Descartes, Simone Weil calls thoughts of this kind "clear and distinct", but the problem remains: how is it that we have this power to form clear ideas and why are we dependent on our entanglement with the external world in order to be able to form these clear ideas at all? To answer these questions Simone Weil brings in the All-Powerful God. She does this because as Springsted points out in *Christus Mediator*, she realizes that the self is "limited in some respect", i.e., "the self cannot give itself things to think", and since the self has the real power to form clear ideas, as Springsted also clearly points out, Simone Weil concludes:

that there must be another existence separate from herself, for if no real power by itself is limited, and her self is obviously limited in some respect (and not degree), it must be limited by another existence or agent...this agent is God or the 'Toute-Puissance'.⁸⁵

Springsted claims that the reason why that which limits us must be God and not a finite agent like ourselves is because other finite agents cannot create themselves as the object of our thoughts. Thus, he claims, "the only thing which could then both limit her (and thus make itself known as another existence, or put differently, make itself an object of thought) and have its own power as an agent, would be the infinite 'toute-puissance'".⁸⁶ Furthermore, says Springsted, the only way for a finite power to understand Weil's absolute power to doubt is for her to recognize that this power comes from participating in the all-powerful, which means that she must recognize the existence of the all-powerful. Springsted's reasoning seems to me to be sound; however, I do think that there could be another aspect to her thought on this point. I think that for Simone Weil the 'toute-puissance' not only makes it possible for us to have any power at all, but also provides the conditions to limit our power by providing us with a world to think about. Furthermore, these limitations make us realize that we have only a limited power. Thus, God guarantees the existence of the external world in order to teach us that we are not God -- we are a limited power:

Ainsi, Dieu même me garantit que, dès que je pense comme il faut, je pense la vérité. Je n'ai pas lieu de supposer que cette garantie est trompeuse, que cette autre existence dont je crois dépendre n'est qu'une illusion imposée par

⁸⁵Springsted, *Christus Mediator*, op. cit., p.45.

⁸⁶Springsted, *Christus Mediator*, op. cit., p.46.

Dieu. Il est vrai que si j'arrive à me heurter à la limite de mon pouvoir, je ne connaîtrai à la rigueur pas autre chose sinon de quelle manière Dieu m'empêche d'être Dieu; mais il n'y a rien de plus à savoir, cette connaissance étant la connaissance du monde.⁸⁷

Springsted argues in footnote number 89 that this is essentially a Spinozist argument concerning the existence of God as the 'toute-puissance'. This means that the 'toute-puissance' "exists independently of me and is that which allows me my power." Since I am not intimately acquainted with Spinozism I cannot enter the debate of whether or not Simone Weil's view of God is Spinozist or not; however, if Springsted means to say that Simone Weil is expressing a kind of pantheism in "Science et perception", then I think it would be worthwhile considering *Appendice IV of Premiers écrits philosophiques*, where Simone Weil discusses the ontological proof in relation to Descartes. There she discusses what Descartes means in speaking about God as the 'toute-puissance'. Simone Weil claims that Cartesian theology develops the attributes of God. These attributes, in appearance, suggest that God is all-powerful but, she says, in reality these attributes express that God is independent.⁸⁸ It seems to me that what she could mean when she says that God is independent is that God is transcendent rather than identical to the universe. Simone Weil makes the same claim about perfect thought -- she says that it can only be independent: "La perfection, pour la pensée, ne peut être que négative; une pensée parfaite, c'est une pensée indépendante et rien autre chose."⁸⁹ Thus, thought is, for Descartes, perfect if it is truly thought because if one truly thinks then one avoids sin and error. This means, according to Simone Weil's analysis, that for Descartes God is pure act and indifferent to all except to the degree that we participate in God's activity through our independent thinking, as she says:

L'on peut concevoir une étendue simplement possible; l'on ne peut concevoir une pensée simplement possible, parce que la pensée est l'acte de penser. C'est à quoi n'ont pas réfléchi ceux qui ont reproché à Descartes de faire un raisonnement tautologique, en alléguant que "Je pense" signifie "J'existe pensant"; ce reproche revient exactement au reproche fait par Kant à la preuve ontologique, et, pour les mêmes raisons, les belles remarques de Kant ne portent pas contre Descartes. Que l'existence soit jointe à la perfection comme la somme des angles égale à deux droits à l'idée de triangle, cela veut dire que la pensée infaillible n'est pas un possible. Car la pensée infaillible, c'est la pensée. Et la doctrine de l'indifférence en Dieu, selon laquelle, loin que Dieu veuille le bien et pense le vrai, le bien se définit comme la volonté, le vrai comme la pensée de Dieu, cette doctrine signifie sans doute que la pensée n'a nul besoin que viennent s'ajouter à elle des perfections positives. Il suffit que l'esprit évite le péché

⁸⁷Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.194.

⁸⁸Weil, *Premiers écrits*, op. cit., p.341.

⁸⁹Weil, *Premiers écrits*, op. cit., p.341.

et l'erreur pour qu'il agisse bien et pense vrai.⁹⁰

I take the above quoted passage to suggest that Simone Weil thinks of God not as 'tout-puissant' in the same way as one who holds the doctrine of pantheism might interpret the idea of 'tout-puissant'; however, in another short essay she recognizes this other sense of 'tout-puissant'. In an essay called "Sur la finalité", Simone Weil discusses Spinoza's view; specifically that the universe exists as an end. In this context she discusses the idea of God being 'tout-puissant' in the sense that God is identical to the universe because all there is is God, but she rejects this view of God as depicting the true God:

Ce Dieu tout-puissant, d'ailleurs, est Dieu-objet: le Dieu véritable n'est pas puissant, comme on peut le voir dans la religion chrétienne.⁹¹

Her reasons for rejecting this view do have a relation to her view of God as pure act, or otherwise called, pure will. She claims that it does not make sense to speak about God and the universe as the same thing because then there is no place for the will, for the act of thinking. There is nothing to give unity to thought:

Or le Dieu-objet ne peut être autre chose que l'univers lui-même. Ainsi dire qu'un Dieu tout-puissant a créé l'univers en vue d'une fin, c'est seulement dire mythologiquement que l'univers est pour soi. Mais que signifie? La matière en soi n'est que fantôme; la matière ne peut être que pour l'esprit. Dire que l'univers est pour soi est seulement dire qu'il n'est pour aucune fin particulière, mais seulement pour Dieu. Or je ne voulais pas dire autre chose quand je disais que cette feuille de papier existe pour moi....La finalité apparaît au moment où je fais serment de ne pas croire que cette utilité soit fortuite; et en même temps je dis que la feuille de papier veut m'être utile. Mais elle ne peut vouloir être utile à moi corps; elle ne peut vouloir être utile qu'à moi esprit;[...]Spinoza est, peut-on dire, entre Descartes et Aristote, quand il parle de formule de repos et de mouvement; car il croit que chaque objet a une âme, mais il croit que cette âme n'est que l'idée de sa formule de repos et de mouvement. Mais j'ai en moi l'expérience que la seule chose qui me donne unité est la volonté. Ainsi je transporte ma volonté de moi à l'objet...⁹²

From these other passages from Simone Weil's early writings, we can see that her early view of God is not pantheistic. Springsted points out Simone Weil's ambiguity on this point in relation to his theme of the mediation of mind. He seems to think that, in her early writings, Simone Weil has "a certain practical tendency to picture an ideal that is more immanent than transcendent."⁹³

⁹⁰Weil, "Appendice IV", *Premiers écrits philosophiques*, op. cit., p.341.

⁹¹Weil, "Sur la finalité", in *Premiers écrits*, op. cit., p.314.

⁹²Weil, *ibid.*, op. cit., p.314-315.

⁹³Springsted, *Christus Mediator*, op. cit., p.64.

I do not agree with Springsted on this point as I see the above quoted passages as stating that she tends to agree more with what she takes to be her interpretation of Descartes' view of God, which is that God is pure act or otherwise called pure will, and thus transcendent. Nevertheless, I do think she tries to establish the view that God is immanent in the sense that there is a relationship between the mind and the body. It is in fact this view of God as both immanent and transcendent that she seems to be confirming in the passage Springsted quotes. I think he uses this passage properly to make his point; that it is difficult to pin Simone Weil down at this point because she may be trying to work out the view that God is both transcendent and immanent (although he then goes ahead and pins her down to a view of immanence). I will quote the whole passage if only to make clear all that she thinks about pantheism and about Descartes' view of God and to show what she was grappling with:

Let us think of pantheism in connection with the Stoics. The question arises in connection with the opposition there is between a transcendent God (who is beyond our grasp) and an immanent God. Plato thought of God as transcendent. The question is one which is related to the ideas one has of the relationship between the mind and the body. One thinks that there is a relationship of harmony between the mind and the body just as one thinks that there is one between God and the world. Now, we have to think of matter both as an obstacle and as a means....So, we have to struggle against the water, as the dove struggles against the air, but we have to love it as the swimmer loves the water that bears him up, etc. The Stoics brought these two feelings together and it is the second which seems more important - that of the love of the world.(...) So pantheism follows naturally from a way of thinking of the relationships of the soul and the body, of the relationships between theory and practice....Descartes' religion: we have no knowledge of ourselves except in relation to God; we know God before we know ourselves. Descartes said that there is nothing like knowing the truth in God's case, because it is because God wills it that two and two make four; that there is nothing like necessity in God, otherwise there would no longer be any activity in God, and God would be even inferior to man. He would be no more than a machine that thinks, Descartes attributes to God only pure judgement, that is to say only pure will.(...) God is beyond ideas just as Plato's Good is. The view that Descartes had of God was of a God who is completely transcendent, whom one does not meet in the world, which is pure matter. (Descartes insisted much more on the opposition between God and the world, as he did on that between mind and body, than he did on their union.) Descartes was a man of action, while the Stoics and St Francis of Assisi were much more contemplative by nature.⁹⁴

Thus it seems that Simone Weil was trying to combine Descartes' view of God and the Stoic conception of God because she wanted to avoid the pitfalls that each view by itself falls into. As we will see, and as Springsted clearly recognizes, Simone Weil has to deal with the contradiction that occurs when one attempts to combine transcendence and immanence. Springsted shows how Weil does this using "Platonic Mediation", yet what remains unclear is how Springsted could find the conception of Platonic Mediation in Simone Weil's early writings if she did not already hold, like Plato, that God is transcendent. This is, I think, how she understood Descartes' All Powerfull God and

⁹⁴Weil, *Lectures on Philosophy*, op. cit., p.179-181.

how she saw the human mind to be made in the image of God and thus it had access to freedom because it had this power to think independently just as God is Pure Will, but of course this does not mean that we are in any way equal to God, only that we participate in God's power of independence:

Dieu ne m'est donc point étranger; c'est en moi-même que je trouve, c'est en soi-même que chacun trouve l'image de Dieu et comme sa marque. Dieu n'a point mis sa marque sur les choses; les choses ne peuvent la recevoir. Il a mis sa marque dans les esprits seulement. Après avoir douté de tout, l'homme, à présent assuré de tout, semble, tant sa connaissance est certaine et son action libre, participer de la nature divine.... Certes je trouve en moi la marque du Dieu dont je suis l'oeuvre,...mais si parfaite que puisse être l'oeuvre, jamais elle ne pourra égaler en valeur l'ouvrier.⁹⁵

Thus, for Simone Weil, to the degree to which the "I" participates in God's All Powerfulness, the "I" is freedom, yet the "I" is also bound by the world; the "I" is limited to exercising its freedom in relation to the world.

All we can say about consciousness at this point is that it possesses a limited power in relation to the world. How, then, does the self enact its limited power when consciousness is constantly bombarded with thoughts from the world and the only time it is free from these thoughts is when it doubts? In order to answer this question and to answer Peter Winch's problem of what the relation is between the activity of the consciousness and the activity of the human body, let us turn our attention to Simone Weil's suggestion that she invent a kind of analysis that would be unknown to the logicians, that would be the source of an orderly progress, that would be based on the world, but that would also allow her to take control of her own bodily actions. How could she do this? She admitted that her power over the world was only indirect, so what was it she had direct power over, enabling her to control her effect on the world? She claimed she had direct power over her imagination:

Moi qui ne veux croire qu'en moi, je ne consulterai qu'en moi aussi ce lien d'action et de réaction entre le monde et ma pensée, que, par opposition à l'entendement, nom de moi qui pense, et à la sensibilité, mon nom en tant que je subis, je nommerai imagination.... Si je n'étais qu'entendement et sensibilité, je saurais que je vois un éclair, que j'entends le tonnerre, à peu près comme je sais que les paroles que l'art muet me présente sur un écran sont prononcées par une voix d'homme ou de femme. Mes impressions, mes pensées, seraient sans mélange les unes des autres, et je n'aurais, hors de la certitude que je suis, ni opinions, ni croyances, ni préjugés, ni passions; je jouirais d'une sagesse négative, mais parfaite. Je serais toujours comme on est au spectacle quand la mise en scène est mauvaise, et que la tempête, l'émeute ou la bataille sont ridiculement imitées. Mais cette supposition est absurde, tant elle est contraire à la réalité, car les impressions des sens ne parviennent à ma pensée qu'en la troublant, et, loin d'être un entendement auquel des sens sont ajoutés comme des téléphonistes à un état-major, je ne suis d'abord qu'imagination.⁹⁶

⁹⁵Weil, "Le cogito et la preuve ontologique," *Premiers écrits*, op. cit., p.343.

⁹⁶Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.200-201.

Thus she rejected the idea that the mind, once seen as having an independent status, had a problem acting through the body. The imagination is in the body; nevertheless, it does have this function of being an intermediary between feelings and the understanding and it is this intermediary which makes Simone Weil's account of how thought and action are connected in the world, intelligible.

The importance of the role Simone Weil assigned to the imagination in her philosophical anthropology cannot be overstated; however, its significance has not been fully recognized by other commentators, such as Peter Winch and Eric O. Springsted.⁹⁷ The role of the imagination has already been emphasized in my earlier analysis of perception. I showed there how the imagination has the character of relating all that affects the body to the mind, but in doing that the imagination often overwhelms the mind and presents a distorted view of exterior reality. In "Science et perception dans Descartes", Simone Weil repeated this idea that the imagination has this character and the role of the imagination was even more clearly stated. As I pointed out above, in "De la perception ou l'aventure de Protée", Simone Weil did not explicitly state that the imagination had a dual function in perception; however, in "Science et perception dans Descartes", much of her dissertation was given over to explaining, by way of her descriptive method, the imagination's dual function in perception. What she argued was that perception unites the kind of imagination which gives rise to emotions and the kind of imagination which gives rise to more controlled thoughts, as she said:

Je reconnais à présent en ces choses perçues l'union de ces deux espèces d'imagination, qui se trouvent, séparées, l'une dans les émotions, l'autre dans la géométrie. La perception, c'est la géométrie prenant possession en quelque sorte des passions mêmes....⁹⁸

⁹⁷Eric O. Springsted, *Christus Mediator* (California: Scholar Press, 1983). The role of the imagination was, in fact, down-played in his account of her philosophical anthropology. Whereas Springsted sees the mind as the mediator between the mind and the body in her early thought, I see the imagination to be the mediator. It is in my view the imagination which makes it possible for the mind to work with clear ideas. Winch, in his "Introduction" to *Lectures on Philosophy*, does not even take into consideration Simone Weil's use of the imagination in her view of perception in "Science et perception", nevertheless, he makes the claim that she changes her view of perception between the time she wrote "Science et perception" and the time she delivered her lectures, which were later published as *Lectures on Philosophy*. I think that Winch did not pay sufficient attention to her early conception of perception. Thus he did not see that for Simone Weil in "Science et perception", it is through the imagination that the mind receives clear ideas, and thus she already held this point of view that there is this order in the world to be perceived. This view is already established through the conception of perception that she works out in that essay.

⁹⁸Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.210.

According to Simone Weil's analysis the self is completely passive in the first function of the imagination but active in its second role. This will become clear in the section that follows. Simone Weil made a distinction between one who acts and one who is acted upon; the human being who immediately reacts to the confused ideas received from the imagination is described as the 'self' as being acted upon:

Le moindre ébranlement des sens me jette sur le monde; mais, comme il ne m'est pas donné sur le monde cette prise directe que j'y cherche à tâtons, mon vouloir, loin d'être actif, tombe à la passion; j'attribue alors à ce vouloir plus ou moins d'influence selon qu'il est moins ou plus déçu, je regarde mon être comme constitué par cette puissance imaginaire qui ne vient que du monde, et, en retour, je doue le monde de passions....En ce corps à corps le monde est toujours vainqueur, quoique je m'y trompe toujours.⁹⁹

When the 'self' is passive, the world is in control, and the movements of my body depend on contingent factors which I merely accept. This is the state of "pure imagination" that was presented in "De la perception ou l'aventure de Protée".¹⁰⁰

On the other hand, in the second function of the imagination the self is active. Simone Weil explains that through the imagination we also receive clear ideas, for example, the idea of number. These ideas seem to come from consciousness itself because in order to grasp them, the self must pay attention. This act of consciousness makes us think that these clear ideas come from the mind itself, but Simone Weil argues that these ideas are not like the "I think, therefore I am". "Ces idées ne rendent pas compte d'elles-mêmes."¹⁰¹ Thus these clear ideas come from the world and this means that they come to consciousness through the imagination since "...l'imagination est la seul intermédiaire entre le monde et moi..."¹⁰² She refers to this second kind of imagination as the simple imagination. The simple imagination can only form clear ideas with the help of the mind, but the mind itself does not create them.

Given that for Simone Weil as for Alain and Descartes, the imagination is entirely within the human body, we might ask: 'How is it possible for there to be two kinds of imagination?' And does the simple imagination have some relation to Kant's idea of 'transcendental imagination'? In answering these questions we will begin with the

⁹⁹Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.201.

¹⁰⁰See endnote 5.

¹⁰¹Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.203.

¹⁰²Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.204.

latter and then return to the former. Thus we will begin with a brief summary of Kant's view of the dual function of the imagination in perception as he explains it in *The Critique of Pure Reason*.

In the *Critique*, Kant, like Simone Weil, speaks of two kinds of imagination and he also assigns to the imagination the role of acting as an intermediary between sensation and the understanding.

Now, since every appearance contains a manifold, and since different perceptions therefore occur in the mind separately and singly, a combination of them, such as they cannot have in sense itself, is demanded. There must therefore exist in us an active faculty for the synthesis of this manifold. To this faculty I give the title imagination.¹⁰³

For Kant the imagination has an empirical and a transcendental function. When the imagination is exercising its empirical function it must help us identify an object. In other words, the empirical or "reproductive" imagination supplies us with an "image" of an object and it follows the rules of association of representations.¹⁰⁴ Thus, the empirical imagination is bound by the laws of psychology. As Kant says: "The reproductive synthesis falls within the domain, not of transcendental philosophy, but of psychology."¹⁰⁵ The transcendental imagination, on the other hand, has a function to provide the "objectively necessary" synthetic unity for the multitude of perceptions. The "transcendental imagination" is also referred to as the productive imagination. It is the productive imagination that establishes the concept which fits an image provided by the empirical imagination. Once this concept is provided for the image we know we have objective knowledge. As Warnock explains, Kant assigns to the imagination the role of acting as an intermediary between sensation and understanding:

It seems that in Kant's system the imagination, whether empirical or transcendental, lies halfway between the purely intellectual part of our knowledge of the world, the part, that is, which consists of our having abstract concepts or thoughts about things, and the purely sensory part which, as we have seen, he regards as totally chaotic and unorganized, if considered on its own. Without imagination, we could never apply concepts to sense experience. Whereas a wholly sensory life would be without any regularity or organization, a purely intellectual life would be without any real content. And this amounts to saying that with either the senses or the intellect we could not experience the world as we do. The two elements are not automatically joined to each other in their functions. They need a further element to join them. The joining element is the imagination; and its mediating power consists in its power to bring the chaos of sense experience to order according to certain rules, or in certain unchanging forms. The imagination obliges us to see the world as bearing these forms whenever we see it at all. It must construct the world into objects which exist independently of ourselves, which persist through change and which manifest some

¹⁰³Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Norman Kemp (Toronto: MacMillan, 1961), p.144.

¹⁰⁴I have used Mary Warnock's book, *Imagination*(London: Faber and Faber, 1976.) to help me summarize this section on Kant's view of the dual function of the imagination.

¹⁰⁵ Kant, *Reason*, op. cit., p.165.

regularly associated features.¹⁰⁶

Although Kant thinks it is difficult to explain why the imagination has this dual function and why it is the only means to obtain objective knowledge of the world, it is thus:

That the affinity of appearances, and with it their association, and through this, in turn, their reproduction according to laws, and so....experience itself, should only be possible by means of this transcendental function of imagination, is indeed strange, but is none the less an obvious consequence of the preceding argument. For without this transcendental function no concepts of objects would together make up a unitary function.¹⁰⁷

Let us return to the first question raised above: Is Simone Weil's simple imagination similar or the same as Kant's idea of a transcendental imagination? Insofar as Kant's transcendental imagination is productive and does construct concepts, it seems that it is not the same as Simone Weil's simple imagination. Simone Weil clearly states that the simple imagination does not construct clear ideas but that these ideas come from the world through the imagination. She claims that the mind must pay attention if it is to receive the knowledge of these ideas, but these ideas are not constructed by the imagination or the mind:

Si je cherche quel crédit doit être accordé à toutes ces pensées que l'imagination nourrit, je trouve que seules, parmi elles, les idées claires ne représentent pas l'invasion du monde en moi, puisque seule ma propre attention me les présente. L'imagination y a bien part cependant, car elles ne me sont pas comme l'idée de "Je pense, donc je suis", entièrement limpides. Pourquoi sept est-il un nombre premier? Pourquoi pas neuf? Je ne sais. C'est ainsi. Ces idées ne rendent pas compte d'elles-mêmes. Je dois les prendre telles qu'elles sont. Elles procèdent donc de quelque chose qui m'est étranger, autrement dit du monde; et puisque l'imagination est le seul intermédiaire entre le monde et moi, elles procèdent de l'imagination. Mais l'imagination les forme, non pas en tant qu'elle soumet la pensée au monde; en tant au contraire que, conduite par l'esprit, elle lui ouvre un passage dans le monde. Telle est donc l'arme de l'esprit contre le monde.¹⁰⁸

I think that Simone Weil shares with Kant the view that the imagination is an intermediary between consciousness and the body, the world. Furthermore, she does intend to assign a dual function to the imagination as Kant does. But, unlike Kant, Simone Weil is claiming that the content of all of our ideas, even our clear ideas, is brought to us from without, i.e., from the world. It seems that Simone Weil might be trying to express an idea of Alain's on the imagination. Alain claims that the imagination is entirely within the body, thus following Descartes

¹⁰⁶Mary Warnock, *Imagination*, op. cit., p.30-31.

¹⁰⁷Kant, *Reason*, op. cit., p.146.

¹⁰⁸Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.203-204.

on this point; however, he argues that there is truth in the imagination which is not the same as the truth of appearance. For example, we might say with the physicist that:

It is not true that the moon appears larger at the horizon than at the zenith. Apply your measure here as you have with the broken stick, and you will find something new, ..., which is that the appearance of the moon is the same in both cases.¹⁰⁹

But says Alain, if we do this we miss that which the imagination can transmit to us:

But once again I will have missed the imagination. For it is clear that if I do not see that the moon appears larger at the horizon than at the zenith, at least I think I see it, and with all my heart.¹¹⁰

What Alain is trying to say with this example is that we must trust that if we pay close enough attention to what the imagination tells us we will arrive at a truth about the world. In a sense the following suggests Simone Weil's two kinds of imagination:

Dizziness invades us and almost throws us over the edge, when we see a cliffside drop away beneath us. But it does not drop away; that is not true. Colors and shadows still have the same appearance; yet we feel ourselves falling, we try to hold back, we are afraid; which is what gives the abyss its frightening appearance. Yet this appearance does not appear in itself; we think it appears. The truth is that one must pay long attention to perceptions of this sort in order to arrive at some correspondence between such muscular preparations and vivid emotions and what we take to be the physical aspects of things.¹¹¹

Thus for both Simone Weil and Alain, the imagination is very important to the transmitting of the content of both confused and clear ideas to the mind, but it is the mind which must actively sort out, by paying attention, whether there is a correspondence between the confused idea and the clear idea and the world, or not. Thus for Simone Weil and Alain, we must follow Descartes by beginning with the idea that the world itself is not deceptive:

The primitive man thinks crudely but aims well, and this contrast between technical perfection and confusion of thinking must lead us to avoid from the start the idea that the world is deceptive- following Descartes, of course, who took the right path, but keeping a tight hold on the assertive eloquence of our passions.¹¹²

Now to the second question: How is it possible for there to be two kinds of imagination when the imagination is in the body? It seems that Alain and Simone Weil are claiming that we are first of all emotions, confused ideas, because our body immediately reacts, but when the mind pays attention to these confused ideas it finds that amongst

¹⁰⁹ Alain, *The Gods*, op. cit., p.11.

¹¹⁰ Alain, *The Gods*, op. cit., p. 11.

¹¹¹ Alain, *The Gods*, op.cit., p.12.

¹¹² Alain, *The Gods*, op. cit., p. 13.

them there are other kinds of ideas as well, clear ideas, and it is the latter that the mind can work with. Thus there is only one imagination but it has two functions, and the second of the two functions does involve the mind. Simone Weil makes this clear in the following passage:

Or l'idée même de mouvement procède de l'imagination, et, quoiqu'elle soit plus claire que toutes les idées auxquelles l'imagination participe, elle n'est pas moins ambiguë, car, comme l'imagination elle-même, elle participe de moi et du monde.¹¹³

Even though these "clear ideas" give the mind a passageway into the world, they do not give consciousness direct access to the world. If consciousness could imprint these clear ideas on the world exactly as they are, there would be no room for chance. In other words, there would be no gap between one's thoughts and how the world receives these thoughts, but that is not the case and there is chance:

Si mes pensées laissaient tout intact hors de moi, ou si, ce qui à cet égard reviendrait au même, elles s'imprimaient elles-mêmes dans les choses, il n'y aurait point place pour le hasard. Mais mes pensées laissent sur le monde une trace qui ne leur ressemble pas....¹¹⁴

Thus chance is needed for the mind to have something to eliminate because, Simone Weil claims, "le propre de l'esprit est de supprimer le hasard."¹¹⁵ Chance is only those passions that the first kind of imagination disturbs the mind with, i.e., the reactions of the body to the world. So the mind begins the process of eliminating chance by paying attention to clear ideas, but according to Weil another step is necessary before consciousness can truly fulfill its nature. For the grasp on the world that these clear ideas give to the consciousness is not sufficient for the mind to act in the world. Simone Weil claims that:

...le monde limite ce pouvoir souverain sur soi qui fait l'esprit. Il réduit l'esprit à ne pouvoir que changer partiellement cette existence étrangère par laquelle il se sent tenu....Mais cette action partielle n'est pas par elle-même action, elle ne me définit pas, la pensée infinie en dispose. Quoique réduit à exercer une prise misérablement peu efficace, l'esprit se retrouve esprit par le pouvoir infini d'ajouter à elle-même cette action finie. Par ce pouvoir, l'esprit échappe à la domination du monde, il égale le monde....C'est ainsi que j'ajoute un à un.¹¹⁶

We can understand now how Simone Weil's idea of inventing an orderly progress allows a limited power to

¹¹³Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.207.

¹¹⁴Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.204.

¹¹⁵Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.204.

¹¹⁶Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.204.

partake in the All Powerful. As Springsted rightly points out in *Christus Mediator* "the imagination does have a means of representing the world which irreducibly belongs to the human subject; namely, the lines and numbers of mathematics."¹¹⁷ Furthermore, it is because this representation comes through the imagination and is ordered by the mind that, as Springsted again clearly sees, "mathematical representations...are prime candidates for mind to find a necessary order" which allows "the understanding ...a grasp on the world that is not dictated by the world's grasp on us."¹¹⁸ It is Simone Weil's special way of seeing mathematics that forms the kernel of her critique of Modern science, for mathematics is the human way of representing the world so that we can act in the world in as orderly a way as possible, as Springsted points out:

Mathematics is, then, first and foremost for Weil, a set of symbols or representations of the world which are essential tools of mind for mind to grasp the world. Because mathematics is such a tool, Weil felt that science should not be simply an abstract translation of experience or experiment, which at its highest levels has itself for its object; rather science should be that which constitutes mind's own expression in the world and its grasp on it. The Necessity which mind needs to find is not just logical necessity but the necessity of this world.¹¹⁹

We must digress a bit at this point to get a grip on Simone Weil's conception of necessity as it is being used here by Springsted. There are, according to Springsted, two different conceptions of necessity in Weil's thought. The first that he identifies is the capital 'N' Necessity and this, he claims, is necessity as conceived by the mind; thus in this case Necessity is order. Secondly, there is small 'n' necessity and this is the "necessity in the world external to man", and Springsted claims that this latter necessity manifests itself and is made evident to us through force or as an obstacle, depending on both the circumstances and how we confront the situation. Let us consider Springsted's distinction. If, as he claims, Necessity is the over-arching order only conceivable by human minds and the other necessity is that which rules the external world, then we must ask: what is the relation between these two forms or kinds of necessity? Do these two kinds of necessity correlate? I would think that they must, for Simone Weil, especially if our mathematical representations are our conceptions of the way things are ordered in the world, i.e., if they allow us to represent the reality of the world and furthermore to act in such a way that it accords with

¹¹⁷Springsted, *Christus Mediator*, op. cit., p.52.

¹¹⁸Springsted, *Christus Mediator*, op. cit., p.52.

¹¹⁹Springsted, *Christus Mediator*, op. cit., p.53.

reality. Thus, the only thing that distinguishes Springsted's capital 'N' Necessity from his small 'n' necessity is that we are able to conceive it. But we could just as well say that necessity is the order of things and the mind has the capacity to conceive of necessity. Then we would say that it is the same necessity; but on the one hand, when it is conceived by the mind it gives the human being a way to eliminate chance and to really act in the world and on the other hand, when the mind does not conceive necessity it is subject to chance and in some circumstances this means that the human being is subjected to brute force. Thus, to some degree, whether or not we encounter necessity as order or force depends upon us, that is, whether or not we act in accordance with our human nature, i.e., as thinking beings, or in accordance with the chance happenings our bodies are subjected to. When we see that there is, for Simone Weil, only one necessity which has two manifestations, then we can account for her later insistence that the Good is always something transcendent to necessity and we can continue to appreciate her dualistic conception of human nature. What the view I propose suggests is that, for Simone Weil, even when we conceive necessity and act with order in mind we may or may not be acting in accordance with the Good. For example, it may be in keeping with necessity for society to impose an order on its people that prevents them from recognizing a certain obligation, but we cannot say that it is good.

Now to return from this digression to my work on her conception of human nature as worked out in "Science et perception." Simone Weil argues that the adding of one clear idea to another clear idea still does not give the 'I' concrete knowledge of the world, for, she says, a series is only a model or a plan of action. This series allows consciousness to order the world as a whole to the satisfaction of its thought. An example of this order that is commonly used by Modern science is the idea of straight motion. Simone Weil points out that scientists build a structure of ideas out of the idea of straight motion before they turn to the world to try to overcome the obstacles it presents to them. It is because this mathematical order is simply made up of thoughts that come from the imagination and the activity of the mind that Simone Weil claims, with Descartes, that "In mathematics...There is no proper understanding except when there is imagination."¹²⁰ Thus, Simone Weil continually argues that science is dependent on the grasp we have on the world through perception because as we will see, the imagination is one

¹²⁰Weil, *Lectures*, op. cit., p. 81.

of the main elements in Simone Weil's view of perception. It is this emphasis on the function of the imagination in perception which marks off Simone Weil's theory of perception from that of the other intellectualists, such as Alain and Lagneau.

Building a structure of ideas, or plan of action, out of clear ideas is done in a state of reflection, she maintained: "Je dois sortir du monde si j'y veux prendre pied. Je ne dois pas attaquer de front et essayer d'étreindre, mais ruser, chercher une prise et saisir de biais."¹²¹ But even with this plan of action, consciousness cannot act in the world with the certainty that its conception of the world completely represents the world as it is in itself because the idea of straight movement is only attributed to the world with the help of the imagination. For what comes from the 'I' in directed movement is the directedness and not the movement which comes from the world, because what constitutes the world is extension, or juxtaposition. For Weil, the world, in itself, is simply extended substance. The fact that movement (extension) is what resists my direction and is indifferent to it, makes my directed movement always subject to time. The movement continues and takes my acts of will with it: "Ainsi, par le mouvement, mon vouloir est comme éparpillé dans le temps."¹²² However, to state this and to suppose this, was not enough for Simone Weil; one must know this by acting in the world.

Thus far, Simone Weil has given us all the elements for the 'I' to act in the world: there is the being who is acted on, "a passive being who is subject to the world," an active being which has a grasp on the world in thought and with this grasp has made a plan of action. Therefore, we have an imagination, a mind, and a plan of how to unite the two; but in order to do that, in order to act effectively, the 'I' needs the intermediary of the world:

Je suis toujours deux, d'un côté l'être passif qui subit le monde, de l'autre l'être actif qui a prise sur lui; la géométrie, la physique me font concevoir comment ces deux êtres peuvent se rejoindre, mais ne les rejoignent pas. Ne puis-je atteindre la sagesse parfaite, la sagesse en acte, qui rejoindrait les deux tronçons de moi-même? Certes je ne puis les unir directement, puisque c'est en cette impuissance que consiste la présence du monde en mes pensées; mais je peux les rejoindre indirectement, puisque ce n'est pas en autre chose que consiste l'action. Non pas cette apparence d'action par laquelle l'imagination folle me fait bouleverser aveuglément le monde au moyen de mes désirs déréglés, mais l'action véritable, l'action indirecte, l'action conforme à la géométrie, ou, pour la nommer de son vrai nom, le travail.¹²³

¹²¹Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.201.

¹²²Weil, "Science et perception" 208.

¹²³Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p. 209.

And a little further along: "par l'intermédiaire du monde...je les (my active and passive being) rejoins."¹²³

However, consciousness has still not been able to act in the world because consciousness needs the intermediary of its own body as a point of intersection between the simple movement it has at its command and the complex movement that is transmitted to the consciousness through the imagination. This complex movement can now be understood to be that which resists the simple movement that consciousness has at its disposal. It is in the body and in the world, to the degree that the consciousness takes hold of the world through work, that the imagination that brings the world to me and the imagination that brings clear ideas to me are united. What Simone Weil did here was separate the imagination into two to make it clear what she thought we receive through the imagination. Thus, for Simone Weil, all thoughts come to us through the imagination, through our bodies, and the imagination, in its two manifestations, is the intermediary between the mind and body:

Cette imagination simple, et cette autre, à tête innombrable, c'est la même, la prise mutuelle du monde et de moi, selon qu'elle obéit surtout au monde ou surtout à moi.¹²⁴

These two kinds of imagination can only be securely united through action in the world, but according to Simone Weil's analysis, they must be united first of all in perception, because in paying attention to the confused ideas that the first kind of imagination brings to consciousness, the mind forms a clear idea such as the idea of straight motion. With this idea in mind, consciousness perceives what must be done for it to truly act in the world. Consciousness perceives that the mind must direct the movements of the body. There is an order in the world that the human being can perceive and this order correlates to the order that is unique to man: "Je reconnais à présent en ces choses perçues l'union de ces deux espèces d'imagination, qui se trouvent, séparées, l'un dans les émotions, l'autre dans la géométrie."¹²⁵

What perception gives are signs of the world. I can react with emotion or with work. If I react with work I "demonstrate" that I have perceived the world, as Simone Weil said: "La perception, c'est la géométrie prenant

¹²³Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.209.

¹²⁴Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.209.

¹²⁵Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.210.

possession en quelque sorte des passions mêmes par le moyen du travail."¹²⁶ As in "De la perception ou l'aventure de Protée", Simone Weil again argues in "Science et perception" that when we perceive the world we take impressions or sensations as signs of the obstacle, extension:

Mes sensations présentent toujours à la pensée, non elles-mêmes, mais une idée qui s'accorde au trouble qu'elles y causent. Quand je réponds à ces assauts du monde contre moi, que je nomme sensations, non plus par la joie ou la tristesse, mais par le travail, elles n'apportent autre chose à la pensée que l'objet du travail.¹²⁷

Once again Simone Weil uses the example from Descartes' *Optics* to emphasize her point:

C'est ainsi que de son bâton comme d'une main, l'aveugle, loin de subir purement et simplement, comme on croit volontiers, des contacts, palpe, non pas la matière sensible, mais l'obstacle.¹²⁸

The human body is for each one of us like the blind man's stick. The body is like a "pincer" for the mind to grasp and handle the world.¹²⁹ Simone Weil argued, as in "De la perception ou l'aventure de Protée", that even before reflective thought, the human being makes use of geometry to make his/her way about the world. For instance, if a baby wants to feed itself, he/she must recognize that he/she must direct the hand to bring the spoon from point A to point B. Perhaps the baby won't succeed with the first try, but having perceived what must be done, the baby can take the sensations it receives as signs of the object of its work. Thus, perception allows the human being a grasp on the world; however, that grasp can only be useful to the mind and to what Simone Weil called "indirect action" if the mind becomes master of the body by taking charge of the imagination.

Perception makes one aware that the mind has at its command a single movement, the ability to act and that it must act on the juxtaposition of movement, the world. The only way it has to do this is through the extended thing attached to oneself, one's body. "Il est impossible que je ressente directement ma propre action, puisque telle est la condition le monde m'impose."¹³⁰ When one perceives the pen over there, one is ready to get up and walk

¹²⁶ Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p. 210.

¹²⁷Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.210-211.

¹²⁸Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.211.

¹²⁹Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.211.

¹³⁰Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.210.

over to the table to get the pen. Perception awakens one's awareness that to get from A to B one must submit one's body to the laws of space and time, one must work.

Now I think we can say that for Simone Weil there was one definite conclusion to be made about the physical world from our perceptions; there is extended substance. We can reply to an assertion made by Eric O. Springsted in *Christus Mediator*, that for Simone Weil, "no definite conclusions can be drawn from perception". This was not Simone Weil's view. As I have shown above, Simone Weil followed Alain and Lagneau and developed an intellectualist theory of perception which claims that we can and do learn about the external world through perception because we can and do take our perceptions as signs of the external world.

We can now answer Peter Winch's query about how Simone Weil's consciousness, defined by its ability to act, unites with the activity of the body. Weil argued that the imagination mediates between the mind and the body. When the imagination is controlled by the mind, then the human being perceives the world. Perception provides us with the knowledge needed to use our bodies to act effectively in the world, that is, to work. In Simone Weil's account of perception in "Science et perception", she recognizes that there is an order in the world that we must perceive and to which we must conform if we want to act in the world. Thus, I cannot agree with Winch's claim that Simone Weil changes her view of perception from the one she puts forth in "Science et perception", when she claims in *Lectures on Philosophy* that "When we are on the point of giving birth to thought, it comes to birth in a world that is already ordered".¹³¹ And finally, I cannot agree with Springsted's claim that "...thought, perception and action by themselves are only material relations between man and the world..."¹³² because there is no thought, perception, or action for Weil without the mind — there is only bodily reaction without the mind. Thus it is through perceiving the world that we first learn that as human beings we have a dual nature; a mind that has the power to make judgments and conceive an order and a body which through the imagination gives us, first of all, confused thoughts, then clear thoughts and also acts as a medium through which we can act in the world.

¹³¹As quoted by Winch in his "Introduction" to *Lectures*, op. cit., p.13.

¹³²Springsted, *Christus Mediator*, op. cit., p.63.

C. WORK WITHOUT METHOD/ WORK WITH A METHOD

The notion of work played a vital role in Simone Weil's analysis of both the human condition and the aspirations which move the human being. Work has the value of allowing the human being to become aware of reality. Real action is the liberty of the human being. The first kind of work that Simone Weil introduced in "Science et perception dans Descartes" was, as we saw above, "work without a method". The initial grasp on the world that perception gives us can only be achieved by making the human body a bridge to the world. "Labour: the original pact between man and nature, between the soul and its body."¹³³ The reason work establishes the relation between mind and body, giving one knowledge of the external world, is that "work" entails, as I pointed out above, the submission of one's body to the laws of space and time. The mind directs the body and the body simply gives over to the action that it is directed to carry out. Work is "indirect action" because the mind must use the body as its medium; one must act through the body.

The body must do things which have no immediate relations to the desired goal. For instance, as in the example from "De la perception ou l'aventure de Protée" quoted above: if a man wants to close the entry of his cave with a big stone, he must push the stone so that it rolls over. This movement does not have any immediate relation to the desired goal and that is what makes it work, for:

Bien mieux, quand il a amené la pierre à moitié chemin, le mouvement qu'il doit faire est le même que s'il avait trouvé la pierre en cet endroit, le même que s'il touchait au but; et à tout moment de son travail, ses mouvements sont aussi étrangers aux mouvements accomplis, aux mouvements projetés, aussi bien qu'aux désirs.¹³⁴

Thus when the body is submitted to extended material, each movement becomes separated from the next movement, just as it is in the world. For Simone Weil, as for Alain, in the world "tout est hors de tout, tout est étranger à tout" and the world is juxtaposed, "tout est immédiat".¹³⁵ Whereas in contrast to this, when we have an immediate feeling such as fear, everything seems to be within us, for as Alain says: "For to receive a shock is only

¹³³Simone Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, trans. Richard Rees (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p.35.

¹³⁴Weil, "De la perception", op. cit., p. 125.

¹³⁵Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.208; Alain, *Introduction*, op. cit., p.232.

to feel ourselves; therefore we know only our own feeling¹³⁶."

These actions carried out in work without a method are directed actions. However, it is not necessary for the mind, at first, to teach the body how to move. That is why Simone Weil claimed that the body seems to know the geometry which the mind has not yet learned. The body carries out its movements in a straight line or in a circle in accordance with what movements are necessary for the body to go from A to B: "De même, pour peu que je craigne, mon corps sait courir..."¹³⁷

But in "work without method" the human being is like the child, for in doing this kind of work human beings do not know the "necessity of labor". As Alain points out:

The child's existence is never really without labor; it is only the necessity of labor that does not appear to him. He grows, he builds his muscles, and that is his labor....In reality, the relationship between labor and food is the closest of all relationships; he who labors not, eats not; but it is also the most hidden relationship in the course of a child's life.¹³⁸

It seems to me that Alain and Simone Weil are trying to make the point that "effort is not labor". However, when we use our sense of touch, as the child does in perceiving the world, we do have "the experience of reality that comes from effort". But Alain says that this is "only half the idea" because we could easily fall back into the child's state of not knowing the "necessity of labor", and thus falling back into an idealism in which the resistance of the world only tells us about ourselves. That is why Alain argues that Maine de Biran is only half right:

And what makes the world known as a reality are the bonds between labor and its effects, those laws, in other words, of which the mere spectator can have no certainty. That is why Maine de Biran says that vision is idealist....The philosopher wished only to insist upon the fact that an active sense of touch, on the contrary, gives us the experience of reality that comes from effort. That is still only half the idea; effort is not labor; and the labor of the subprefect was almost all magic. But he was on the right path.¹³⁹

Like Alain, Simone Weil argues that the human being is nothing without this activity, this relation to the external world, for to exist is to act. Human beings do this daily, so there should be no problem with illusion — one

¹³⁶Alain, *The Gods*, op.cit., p.40.

¹³⁷Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.211.

¹³⁸Alain, *The Gods*, op.cit., p.30.

¹³⁹Alain, *The Gods*, op.cit., P.41.

encounters extension and acts on one's perceptions as a matter of course. The mind is used in this activity but it is the degree to which the mind is conscious which makes for the difference between work without a method and work with a method for both Simone Weil and Alain. The problem is, as was pointed out above by Alain, that one does not yet realize in work without a method the importance of confirming the relation and the fact that this relation must be constantly reaffirmed, then one is prone to fall back into the arms of 'Proteus' "pure imagination".

As important as this initial relation to the external world through work as effort in action is, this relation is not effective in keeping Proteus still. Thus, Simone Weil claimed we need the sciences. Through science one learns how to devise a method of action. This kind of work relates the thought that comes from the mind to action. Scientists approach the world with this second kind of work and it is this that other commentators have recognized as Simone Weil's conception of work. For example, Springsted claims that "Work...for Weil constitutes 'the ultimate wisdom' and the ultimate mediation of mind wherein all is subjected to it and all shows its mark. It is the ultimate wisdom because it is the true mastery of self and the sole power which man has in the universe".¹⁴⁰ Although Springsted recognizes Simone Weil's conception of work with a method and its importance for his theme of mediation, he did not see how she worked it out in "Science et perception dans Descartes" and the significance of this conception of work in her analyses in *Oppression et Liberté*. It is, in fact, one of the main conceptions of human nature that she uses in the latter work to formulate her criticisms of the communists of her time. I will return to this analysis in the second part of this chapter. James Calder works out Weil's idea of work with a method, and also her idea of work without a method, in his Ph.D. thesis, *Labour and Thought in the Philosophy of Simone Weil (1909-1943): Preface to a Philosophy of Education*.¹⁴¹ Although Calder recognizes the importance of work with a method to Weil's later thought and to her conception of human nature as worked out in her later thought, he does not see that this is one of the connections between her earlier thought and her later thought. It was not his intention to show that this is one of the essential concepts of human nature that unites her work, yet since I think that Weil really works out her ideas in the early thought and then assumes these ideas in her later thought, it is important to analyse the

¹⁴⁰Springsted, *Christus Mediator*, op. cit., p.61-62.

¹⁴¹Calder, James Gordon, *Labor and Thought in the Philosophy of Simone Weil (1909-1943): Preface to a Philosophy of Education*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Dalhousie University, February, 1985. See Chapter I and V.

early works such as "Science et perception" and "Proteus" so as to realize the fullness of her conceptions and how closely tied they are to her view of perception. Thus, although Calder's thesis goes much further than Springsted's book in showing the significance of work with a method in Weil's thought, he does not show the importance of Weil's early thought in presenting the elements of human nature which allow the human being to work with method in mind. Calder has a tendency to define Weil's conception of human nature through the Platonic distinction between necessity and the Good. One can do that with her later work but not so easily with her earlier work.

Simone Weil's meditation in "Science et Perception dans Descartes" showed that perception combines thought which comes from the imagination and action. However, there remains a difference between reflective thought and the thought that comes from perception. She showed this in her meditation by showing how we consciously become masters of our bodies and by analogy extend that mastery to the external world through reflective thought, through work with a method.

...si je veux, moi, savoir courir, ce n'est pas en courant que je l'apprends, c'est en m'exerçant séparément à lever les genoux et à allonger le pas; exercices qui ne ressemblent pas plus à la course que la droite au cercle. Cet intermédiaire entre la géométrie et le travail, c'est la gymnastique.¹⁴

Since the body has its own geometry, in order to be able to use one's body as one's instrument, one must study the movements of one's own body — pay attention to the circular movement one's arm has in being attached at the shoulder. Once one has separated out this circular movement from the other movements of the body then one can exercise that circular movement and combine this with a straight movement in order to strengthen one's arm. Thus, it is by breaking down the different movements of the body into one simple movement, then another simple movement, that one learns to command one movement by itself and then combine that one with another simple movement:

En plus, comme, par l'étendue du corps, je dispose de plusieurs mouvements droits, je puis les combiner; mais tout d'abord, je les sépare, et, tout comme dans un problème, je divise la difficulté pour en considérer à part chaque élément, de même j'apprends à mouvoir, non tout le corps par une pensée, mais seulement le membre que je veux. Puis, par une sorte de géométrie en acte, je combine ces mouvements suivant un ordre du simple au complexe.¹⁵

When one takes possession of one's body in this way and trains it to make simple movements and then more

¹⁴Weil, "science et perception", op. cit., p. 211.

¹⁵Weil, "science et perception", op. cit., p. 211.

complex ones, one has put one's movements in an order, a "series", which goes from the simple to the complex.

After devising this method, one is able to work one's body methodically.

De même, pour peu que je craigne, mon corps sait courir; mais si je veux, moi, savoir courir, ce n'est pas en courant que je l'apprends, c'est en m'exerçant séparément à lever les genoux et à allonger le pas; exercices qui ne ressemblent pas plus à la course que la droite au cercle. Cet intermédiaire entre la géométrie et le travail, c'est la gymnastique.

.... Dès que mon corps est ainsi à moi, je ne conçois plus seulement, comme la géométrie me le permettait, qu'on puisse louvoyer en cette mer du monde; j'y louvoie; non seulement j'ai prise sur le monde, mais ma pensée est comme un élément du monde, tout comme le monde, d'une autre manière, fait partie de ma pensée; de ce moment, j'ai part à l'univers, je suis au monde.¹⁴⁴

The study of the geometry of the human body allows us to abstract the geometrical movements and to re-create these movements in matter so that one can extend one's body to meet the obstacles of the world which one's own body cannot overcome, due to the fact that one's body is limited in strength and because it feels pain.

L'impulsion de l'esprit est ainsi coulée, non uniquement dans le moule immuable de ce premier outil qui m'est joint, mon corps, mais en plus dans le moule des outils proprement dits, dont la structure n'est immuable qu'autant qu'il me plaît.

Au reste ces outils, tout en étendant ma portée, jouent le même rôle à mon égard que le corps même. Ce sont des obstacles formés de manière à transformer mon impulsion en mouvements plus composés.¹⁴⁵

Once one does extend the body by creating machines, one not only uses the body as an instrument to deal with the obstacles one encounters in the world, but one uses "industry as an extension of work". One works with method in mind and knows external reality as certainly as one knows oneself. As Simone Weil says:

En un éclair, l'esprit qui s'arrache à ce qu'il sent se retranche en soi-même et agit, le pilote qui dans la tempête dirige le timon, le paysan qui balance sa faux se sait soi-même et sait le monde de la manière qu'exprime la parole "Je pense, donc je suis" avec son cortège d'idées.¹⁴⁶

Alain argues the same point, i.e., that work with a method allows one to encounter external reality:

...working from one end of the field to the other(,) never ceases to pay out a stable change, where the laborer is established to continue it. Here there is no suspicion of idealism, because what is felt in the exchange between shoulders, arms, plow, and the resisting earth, is the antagonistic term, strongly bound in all of its parts by a nonarbitrary law. It is no small business to change the appearance of plowed land and it is labor that gives

¹⁴⁴Weil, "science et perception", op. cit., p. 211-212.

¹⁴⁵Weil, "science et perception", op. cit., p. 212.

¹⁴⁶Weil, "science et perception", op. cit., p. 217.

consistency to this series of visions....it is only through labor that one is assured of the world....¹⁴⁷

In the same way as the perceiving subject must take what he/she feels as signs of his/her body and imagine that these movements are the movements of his/her body, so too the scientist must "imagine" that the movements perceived through his instruments shows how the world is:

D'autre part comme la géométrie la plus simple est comme enfermée en mon corps, d'autres corps sont fabriqués, qui, tels que les lunettes astronomiques, en même temps qu'ils sont purs de tout mélange de sensibilité, enferment une géométrie supérieure; ce sont les instruments. Ainsi, là où les hommes ne saisissent pas l'espace, la science les aide à supposer l'étendue. Car elle imite, par les constructions de la géométrie, entre ce qui est constaté et l'étendue, cette liaison parfaite qu'établirait le travail. A cet effet elle imagine, pour ainsi dire sous les phénomènes constatés, des combinaisons d'outils simples, tels qu'en forment les machines. Ces modèles mécaniques des choses, elle ne prétend pas qu'ils reproduisent le monde; cela n'aurait même pas de sens. Du moins permettent-ils de placer les phénomènes que nous ne saisissons pas, en série avec ceux que nous saisissons, selon l'ordre géométrique du simple au complexe.¹⁴⁸

Simone Weil wanted to make it clear to us that all of science is dependent on the "simple grasp" the human being has in perception and on the imagination which allows human beings to imagine and then reflect on these thoughts so as to build a series, a method from which to act. Thus, science, according to Simone Weil, cannot just be a method for thinking well, it must also be an activity – it must be work with a method.

In Simone Weil's criticism of modern science, she argued that if modern science admitted that perception constitutes the grasp the human being has on the world, science would not be considered only a language. It would always be considered necessary to base scientific reasoning on perception, that is, on what the perceiving human being could understand by following an analysis from beginning to end. In *Leçons de philosophie*,¹⁴⁹ Simone Weil also objected to viewing science as a language.¹⁵⁰ In the section called "Le raisonnement mathématique" she distinguished three ways of doing mathematics. In the first two ways the imagination plays a part. In the third, the imagination can be absent. As she said: "Dans ce cas, ce qui restes, c'est seulement le langage. Dans le

¹⁴⁷ Alain, *The Gods*, op.cit., p.41-42.

¹⁴⁸Weil, "science et perception", op. cit., p. 215-216.

¹⁴⁹Simone Weil, *Leçons de philosophie*(Roanne 1933-1934), transcrite et présentées par Anne Reynaud-Guérithault (1956; Paris: Union Générale d'éditions, 1966).

¹⁵⁰This was her objection in the section on Descartes. She did not think that Descartes saw scientific reasoning to be only a language.

mathématiques, il n'y a réellement compréhension que dans le cas où il y a imagination, comme l'a bien vu Descartes."¹⁵¹

Thus, science is bound by the imagination because it is based on the simple grasp we have of the world through perception. Science uses language to make a plan of action or a method; however, as Simone Weil pointed out, making plans and methods remains a game unless put into action in the world:

Ce que le langage peut seul nous donner, c'est une méthode, et cela précisément parce qu'il est étranger au réel.... Cependant, tant qu'on s'en tient aux mots tout seuls, l'ordre et la nécessité disparaissent....Donc, la vertu du langage se trouve dans un rapport entre le langage et autre chose. L'action apporte une réalité.¹⁵²

The way the world operates today, scientists and technicians devise the methods and workers put them into action without understanding the method employed. Thus, workers depend on a pre-established order. As Simone Weil said in "Science et perception dans Descartes", workers establish reality while work is being done, but: "Hors de l'action efficace, dans les moments où le corps, dans lequel les perceptions passées se sont inscrites, dispense l'esprit d'explorer, la pensée humaine se trouve livrée aux passions..."¹⁵³ Simone Weil argued that the workers need to learn science, first of all to learn to think well, which means that they will learn to silence their imaginations and interpret their perceptions in a way that will allow them to act effectively:

La fin de la science...est d'abord de rendre l'esprit humain maître, autant que possible, de cette partie de l'imagination que de perception laisse libre, puis de le mettre en possession du monde; et peut-être en regardant bien les deux fins ne font-elles qu'une.¹⁵⁴

Weil thought that science should be done for the purpose of maintaining a healthy soul. For Simone Weil, the relation between thought and action would always be necessary. Furthermore, the idea of being "conscious of reality" had moral value for her.

What we have learned about Simone Weil's philosophical anthropology from these three early essays, "De la perception ou l'aventure de Protée", "Du temps", and "Science et perception dans Descartes," is that the

¹⁵¹Weil, *Leçons*, op. cit., p. 88.

¹⁵²Weil, *Leçons*, op. cit., p. 73-75.

¹⁵³Weil, "science et perception", op. cit., p. 217.

¹⁵⁴Weil, "science et perception", op. cit., p. 216.

individual learns first of all to perceive. There are, in perception, two kinds of imagination. The first kind of imagination is "pure imagination". In this state of being we are emotions; these are the reactions of the human body. The baby feels the pangs of hunger from its body and the baby reacts. The feeling of the pain of hunger and the baby's reaction makes the baby perceive its "self". Thus Simone Weil agrees with Alain that "A child is an idealist..."¹³⁵

I have argued that the state of "pure imagination" which brings us a vague awareness of self and makes us begin as idealists does not constitute Simone Weil's idea of perception because it is only one stage in coming to perceive; it precedes perception. Perception, I have argued, must include both the first and second kind of imagination. The second kind of imagination involves the attention of the mind and clear ideas from the external world. One of these clear ideas is the thought that there is something external to the self; there is extended material. Thus, it is only when Simone Weil introduces the second function of the imagination that we are able to fully understand how it is that perception involves not only a vague awareness of self, but also an awareness of extension, especially of one's own body. Only when the baby begins to awaken to the idea that this movement from its body that brings those first pangs of hunger can be directed to get the food in the bowl, does the baby perceive. At this point the child takes those feelings and emotions as signs that he/she is attached to a body and that this body is subject to other things in the world. It is because the mind is active in perception and does attend to the ideas brought from the external world and does begin to order those ideas that perception prepares us for action in the world. But, the only way for the mind to know if what the imagination has brought, and what the mind has sorted it out to be actually exists is to act. Thus action which follows from perception is "effort voulu", work without method. If the actions are effective, then the mind understands that it is related to an exterior world which it can, at least in thought, organize, in order to exist in the world. But for Simone Weil, as for Alain, 'effort voulu' is not work with a method, or as Alain says, it is not labor because labor involves action with a method in mind and this kind of action involves a real encounter with the obstacle. What distinguishes the human mind is not its capacity to organize itself to act effectively in the world, but its capacity to act consciously, "with method in mind". By that I mean its

¹³⁵Alain, *The Gods*, op.cit., p.39.

capacity to separate itself from the world and to doubt one's perceptions and to reflect on what it means to perceive and to come to realise that perception itself contains knowledge. If perception involved no thought, then reflecting on it could not give us the wisdom of bodily geometry. Human beings could not become aware of the fact that learning to act consciously means directing one's body with method in mind. The fact that human beings have the capacity to reflect and to be conscious of this relation between mind and body, thereby allowing them to act morally, is what makes human beings distinct, according to Simone Weil. In "Science et perception dans Descartes", acting morally is to perceive correctly, reflect, devise a method of action and act accordingly.

What is not yet clear is whether language is a part of the process of perceiving or if that comes after. If language does come after, then thought is not identical to language. Thus far we know that perceiving includes thought which comes from the imagination attended to by the mind. Simone Weil identified the self with the intellect when she referred to turning away from the world to devise a method. The self, which she also referred to as the mind, the understanding and the will, only really exists in the world when the self puts its plan into action, when the self acts with methodical action in mind. Consciousness can only act in the world indirectly because consciousness must take what it receives from the imagination as its data for making a plan of action. Its first task is to plan how to get the body, that the self has potentially under its limited power, to do things in an orderly fashion so that the self can really exist in the world. For Simone Weil as for Alain, "...What makes existence is not the appearance, it is the appearance at the command and under the condition of labor".¹⁵⁶ It is the peasant who really exists in the world and not the visionary (such as the geometer) because:

when the peasant takes a rest and looks around it is not the treasures of Aladdin, or any other kind of treasure, it is at his own labor, which he feels at the same time as he sees it....for on condition that one obeys and delves oneself, as a picking and shoveling creature, into the tissue of things, one learns finally what it means to will, which is also to will what one does not will.

On the other hand,

...visionaries are light-hearted men, alienated men, dreamers of the world, who never stop waiting for a miracle, that is, for treasure without work. These same visionaries seek proof; and I can well believe it; they do not know what existence is. Theirs is always the bishop's supper.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p.41.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p.43.

For Simone Weil as for Alain, unless I submit my body to the laws of space and time and "grapple with the world", I live in a dream and I do not really exist:

He who does not know how to carry the law of labor down to concrete things, and bind them together according to the blind man's mechanics, cannot know what it costs to turn fallow land into a field of wheat....Over the past few days, while I have been writing, the ripe fields have turned into piles of wheat and piles of straw; and I knew nothing about it; I only saw that the decor had changed, through the agency of the earth - spirits who appear at the end of the field and arrange such things. My bread is brought to me in the same way. Where does the bread come from? And who takes care of it? Even if I were concerned with it myself, even if I represented to myself the successive spectacle of plowing, sowing, growth, harvest, milling, and baking, it would give me only a better connected dream, I would not really know that I am nourished by men's pains.¹³⁸

In the importance that Simone Weil gives to "work" in her thought she is Professor Alain's student. Unlike the phenomenologists of her time, such as Husserl, Simone Weil was not content to describe the *Lebenswelt* and claim this to be the world as described and lived by conscious beings.¹³⁹ Thus, the body has an integral part to play in the coming into existence of the self in the world because every intellect is given a body with which to act in the world and would not be able to come into existence otherwise.

There is a significant difference between the way the imagination is in the body and the way the mind is in the body. The imagination acts as a messenger to the mind and the mind either submits to the message by allowing the body to respond without any specific order from the mind (in which case the body responds according to its feelings in a more or less chaotic way, depending on chance), or the mind directs the imagination and acts in an orderly way. Thus, in Simone Weil's philosophical anthropology, the dual function of the imagination remains essential to perception. We could not perceive the world without taking our feelings and emotions as signs and distinguishing the clear ideas from the confused ideas. In other words, the primary activity of the mind is to perceive and then it must demonstrate that it has perceived correctly by working. As my analysis shows, for Simone Weil, the encounter with external reality that human beings can have in "work with a method" is essential to human nature. "Work with a method" allows the human being to make the relation between thought and action and thus to really

¹³⁸Ibid., p.43-44.

¹³⁹See Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans., with an introduction by David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970) where Husserl establishes his view of the *Lebenswelt*.

exist in the world; through work with a method the human being knows not only the self but also the world. This conception of work will remain essential to Simone Weil's philosophical anthropology. This will become evident as we move to part two of this chapter.

There is a dualism in Simone Weil's philosophical anthropology, but there is also a very secure relationship developed between the mind and the body through the dual function of the imagination that allows us to perceive the world. However, one thing is certain: the intellect must be active if human thought is to have any place in this world. We will see that Weil never let go of the effort she made in these first essays to maintain that there must always be both the relation of mind to body and the separation of mind and body for human thought to be possible.

Endnotes

Chapter Two: part one

- 1 Simone Weil followed Descartes in reducing the imagination to the movements of the body. She quoted Descartes from *Regulae* in "Science et perception dans Descartes":

((Il font se représenter)) que cette imagination est une véritable partie du corps Par là on peut comprendre comment peuvent s'accomplir tous les mouvements que font les animaux, bien qu'en eux on ne puisse admettre aucune connaissance des choses, mais seulement une imagination purement corporelle.

Weil, "science et perception", op. cit., p. 171.

Alain also follows Descartes in reducing the imagination to the movements of the body. See Alain, *Histoires de Mes Pensées*, op. cit., 152. Thus, it is probably from Alain that Simone Weil learned of this view of the imagination.

- 2 In "The emotions: outline of a theory," Sartre also develops a very similar theory of this state in which one is overcome by emotions. He claims that the "unreflective consciousness" responds to the world with emotions and at this point all one knows is one's emotion. For example, he claims that feeling is a way of being-in-the-world and at this point consciousness is captivated by its own response to what it constitutes as the object which has caused that response:

What is constitutive of the emotion is that it perceives upon the object something which exceeds it beyond measure. There is, in effect, a world of emotion. All emotions have this in common, that they make a same world appear, a world which is cruel, terrible, gloomy, joyful, etc., but one in which the relationship of things to consciousness is always and exclusively magical. It is necessary to speak of a world of emotions as one speaks of a world of dreams...that is, a world of individual synthesis maintaining connections among themselves and possessing qualities. Jean-Paul Sartre, "The emotions: outline of a theory," *Essays in Existentialism* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1965) 242-243.

- 3 Alain (Emile Chartier), in *Introduction à la philosophie* (Paris: Union Générale d'éditions, 1939), introduces those thinkers who support the idea of a "Cartesian revolution" in science. Simone Weil likely followed Alain in this. Alain:

On m'a conté que Pierre Lafitte, en un de ses cours toujours inspirés, comme on sait, de la pure doctrine de Comte, élevait de ses deux main un livre carré, disant: "Voilà la grande oeuvre de temps modernes." C'étaient les *Méditations* de Descartes. Or le disciple, courant à ce précieux livre, aurait été surpris de n'y trouver que théologie au premier aspect, et métaphysique au mieux, genre de méditation dont Comte se gardait. Alain, *Introduction* 115.

- 4 This idea, that "to exist is to act", became one of the main ideas of the existentialism that was beginning to evolve in the 1920s and 1930s. See, for example, its later iterations in Sartre's very popular work *Existentialism and Humanism*: "The doctrine I am presenting before you...declares that there is no reality except in action....Man is nothing else but what he purposes, he exists only insofar as he realizes himself, he is therefore nothing else but the sum of his actions." *Existentialism and Humanism* (1945; London: Methuen, 1987) 41.

- 5 In the *Treatise on the Passions of the Soul*, Descartes also claims that there are certain imaginings which come from the body and which affect the soul. See articles XXI-XXVI. For example, he says:

It remains for us to notice here that all the same things which the soul perceives by the intermission of the nerves, may also be represented by the fortuitious course of the animal spirits....we cannot be ... deceived regarding the passions, inasmuch as they as so close to, and entirely within our soul, that it is impossible for it to feel them without their being actually such as it feels them to be we cannot be sad ... without its being very true that the soul actually has this passion within it.

E.S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross, eds., *Philosophical Works of Descartes* (New York: Dover, 1955) 344-345.

- 7 It may be that Alain and Simone Weil were trying to integrate Spinoza's idea of "the link between work and reality" into their thought. Goldschlager makes this parallel also (Simone Weil et Spinoza: essai d'interprétation (Sherbrooke: Editions Naamen de Sherbrooke, 1982: 170). However, at this point Simone Weil had only begun to develop what would later become for her the "spirituality of work".

- 8 It is difficult to say where this particular notion of "work" originated, for besides through Alain and Lagneau, who seemed to be attuned to Newton's ideas of force and work, there were also influences coming from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*, and themes in Marx (*Theses on Feuerbach* and *Capital*). Also in the 1920s Georg

Lukàcs' humanist interpretation of Marx was a rediscovery of Marx the Hegelian (this idea is advanced by Kate Soper in *Humanism and Anti-humanism* (London: Hutchinson, 1986: 43). Soper points out that Hegel's thought and influence on Marxism in France in the 1920s and 1930s was one of the main influences behind Sartre's existential thought. This influence may perhaps be seen in Simone Weil's inclusion of aspects of Hegel's master-slave relationship in her thesis. The idea of work as an essential part of coming to consciousness of the self for the individual may also find its sources there. However, it was not until 1933, when Alexandre Kojève came to the *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes* that the idea of Hegel as a "realist" entered French intellectual circles. That is, if we can credit Vincent Descombes' interpretation of Kojève's thought and influence. If Simone Weil used Hegel in this fashion for her dissertation, and interpreted him as a "realist," she was certainly quick to pick up on the trend of thought that Kojève was to bring to France at least four years later. Simone Weil wrote her dissertation in 1929. The contributions of Hegel as "realist" likely came from Alain.

CHAPTER TWO

Part Two

DUALISM OVER MATERIALISM

Si le monde est divin, tout est bien;
si le monde est livré au hasard, ne va pas toi aussi au hasard
La pensée libre de passions est une citadelle
(Marc-Aurèle)¹⁶⁰

As she became more active in her life, Simone Weil continued to emphasize the importance of the liberty of the individual intellect. Instead of the intellect governing natural forces, as was the case in "Science et perception dans Descartes", she now turned her attention to the intellect's task in governing social forces. Two articles give us an insight into the reasons she had for thinking that she had to prove that mind was something other than matter, as she does in *Leçons de philosophie* (Roanne 1933-1934).¹⁶¹ These two articles were written about the political ideas that she had encountered among the leftist groups that she was associating with at the time. The first article, "Perspectives: Allons-nous vers la révolution prolétarienne?", was written by Simone Weil after two years of teaching, union work, and a trip to Germany to study the political situation there. It was published in the August 25th issue of *La révolution prolétarienne*, 1933. This article preceded her year of teaching at Roanne, where *Leçons de philosophie* (Roanne 1933-1934) was written. The second article (actually a book review), "Sur le livre de Lénine 'Matérialisme et empirio-criticisme'", was published in November 1933, in *La critique sociale*, suggesting it was written during Simone Weil's early months at Roanne. The dates are important here as I will argue that her method of teaching at Roanne and the way she begins with the materialist point of view may have more to do with the fact that she was influenced by what she had learned through her political activities

¹⁶⁰As quoted in *Leçons de philosophie* (Roanne 1933-1934) par Simone Weil, transcrites et présentées par Anne Reynaud-Guérithault (1959; Paris: Union Générale D'Éditions, 1966), p.210.

¹⁶¹Both Springsted and Winch make much of the fact that Simone Weil began this text from the materialist point of view. See Springsted, *Christus Mediator*, op. cit., p.34-35 and Winch "Introduction" *Lectures*, op. cit., p.7. I will return to their claims as to why she does this shortly.

than with the fact that Simone Weil held a materialist point of view at this time. In fact, I will argue that she was already at this point in her life a confirmed dualist.¹⁶² I will also argue that Simone Weil does not change her view of the mind/body relation from "Science et perception" as Winch claims;¹⁶³ however, before I take up these arguments I think it is necessary to analyse the ideas of human nature Simone Weil was grappling with in connection to her political alliances with the unions.

A. "PERSPECTIVES"

In "Perspectives: allons-nous vers la révolution prolétarienne?", Simone Weil presented her analysis of the situation which then faced the worker's movement. In general, she argued that the revolutionaries, intellectuals, and unionists should face the reality that Marx's scientific hypothesis was not scientific. I will outline this argument and concentrate on the parts which show that Simone Weil based her analysis of Marx and of the worker's situation on her philosophical anthropology. Simone Weil began "Perspectives" by giving a brief history of the disappointments the workers faced from their spontaneous and organized uprisings against the oppressors. She claimed that Russia presented the best example of these disappointments and that Trotsky was wrong to claim that Stalin's regime was a worker's state, but a deformed one. She claimed that the Russian State is not a worker's state but something entirely different:

Descartes disait qu'une horloge détraquée n'est pas une exception aux lois de l'horloge, mais un mécanisme différent obéissant à ses lois propres; de même il faut considérer le régime stalinien, non comme un Etat ouvrier détraqué, mais comme un mécanisme social différent, défini par les rouages qui le composent, et fonctionnant conformément à la nature de ces rouages.¹⁶⁴

Of course, Marx never foresaw this happening, nor did he foresee the possibility of "fascism"

¹⁶² Both articles are collected in Simone Weil, *Oppression et liberté* (1955; Paris: Gallimard, 1981): "Perspectives: allons-nous vers la révolution prolétarienne?" p. 9-38; "Sur le livre de Lénine 'matérialisme et empirio-criticisme'", p.45-53. Hereafter: "Perspectives" and "Sur le livre de Lénine."

¹⁶³ See Winch, "Introduction" *Lectures*, op. cit., p.7-8.

¹⁶⁴ Weil, "Perspectives", op. cit., p.15.

developing out of his thought about scientific socialism; nonetheless, both regimes, Stalin's regime and Hitler's fascist regime, claim to be marxist in essence. Simone Weil claimed that neither Stalin's regime nor Hitler's regime had anything to do with the traditional picture of "class struggle". The main characteristic which defined Stalinism and fascism was present in the ideological trends of most political movements of Weil's time. Simone Weil characterizes these two regimes by their success in "management." Actually, Marx had already foreseen how this phenomenon would oppress the workers. The passages from *Capital* Simone Weil chose to demonstrate Marx' awareness of this phenomenon also demonstrate Marx' preoccupation with the individual destiny of the worker against this force of oppression. According to Marx, the worker becomes oppressed by mechanization because of the separation of the spiritual forces from the process of production in manual work: "Dans la fabrique existe un mécanisme mort indépendant des ouvriers, et qui se le incorpore comme des rouages vivants."¹⁶⁵ What this means, according to Simone Weil's analysis of the human being in "Science et perception dans Descartes", is that the worker is not even given to understand how the machine functions so that the worker can use his/her intelligence while at work -- so that the worker can relate "thought to action". Thought is completely alienated from the worker. Weil argues that although Marx analyzes what oppresses the worker, his method of remedying the situation does not remove the forces of oppression. The "Russian experiment" shows that it is possible to remove the capitalist and still have the oppressors in another form; that is, in the form of those who have the machine at their disposal, namely, the technicians. Simone Weil remarked that recently there were workmen who carried out work, as she defined it in "Science et perception dans Descartes", as work with a method, "...en utilisant la machine avec autant de liberté, d'initiative et d'intelligence que l'artisan qui manie son outil; c'étaient les ouvriers qualifiés."¹⁶⁶

She lamented with Marx that rationalization had completely wiped out the need for these kind of workers. The workers that are left in the factories are alienated at the heart of their own perception, for,

¹⁶⁵ Marx, as quoted by Weil, "Perspectives", op. cit., p.21. Marx, (*Le Capital*, Livre premier, quatrième section, chapitre 15, Bibl. de la Pleiade, pp. 955-956).

¹⁶⁶Weil, "Perspectives", op. cit., p.22.

as Simone Weil pointed out, they execute the work without taking any active part in it. When Weil claimed the worker takes no active part, she was using her definition of work with a method, as opposed to the appearance of action. The alienation becomes even more institutionalized as the responsibility for the situation is further removed from the capitalist because, as she pointed out, the managers are no longer the capitalist as with Ford, nor are they the engineers; the managers are a board of technicians. Simone Weil said that Marx had perceived that the managing staff would not be the capitalists. He could not have perceived how the role of the "technicians of management" could become a permanent and powerful social stratum mediating between small shareholders and the big capitalists, but this is exactly what had happened. She referred to Laurat's analysis of the mechanism of exploitation exercised by the bureaucrats. She agrees with Laurat that there are three, instead of two, social strata grouped around the process of production: the workers, "passive instruments of the undertaking"; the capitalists, whose power rests on an economic system in the process of decay; and the managing personnel, who rely on the development of technique that keeps increasing their power.¹⁶⁷

This bureaucratic element in industry is essentially an aspect of the general phenomenon of specialization. Simone Weil pointed out that not only are there skilled workmen being replaced by specialized unskilled hands, trained to serve one machine, there are also technicians, who are not only ignorant of the working practice, but, as well, are only proficient in their very restricted field. The technicians, she claims, apply knowledge from a theoretical basis of which they are ignorant. The scientists, too, are out of touch with technical problems and a general view of science. They tend to have very specialized fields, and the scientist, like the workers, are only unskilled hands doing scientific work, cogs in a whole their minds are quite incapable of embracing.¹⁶⁸

All this specialization makes the function of co-ordinating supremely important. In this manner, bureaucracy invades every area of human activity. The image we have of the rationalized factory, Weil

¹⁶⁷ Weil, "Perspectives", op. cit., p.24.

¹⁶⁸ Weil, "Perspectives", op. cit., p.25. This is part of a general critique of Modernity which will be further developed in Chapter Three of this thesis.

argued, can be seen as the image of our present-day society wherein the interests of a passive mechanism direct and human beings are stripped of the qualities that make for initiative, intelligence, knowledge, and method. The bureaucrat, according to Weil, may be made of flesh, but is as irresponsible and as soulless as the factory machines made of iron and steel.¹⁶⁹ Thus, society must guard against bureaucratic oppression.

Simone Weil claimed that Marx had clearly recognized that the true obstacle to emancipatory reforms is not the system of exchange and property, but the bureaucratic and military machine of the state. Also he understood that what socialism had to wipe out was not wage-earning, but the degrading division between manual and intellectual work.¹⁷⁰ However, Simone Weil argued that Marx did not question himself about the nature of this bureaucratic function. He did not question how, after the revolution when the capitalists are expropriated, workers would be emancipated when the system of production remained the subordination of one group to another. Weil asserted that whatever social group finds that it has a monopoly in its hands it struggles to preserve that monopoly until history renders it powerless. Thus, socialism cannot come about by abolishing the division of men into capitalists and proletarians, as Marx had thought, because of the way the system of production is structured. Labour is subordinated, by means of the machine, to the necessary function of management of labour.

The Russian workers, Weil claimed, exemplified this problem. The utopian picture, painted by American technocrats of maximum leisure and comfort for all was false. Simone Weil suggested we keep in mind:

Tout groupe humain qui exerce une puissance l'exerce, non pas de manière à rendre heureux ceux qui y sont soumis, mais de manière à accroître cette puissance; c'est là une question de vie ou de mort pour n'importe quelle domination.¹⁷¹

In her analysis of how this bureaucratic dictatorship affects the human being, Weil clearly shows how she applied the basic concepts that she had established in her meditation in "Science et perception dans

¹⁶⁹Weil, "Perspectives", op. cit., p.26.

¹⁷⁰Weil, "Perspectives", op. cit., p.26.

¹⁷¹Weil, "Perspectives", op. cit., p.28.

Descartes". She argued that the moral atmosphere of a regime would be more stifling and oppressive under bureaucratic dictatorship than under capitalism. Capital "C" capitalism exploits the proletariat, but it has otherwise given full scope, in every branch of activity, to initiative, free enquiry, invention, and genius. The bureaucratic machine, on the other hand, excludes all judgment and all genius and, by its structure, tends to concentrate all powers in itself.¹⁷²

This meant for Simone Weil that the individual would no longer be permitted by the system to form an opinion contrary to the official state bureaucracy. This kind of bureaucratic state methodically destroys all initiative, all culture, all thought. According to Weil's philosophical anthropology, the individual cannot act freely when they no longer have the right to form a judgment and express it. In Weil's terms, the individual is rendered "passive" and is subjected to the world, rather than being an active individual who has a "grasp on the world." For this reason, she emphatically re-stated the goal of the socialists:

N'oublions pas que nous voulons faire de l'individu et non de la collectivité la suprême valeur. Nous voulons faire des hommes complets en supprimant cette spécialisation qui nous mutile tous.¹⁷³

In Simone Weil's analysis of the political and the social world, the individual is always cited as the supreme value because the individual thinks, invents, and acts. Only the individual can relate thought and action and make real contact with the world through the medium of labour. Thus, in "Perspectives: Allons-nous vers la révolution prolétarienne?", she pointed out how Marx' analysis of exploitation as the degrading division of labour into intellectual and manual labour continued to affect the individual and society and was the critical element to be changed:

Nous voulons mettre en pleine lumière les rapports véritables de l'homme et de la nature....Nous voulons rendre à l'homme, c'est-à-dire à l'individu, la domination qu'il a pour fonction propre d'exercer sur la nature, sur les outils, sur la société elle-même; rétablir la subordination des conditions matérielles du travail....

C'est là la tâche propre de notre génération.¹⁷⁴

Weil had shown in "Science et perception dans Descartes" how science as a method, a plan of

¹⁷²Weil, "Perspectives", op. cit., p.29.

¹⁷³Weil, "Perspectives", op. cit., p.32.

¹⁷⁴Weil, "Perspectives", op. cit., p.33.

action, is the product of reflection on how nature, the external world, affects the individual's thought.

In "Perspectives: Allons-nous vers la révolution prolétarienne?", she analysed how society had become a force of nature and affects how the individual thinks. However, in this case, the individual must take control of this "force" by treating it equally as an "obstacle", just as the Renaissance men treated nature as an obstacle.

This subordination of the society to the individual is, she said, the definition of true democracy and socialism:

Actuellement cette force pese sur nous plus cruellement que l'eau, la terre, l'air et le feu; d'autant qu'elle a elle-même entre ses mains, par les progrès de la technique, le maniement de l'eau, de la terre, de l'air et du feu....Or le mécanisme social, par son fonctionnement aveugle, est en train....de détruire toutes les conditions du bien-être matériel et moral de l'individu....Maîtriser ce mécanisme est pour nous une question de vie ou de mort; et le maîtriser, c'est le soumettre à l'esprit humain, c'est-à-dire à l'individu.¹⁷⁵

In expressing the enormity of the task, she pointed out that Marx had perceived the nature of the modern state by describing it as the crystallization of all the intellectual and moral forces. But Marx only perceived the problem, he did not offer any solution.

Simone Weil also did not offer any solutions in "Perspectives: Allons-nous vers la révolution prolétarienne?" on how to subordinate the blind force of the bureaucratic society to the individual, but she did warn the revolutionaries and the militants against inadvertent alliances with state apparatus.¹⁷⁶ In fact, she thought it might not be possible to accomplish more than an elucidation of the object of our efforts, so that, "...si nous ne pouvons accomplir ce que nous voulons, nous l'ayons du moins voulu, et non pas désiré aveuglément....Rien au monde ne peut nous interdire d'être lucide."¹⁷⁷ At the time she wrote "Perspectives: Allons-nous vers la révolution prolétarienne?" Simone Weil was just beginning her own analysis of the social force which must be overcome. She laboured methodically to subject this social force to the human mind, the individual. As I have shown, underlying Simone Weil's idea in

¹⁷⁵Weil, "Perspectives", op. cit., p.33-34.

¹⁷⁶Weil, "Perspectives", op. cit., p.35-36. See the analysis of the path leading to German facism.

¹⁷⁷Weil, "Perspectives", op. cit., p.38.

"Perspectives" that the goal of the worker's movement is to subject the social force to the human mind and her analysis of how the Russian bureaucratic state machine was as oppressive to the workers as the Capitalist system was her dualistic conception of human nature.

B. MARX WAS NOT A MATERIALIST: LENIN WAS

In an essay following "Perspectives: Allons-nous vers la révolution prolétarienne?" called "Réflexions concernant la technocratie, le national-socialisme, L'U.R.S.S. et quelques autres points," Simone Weil pointed out wherein lies the real value of Marxism.¹⁷⁸ She claimed that Marx created a method of analysis which he applied to the phenomena of his time. Each generation could make use of this method to define the essential phenomena of its own period. Again, in this essay Simone Weil uses her own dualistic conception of human nature as a basis of her judgments of Marx's method. She argued that Lenin applied the Marxist method to his time. But for the militants of her time, Simone Weil claimed, Marx represented, at best, a doctrine:

...nos corps vivent seuls dans cette période prodigieusement nouvelle, qui dément toutes les prévisions antérieures; et que nos esprits continuent à se mouvoir, sinon au temps de la première Internationale, du moins au temps d'avant-guerre, à l'époque de la C.G.T. révolutionnaire et du parti bolchévik russe.¹⁷⁹

Simone Weil understood Cartesian science to be the method used in overcoming natural forces and, similarly, she understood Marxist social analysis to be the method used in defining and overcoming social force. To take Marxism as a doctrine rather than to apply Marx' method is equivalent to surrendering to the social force instead of using the method to devise a plan of action. In applying Marx' method of analysis, Weil pointed out that bureaucracy was a new factor in the social struggle. This led her to pose

¹⁷⁸ Simone Weil, "Réflexions concernant la technocratie, le national-socialisme, L'U.R.S.S. et quelques autres points," *Oppression et liberté* (1955; Paris: Gallimard, 1981) 39-44. This essay, according Simone Pétrement, was written before "Perspectives: Allons-nous vers la révolution prolétarienne?" -- which means sometime in 1932 or early 1933.

¹⁷⁹ Weil, "Technocratie", op. cit., p.40.

the question of whether it was possible to organize the workers in a given country without such organization "secreting" a bureaucracy which would immediately place the organization in the control of a state machine, that of the country itself or that of the U.S.S.R.¹⁸⁰

In order to answer this question, Weil would have to study both the theory behind the workers' movement and the actual life problems of the workers in the factory. Her own reading of Marx' writings had presented her with a method of analysis. Also, she knew that Lenin had applied this method to the situation in Russia and he had written a theoretical work in which he set out clearly what "scientific socialism" meant for him and how it cohered with a theory of knowledge. She recognized that the militants of her own time were treating Marxism as a doctrine. What kind of doctrine? To answer this question she studied Lenin's book, *Matérialisme et empirio-criticisme*.¹⁸¹

At about the same time as she was reviewing this book, Simone Weil was teaching at Roanne. The student who later published *Leçons de philosophie (Roanne 1933-1934)*, Anne Reynaud-Guéritault, was taught by Simone Weil in Roanne. In the book review, the main issue Simone Weil dealt with was Lenin's assertion that Marx' epistemology is a *materialist epistemology*. And in *Leçons de philosophie (Roanne 1933-1934)*, Weil set out to prove that materialism, although a very convincing theory, omits an extremely necessary aspect of the human being, the mind as independent of the body. In my analysis of Simone Weil's review of Lenin's book, *Matérialisme et empirio-criticisme*, I have noticed that she does not accept the view that Marx' epistemology is a materialistic epistemology, nor does she think that the workers' movement can be based on such a theory of knowledge. It is a matter of great debate as to whether or not Marx is a materialist, but it is not the subject of this thesis to enter that debate. What is important is Simone Weil's claim that the materialist theory of knowledge is not an appropriate base for the workers' movement. It is this claim that makes me think that she began *Leçons de philosophie (Roanne 1933-1934)* from the materialist point of view. She had come to recognize how powerful the materialist

¹⁸⁰Weil, "Technocratie", op. cit., p.28.

¹⁸¹Simone Weil, "Sur le livre de Lénine 'Matérialisme et empirio-criticisme'", *Oppression et liberté* (1955; Paris: Gallimard, 1981), p.45-53.

theory of knowledge had become among the political groups of the left, especially among communists and socialists, and she felt she had to point out its grave weaknesses.

Eric O. Springsted, quoting Weil herself, presents two other reasons why he thought she began her lectures from the materialist point of view: first, "the more honestly we are materialists in this study we are making, the better we shall be able to defend ourselves against them later"; second, "that it is by studying matter that we shall find mind."¹⁸² Springsted makes much of the second reason. It is this latter that suggests to him that Weil thought that we must begin with matter to appreciate mind. But Springsted fails to quote the entire passage which relates to the second reason. The complete quotation is: "So one could say that materialism and its opposite are correlative one to the other. It is by studying matter that we shall find mind."¹⁸³ The sentence Springsted fails to include suggests that if she had begun with mind she would also find matter -- both are needed. So although I do not contradict Springsted's reasoning, the more important explanation for Weil beginning with the materialist point of view has to do with the fact that Simone Weil already held a dualistic philosophical anthropology. Also, she had to show that the materialists, be it Marx, Lenin, or the marxists of her time, could not ignore mind, as Springsted after all points out. It may also have been part of her curriculum to present the students with a number of what she saw to be materialist theories. Thus, although I agree with Eric O. Springsted's claim that Simone Weil in *Lectures* "begins an examination of man considered as an active material being...."¹⁸⁴ I cannot agree that she also adopts "the materialist point of view" in *Réflexions sur les causes de la liberté et de l'oppression sociale* as Springsted claims.¹⁸⁵ In the following part of this thesis I will argue that Simone Weil depends on her earlier dualistic philosophical anthropology, as worked out in "Science et perception" and the other essays discussed above, throughout her critique of the marxists of her time and of Marx himself. Springsted

¹⁸²As quoted by Springsted, *Christus Mediator*, op. cit., p.34.

¹⁸³ Weil, *Lectures*, op. cit., p.40.

¹⁸⁴Springsted, *Christus Mediator*, op. cit., p.34.

¹⁸⁵Springsted, *Christus Mediator*, op. cit., p.34.

confuses the order of her thought by suggesting that, for Weil, human beings are first material beings and then thinkers. Rather, I will argue that for Simone Weil, human beings are in essence body and mind or vice versa. Consciousness is both mind and body throughout life. It would be difficult to say when in terms of time Simone Weil thinks the human being first begins to think thoughts which come from the mind. It may be that since perception demands the activity of the mind for her we are thinking as soon as we combine thoughts which come from the mind and thoughts which come to us through the imagination. Furthermore, I will argue that her dualistic view of human nature allows her to focus on the materialist point of view since she has already, in "Proteus" and in "Science et perception", focused on that state of being she called 'pure imagination'.

The context in which Lenin was writing *Matérialisme et empirio-criticisme* was an important factor in Weil's analysis. Although he was addressing purely philosophical questions, she remarked that he was also opposing his views to his opponent's doctrines in the political arena of the Russia of 1908. She claimed that Lenin, on the one hand, set up his opponents as "Idealists," who did away with the notion of an object exterior to thought, and, on the other hand, placed in opposition to them the "materialism" of Marx and Engels. Weil argued that the book was mediocre mainly because Lenin's method of analysis was to refute his opponents by presenting the party's theory of knowledge as the only possible correct theory of knowledge, without demonstrating why the party's theory was better than his opponents'. She agreed with Lenin that one can measure how oppressive a society is by how the theoretical relationship between man and nature operates. It would be fine, she argued, if Lenin had analysed "how" theoretical culture is closely connected to the division of society into classes. But Lenin did not argue that his opponents' conception of society distorted the true relationship between man and the world and was therefore reactionary. Lenin instead argued that a particular conception deviates from materialism, leads to idealism, furnishes religion with arguments, and is therefore reactionary and false.¹⁸⁶

Weil pointed out that Lenin's is not the argument of a free man. The party spirit had distorted Lenin's

¹⁸⁶Weil, "Sur le livre de Lénine", op. cit., p.46. See endnote 1.

attitude towards his own thought. So it is understandable how this party could turn into a stifling regime when in power, as it had in Russia. Weil claimed that long before it robbed the whole of Russia of liberty of thought, the Bolshevik party had already taken away from it their own leader.¹⁸⁷

Having criticized Lenin's method of thought, Simone Weil argued that Marx' process of thinking was different. She claimed that Marx had learnt from Hegel that instead of refuting incomplete notions, it is better to surmount them while retaining them. That is why Marx' thought differs from the Marxists and even Engels, especially, she argued, in Marx' dealing with the problem of knowledge, i.e., of the relation between the mind and the world.¹⁸⁸

Lenin, she claimed, explained how the mind has knowledge of the world by choosing between two points of views. The first visualizes the world as being a creation of the mind. The second visualizes the mind as one of the products of the world. The second point of view, argued Weil, adds a rather mysterious dimension to the "mind" that no other product in the world contains: the mind also constitutes its image or reflection. According to Weil, Lenin claimed that every philosophy must come back to one or the other of these two conceptions of knowledge, and he, of course, chose the second. He followed Engels' formula, that the mind and the consciousness were products of the human brain (in the last resort products of nature) and far from being in contradiction with the general scheme of nature, they correspond to it.¹⁸⁹ Weil argues that these two conceptions of knowledge, from which Lenin claimed we must choose, each have the consequence of eliminating one of the terms of the problem of knowledge. The first conception eliminates the world and the second eliminates the mind. Weil argued that rather than constructing a theory of knowledge, one should instead try to ascertain how one knows the world. It requires acknowledging the existence of a world which lies beyond mind and of a mind which -- far from passively reflecting the world -- exercises itself on the world with the double aim of knowing it and

¹⁸⁷Weil, "Sur le livre de Lénine", op. cit., p.46.

¹⁸⁸It is very probable that Simone Weil had encountered Kojève's thought on Hegel and Marx. See endnote 2.

¹⁸⁹Weil, "Sur le livre de Lénine", op. cit., p.48.

transforming it.¹⁹⁰ She maintained that Descartes and Marx thought like this.

Simone Weil supported this claim by pointing out that Marx' works contain a different spirit from those of Engels and Lenin. She cited Marx from the *Thesis on Feuerbach* to establish her point that Marx never regards man as being a mere part of nature — but always being at the same time a free agent, and antagonistic vis-à-vis nature:

Le défaut principal de toutes les doctrines matérialistes qui ont été formées jusqu'à ce jour, y compris celle de Feuerbach, consiste en ce que le réel, le sensible, ne sont conçus que sous la forme de l'objet, de la contemplation, et non comme activité humaine sensible, comme *praxis*, d'une manière subjective. C'est pourquoi le côté actif a été développé, d'une manière abstraite, il est vrai, en opposition avec le Matérialisme, par l'idéalisme — qui, bien entendu, ne connaît pas l'activité réelle, sensible, comme telle.¹⁹¹

Furthermore, Weil pointed out that Marx, in reading the *Anti-Dühring* of Engels and approving it, did not take the time to consider what separated him from Engels. The passage above, which she took from Marx' "Thesis on Feuerbach," might be obscure, but at least it states that the problem of knowledge demands that there be a synthesis of idealism and materialism — one in which a radical opposition between passive nature and human activity is preserved.¹⁹²

According to Simone Weil's analysis as presented so far, Marx' epistemology, and what it says about human nature, is much closer to Descartes' than it is to Engels' and Lenin's materialism. We can understand why she thinks that it is important to make this connection when we consider how she connected Cartesian science to "perception," "real action," and "work" in "Science et perception dans Descartes." She argued that the real purpose of science is to teach man how to take possession of himself and then the world. There has to be an active mind to conceive a method. She could not believe that Marx could think differently and she provided evidence that in his early work he thought like her. She also pointed to Marx' conception of the relation between man and nature from *The German Ideology*, in which he asserted that the thoughts formed by men in technical, economic, and social conditions correspond to the way in which

¹⁹⁰Weil, "Sur le livre de Lénine", op. cit., p.48.

¹⁹¹Weil, "Sur le livre de Lénine", op. cit., p.49. See endnote 3.

¹⁹²Weil, "Sur le livre de Lénine", op. cit., p.50.

they act upon nature by producing their own conditions of existence.¹⁹³

Simone Weil claimed that we should interpret Marx' conception of historical materialism from passages like the one referred to above. This is why, she claimed, Marx developed the idea of the proletarian revolution. He could see that the capitalist system (and she quoted Marx) consists of a reversal of the relationship between subject and object. She explained that this reversal is brought about by the subordination of the subject to the object and of "the worker to the material conditions of work." In the same way as Cartesian science is supposed to teach to the thinking subject how to think well, Marx' proletarian revolution is supposed to give back to the thinking subject (after capitalism has reversed the relationship between the subject and object) his proper relationship to matter:

...la révolution ne peut avoir d'autre sens que de restituer au sujet pensant le rapport qu'il doit avoir avec la matière, en lui rendant la domination qu'il a pour fonction d'exercer sur elle.¹⁹⁴

Thus, according to Simone Weil's analysis both Descartes and Marx would agree that the thinking subject should maintain control over the world and that both the thinking subject and the world must exist independently of each other in order for there to be a synthesis of the two, dialectical materialism.

After establishing that Marx' philosophy differs quite radically from Engels' philosophy on the question of the relationship between the mind and matter, Simone Weil returned to Lenin's party, i.e., the Bolshevik Party, to point out that:

Il n'est nullement surprenant que le parti bolchévique, dont l'organisation même a toujours reposé sur la subordination de l'individu, et qui, une fois au pouvoir, devait asservir le travailleur à la machine tout autant que le capitalisme, ait adopté pour doctrine le matérialisme naïf d'Engels plutôt que la philosophie de Marx.¹⁹⁵

Furthermore, she was amazed that Lenin could admit (in a fragment concerning dialectics), after invoking dialectical materialism as a complete doctrine, that he had only been concerned with popularizing the dialectical method, and not with verifying its truth through the history of science.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³Cited in Weil, "Sur le livre de Lénine", op. cit., p.49-50.

¹⁹⁴Weil, "Sur le livre de Lénine", op. cit., p.50.

¹⁹⁵Weil, "Sur le livre de Lénine", op. cit., p.50.

¹⁹⁶Weil, "Sur le livre de Lénine", op. cit., p.50.

Finally, in some despair, Weil claimed that Lenin's *Matérialisme et empirio-criticisme* marks a deficiency in the socialist movement's domain of pure theory. She cited a few révolutionnaires who acknowledge that the revolution must be as much an intellectual as a social revolution. Therefore, pure theory has its part therein.

Simone Weil clearly showed that, at the heart of the marxist revolutionary movement, the underlying view of human nature does not correspond to Marx' view of man. She pointed out that this essential divergence from Marx would (and did) lead the Bolshevik Party to oppress the workers in their own State, rather than lead them to liberty. She thought that Lenin's and Engels' view that man's mind is no more than a product of nature is a view that would be contrary to Marx' idea that the workers should be restored to their proper roles as subjects who produce their own 'conditions of existence'. The assertion that the Marxists who followed Lenin's and Engel's doctrine of materialism, rather than studying Marx' dialectical materialism, did not allow that there were different views of human nature at the bottom of each position. This led Simone Weil to do an in-depth analysis of Marx' revolutionary theory as well as an analysis of oppression and liberty. This oversight was, according to Weil, one of the main reasons why the workers' movement was failing.

Whether or not Simone Weil is right in what she says about Marx' view of human nature, it should be clear from these political essays, written before and during Simone Weil's year of teaching at Roanne, that she was struggling with the materialist epistemology that she found among the Marxists. As I pointed out earlier, it is my belief that she began her lessons at the Lycée that year with the intention of demonstrating that the materialists cannot account for all of human activity. This analysis, in some respects, parallels Simone Weil's analysis of the human being in "Science et perception dans Descartes."

Simone Weil explained in "Science et perception dans Descartes" how every human being can have a grasp on nature by choosing to act on nature with willed effort. It is from the individual encounter with nature through work (based on perception) that human beings begin to reason about nature, and to innovate and to order the world by obeying its order. What Simone Weil tried to preserve was the individual's ability to make intelligent judgments and to think independently. Before we analyse Simone Weil's study

of human action from the materialist point of view, it might be helpful to remember how Simone Weil had analysed human action in "Science et perception dans Descartes." The first kind of human action she described in her meditation was what she referred to there as "the appearance of action" or an "immediate reaction" to the ideas the mind receives from the world. This reaction does not exercise the mind at all. The mind is moreover subservient to the imagination at this stage. The second kind of human action was referred to in her meditation as 'indirect action' or 'real action' because the mind does not react immediately to the ideas received from the world through the imagination.

This kind of action is that which follows from perception. This is work without a method. However, once one reflects on this initial kind of work (as Simone Weil thought was the role of science), one then returns to the world with a plan in mind, the human being does work with a method. Furthermore, only the human being who acts with thought in mind can encounter reality, can know the relation between mind and matter. The first kind of work has thought, but not reflective thought. It is with these ideas of human nature in mind, as I pointed out above, that Simone Weil was led to claim in her book review of Lenin's book that materialism, as a way of conceiving the relation between human beings and nature, is inadequate and it was these same ideas that, as I argued above, prompted her to show the materialists from their own point of view where mind entered.

i Materialism needs idealism

In *Leçons de philosophie* (Roanne 1933-1934) Simone Weil took the materialists as far as their view of the human being takes them in accounting for human action, and she showed in her analysis at what stage mind or human intellect must be brought in to account for human action which bodily reaction cannot account for. What she aimed to show is that the mind is not one of the products of the world which by some miracle constitutes its image or reflection. Rather, she argued that mind is something other than matter that exists in its own way and acts on the world with the double aim of knowing it and

transforming it.¹⁹⁷

Simone Weil began her study with an analysis of different psychological theories. What her study suggested to her was that the various theories of psychology do not present us with thought which comes from the mind alone. After rejecting the possibility of any of the psychological theories presenting us with mind, Simone Weil embarked on her own analysis of the problem.

To begin the study of how the body influences the soul or the will, she analysed congenital reflexes, conditional reflexes, and the difference between instincts and reflexes. About congenital reflexes, she pointed out that we generalize stimuli by our reactions; for example, salivary glands always secrete digestive juices no matter what the food. Thus, the body generalizes things in the world through reaction before there is any thought. But conditioned reflexes are also studied by psychologists. She gave three examples to show how we acquire reflex actions. As an example she used stairs, which can be made of wood or stone, covered with carpet, etc. Before anything else, they call up the idea of stairs.¹⁹⁸ In the case of conditioned reflexes, the body grasps the relation. Thought which comes from the mind does not enter into it here. She concluded that both congenital and acquired reflexes establish a classification among things in the world.¹⁹⁹

According to Simone Weil's analysis in *Leçons de philosophie (Roanne 1933-1934)*, as Peter Winch points out in his "Introduction" to the English translation of *Lectures, op. cit.*, p.²⁰⁰, our body provides us with a certain order even before we begin to use our minds. From this point of view, it is not unreasonable for the materialists to claim that human beings are merely a higher form of matter. Weil noted that reflexes play a large part in human life, and that education consists for the most part in providing

¹⁹⁷See endnote 4.

¹⁹⁸ Weil, *Leçons*, op. cit., p.23.

¹⁹⁹ Weil, *Leçons*, op. cit., p.23.

²⁰⁰ Winch, "Introduction" *Lectures*, op. cit., p.13.

children with conditioned reflexes.²⁰¹ This raises the question of whether or not moral ideas may be nothing more than conditioned reflexes. Hence Simone Weil proposed to study whether all action can be explained by means of the body, by the means of the mind, or whether action at some point demands that both mind and body be brought in to explain it.

Simone Weil claimed that there are three different moralities stemming from the three different epistemological views. The materialists, those who strive to explain all action by means of the body, claim that morality is only a matter of policy. The idealists, those who strive to explain all action by means of the mind, claim that morality is a matter of principles. The dualists, those who explain all action by means of both the mind and the body, claim that morality consists of putting matter under the control of the mind.

Simone Weil proposed to study this problem by analysing the role of the body in action, feeling, and thought. If the mind is discovered as necessary for explaining action, then she claimed that she would study the mind's role in thought, feeling, and action.

Weil pointed out that there are certain bodily reactions which appear to be more complicated than the conditioned reflexes already analysed, namely the instincts. She had to determine whether instincts are different from reflexes and, to do this, Simone Weil analysed Darwin's theory of instincts. According to Weil, Darwin believed in the power of reason, yet he decided that adaptation was a part of being an animal, that nature's choices are made blindly. Even so, she pointed out, Darwin added the idea that there is a struggle for existence and, because of this struggle it is not only those who cannot adapt, but also those who partially adapt, who are eliminated. Therefore, there is a kind of mechanical progress and those that do not follow the line of progress are eliminated. Thus, a large proportion are eliminated and the survivors possess instincts which have been perfected. After some analysis of instincts, Simone Weil decided that for the purpose of this study she would adopt Darwin's solution of reducing instinct to reflex or conditioned action. She pointed out that a great deal of human action is the result of conditioned reflexes, citing

²⁰¹ Weil, *Leçons*, op. cit., p.24.

examples of customs, and family traditions. Society, she claimed, uses many means to create conditioned reflexes as well as doing so naturally since each word is for everyone a conditioned reflex.³⁰²

In the study of the role of the body in feeling, Simone Weil studied the mechanism of producing and reproducing feelings, and the nature of feeling itself. Under the mechanism of producing and reproducing feeling, she analysed the filial instinct and the sexual instinct. She concluded that both are explained by a combination of physiological needs (instincts) and conditioned reflexes. Under the nature of feeling itself, Simone Weil argued that the physical signs of a feeling or emotion make up the emotion itself. She gave three examples to make her point.³⁰³ Then she concluded by pointing out that the materialist theory of the emotions is completely consistent and she summarized the ideas it rests on:

L'étoffe des affections est constituée par des mouvements corporels (William James), et les mouvements corporels qui constituent les affections *sont tous le fait ou d'instincts* ou de réflexes naturels ou de réflexes conditionnés, ou de la combinaison de tous ces facteurs (Descartes, Spinoza, Freud).³⁰⁴

Thus through feelings and emotions we do not encounter what Simone Weil thinks of as mind. That is why Simone Weil turns her attention to when it is necessary to bring in the concept of "mind" to explain actions which are not mere reactions of the body but are actions of "consciousness." In the section "Role du corps (réflexes et instincts) dans le sentiment," Simone Weil also studies sensations, perceptions, general ideas, language and reasoning. She thinks we might encounter mind through these actions.

About "sensations," Simone Weil argued, as she had in "Science et perception dans Descartes," that the body brings to thought sensations that give us images. This is the state of "pure imagination" that Simone Weil discussed at length in "De la perception ou l'aventure de Protée." Again in her analysis of perception in *Leçons* these images, when carried by the imagination to thought, give us an idea that there is something external to us to which we react:

³⁰²Weil, *Leçons*, op. cit., p.29.

³⁰³ Weil, *Leçons*, op. cit., p.34.

³⁰⁴Weil, *Leçons*, op. cit., p.34.

*Les sensations ne nous donnent rien du monde....Cependant nous percevons le monde; c'est donc que ce qui nous est donné, ce n'est pas seulement les sensations....les peintres impressionnistes n'auraient pas non plus tant de mal à se donner pour reproduire ce qu'ils voient; elles sont données comme signes de choses imaginées, lesquelles n'ont aucun rapport avec la sensation, mais seulement avec nos réactions vis-à-vis des sensations.*³⁰⁵

If we perceive the world in this way, Weil realized she must demonstrate that the imagination does not distort "sensations" nor take their place. Otherwise, we would always be in a state of "pure imagination". She demonstrated this by studying the case of dreaming and the case of illusion. In "De la perception ou l'aventure de Protée," she had begun by demonstrating how "normal perception" differed from the dream and illusion. In *Leçons de philosophie (Roanne 1933-1934)*, she did not offer an example for the case of "normal perception", but merely asserted that imagination does not alter the normal sensation and that it cannot take its place.³⁰⁶ After analysing dreams and illusions and suggesting that they are based on the imagination added to sensation, Simone Weil concluded that the imagination does not take the place of sensations and sensations are truly felt. Again she makes the same point about how sensation presents us with the occasion to become conscious as she had argued in "Science et perception". After establishing that the source of the identity of objects is in the imagination alone, Simone Weil proposed to examine all that belongs to the external world and that which we learn about through the imagination.

As in "Science et perception" Simone Weil examines space, but in *Leçons* she adds an analysis of depth, and shape. Again she points out clearly that what is given to us through the imagination that belongs to the external world is a knowledge of "space". Furthermore, she explicitly says that when we perceive spatial relations, we are ready to act in a certain way. This claim suggests that in perceiving the world we obtain the thought of how to behave in order to agree with this perception:

Les rapports de l'espace, quels qu'ils soient, sont toujours constitués par un rapport entre nous et les sensations, lesquels rapports consistent dans une certaine disposition à l'action excitée en nous par les

³⁰⁵Weil, *Leçons*, op. cit., p.43-44. Peter Winch in *Simone Weil: the just balance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.25-29 has given a somewhat different interpretation of this passage, comparing it to Wittgenstein. I do not think that my interpretation essentially disagrees with that of Winch on this point.

³⁰⁶ Weil, *Leçons*, op. cit., p.44.

sensations.²⁰⁷

She concluded that there is an "elementary geometry" in perception and although this "elementary geometry", as Simone Weil had shown in "Science et perception dans Descartes", is only the beginning stages of coming to consciousness, it is not at all arbitrary or synonymous with fantasy or "pure imagination". For example, when we see two points, although we only "imagine" a straight line between them, we are not free to see anything else but a straight line. It is the same for all the objects that surround us. Our imagination connects the points that they are made up of. This is how objects are formed. For example, Simone Weil pointed out that objects take on a shape because we imagine "ce qu'on appelle la forme réelle." This "real shape" is imagined out of what appears to us. How does this work? Weil argued that:

...il est impossible de voir en même temps deux ou trois points; on les réunit pour leur faire former un segment de droite, un triangle. Or, ce triangle n'existe pas; il existe trois points, et c'est tout. L'imagination s'exerce.²⁰⁸

This is the way our eyes react to points, she says: "*Toutes les lignes qui limitent les objets, qui constituent des formes, nous sont données par nos réflexes, par notre propre mouvement.*"²⁰⁹ As it is our bodies that react this way, and our imagination that brings thought to the mind about shapes, depth, etc., we must acknowledge that Simone Weil is once again presenting in *Leçons* her view that perception contains thought, ideas about the world.

*Il y a donc tout une géométrie élémentaire déjà dans la perception. Tout se passe comme si notre corps connaissait de théorèmes géométriques que notre esprit ne connaît pas encore. Dans la perception normale il y a déjà géométrie. Donc il n'y aura pas à s'étonner s'il y a imagination dans la géométrie puisqu'il y a déjà imagination dans la perception.*²¹⁰

As our analyses have shown, Simone Weil made this same point in "Science et perception dans

²⁰⁷Weil, *Leçons*, op. cit., p.46.

²⁰⁸Weil, *Leçons*, op. cit., p.49.

²⁰⁹Weil, *Leçons*, op. cit., p.49.

²¹⁰Weil, *Leçons*, op. cit., p.49-50.

Descartes" "La perception, c'est la géométrie prenant possession en quelque sorte des passions mêmes....Le corps humain est pour l'esprit comme une pince à saisir et palper le monde."²¹¹ But none of this geometry could be perceived without the help of the imagination:

C'est la même cause essentielle (imagination) qui fait que nous percevons les choses les plus vulgaires et que nous faisons de la géométrie, qui est à la base de toutes les sciences....

...le rapport essentiel entre nous et l'extérieur, rapport qui consiste en une *réaction*, un *réflexe*, qui constitue pour nous la perception du monde extérieur. *La simple perception de la nature est une sorte de danse*; c'est cette danse qui nous fait percevoir.²¹²

Thus, in order to perceive the world, do geometry, the imagination must transmit "images" (which are "les traces des choses sur le corps, traces qui sont en réalité celles des réactions du corps à l'égard des choses") to the mind. As Alain taught and Simone Weil develops, we have to learn to see "ideas" in "images".²¹³

Thus, without the "imagination" we would not be able to perceive the world, nor do geometry and we would have no science. Simone Weil shows the very important part which imagination plays in perception. We see that she did not change her view of perception in her lectures to her students. She consistently argued in both "Science et perception" and in *Leçons* that to perceive means to take sensations as signs of the external world, as the intellectualists had also argued.

In Simone Weil's conception of what appears to be the intellectual operations, we learn that we receive, first of all, "general ideas" in perception, and that the ideas that we receive from the thought which comes from the imagination are "general ideas" of things. Simone Weil identified herself with the Realist school, holding that general ideas have real existence. The mind, she argued, begins with general ideas, and works to obtain knowledge of the particular: "En fait, nous percevons les ressemblances avant les individus qui se ressemblent et, dans un agrégat de parties continues, le tout

²¹¹Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.210-211.

²¹²Weil, *Leçons*, op. cit., p.50.

²¹³See endnote 5.

avant les parties."²¹⁴ As Springsted rightly points out, according to Simone Weil, "general ideas naturally precede particular perceptions".²¹⁵ Yet, for Simone Weil, there has to be a relation between, for example, the general idea of man and particular men; that is why she says that the nominalist thesis is absurd. Their claim is that only the particular exists. Each man, for example, is only particular characteristics and thus there is not anything which we can call man in general. But argues Simone Weil we do have general ideas of man which we receive because our bodies react in a general way to other men:

Il faut pourtant bien que l'homme existe quelque part pour qu'on en ait l'idée. Le rapport entre les choses et nous est constitué par les réactions que ces choses provoquent en nous. L'homme, c'est avant tout l'être à qui l'on parle...²¹⁶

Again we see Simone Weil expressing her view that human beings and things must really exist for us to have general ideas of them, and we must have these general ideas before we can have particular or concrete ideas. It is the body which brings us general ideas as well as abstract ideas. Simone Weil claimed that abstract ideas are the same as general ideas, and that is why she concluded in *Leçons* that none of these operations requires mind or thought conceived by the understanding. But what confuses us in *Leçons* is that Simone Weil made other claims which seem to contradict this point of view. For example, she claimed that sensations are only received by us through an effort of the will.²¹⁷ What does change in her lectures to her students is that she adds the idea that we can really only be sure to be talking about the mind when the mind shows that it has thought conceived by the understanding. It seems to me that Simone Weil's view of perception in *Leçons* is not sufficiently worked out for us to decide one way or the other whether or not she thought perception also included that extra insight

²¹⁴Weil, *Leçons*, op. cit., p.64.

²¹⁵Springsted, *Christus Mediator*, op. cit., p.38.

²¹⁶Weil, *Leçons*, op. cit., p.57.

²¹⁷See Weil, *Lectures*, op. cit., p.47 where she says "Far from sensations being the only things that are immediately given to us, it is, as such, only given to us by an effort of abstraction, and by a great effort at that." I first came across this passage in Springsted's book, *Christus Mediator*, op. cit., p.35.

which brings awareness of consciousness -- self as mind -- as she had argued in "Science et perception". In *Leçons* she leaves out the view that we receive "clear ideas" from the world and that we only receive these "clear ideas" through perception -- by taking "sensations as signs". So although I see many of the same analyses of perception in *Leçons* as she had worked out in her early essays, I think Weil leaves out of *Leçons* the idea that perception brings us awareness of our consciousness; however, I am not convinced that she renounces this intellectualist view of perception because she takes it up again in her later thought.

We saw in part one of this chapter that according to Simone Weil's philosophical anthropology the human being is a mind and a body. Most of a human being's life is spent dealing with ideas that come through the imagination. She took these to be general and particular ideas. We receive ideas through our encounter with the world but, in order to perceive these ideas at all, Simone Weil had argued in her earlier essays analysed above that we first need to know the self and this we come to know through those first bodily experiences of the world. Thus, we need those experiences in order to perceive the world and, in so doing, we become aware of the self first and then the world. However, in *Leçons* she says little about the self as the "je peux, donc je suis." But as I have shown above, she puts forth a similar view of perception in *Leçons* as in "Science et perception": I think she is assuming in *Leçons* at least the existence of her version of the *cogito ergo sum*. I take this to be because Simone Weil claims, as I pointed out above, in *Leçons*, as she had in "Science et perception", that sensations are only received by us through an effort of the will. On the one hand, in "Science et perception", Simone Weil was concerned with showing how cartesian science is firmly grounded on the simple grasp we have on the world through perception and to do that she had to show how perception involved the mind and the body. On the other hand, in *Leçons*, her task is to show that although bodily reactions can apparently account for much of so-called human activity, they cannot account for them all. In order to do that she argued that most thoughts come to us through the imagination and prompt the body to react in a certain manner. In "Science et perception", she had to show that the imagination and the body, in giving us the stuff of perceptions, provide us with the means by which the mind can *truly act* in the world, but that

does not say that the mind will act as such. In perception the mind does act insofar as it understands. It receives the sign but it is another thing for the mind to actually show that it understands the sign by acting in the world accordingly. As she pointed out, in actually acting with method in mind, the human subject shows that it really does exist and only then does her version of the *cogito ergo sum* mean something concrete. In *Leçons*, Simone Weil shows us again how difficult it is for the mind to act in the world. However, rather than depending on the clear ideas that one receives through numbers or natural bodily geometry, she introduces the mind through another capacity that is unique to human beings, namely language. Simone Weil does not explore the question of the relation between perception and language. This is a lacunae in her early analyses of perception and of human nature. I might add that she does not deal with this problem in her later thought either. This would have helped to settle the problem of her view of perception. Thus, not only through perceiving geometrical and mathematical relations does Simone Weil's human being become aware of his/her human capacity to be split into a dual nature of an active and passive being, but also as Springsted rightly points out, language makes man into a dual nature of an active and passive being.

C. LANGUAGE

For Simone Weil, language is distinctively human, and therefore we come to the mind in the use of language. As she says:

Le langage est la chose humaine par excellence. Descartes, quand il s'est demandé si les animaux pensaient, a trouvé la solution grâce au langage. Si les animaux parlaient, ils pourraient communiquer avec nous....En tout cas, ils n'ont pas de langage écrit, pas d'archives....Donc, avec le langage, *on entre dans le domaine purement humain.*²¹⁸

She claims that there are two aspects to language. Firstly, it is social insofar as "*les rapports des mots*

²¹⁸ Weil, *Leçons*, op. cit., p.66.

*aux choses sont des réflexes conditionnés ...*²¹⁹ In this way language always belongs to a particular group of people, i.e., linguistic boundaries are cultural boundaries. Secondly, it is artificial in relation to the individual. There is nothing to compel one to name what one eats on "a table". It could be given another name. One learns that the society one is raised in calls this thing one eats on "a table" because each time one is fed, the parent points to it and says the word "table". The word, therefore, relates to all those things resembling a table. Table is a general idea at first. Although Simone Weil does not make this relation, she did claim that we receive general ideas through perception. So here we see one relation between her view of perception and her conception of language.

These two characteristics of language, argued Simone Weil, should allow one to explain "tout ce en quoi consiste la vertu merveilleuse du langage."²²⁰ We will first analyse Simone Weil's idea that language is a means of conditioning human thoughts and then turn to her other view that language is also a means to formulate a method for action. It is the latter aspect of language that brings mind-thoughts conceived by the understanding.

Although Simone Weil claims that human beings are not like animals insofar as they have language, she also sees an important similarity between humans and animals insofar as both can be conditioned to relate certain sounds to certain objects or feelings. She claims that language aids the memory and she uses an example of prisoners who write the names of their loved ones on the wall so that they will not forget them. Furthermore, she points out that words can also stimulate an emotion, as in the case of the lover who is no longer with the loved one but may feel sorrow every time the name of a certain lake comes up, because of the special moments spent there together. Thirdly, she argues that words incite one to act in a particular way, for example the use of words to praise and "the role of maxims". Finally, one is conditioned to use certain words to refer to certain objects in the world. When one studies geometry one

²¹⁹Weil, *Leçons*, op. cit., p.67.

²²⁰Weil, *Leçons*, op. cit., p.67. This statement suggests that Simone Weil only concentrated on the positive aspects of language, but she also recognized that the very characteristics which make it so valuable also make it corruptible.

does not write "sun", rather one writes "triangle".

Weil points out that in the same way that language can aid the memory, words can also recall a memory which completely distracts the mind and causes one to forget where one is. This happens often when one has a deep sorrow about someone lost to death. One hears a word which reminds one of that person and becomes lost in thought. Losing one's thought to such memories can sometimes have negative consequences as it may make one lose one's attention towards what one is reading or when one is in a class.

In all of these ways, Simone Weil points out, language can be used to condition our behaviour and emotions and this conditioning, as we have seen, lends itself to good or bad use. Society, she claims, has a great influence on us through the use of language. All of our thoughts, which come from the imagination in perception, come to us through language:

...grâce au langage, nous sommes baignée dans un milieu intellectuel....A mesure que nous exprimons un état de nous-mêmes, nous le faisons rentrer dans le domaine de tous les hommes.²²¹

This social aspect of language allows us to communicate with the other but it also makes the other's thoughts one's own. This is good insofar as this is what makes up a culture. However, it is not always good, she argues, when language conditions us to conformity.

As Springsted and Winch clearly saw Simone Weil realized how profoundly human beings would be conditioned by society if the individual did not have the means to turn away from the world/society and use language to create a method.²²² In creating a method she argued language brings us mind-thoughts conceived by the understanding because one can objectify his/her thoughts.

According to Simone Weil language's characteristics are useful to method. The fact that words are artificial, she argues, means that one can completely control words but one cannot completely control the objects referred to by words. For example, one cannot control the sun and stars, yet one can completely control how one uses the words "sun" and "stars". Furthermore, language, as was pointed out, aids the

²²¹Weil, *Leçons*, op. cit., p.80.

²²²See Peter Winch, *Simone Weil "the just balance"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.), p.54 and Springsted, *Christus Mediator*, op. cit., p.39.

meaning and therefore helps us to remember the past so that "Il nous donne toutes les choses absentes." Language gives us these absent things ordered chronologically. One can then say one saw a friend yesterday. With language as our link to the past (even yesterday) and future, and with the artificial aspect of language (that it is so different from what is real), we can make relationships which are completely foreign to our needs. Thus, Simone Weil pointed out, this allows one to say the moon exists even when one does not see it. What is paradoxical about language is that it can seem to give us "objective necessity" even though this necessity is not directly related to the world. For instance, Simone Weil pointed out that there is no relation between the necessity of $1 + 1 = 2$ and the necessity one feels when a weight of two kilos falls on one's head. As I pointed out in part one of this chapter, Weil separated these two kinds of necessity to make the distinction between how language or mathematics can give us an order that has nothing to do with the world, but we must always remember, she argued, this order would be no better than a dream if it could not be related to the world at some point.

Nevertheless, according to Weil, it is the difference between these two kinds of "necessity" that allows the human being to use language to order the world. On the one hand, the necessity which the weight of the two kilos presents one with is "force". When one is subjected to the world in this way, to force, then the world reduces the human being to the plaything of chance: "En ce corps à corps le monde est toujours vainqueur, quoique je m'y trompe toujours."²³ On the other hand, the "objective necessity" which language brings can give us an "order", or "method" which is perfect. As Springsted points out, and as we already saw in our analysis above, Simone Weil argues in "Science et perception" that human beings can conceive of a necessary order and this order comes from the mind through reflection. But, as I have argued above, this necessary order must always, at some point, relate to the thoughts which come from the world. However, as Springsted rightly argues, for Weil the idea of a necessary order (or perfection or infinity) "cannot be *derived* from the material conditions of existence."²⁴ This suggests that the "clear ideas" that

²³Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.201.

²⁴See Springsted, *Christus Mediator*, op. cit., p.42, 45-46 where he analyzes Simone Weil's argument from "Science et perception" that God guarantees that when we think well we think the truth, in accordance with

Weil claimed in "Science et perception" came to us through perception demanded more of us than the kind of imagination that is totally linked to the body. I would suggest that what *Leçons* is missing is Weil's second kind of imagination which involves mind.

In any case, language allows one "to leave the world" and "count the grains of sand", to study the movement of body, the appearances of perception, the words which evoke particular emotions, and the series of colours. One can make a plan of how to proceed in creating or doing what one wants, and this method of proceeding can be perfect on paper.²²³ Language, Weil argues, is the medium human beings have been given to order their thoughts so as to be able to limit chance, i.e., to encounter necessity. Language helps us to encounter mind-thought which comes from the understanding.

Nous avons vu que le *langage* est un instrument de *dédoublement* de l'homme entre un être actif et un être passif: a) création des réflexes conditionnés en soi; b) examen de ses propres idées.²²⁴

Although language is artificial and allows us to reflect upon our thoughts and these thoughts always contain imagination, language by itself cannot give us mind/thoughts which come from the understanding; we also need thoughts which come from the imagination. That is why Simone Weil claimed that "le langage lui-même renferme déjà des pensées". Like all thoughts, they must have some relation to reality: "Donc, la vertu du langage se trouve dans un rapport entre le langage et autre chose. L'action apporte une

necessity. Also, as we will see below in *Leçons* Simone Weil explicitly states that there is a clear boundary between thoughts which come from the imagination and thoughts which come from the mind. I first learned of this argument from Springsted.

²²³Method, as I pointed out above, is not enough according to Simone Weil, for "... tant qu'on s'en tient aux mots tant seuls, l'ordre et la nécessité disparaissent." Objective necessity or order in the mind is not enough, as we saw from our analysis of "Science et perception". For Simone Weil method has to be put into action for one to encounter reality. It is only through action that one has the possibility to encounter reality, *real* objective necessity. Thus, once again, Simone Weil argues that action which has method is needed to encounter reality or necessity. However, this necessity is the perfect encounter between the order in the mind and the order of the world. According to Simone Weil, when we encounter this necessity, we realise that the necessity or order we get through language alone or mathematics alone is completely insufficient for the mind to act in the world, to eliminate chance. In our analysis of "Science et perception" we learned that in Simone Weil's philosophical anthropology it is the essence of the human mind to eliminate the chance happenings of the world, thus although language is something essentially human and it can allow the mind to make a plan, it is still inadequate. It cannot replace the encounter with necessity. However, as Simone Weil clearly argues, language is an indispensable element without which the human mind could not fulfil its essence.

²²⁴Weil, *Leçons*, op. cit., p.95.

réalité"²²⁷ Language is truly a double-edged sword: it provides us with the means to limit chance as long as we use it to encounter real necessity, but it may at the same time bring us many thoughts, therefore hindering the mind in its essential task. Weil points out that language is also the medium through which we become rooted in a particular society. Depending on the particular society, our collective language can be very healthy or very unhealthy for the individual or it can be a mixture of health and ill-health. In either case, it is through language that we become socialized and in Simone Weil's anthropology this socialization more often than not appeals to the imagination alone rather than to the imagination and the mind together. Language's two characteristics are, as we saw above, language is social and it is artificial. According to Simone Weil, it is the social aspect of language which conditions us and brings us the social order, good and bad as it may be. It is, on the other hand, the artificial aspect of language which makes it possible for the human being to create his/her own order, which demands the use of the mind.

i. Mind: Thoughts which come from the Understanding

Simone Weil treated language somewhat like mathematical reasoning and this she turned to next in her search for mind. Earlier, we pointed out that "mathematical reasoning" involves "thought which comes from the imagination".²²⁸ But does it also involve thought which comes from the understanding? Simone Weil claimed that it does because even elementary arithmetic operations give us order.²²⁹ Mathematics allows us to reduce a problem to a series of simple movements, operations, and allows us to suppress "cette propriété du temps qui consiste à amener des accidents," while keeping the property "qui consiste à régler les actions."²³⁰ As Springsted points out for Simone Weil it is the fact that human beings can conceive of the perfect straight line that indicates mind.

²²⁷Weil, *Leçons*, op. cit., p. Both of the passages come from this page.

²²⁸See endnote 6.

²²⁹Weil, *Leçons*, op. cit., p.85.

²³⁰Weil, *Leçons*, op. cit., p.87.

However, as Springsted also points out, Simone Weil realised that the materialists might object by saying that the infinite can also be represented by an ever-increasing progression so that perfection is represented by the less perfect. Simone Weil agreed that the perfect straight line is imagined as an ideal limit by means of a series of more or less perfect straight lines. Nonetheless, she argues that: the progression in itself necessarily contains what is infinite. It is in relation to the perfect straight line that one can say that a particular straight line is less twisted than some other, and that without this reference the series would not have any sense....There is a complete break between thought and what is not thought, because, either one conceives the infinite or one does not conceive it at all.²¹

Thus, thoughts which are conceived by the mind have a *sense* of the infinite, of perfection, whereas thoughts which are conceived by the imagination are only full of the stuff of the world.

Although being able to conceive the infinite introduces mind for Simone Weil, as Springsted clearly shows, Simone Weil argued that we would never encounter "necessity" with the series if thought did not constantly come up against an obstacle (nature). For mind to invent it must encounter necessity: "C'est dans la mesure où l'homme manie la nature soit véritablement, soit sous la forme de symboles, qu'il a la notion de nécessité".²²

Simone Weil argued throughout the writings that we have examined that:

Pour qu'il y ait nécessité il faut *rencontre*, il faut *deux éléments*: le monde et l'homme (esprit)....le matérialisme se détruit lui-même quand il se fonde sur la notion de nécessité.²³

Simone Weil was not prepared to give up her dualist position, nor did she see any problem in reconciling mind and body through necessity.

Simone Weil used, in *Leçons de philosophie (Roanne 1933-1934)*, the same language as she did in "Science et perception dans Descartes", and came to the same conclusions: "L'homme ne peut pas construire en mettant directement la main au monde." And in "Science et perception dans Descartes", she

²¹As quoted by Springsted, *Christus Mediator*, op. cit., p.46.

²²Weil, *Leçons*, op. cit., p.97.

²³Weil, *Leçons*, op. cit., p.97.

approached the problem of encountering necessity from the other direction, first discovering mind: En ce corps à corps le monde est toujours vainqueur, quoique je m'y trompe toujours."²⁴

The solution to the problem is the same. Thus, in *Leçons de philosophie (Roanne 1933-1934)*:

Pourquoi l'homme doit-il alors s'évader du monde pour se retrouver face à face avec lui-même dans les mathématiques? Parce que le monde ne laisse aucun répit à l'homme; il est impossible de créer une série tant qu'on s'attaque au monde réel.²⁵

Likewise, in "Science et perception dans Descartes", Weil states:

Je dois sortir du monde si j'y veux prendre pied. Je ne dois pas attaquer de front et essayer d'étreindre, mais ruser, chercher une prise et saisir de biais.²⁶

Thus, whether her method was the reflexive method of Jules Lagneau or Alain, or the scientific method adopted in *Leçons de philosophie (Roanne 1933-1934)*, Simone Weil was still working with two terms: mind and body(the world) – the only way to encounter necessity.

We have seen in *Leçons, op. cit., p.de philosophie (Roanne 1933-1934)* that Simone Weil rejected the materialist point of view because it does not account for the aspect of the human being which allows for reflection and the invention of a plan of "real action" based on "thought conceived by the understanding" rather than "thought conceived by the imagination". However, the materialist point of view on knowledge and on the human being does account for a lot of human action, feeling and thought as she has shown. Much of what we know we learn through the body and language, because this brings with it a whole social and intellectual environment. But, according to her view of the human being, it is morally important for each and every individual to have the possibility to act with "thought conceived by the understanding" so that each individual has the notion of "necessity" which only comes about when thought encounters reality (as an obstacle). In "Science et perception dans Descartes", and in *Leçons de philosophie (Roanne 1933-1934)*, Simone Weil tells us why it is morally important for each and every "human being" to encounter reality through action. The first reason, given in "Science et perception dans Descartes" is for the health

²⁴ Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.201.

²⁵Weil, *Leçons*, op. cit., p.97.

²⁶Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.201.

of the individual soul: "La fin de science...est d'abord de rendre l'esprit humain maître, autant que possible, de cette partie de l'imagination que la perception laisse libre, puis de le mettre en possession du monde...."²⁷ The second, given in *Leçons de philosophie* (Roanne 1933-1934), is for the health of society. It has a more consequential effect, in that the person who conceives the plan of action experiences the consequences of the action and can adjust his/her thinking accordingly:

Dans l'action méthodique: nous agissons nous-mêmes, puisque c'est nous-mêmes qui avons trouvé la méthode; nous agissons réellement parce que des imprévus viennent se présenter. On ne peut jamais prouver aucune réalité; *la réalité ne se prouve pas, elle se constate*. Elle se constate justement parce que la preuve est insuffisante.²⁸

In *Leçons de philosophie* (Roanne 1933-1934), Weil agreed with the materialists that the kind of thought which marks the mind off from everything else must be something else besides simply "consciousness of the world". Something must come from it. This "something else" was defined in "Science et perception dans Descartes" as direction and method. And again in *Leçons de philosophie* (Roanne 1933-1934), it was defined as order and method. Thought that comes from the understanding has the ability to conceive of the infinite which gives meaning to the series: it can build a perfect plan with which to confront the obstacle-extension and encounter necessity. Simone Weil's necessity is full of reality, not just phenomena.

ENDNOTES: Chapter Two, Part Two

1 It seems to me that Simone Weil has captured the spirit of Lenin's book and fairly criticized it. One cannot do more in a book review. However, it is debatable as to whether or not she has given a fair description of the contents of the book. One might be surprised to find that Lenin engages in quite a lengthy discussion of the late 19th and early 20th century positivists -- especially Mach. Also, Lenin addresses some of the issues concerning contemporary science. He claims Boltzmann as a materialist. This may well have inspired Simone Weil to take another look at science from her own epistemological point of view. I will reserve her later discussion of contemporary science for the third chapter of this thesis.

2 Descombes mentions that Georges Bataille attended Kojève's course on Hegel from 1933-1939. Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy* (Cambridge, MASS: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p.10. In 1933 Simone Weil had some connection with Bataille, who was apparently a member of a group called the Communist Democratic Circle. Weil mentions his name many times

²⁷Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.216.

²⁸Weil, *Leçons*, op. cit., p.77.

- in a letter, responding to an invitation from Bataille to join the circle ("Letter to a circle"). See Simone Pétrement, *Simone Weil: a life* (New York: Random House, 1976), p.208-209.
- 3 Simone Weil quotes Marx from *Thèses sur Feuerbach*. This issue, concerning Marx' view of human nature and his theory of knowledge, has been widely discussed in the last fifty years -- especially since the arrival of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* had its impact. However, not many people see in Marx' thought this view of human nature as a kind of dualism -- which preserves the relation and the antagonism between the mind and nature. One who does interpret Marx this way is John McMurtry in *The Structure of Marx' World View* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978). McMurtry also shows the consistency in Marx' view of human nature between his early and later work. However, even McMurtry has a peculiar way of characterizing Marx' view of human nature. He claims that Marx distinguishes human beings from other animals because humans have a special capacity, which he calls "projective consciousness." This consciousness needs to express creativity through "composition," i.e., invention, and to universalize the self. This, McMurtry says, is human nature in general. This also accounts for human freedom.
- What is interesting about this account of Marx' view of human nature is that it makes only oblique suggestions as to what status the human capacity as "projective consciousness" has. There are, however, a couple of indications that McMurtry does not consider Marx' view of human consciousness to be a "free activity" as separate from the body: first, he rejects Sartre's early view of human consciousness; second, McMurtry explicitly rejects dualism as characterizing Marx' theory of human nature in general in a footnote (page 24, footnote 6).
- His argument is quite convincing, and explains some of the inconsistencies Simone Weil later finds in Marx' thought. However, what it does not explain is why human consciousness, which is defined by "projective consciousness," should necessarily escape that ancient curse called work. If this were to happen, would human nature in general no longer express itself in terms of the strong using their power to oppress the weak? Furthermore, it is not clear how an essentially material consciousness could free itself to make a plan of action.
- 4 Peter Winch argues that Simone Weil abandons the identification of thought and action, i.e., the view of consciousness she established in "Science et perception dans Descartes," in *Leçons de philosophie* (Roanne 1933-1934), to take up the materialist point of view. See Peter Winch, *Simone Weil: the just balance* (Cambridge, MASS: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 33. I disagree that Simone Weil abandoned the view that she established in "Science et perception dans Descartes." Even in *Leçons de philosophie* (Roanne 1933-1934) she only begins with the materialist point of view as a hypothesis which takes as its starting point "external world really exists." This is only an assumption -- and it is the same assumption she has had to make in her earlier essays. She also goes through the same stages of demonstrating how an individual obtains consciousness of itself and begins to think and act in the world. The major difference is that she does not speak in the first person in *Leçons de philosophie* (Roanne 1933-1934), so that the phenomenological descriptions are not used to show how consciousness is really first of all immersed in the world in "pure imagination." Nevertheless, the same thing is shown but perhaps more emphatically as a refutation of the materialists.
- 5 Again, Peter Winch, in *Simone Weil: the just balance* (Cambridge, MASS: Cambridge University Press, 1989) and "Introduction" to *Lectures on Philosophy* (Cambridge, MASS: Cambridge University Press, 1978) does not recognize the importance of the imagination in Simone Weil's view of perception. This is why, I think, he cannot see her view of perception does not change between "Science et perception dans Descartes" and *Leçons de philosophie* (Roanne 1933-1934). I do not agree that Simone Weil gets herself into a "straight-jacket" in "Science et perception dans Descartes," because in perception there is a relation between the body and that part of the mind which receives "thoughts from the imagination. See particularly, *Simone Weil: the just balance* 5-47.
- 6 Simone Weil agrees with Kant that mathematical reasoning cannot be reduced to the syllogism; that

mathematical propositions are not analytical propositions. rather they are synthetical propositions. See Kant's *Critique of pure reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1961: 199), where he claims that the proposition, "if equals be added to equals the whole are equal," is a synthetic proposition, and that "The assertion that 7 plus 5 is equal to 12 is not an analytical proposition." Simone Weil agrees with this both in "Science et perception dans Descartes," and *Leçons de philosophie* (Roanne 1933-1934). However, she claims in *Leçons* that it was Descartes who had demonstrated that "two quantities equal to a third are equal to each other" is not an analytical judgment" (*Leçons*, op. cit., p.84-85). This is also what she means when she is commenting on Descartes in "Science et perception dans Descartes" (181).

D. THE INDIVIDUAL SOUL IGNORED

Simone Weil's philosophical anthropology, as we have already seen from her review of Lenin's book, "Sur le livre de Lénine 'Matérialisme et empirio-criticisme'" met with a great deal of resistance. The whole of industrial society specializes in separating intellectual labour from manual labour so that it is seldom that the same individual is given the possibility to possess the relationship between language and action which brings reality with it. Marx, who seemed to have perceived this problem clearly and who claimed to have individual liberty of expression (spiritually) in mind, offered a solution which, according to Simone Weil, gives us a method to work with. In "Perspectives: Allons-nous vers la révolution prolétarienne?", we have already seen Simone Weil proposing that the socialists and communists reconsider what they were making the "supreme value" by unconsciously allowing politics to sweep them toward a form of "State Capitalism". The individual, not the collectivity should remain the supreme value, even for social.

Still, speaking to her comrades she tried to re-establish the goals of their political movement and the main force impeding the realization of these goals:

Nous voulons faire des hommes complets en supprimant cette spécialisation qui nous mutile tous. Nous voulons donner au travail manuel la dignité à laquelle il a droit, en donnant à l'ouvrier la pleine intelligence de la technique au lieu d'un simple dressage; et donner à l'intelligence son objet propre, en la mettant en contact avec le monde par le moyen du travail. Nous voulons mettre un pleine lumière les rapports véritables de l'homme et de la nature....les hommes de pensée et d'action travaillent méthodiquement à rendre l'esprit humain maître des forces de la nature; et le succès a dépassé les espérances. Mais au cours du siècle dernier l'on a compris que la société elle-même est une force de la nature....Or le mécanisme social, par son fonctionnement aveugle, est en train...de détruire toutes les conditions du bien-être matériel et moral de l'individu, toutes les conditions du développement intellectuel et de la culture. Maîtriser ce mécanisme est pour nous une question de vie ou de mort; et le maîtriser, c'est le soumettre à l'esprit humain, c'est-à-dire à l'individu.²⁹

²⁹Simone Weil, "Perspectives: Allons-nous vers la révolution prolétarienne?", *Oppression et liberté* (1955; Paris: Gallimard, 1981), p.32-34.

One of the obstacles to subjecting this "social force" to the human mind (the individual) was the differences within the political movement over what constitutes the relationship between man and nature, i.e., the differences between marxists concerning philosophical anthropology. Simone Weil dealt with the question initially in her review of Lenin's book and more thoroughly in *Leçons de philosophie (Roanne 1933-1934)*. In Simone Weil's works analysed thus far, the individual acting with thought in mind remains the value to be pursued and this value rests on the philosophical anthropology that she worked out in "Science et perception dans Descartes", and, in a different manner, in *Leçons de philosophie (Roanne 1933-1934)*. Furthermore, in *Leçons de philosophie (Roanne 1933-1934)*, she showed how profoundly society determines human knowledge and experience through language and the imagination. This realization made her project -- to make clear the errors in socialist/communist/marxist thought (in theory) -- so much more pressing. Also, socialist theory was the rhetoric behind Hitler's National-Socialist Party.

The communists and socialists of the time, rather than take real action, could always imagine that Hitler and his lieutenants were mere instruments in the hands of monopolistic capitalism. But Simone Weil could not accept this view for, as she argued in an article called "Réflexions sur la guerre", 'war socialism' of the sort Hitler proposed would be one of those revolutions which, according to Marx, perfect the state apparatus instead of destroying it.²⁴⁰

Au reste; pour reconnaître la parenté profonde qui lie le phénomène de la guerre et celui du fascisme, il suffit de se reporter aux textes fascistes qui évoquent "l'esprit guerrier" et le "socialisme du front." Dans les deux cas, il s'agit essentiellement d'un effacement total de l'individu devant la bureaucratie d'Etat à la faveur d'un fanatisme exaspéré. Si le système capitaliste se trouve plus ou moins endommagé dans l'affaire, ce ne peut être qu'aux dépens et non au profit des valeurs humaines et du prolétariat, si loin que puisse peut-être aller en certains cas la démagogie.²⁴¹

Simone Weil was prepared to struggle against the social force both at the political and theoretical level. She did not see any need to encourage the state machine by joining the enthusiasm for war. She maintained that the only way to struggle against the overwhelming bureaucracy of the state is to resist the easier solution of subordinating

²⁴⁰Simone Weil, "Réflexions sur la guerre," *Ecrits historiques et politiques* (1933; Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p.229-239.

²⁴¹Weil, "Réflexions sur la guerre", op. cit., p.238.

one's individual self to the machine apparatus. At that level of society, the individual must be protected in order to protect the mind from being subordinated to the language of the state bureaucracy because this would allow no freedom of thought.

According to Weil, society is like an immense machine that continually snatches up and devours people and that no one knows how to control. Those who sacrifice themselves for social progress are like people who would hang on to the wheels and the transmission belts in an attempt to stop the machine and who would be ground to bits in turn. She thought that the worst possible treason was to consent to subordinate oneself to this apparatus and to suppress all human values in oneself and others in order to better serve it.²⁴²

Simone Weil's solution was not to give up one's life to stop the machine, nor to give up the value of individual life. Perhaps the only possible way of change that she could reasonably think of was to fight against the state's oppressive ways from the inside. The only way that she could conceive of doing this was by focusing on the 'liberty' of the individual as both a spiritual and political value. She had perceived that the political parties that claimed to be marxist in orientation tended to encourage the growth of the state apparatus rather than its destruction.

Before we analyse Simone Weil's critique of Karl Marx' writings, I would like to show how Simone Weil's view of human nature as elaborated in "Science et perception dans Descartes", meets Marx' definition of manual labour as presented in *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. This is important for two reasons: first, Simone Weil's critique of Marx' *Capital* in *Réflexions sur les causes de la liberté et de l'oppression sociale*²⁴³ rests on her idea, outlined in "Perspectives: Allons-nous vers la révolution prolétarienne?", that Marx had a view of human nature similar to hers; and second, with this idea Simone Weil assumes that Marx maintained the opposition between subject and object and was thus a dialectical dualist like Hegel rather than a materialist.²⁴⁴

It was from this point of view that she began her critique of marxism. If this were not made clear before we analysed this text, then it would seem that Weil was imposing her own philosophical anthropology on Marx,

²⁴²Weil, "Réflexions sur la guerre", op. cit., p.239.

²⁴³Simone Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes de la liberté et de l'oppression sociale* (1955; Paris: Gallimard, 1980).

²⁴⁴See endnote 1.

criticizing him in the same way that she accused Lenin of arguing -- thinking with the object of refuting, the solution being already given before the research.²⁴⁵ But this was not the case. Simone Weil, as I have suggested earlier in this chapter, considered Marx to have begun his analysis of labour with a dualistic philosophical anthropology.

Thus, to better understand why Simone Weil criticized Marx' conception of the development of productive forces from the point of view of what should be the meaning of "free labour" or the "emancipation of man", in *Réflexions sur les causes de la liberté et de l'oppression sociale* I will first of all examine Marx' conception of "manual labour" in the *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. Then I will show how Simone Weil's conception of "manual labour" meets that of Marx. This clarification will give perspective to Simone Weil's project of thinking clearly about the theory behind the class movement.

We will see that she continued to hold her view of the human being throughout *Réflexions sur les causes de la liberté et de l'oppression sociale*. In the following pages, I will show that the philosophical anthropology that she had developed in the early writings, analysed above, formed the basis of her conception of liberty and oppression. In contrast to Springsted who claims that Simone Weil begins *Réflexions sur les causes de la liberté et de l'oppression sociale* with "an examination of man considered as an active material being"²⁴⁶ which seems to suggest to him that she adopts the materialist point of view, I will argue and show that her analysis throughout *Réflexions* is done from the point of view of her already developed dualistic conception of human nature. For some reason, Springsted presents her analyses in *Réflexions* as if she had not yet developed her early philosophical anthropology but as I have shown above this is not at all the case. But Springsted does recognize that Simone Weil in her critique of Marx was not a "thoroughgoing materialist". In fact, as I will show, Weil's critique of Marx and of oppression makes sense only when it is analysed from the point of view of her early view of human nature.

In critiquing the premises of "political economy" in the material on estranged labour in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx argued that the political economist assumes as a fact, what, in historical form, has to be explained. What Marx meant by this is that the system of political economy makes humans into

²⁴⁵Simone Weil, "Sur le livre de Lénin 'Matérialisme et empirio-criticisme'", *Oppression et liberté* (1955; Paris: Gallimard, 1981) 46.

²⁴⁶Springsted, *Christus Mediator*, op. cit., p.34.

property-less workers and it claims that this is a fact of the relationship between the division of labour and exchange. However, he pointed out that this fact of the property-less worker can be explained — at least in what it does to the worker. This fact, Marx said, expresses that the product of labour is "something alien... a power independent of the producer..."²⁴⁷ Now the problem with this is that the labourer's way of making himself real is by embodying himself in an object. If this object is taken away from him/her before he/she even sees it, then labour sees objectification as a "loss of realization", rather than as an affirmation of self. Marx states:

The product of labor is labor which has been embodied in an object, which has become material: it is the objectification of labor. Labor's realization is its objectification. In the sphere of political economy this realization of labor appears as a loss of realization for the workers; objectification as loss of the object and bondage to it...²⁴⁸

It seems clear that by losing the object of his/her work, the labourer is losing more than the 'material object'. He/she is also losing the embodiment of self in the object. His/her own activity becomes alien to him/her because the object of this activity is appropriated before he/she can see what his/her efforts have come to be. Thus it seems that for Marx, in this part of his analysis of manual labour, there is the labourer — a man who realizes himself through a great effort of the intellect, the mind — and nature. This interpretation draws on the following passages:

The worker can create nothing without nature, without sensuous external world. It is the material on which his labor is realized, in which it is active, from which and by means of which it produces. But just as nature provides labor with the 'means of life' in the sense that labor cannot 'live' without objects on which to operate, on the other hand, it also provides the 'means of life' in the more restricted sense, i.e., the means for the (physical subsistence) of the 'worker' himself.... What, then, constitutes the alienation of labor?...it (labor) does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind... As a result, therefore, man (the worker) only feels himself freely active in his animal functions...; and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal. What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁷Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), p.108.

²⁴⁸Marx, *Manuscripts of 1844*, op. cit., p. 108.

²⁴⁹ Marx, *Manuscripts of 1844*, op. cit., p. 72-74. We have seen that all of these passages can be interpreted differently — if we are willing to look at Marx' writings from the point of view of his later work. However, as I have noted, Simone Weil's interpretation remains reasonable as well. Soper (*Humanism and Anti-Humanism*; 31-37) pointed out that Marx tends to agree with both Hegel and Feuerbach in his earlier writings. Simone Weil perceived the problems of human nature within Marx, particularly as they depend on humans as "innovators."

Thus, for the Marx of *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, what distinguishes human beings from animals is the ability human beings have to act consciously and freely. According to his analysis animals are not conscious of their actions and they do not have the spiritual need to objectify themselves. Marx explicitly stated that:

The animal is immediately one with its life activity. It does not distinguish itself from it. It is its life activity. Man makes his life activity itself the object of his will and his consciousness. He has conscious life activity...²⁰

Simone Weil, in "Science et perception dans Descartes", and more so in *Leçons de philosophie* (Roanne 1933-1934), argued that the human being can act spontaneously -- what she called the "appearance of action" -- or they can really act through work with a method. She maintained that it is through work that reason grasps the world itself and masters the uncontrolled imagination.²¹

Par l'intermédiaire du monde seulement, par l'intermédiaire du travail, je les rejoins; car par cet intermédiaire, si je n'unis pas les deux parties de moi, celle qui subit, celle qui agit, je peux faire du moins que je subisse les changements produits par moi, que ce je subisse, ce soit ma propre action. C'était impossible tant que je ne savais que désirer, puisqu'au désir d'un bonheur quelconque ne correspondait qu'un mouvement dans le monde, entièrement étranger au bonheur. Mais si je ne fais porter ma volonté que sur l'idée d'une direction, à ce vouloir répond aussitôt une impulsion qui lui est conforme; ma volonté s'imprime toute vive dans le monde.²²

For Simone Weil, as for the early Marx, work was the embodiment of the self in the object. This is the real activity of the human being and it is this activity which distinguishes humans from animals, although humans also participate in the spontaneous or unconscious activity that makes an animal an animal. Thus, for Simone Weil, as for Marx, to make man's primary activity that spontaneous activity that constitutes the life activities of animals -- to make man's physical needs the whole of his activity -- was to suppress the worker. As Marx put it: "Estranged labor reverses this relationship, so that it is just because man is a conscious being that he makes his life activity, his essential being, a mere means to his existence."²³ From this comparison, we can see that for the early Simone Weil, and perhaps for the early Marx, human nature is defined in terms of the spiritual need to objectify oneself

²⁰ Marx, *Manuscripts of 1844*, op. cit., p. 113.

²¹ Simone Weil, "Science et perception dans Descartes," *Premiers écrits philosophiques*, ed. André Devaux and Florence de Lussy, *Simone Weil: Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988) Tome 1: 209.

²² Weil, "Science et perception", op. cit., p.209.

²³ Marx, *Manuscripts of 1844*, op. cit., p. 113.

and come to know oneself through work with a method. Thus, according to Simone Weil, not only is it the essence of the mind to act but it is the essence of the human mind to act through the body on the world. This is the only way the mind can limit chance. That is why she agreed with Marx' definition of man as the producer. However, what Simone Weil's critique of Marx brings to light is that Marx went off track when he adopted the materialist point of view whole-heartedly, thus giving no place to mind as "free activity".

It is on the basis of this analysis of what is essential to human nature that Simone Weil criticized Marx' later writings. She tried to show how Marx had lost sight of the idea of what is essential to human nature, and, thus, of the ideal goal of the proletariat revolution. Simone Weil began *Réflexions sur les causes de la liberté et de l'oppression sociale* with a critique of Marxism based on Marx' own writings. Once she established how she thought Marx had gone astray, Weil tried to set the proletarian movement back on track by redefining oppression and liberty, using as a basis what is essential to human nature. Then she analyzed contemporary society (1933-34) according to the limits of oppression and liberty. We will turn to this text to show that Simone Weil used her view of human nature as the point of departure in her judgment of Marx' later theories and in defining for herself oppression and liberty.

Simone Weil began *Réflexions sur les causes de la liberté et de l'oppression sociale* with a description of the state of affairs the proletariat movement found itself in throughout Hitler's rise to power. She lamented, as did Rosa Luxemburg, how the nationalist movements (and the authoritarian movements) left little hope for democracy. She despaired over the fact that work (such as it was) was in such short supply so that it was a privilege to have a job at all, never mind the conditions under which one worked. Technical progress had not brought happiness to the masses, but instead had left them floundering in physical and moral wretchedness. She considered how the workers and the concerned bourgeois intellectuals put their hope in a workers' revolution. Simone Weil parted ways with Rosa Luxemburg and all those like her when it came to this idea of a violent workers' revolution. As Weil said: "...voici longtemps que la classe ouvrière n'a donné aucun signe de cette spontanéité sur laquelle comptait Rosa Luxemburg, et qui d'ailleurs ne s'est jamais manifestée que pour être aussitôt noyée dans le sang..."²⁴

²⁴Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.11.

Furthermore, she said, revolution may be nothing more than a name -- without any precise content -- and it takes intellectual courage to face up to the possibility that the human beings who have sacrificed everything, their lives included, in the service of this word, may have spilled their blood as uselessly as the Greeks and Trojans who, duped by a false appearance, fought for ten years over the shadow of Helen.²³ How this could happen brings us to Simone Weil's analysis of Marx' own writings.

E. CRITIQUE OF THE DOCTRINE OF REVOLUTION

In the first section of *Réflexions sur les causes de la liberté et de l'oppression sociale*, "Critique du Marxisme", Weil explained how Marx himself fell under the spell of the capitalist and bourgeois ideology which he was so adept at analyzing. She admired the account Marx made of the mechanism of capitalist oppression, but within this account, she argued, there is a difficulty which Marx had not perceived.

Marx' analysis showed that the reason for the exploitation of the workers does not reside in the desire on the part of the capitalist to consume and enjoy; rather, it exists in the struggle to expand the undertaking so that the capitalist can be more powerful than his rivals. Marx perceived that as long as there is a struggle for power fought out through the victory of industrial production the workers will be exploited. But, argued Simone Weil, what Marx assumed, but did not prove, is that every kind of struggle for power will disappear on the day socialism is established in all industrialized countries. She noted that Marx had every opportunity to see his own oversight. He recognized that revolution could not take place in every country at once. And even when it did take place in one country, it still had to exploit its workers in order to remain at least as strong as the other nations. Marx, said Simone Weil, had noticed how science was used by the capitalists in their pursuit of power and she cited Marx from *Capitale*:

Dans la fabrique...il existe un mécanisme indépendant des travailleurs, et qui se les incorpore comme des rouages vivants...La séparation entre les forces spirituelles qui interviennent dans la production et le travail manuel, et la transformation des premières en puissance du capital sur le travail, trouvent leur achèvement dans la grande industrie

²³ Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.12.

fondée sur la machinisme. Le détail de la destinée individuelle du manoeuvre sur machine disparaît comme un néant devant la science, les formidables forces naturelles et le travail collectif qui sont incorporés dans l'ensemble des machines et constituent avec elles la puissance du maître.²⁵⁶

Thus, she argued, workers' oppression "repose sur la structure de l'usine et non sur le régime de la propriété."

Bourgeois-capitalist culture is founded on the degrading division of labour into manual and intellectual labour; that is, it is a culture of specialists. Scientists have the monopoly on knowledge (i.e., method), and state oppression is implemented by the organizers -- those who decide how this knowledge gets put into action. After this analysis, Simone Weil asked herself: how could Marx and his disciples believe in the possibility of a real democracy based on our present civilization? For, she said:

Toute notre civilisation est fondée sur la spécialisation, laquelle implique l'asservissement de ceux qui exécutent à ceux qui coordonnent; et sur une telle base, on ne peut qu'organiser et perfectionner l'oppression, mais non pas l'alléger. Loin que la société capitaliste ait élaboré dans son sein les conditions matérielles d'un régime de liberté et d'égalité, l'instauration d'un tel régime suppose une transformation préalable de la production et de la culture.²⁵⁷

Simone Weil answered the above-stated question with an account of Marx and his disciples' theory of the development of the productive forces. He argued that the development of the productive forces was practically unlimited and the true motive power of history. Every social system, every dominant class has the task or the historic mission, as Weil interpreted Marx, of carrying the productive forces to an ever higher level, until the day when all further progress is arrested by the social cadres and a new class takes power.²⁵⁸

She pointed out that it was Marx' idea to use the capitalist system against itself because, he argued, even the force of condemning it morally for grinding down millions of men in its pursuit of power does nothing to undermine the system. However, Marx thought that the capitalists (and their system) would be condemned by historical progress itself as they would end up being not the directors or executors of productive progress, but the obstacle to it, making way for the proletariat to emancipate the productive forces. Thus, said Simone Weil, "La tâche des

²⁵⁶ As quoted by Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.15-16.

²⁵⁷ Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.17.

²⁵⁸ Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.17-18. It is at this point that Simone Weil sees Marx deviating from his Hegelian view of human nature. This is what she tries to make clear in her criticism of Marx.

révolutions consiste essentiellement dans l'émancipation non pas des hommes mais des forces productives."²³⁹

Simone Weil argued that Marx noticed this oversight in his theory and so he searched for a way to reconcile his aspirations to emancipate humankind along with the productive forces. He argued, therefore, that once production is developed to a level high enough for it to be carried out at the cost of little effort, the emancipation of man would coincide with the emancipation of the productive forces. She noted with some irony how Marx conceived this would come about:

A ses yeux, la technique actuelle, une fois libérée des formes capitalistes de l'économie, peut donner aux hommes, dès maintenant, assez de loisir pour leur permettre un développement harmonieux de leurs facultés...jusqu'à ce que l'humanité atteigne enfin un état à proprement parler paradisiaque, où la production la plus abondante coûterait un effort insignifiant, où l'antique malédiction du travail serait levée...²⁴⁰

Simone Weil points out that Marx' theory of the development of the productive forces as something that tends towards the better was based on Darwin's view of evolution – that human beings adapt to their conditions of existence. But, she argued, in this theory Marx did not hold, as Darwin did, that human beings play an active part in the betterment of the productive forces. Rather, he assumed as a postulate that productive forces have a tendency to improve – an inexplicable tendency. Thus, she said, Marx allied himself with Lamarck, not Darwin, because it was Lamarck who based his biological system on an inexplicable tendency of living creatures to adapt. Marx founded his revolutionary theory on the inexplicable tendency of productive forces to develop towards the better (increase). Thus, she pointed out that Marx implicitly admitted that productive forces have a secret virtue or power that permits them to overcome obstacles.²⁴¹

Although Marx thought that his theory of the revolution and the productive forces was scientifically based, Simone Weil argued that it was absolutely devoid of any scientific basis. She explained that Marx' theory of the development of productive forces was actually rooted in Hegel's thought. She pointed out that Hegel believed in a hidden mind at work in the universe and thus to study history is to study the history of this world mind. The identifying characteristic of mind for Hegel is that mind tends indefinitely toward perfection. Marx, she argued,

²³⁹ Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.18.

²⁴⁰ Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.18-19.

²⁴¹ Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.20.

accepted Hegel's view of history except for one difference – he saw "matter" as the motive power of history, not "mind". And so, "par un paradoxe extraordinaire, il a conçu l'histoire, à partir de cette rectification, comme s'il attribuait à la matière ce qui est l'essence même de l'esprit, une perpétuelle aspiration au mieux."²⁰²

With this one difference, Simone Weil asserted, Marx fell into the capitalist mode of thinking by transferring the principle of progress from mind to things and giving philosophical expression to the reversal of the relationship between subject and object. Worse still, Marx did not escape religion as he had thought. According to Weil, "croire que notre volonté converge avec une volonté mystérieuse qui serait à l'oeuvre dans le monde et nous aiderait à vaincre, c'est penser religieusement, c'est croire à la Providence."²⁰³

It is characteristic of some religions to make humans into instruments of Providence. Scientific socialism has this characteristic as it makes humans instruments of historical progress or productive progress. Simone Weil was aware that Marx had the highest goals of equality and liberty in his heart when he was conceiving his view of historical materialism; however, she claimed, he ended with a view that was as utopian as the socialism that Marx, himself, criticized.

Simone Weil separated out Marx' materialistic idea of productive forces and showed that it served to oppress modern Russia. However, she recognized that there was another side to Marx' materialism that would be useful to future generations. The affirming side is based on what Simone Weil considered to be the only comprehensive view of human nature: "on trouve chez Marx une autre conception...un materialisme qui n'a plus rien de religieux et constitue non pas une doctrine, mais une methode de connaissance et d'action."²⁰⁴ This method comes from what Simone Weil said was Marx' truly great idea: "c'est que dans la société aussi bien que dans la nature rien ne s'effectue autrement que par des transformations matérielles." And quoting Marx: "Les hommes font leur propre histoire, mais dans des conditions déterminées."²⁰⁵

²⁰² Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.21.

²⁰³ Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.21.

²⁰⁴ Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.22.

²⁰⁵ Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.23.

In *Réflexions sur les causes de la liberté et de l'oppression sociale* she recast the idea:

Désirer n'est rien, il faut connaître les conditions matérielles qui déterminent nos possibilités d'action; et dans le domaine sociale, ces conditions sont définies par la manière dont l'homme obéit aux nécessités matérielles en subvenant à ses propres besoins, autrement dit par le monde de production.²⁶⁶

Thus, Marx discovered a method of analysis. Human beings can critically study what material transformations have taken place, the method of production that is used, the expected output, and if there is a form of social and cultural organization that is compatible with it. Finally they can study how society might be transformed for the better. The human being has the ability to reflect on the conditions of existence and to formulate a plan of action to methodically improve these conditions and to methodically improve social organization. Simone Weil proposed to try the method Marx himself did not deploy. Her analysis remains relevant to our own times; however, it is out of the range of this thesis to consider it here. Nonetheless, the end of her analysis does suggest giving a meaning to what she showed to be a word without any content -- revolution. Revolution, she says, is "the abolition of social oppression." Furthermore, she suggested this definition of revolution should act as a revolutionary ideal; as a theoretical limit of feasible social transformations.

F. OPPRESSION: SEPARATION OF THOUGHT AND ACTION

To be clear about this revolutionary ideal, Simone Weil thought it was necessary to distinguish between oppression and the subordination of personal desires to a social order. She pointed out that society will always put constraints on the life of individuals, but it is only named oppression,

...dans la mesure où, du fait qu'elle provoque une séparation entre ceux qui l'exercent et ceux qui la subissent, elle met les seconds à la discrétion des premiers et fait ainsi peser jusqu'à l'écrasement physique et moral la pression de ceux qui commandent sur ceux qui exécutent.²⁶⁷

Thus, we see that Simone Weil defined social oppression as a form of social organization in which thought and action are so thoroughly separated one from the other that work physically and morally crushes the individual.

²⁶⁶Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.23.

²⁶⁷ Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.39.

She added that unemployment and the lack of work is equally oppressive to the individual – for then the individual neither gets to think nor to act. We see here that her analysis of oppression is based on her dualistic conception of human nature. In studying the problem of oppression, Simone Weil decided to use Marx' excellent analysis of the present system of production in her attempt to answer the question of whether it would ever be possible to abolish social oppression or even conceive of the abolition of social oppression by means of a limit. She raised the problem:

...si l'on peut concevoir une organisation de la production qui, bien qu'impuissante à éliminer les nécessités naturelles et la contrainte sociale qui en résulte, leur permettrait du moins de s'exercer sans écraser sous l'oppression les esprits et les corps.²⁶⁸

To solve this problem, Simone Weil considered the history of social oppression and how other past thinkers overcame the problem, again especially Marx. She noted that, generally, thinkers regard the usurpation of power by the oppressors either by force or systematic persuasion to be the cause of oppression. The people's opposition to the usurpation of power was either to express a radical disapproval or to use armed force in the name of justice. However, the people have never entirely succeeded in erasing oppressive regimes. Even when they did succeed in ridding themselves of one oppressive regime, another one always seemed to replace it. Marx, said Simone Weil, perceived this failure to be caused by choosing techniques that were not appropriate for attacking the causes of oppression. The causes of oppression, according to Marx, were the objective – material – conditions of the social system.²⁶⁹ Simone Weil pointed out how Marx' analysis of oppression drew on the theory of evolution which Marx attributed to Darwin but, as we saw above, actually originated with Lamarck. If the cause of oppression rests with the material conditions of the social system, then it is the organ (i.e., division of labour), which develops from the social function (i.e., production):

Il (Marx) élaborait ainsi une conception de l'oppression tout à fait neuve, non plus en tant qu'usurpation d'un privilège, mais en tant qu'organe d'une fonction sociale. Cette fonction, c'est celle même qui consiste à développer les forces productives...et, entre ce développement et l'oppression sociale, Marx et Engels ont aperçu

²⁶⁸Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.40.

²⁶⁹Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.42.

des rapports réciproques.²⁷⁰

According to Marx and Engels, oppression develops in relation to the system of production in an evolutionary process: first, oppression becomes established when improvements in production have brought about a sufficiently advanced division of labour; second, a higher stage of development of the productive forces will make oppression no longer necessary. However, Simone Weil claimed that this analysis, as brilliant as it was, left unanswered a whole host of questions about the mechanism of oppression and the mechanism of liberation.²⁷¹ Furthermore, she argued, Marx and his disciples made the assumption that oppression corresponds to a function in the struggle against nature. Weil claimed that this assumption rested on the unconscious application of Lamarck's principle that the function creates the organ to social organisms. In the case of Marx' analysis, the development of production creates the division of labour. The division of labour creates oppression. But, noted Simone Weil, Darwin replaced Lamarck's principle with the notion of "conditions of existence". It was Darwin's improvement on Lamarck's theory of evolution that allowed biology to become a science. The function cannot be considered the cause of an organ – it is not because birds fly that wings developed (my example), in fact it is quite the contrary – the function is the result of the organ. The bird can only fly (function in this way) if the organ (wings) exist. Thus, said Simone Weil:

"...le rôle de cause n'est dès lors attribué qu'à un mécanisme aveugle, celui de l'hérédité combiné avec les variations accidentelles...l'adaptation de l'organe à la fonction rentre ici en jeu de manière à limiter le hasard en éliminant les structures non viables, non plus à titre de tendance mystérieuse, mais à titre de condition d'existence..."²⁷²

What Simone Weil argued here was that the function – flying – cannot be the cause of an organ – wings, but perhaps out of the need to survive due to certain conditions of existence an animal would develop wings. Thus, there is an adaptation of the organ to the demands of the conditions of existence. But the process is prompted by the conditions of existence, which is an exterior necessity, and not, as Lamarck had thought, an interior necessity. It was not true for Simone Weil that the system of production is necessarily the cause of division of labour, and therefore oppressive. However, if the system of production is orchestrated to be oppressive, it will probably be so.

²⁷⁰ Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.42.

²⁷¹ See endnote 2.

²⁷² Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.45.

In order to avoid oppression, Simone Weil suggested that it would be useful to improve the Marxist analysis of social oppression, just as Darwin improved Lamarck's analysis of evolution. The way to do this would be to take Marx' organized structures — those which have not been organized by anyone — and to show that there are, in fact, organizers. However, she pointed out that these organizers must be made aware of themselves and of the conditions of existence in which they operate. Thus, this new analysis of oppression would look for the causes of social evolution in the daily efforts of humans considered as individuals. What Simone Weil tried to point out is that underlying what appears to be society evolving in its own direction, are individuals, either expressing what is essential to their nature: "la nature humaine comporte entre autres choses le pouvoir d'innover, de créer, de se dépasser soi-même..." or submitting to the conditions of existence which demands their conformity.²⁷³ Thus, again we see underlying Simone Weil's analysis is her view of human nature. There is a distinction made between those who direct their conditions of existence and those who allow themselves to be directed by their conditions of existence. "Ces conditions d'existence sont le plus souvent ignorées des hommes qui s'y soumettent; elles agissent non pas en imposant aux efforts de chacun une direction déterminée..."²⁷⁴

Of course, the distinction is not clear-cut. The social is always a part of the human being because of the imagination and especially because of language. However, the choice to direct one's own life with one's own plan of action should always be a possibility for the individual even though it is limited by the social world. There are two terms to the social problem for Simone Weil; the dualistic nature of the human being, and the conditions of existence. I have already given an account of Simone Weil's early conception of human nature; therefore, I will now give her account of the conditions of existence. The conditions of existence, according to Weil, are determined by: the natural environment; the existence of activity and especially the competition of other organisms of the same species, such as other social groups (in the case of society); and the organization of the natural environment, capital equipment, armaments, methods of work and warfare. With these terms of the social problem clearly laid out, Simone Weil felt that it would be possible to arrive at a concrete analysis about the limits of a social

²⁷³Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.45.

²⁷⁴Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.45.

system, the degrees of oppression and liberty. These would, of course, be ideal limits around which it might be possible to organize a society. To do this, she needed to develop an analysis of the nature of oppression and liberty.

In studying the nature of oppression, Simone Weil again used Marx as a kind of spring-board, and looked at oppression as it had manifested itself in other historical periods. Her analysis consists of looking at what oppression consists of in primitive societies where production is also primitive and then comparing it to more highly developed societies.

Again, I will point out how Simone Weil uses her early dualistic conception of human nature as the basis of her analysis of oppression. In primitive societies, she argues, each individual seems relatively free with respect to other individuals because he/she is in direct contact with the conditions of his/her own existence. Yet humans are more immediately subjected to nature's dominion. At higher stages of production, humans seem to dominate nature (organic nature) but, claimed Weil:

...cette émancipation n'est qu'une flatteuse apparence. En réalité, à ces étapes supérieures, l'action humaine continue, dans l'ensemble, à n'être que pure obéissance à l'aiguillon brutal d'une nécessité immédiate; seulement, au lieu d'être harcelé par la nature, l'homme est désormais harcelé par l'homme.²⁷⁵

The reason that oppression is the same whether it be caused by being subjected to nature or to other human beings is, according to Simone Weil, because both oppress with force — actually force originates in nature — and humans use the tools from nature/human nature combined, to oppress. One example she gives is the existence of privileges which she claims are inevitable in human development. Such privileges can give rise to forces that come between ordinary man and his own conditions of existence. For instance, privileges can become force when nature's powers become the monopoly of a few priests or of the scientific community. Privileges also develop in other ways: by the development of arms; the replacement of gold or money as a means of exchange of goods; the development of society demands co-ordinators, etc. Nonetheless, said Simone Weil, privileges alone are not sufficient to cause oppression — there must also be a will for power:

Cependant les privileges, par eux-mêmes, ne suffisent pas à déterminer l'oppression. L'inégalité pourrait facilement être adoucie par la résistance des faibles et l'esprit de justice des forts; elle ne ferait pas surgir une nécessité plus

²⁷⁵Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.51. Simone Weil first broached the idea in "Perspectives: allons-nous vers la révolution prolétarienne?". Rousseau also made this claim in *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*.

brutale encore que celle des besoins naturels eux-mêmes, s'il n'intervenait pas un autre facteur, à savoir la lutte pour la puissance.²⁷⁶

According to Simone Weil, this struggle for power is never-ending, and in turn, makes the struggle against oppression continual as well. The struggle against nature may weigh heavily, but it does not oppress man because nature resists, but she does not defend herself. As Simone Weil explained in "Science et perception dans Descartes", as long as a human being makes the effort to see the problems faced in nature as an obstacle, then he/she can choose to devise a method of action to deal with the problems. However, she pointed out, in the struggle against other humans, it is a completely different matter. Once one man has gained power over others, he must maintain it both against rivals and inferiors, and the subjected cannot do otherwise than try to rid themselves of their oppressor. As Simone Weil said: "...par un cercle sans issue, le maître est redoutable à l'esclave du fait même qu'il le redoute, et réciproquement; et il en est de même entre puissances rivales."²⁷⁷ She argued that the two methods which would break the vicious circle prove to be defective. The method of 'setting up a state power' — a balance between those who command and those who obey — shows itself to be a chimera because of the nature of the struggle between man and man, and ultimately because of human nature: "...les hommes sont des êtres essentiellement actifs, et possèdent une faculté de se déterminer eux-mêmes qu'ils ne peuvent jamais abdiquer, même s'ils le désirent, sinon le jour où ils retombent par la mort à l'état de matière inerte..."²⁷⁸ Again we see Simone Weil using her early dualistic conception of human nature as the basis of her analysis of power as a means of oppression. Human nature itself makes all power unstable because there is, at the centre of power, a contradiction which makes power non-existent in any real way. The masters are always struggling to maintain their power against the real and constant threat of losing everything to another or to the people. This struggle in itself demonstrates the essential impossibility of possessing power. The instruments of power can be taken up by others. On the other hand, the other method of breaking the vicious circle — by abolishing inequality — remains equally difficult since

²⁷⁶ Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.54.

²⁷⁷ Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.55.

Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.57.

the very methods of labour and of warfare rule out equality.

Finally, Simone Weil argued there will always be social oppression because the race for power enslaves the strong and weak alike. She defined the "essential evil" that plagues humanity as "the substitution of means for ends". This reversal shows its absurd nature when human life is constantly sacrificed for things which are merely a means to a better way of living. Weil thought that the necessity of social oppression could not be considered a providential necessity as Marx seemed to be suggesting. Weil pointed out that Marx, in developing his theory of the productive forces, merely developed Aristotle's idea that slavery could be abolished if there were mechanical slaves to do the indispensable jobs. This would be true, she said, if men were guided by considerations of welfare, but she argued:

...depuis l'époque de l'Iliade jusqu'à nos jours, les exigences insensées de la lutte pour le pouvoir ôtent même le loisir de songer au bien-être. L'élévation du rendement de l'effort humain demeurera impuissante à alléger le poids de cet effort aussi longtemps que la structure sociale impliquera le renversement du rapport entre le moyen et la fin....²⁷⁹

This reversal comes about as soon as society is divided into some who command and others who execute; then, the whole of social life is governed by the struggle for power. There is no possibility of returning to primitive methods of production because the natural environment has already been transformed. We return to the problem of the separation of thought and action, which Marx and Weil in their earlier works, claimed to be the effects of the modes of production of all oppressive societies – in Marx' case, the capitalist system and in Simone Weil's case, all higher forms of society. In Simone Weil's analysis of oppression, she added a new term to be considered in the analysis of social oppression – the "problem of power." She proposed this modification to Marx' analysis of the relations between man and nature established by production:

La vue marxiste selon laquelle l'existence sociale est déterminée par les rapports entre l'homme et la nature établis par la production reste bien la seule base solide pour toute étude historique; seulement ces rapports doivent être considérés d'abord en fonction du problème du pouvoir, les moyens de subsistance constituant simplement une donnée de ce problème. Cet ordre semble absurde, mais il ne fait que refléter l'absurdité essentielle qui est au coeur même de la vie sociale. Une étude scientifique de l'histoire serait donc une étude des actions et des réactions qui se produisent perpétuellement entre l'organisation du pouvoir et les procédés de la production; car si le pouvoir

²⁷⁹Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.63-64.

dépend des conditions matérielles de la vie, il ne cesse jamais de transformer ces conditions elles-mêmes.²⁰

As I pointed out above, this analysis is based on Weil's early conception of human nature. She pointed out that "power" is essentially an individual capacity -- as soon as one has to collaborate to maintain power, then one faces potential rivals. Thus, true power extends only to what is effectively under the control of the faculties of a single individual. This makes the idea of "collective power" a fiction. Other factors allowing one person to oppress another include the instruments at this individual's disposal, the ability to make enough surplus to keep everyone-- "master or slave"-- alive, and the belief among the powerful that they are inherently superior to those they have power over. She describes the latter factor in the following manner:

Les puissants, qu'ils soient prêtres, chefs militaires, rois ou capitalistes, croient toujours commander en vertu d'un droit divin; et ceux qui leur sont soumis se sentent écrasés par une puissance qui leur paraît divine ou diabolique....²¹

Simone Weil called this tendency the religion of power. This religion of power cements every oppressive society and falsifies all social relations making it possible for the powerful to command more than what they are able to simply impose. Instead of one man acting on and reacting to nature, there are several men putting into action the thought of one man. The result is a state of social oppression in which those who command direct those who obey. Weil cited Goethe, who in *Faust* expressed it as: "Un esprit suffit pour mille bras."

Simone Weil pointed out that the weight of nature on primitive man has been overcome by man making himself the master of nature, as Descartes had predicted. But by a strange inversion, the weight of social oppression on the individual equals the weight of nature on primitive man and so it seems that ... "l'homme ne puisse parvenir à alléger le joug des nécessités naturelles sans alourdir d'autant celui de l'oppression sociale, comme par le jeu d'un mystérieux équilibre."²² The difference between primitive man and a worker in a factory is that the former could

²⁰Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.64-65.

²¹ Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.67.

²²Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.77.

still try to think things out and innovate at his/her own risk, whereas the worker, engaged in a production line, does not have that possibility. Thus, claimed Simone Weil: "L'humanité se trouve de ce fait le jouet des forces de la nature, sous la nouvelle forme que leur a donnée le progrès technique, autant qu'elle l'a jamais été dans les temps primitifs.... Il semblerait que l'homme naisse esclave, et que la servitude soit sa condition propre."²³

This was Simone Weil's first implicit expression of the idea that work has always been, and always will be, a part of the human condition. She acknowledged at that time that her account of the human condition had been, all along, the Biblical condition described in Genesis. In other words, her account of work as an essential part of human nature was an acknowledgement that humans were "born enslaved, and that servitude was their proper condition." Perhaps she did not consciously realize before this that her account of the human condition cohered with the Biblical account. It seems to me that until Simone Weil worked with the unions she was somewhat uncertain about her own views on work and how work connected with the human condition. Also, she had not really attended to how Marx conceived of liberty; that is, as a paradisiacal state to which we evolve. For Weil, that paradisiacal vision of liberty remained no more than a dream, a consolation for working people. The points of divergence between her own views and those of Marx were clearly defined when she saw for herself the working conditions. Only then did she become fully conscious that human beings will never totally be relieved of that "ancient and desperate curse of Genesis." She realized that she held a different conception of liberty from the other marxist and socialist activists.

Thus, Simone Weil argues that even though servitude is, on the one hand, the natural condition of the human being, on the other hand, the human being is a "thinking creature" and one knows (or has the correct intuition) that no matter what happens, one cannot accept servitude. And so there is this other ideal limit, which balances out oppression — liberty. But, said Weil, instead of dreaming of liberty as in the communism imagined by Marx, it would be useful to clearly represent perfect liberty as an ideal. It would be possible to direct society towards the ideal — not with the expectation of attaining it — but to allow for a system of measurement: "L'idéal est tout aussi irréalisable que le rêve, mais, à la différence du rêve, il a rapport à la réalité; il permet, à titre de limite, de ranger

²³Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.84.

des situations ou réelles ou réalisables dans l'ordre de la moindre à la plus haute valeur."²⁴ Simone Weil clearly stated that, unlike Marx, she did not put forth her conception of "perfect liberty" for the purpose of ridding human beings of necessity. Rather, her conception of liberty values an encounter with necessity as an obstacle to be overcome through action with a method in mind.

G. LIBERTY

In 1943, Simone Weil defined liberty thusly: "La Liberté, au sens concret du mot, consiste dans une possibilité de choix. Il s'agit, bien entendu, d'une possibilité réelle."²⁵

The question which comes to mind is: What constitutes real choice? Would it consist of being able to choose between the red t-shirt or the yellow t-shirt in a boutique, as the capitalists offer? Or, would it consist of being able to have a modest life with enough to eat and a home to live in, without working for it, as the Marxists propose?

Actually neither of these choices constituted liberty for Simone Weil. The first kind of choice -- between one t-shirt and another -- is liberty defined as caprice. Simone Weil did not include this kind of choice in her idea of liberty because it involves no possibility for encountering obstacles, no opportunity for self-conquest. This kind of choice takes no effort of thought. The more these kind of choices occupy one's imagination the more one is delivered over to caprice. These kinds of choices only exercise the imagination because they are completely removed from "true needs" let alone the "needs of the primitive man" who is presently considered by us to be a slave to nature. If we restrict the idea of needs to what would allow for a healthy body and soul, we quickly recognize that the choice between a red and yellow t-shirt is completely foreign to needs.

In this state one has no liberty. One acts in accordance with those who decide the fashion in the broad sense and in reaction to the emotions one feels when one's efforts have been or have not been appreciated. One is not free when one acts with the images of fashion. "Un homme serait complètement esclave si tous ses gestes procédaient

²⁴Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.85.

²⁵ Simone Weil, *L'Enracinement: prélude à une déclaration des devoirs envers l'être humaine* (1949; Paris: Gallimard, 1977), p.21.

d'une autre source que sa pensée, à savoir ou bien les réactions irraisonnées du corps, ou bien la pensée d'autrui...."²⁶ Thus, when the capitalists work to condition girls/boys – and consumers generally – to want the latest in fashion, these girls (or consumers generally) become slaves to the images presented to them or slaves to the world.

However, the second idea of liberty – the idea of being able to satisfy one's needs or desires without work was also rejected by Simone Weil. First of all, she rejected the idea of liberty as being defined as the satisfaction of needs or desires without having to work for it.²⁷ She argued that this is a dream because it goes against "human nature." The human being, she said, is a "thinking creature" and a part of the universe to which humans are subjected. If one has no need to work, then one has no way to control the imagination and come face to face with reality. Work is the only kind of action that allows the human being to express what characterizes human nature: "la nature humaine comporte entre autre choses le pouvoir d'innover, de créer, de se dépasser soi-même ..."²⁸

Simone Weil argues that we cannot define liberty as a way of escaping encounter with necessity because that leads to caprice. Human beings cannot just create their own needs and then seek to satisfy these endlessly – as humans now seem to be engaged in doing in our stage of late capitalism. According to Simone Weil's philosophical anthropology there is thought as well as body – there is the universe. Both of these constitute the only means of encountering "necessity". If humankind arrives at the state in which all needs and desires are whimsical and have no relation to necessity (which belongs to the relation between human thought and the universe), then the individual loses sight of the universe as an obstacle to action and worst of all as a means to encounter reality. Without reality, the individual remains in a dream-like state. According to Simone Weil's idea of human nature, work is the only way out of this dream-like state: "...il n'y a pas d'autre source de discipline pour l'homme que l'effort demandé par les obstacles extérieurs."²⁹ Simone Weil had her own way of interpreting Kant's phrase: "La colombe, quand

²⁶ Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.89.

²⁷ Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.85. Simone Weil points out that this was Marx' idea of liberty – but she says this is a dream – and if it offers consolation, it does so in the same way as opium.

²⁸ Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.45.

²⁹ Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.86.

dans son libre vol elle fend l'air dont elle sent la résistance, pourrait croire qu'elle volerait encore mieux dans la vide.²⁹⁰ She interpreted "la colombe" as thought and "l'air" as "the world", the obstacle to thought. For the dove to fly it needs the air; if there is no air the dove ceases to fly. Human thought needs the world as its obstacle to be able to think and to act. Thus, Simone Weil thought that the Marxists' and later capitalists' conception of liberty in which the world ceases to be the obstacle was absurd. In such a world the human being would cease to be able to think and act. This sends the human being back to a state of "pure imagination", a state of "reaction to emotions", to feeling lost the way a dove would be without the ability to fly:

Le corps humain ne peut en aucun cas cesser de dépendre du puissant univers dans lequel il est pris; quand même l'homme cesserait d'être soumis aux choses et aux autres hommes par les besoins et les dangers, il ne leur serait que plus complètement livré par les émotions qui le saisiraient continuellement aux entrailles et dont aucune activité régulière ne le défendrait plus.²⁹¹

Simone Weil argues that human beings cannot create their own obstacles. For instance, the American's need to race the Russians to the moon turned the notion of obstacle into something completely arbitrary -- which is, of course, a contradiction. An obstacle cannot be created -- because that renders the whole thing a game. A game is, however, completely divorced from reality. Thus an artificial obstacle cannot replace the true obstacle and, consequently, cannot prevent human beings from falling prey to their emotions and even madness.

Il suffit de tenir compte de la faiblesse humaine pour comprendre qu'une vie d'où la notion même du travail aurait à peu près disparu serait livrée aux passions et peut-être à la folie Un peuple d'oisifs pourrait bien s'amuser à se donner des obstacles, s'exercer aux sciences, aux arts, aux jeux; mais les efforts qui procèdent de la seule fantaisie ne constituent pas pour l'homme un moyen de dominer ses propres fantaisies. Ce sont les obstacles auxquels on se heurte et qu'il faut surmonter qui fournissent l'occasion de se vaincre soi-même.²⁹²

Simone Weil argued that primitive people were less oppressed than many people of the 20th century, especially the workers and the unemployed. Humans today believe they have completely overcome the nature which they perceived as enslaving primitive peoples and, indeed to some degree, they have:

Enfin il semble que nous soyons parvenus à cette époque prédite par Descartes où les hommes emploieraient "la force et les actions du feu, de l'eau, de l'air, des astres et de tous les autres corps" en même façon que les métiers

²⁹⁰ Weil, *Leçons*, op. cit., p. 98.

²⁹¹ Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.87.

²⁹² Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.86-87.

des artisans, et se rendraient ainsi maitres de la nature.²⁹³

But it is not the individual human being who has accomplished this power over nature, rather: "... seules les plus vaste collectivités sont en état de manier la force et les actions de feu, de l'eau, de l'air ... et de tons les autres corps qui nous entourent."²⁹⁴ But instead of being enslaved by nature, individual human beings have become enslaved by other human beings, as she said:

Par malheur, cette émancipation n'est qu'un flatteuse apparence. En réalité, à ces étapes supérieures, l'action humaine continue, dans l'ensemble, à n'être que pure obéissance à l'aiguillon brutal d'une nécessité immédiate; seulement, au lieu d'être harcelé par la nature, l'homme est désormais harcelé par l'homme.²⁹⁵

She argues that collective power over nature does not constitute liberty for the individual because the social element intervenes first at the level of conditioning with respect to what ends one should pursue and then at the level of what means one should use to arrive at those ends. According to Simone Weil, social conditioning becomes oppressive and prevents human beings from exercising their liberty of choice when the society completely removes all occasions for thought and the relation between thought and action becomes obscured. A human being can no longer make a judgment about the ends to be pursued and the means by which these ends should be pursued if he/she no longer understands the relation between one's actions and the means and ends being pursued, as she says:

On les voit abandonner dans une large mesure la recherche de la nourriture, de la chaleur et du reste, et consacrer le meilleur de leurs forces à des travaux en apparence stériles. A vrai dire ces travaux, pour la plupart, loin d'être stériles, sont infiniment plus productifs que les efforts de l'homme primitif, car ils ont pour effet un aménagement de la nature extérieure dans un sens favorable à la vie humaine; mais cette efficacité est indirecte, et souvent séparée de l'effort par tant d'intermédiaires que l'esprit a peine à les parcourir ...²⁹⁶

Thus, according to Simone Weil's analysis, an individual from a primitive society has a better chance of

²⁹³ Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.78.

²⁹⁴Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.79.

²⁹⁵ As quoted above, Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.51. We will examine the aspect of human nature which necessarily turns this power over nature into oppression for some human beings.

²⁹⁶Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.81.

approximating what Weil defines as perfect liberty than an individual who participates fully in modern society. An individual from a primitive society can know, by the demands made from the body, what ends must be pursued and can easily understand the simple methods, passed on by ancestors, used to meet these ends. But the individual of modern society is alienated from an understanding of why one pursues the ends they pursue — which seem so removed from one's needs — and of how one's actions are a means to these ends. According to Simone Weil, *true liberty* is defined by having the choice and the ability to consent to necessity which for the human being means to "know thyself" — to know that one has a body which has certain needs and a mind which must act through the body in order to encounter reality. As she said:

La liberté véritable ne se définit pas un rapport entre le désir et la satisfaction, mais par un rapport entre la pensée et l'action; serait tout à fait libre l'homme dont toutes les actions procèderaient d'un jugement préalable concernant la fin qu'il se propose et l'enchaînement des moyens propres à amener cette fin.²⁹⁷

The individual of a primitive society can understand the ends being pursued and the means to pursue these ends. This individual has the "liberty" to think about how to overcome obstacles encountered and to act in accordance with these thoughts. Since nature is generally the guide to what ends are to be pursued, these ends generally have a relation to "the beauty of the world". But the factory worker has no direct relation to the ends being pursued, nor does he/she understand the means to those ends; thus, he/she has no thought about the end being pursued nor about the means of obtaining that end.

Simone Weil's analysis of true liberty claims that each individual should have the choice to obey the relationship (which is ours insofar as we are human) between thought and action. For this to be possible, each one must have an understanding of the fact that one has the choice at any point in life to represent necessity to oneself and to act according to this representation, thus attempting to limit chance oneself or to act solely in relation to the spur of either conditioning or desire:

L'homme vivant ne peut en aucun cas cesser d'être enserré de toutes parts par un nécessité absolument inflexible; mais comme il pense, il a le choix entre céder aveuglement à l'aiguillon par lequel elle le pousse de l'extérieur, ou bien se conformer à la représentation intérieure qu'il s'en forge; et c'est en quoi consiste l'opposition entre servitude

²⁹⁷Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.81.

et liberté.²⁹⁸

When one no longer knows whether the ends one pursues have a relation to the kinds of ends that are a finality (in the way beauty is a finality), then one is not free and all those engaged in that pursuit are not free. However, not only is it necessary for the end to be related to beauty, but it is also necessary that the means be in total accordance with the end. Simone Weil believed Bacon to be saying this when he stated: "L'homme commande à la nature en lui obéissant." If human beings were to respect this truth, then the end would always be in accordance with "the beauty of the world"; the means in accordance with the end, because each individual would see in each situation the value of consciously submitting to necessity. A factory in which the body and soul of the workers are sacrificed to the means (production) is an example of the end justifying the means; thus, there is a gap between the means and the end. But in the example of human liberty given by Simone Weil, there is no gap between the means and the end:

On trouve des différences analogues dans l'action collective; une équipe de travailleurs à la chaîne surveillés par un contremaître est un triste spectacle, au lieu qu'il est beau de voir une poignée d'ouvriers du bâtiment, arrêtés par une difficulté, réfléchir chacun de son côté, indiquer divers moyens d'action, et appliquer unanimement la méthode conçue par l'un d'eux, lequel peut indifféremment avoir ou ne pas avoir une autorité officielle sur les autres. ♣²⁹⁹

Although liberty must always be the conscious consent to act in accordance with thought, it is clear from this example that Simone Weil did not think that every individual must be an innovator, a scientist or an artist. Rather, in the case of the worker, what is important is that he/she understands the reason for pursuing a certain end and how the means is in accordance with the end and that both the end and the means are in accordance with necessity.

Simone Weil knew very well that this perfect liberty is no more than a useful ideal and "...ne peut pas se trouver dans une situation réelle que la droite parfaite ne peut être tracée par le crayon...."³⁰⁰ For Simone Weil, it is also based on her conception of the human being as described in "Science et perception dans Descartes"; for, it is by means of the human mind overcoming the bodily weaknesses for desires and fears (i.e., the imagination),

²⁹⁸Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.88.

²⁹⁹Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.113.

³⁰⁰Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.91.

and coming up against necessity (i.e., the material world), and directing this material to allow for his/her own existence. In this sense, the imagination (in the human body), and the matter (of the world), would be an obstacle – there would always be perfect obedience to mind in the case of the human body and the realization in matter of what the mind conceived, and in this way the human being does, in fact, produce his/her own conditions of existence.

She pointed out that it is in keeping with human nature for human beings to use that which is highest in the species. For example, the ability to act with method in mind in order to gain power (therefore causing social oppression) is natural, but it is equally natural to act with method in mind in order to be perfectly free (and therefore allowing others to be free as well). Simone Weil's study of oppression and liberty shows how human nature presents us with this choice. With these two conceptions of liberty and oppression in mind, she proposed to outline her conception of a perfectly free society and then to measure how contemporary society falls into oppression.

H. WEIL'S EARLY THOUGHTS ON A "FREE SOCIETY"

The first obstacle to the perfect free society is both a limitation and a challenge for the human being. The world is too big and complex for our human intellect to deal with. However, according to Simone Weil, we do have a means to overcome this obstacle and it lies in the development of science. Weil's analysis of how we can overcome this obstacle is based on her dualistic philosophical anthropology. We can reflect on what the material world gives us and we can invent a chain of intermediaries – an abstract diagram of how to link our movements to the results we wish to obtain in the material world. In this way, she pointed out (as she did in "Science et perception dans Descartes"), man can succeed in preventing the complexities of the world from overwhelming the individual mind. As mentioned above, what Simone Weil considers to be important and what science helps us to do is to restrict the role of chance events as much as possible. This helps us make method the core of our work. As she said: "Ce qui importe, c'est que ce rôle soit subordonné et n'empêche pas la méthode de constituer

l'âme même du travail."³⁰¹ Thus, the first obstacle to living in a free society can be minimized by a thinking being inventing plans of action and methods to deal with the complexity of the world.

The first obstacle has turned out to be a blessing in disguise, because it encourages the human being to exercise his/her essential faculty and to become conscious of the value of this faculty in eliminating chance actions. Knowing how to act, what Simone Weil considered to be real human action, gives the human being the feeling that he/she can know the world and thereby provide his/her own conditions of existence. Nature was mysterious to the primitive man, but modern man, on the other hand, can know nature and how to operate with her. Thus we form in our mind the idea of necessity and we apply it to the world. However, there is still one source of mystery that even the moderns cannot eliminate, and that is what constitutes the immediate relationship linking our thoughts to our actions. In this area, she said, we cannot conceive of any necessity because we cannot determine the intermediate links, only an approximate regularity. That is why human beings, in the age of science and technology, prefer to use passive instruments in the struggle against nature because these instruments are more reliable. As well, humans can make the combination of movements that he/she conceives pass directly into instruments, and then "...la notion de nécessité apparaît dans sa pureté, sans aucun mélange de magie."³⁰² With this technology, the human body is reduced to playing the intermediary role between mind and instruments, and every new technical advance helps to reduce it to this intermediate role.

This method of gaining liberty from the natural world by subjecting all forms of work to methodical thought gives rise to a new obstacle to liberty because of the profound difference between methodical thought and the application of this thought. For instance, as Simone Weil points out, the person who is solving a problem at the theoretical level will proceed from what is simple to what is complex; whereas, the movements of the manual worker may be simple or they may be complex. For both, the rule of thumb is the movements which come before are the condition of those which come after. The difference between the sequence of ideas and the sequence of movements permits the following situation to occur: the person putting ideas into action may not be the person

³⁰¹Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.93.

³⁰²Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.96.

who has conceived these ideas. As Simone Weil said it: "On ne peut dire en pareil cas que l'action soit à proprement parler méthodique; elle est conforme à la méthode, ce qui est bien différent. La différence est capitale; car celui qui applique la méthode n'a pas besoin de la concevoir au moment où il l'applique."³⁰³ Simone Weil pointed out that we are faced with a paradoxical situation: we see that there is method in work but not in the thoughts of the workers.³⁰⁴ The method conceived by a mind can be completely transferred to a piece of metal which can carry out the method even better than a human being. The workers who serve the machine are reduced to the condition of automata — as Marx had asserted in *Capital*. That is why Simone Weil, in a letter to Alain, could say:

...l'aventure de Descartes a mal tourné. C'est donc qu'il manque quelque chose au *Discours de la Méthode*. Quand on compare le *Regulae* à la *Géométrie*, on sent bien qu'il manque en effet beaucoup. Pour moi, voici la lacune que je crois y trouver. Descartes n'a pas découvert un moyen d'empêcher l'ordre, aussitôt conçu, de devenir une chose au lieu d'une idée.³⁰⁵

This is a problem not only for the application of method in the material world, but also between the application and the understanding of method in the realm of pure theory. And Simone Weil gives a simple example of this; it is difficult to work out a division sum and to keep the theory of division in mind. Also, we forget that the symbols we are working with signify something and it becomes more difficult to keep this relationship in mind when we are dealing with something as abstract as algebra. The reason for this is there are too many theories involved and the signs often signify more than we are capable of keeping present in the mind at once. Here, the signs are related to one another on the sheet of paper without the relations being made in the mind to the degree that:

On se trouve ainsi avoir résolu un problème par une sorte de magie, sans que l'esprit ait mis en rapport les données et la solution. Dès lors là aussi, comme dans le cas de la machine automatique, la méthode semble avoir pour domaine les choses au lieu de la pensée; seulement, en l'occurrence, les choses ne sont pas des morceaux de métal, mais des traits sur du papier blanc.³⁰⁶

³⁰³Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.98.

³⁰⁴ Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.99. Marx, as Simone Weil has noted, showed how this operates to oppress workers and give power to capitalists. Marx does not, however, present the same kind of criticism as Simone Weil does. He does not explicitly claim that work with a method should be valued.

³⁰⁵ Simone Weil, "Réponse à une lettre d'Alain," *Sur la Science* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), p.111.

³⁰⁶Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.101-102.

Order becomes a thing. Weil said in her letter to Alain, when a series is considered as a reality distinct from the terms which compose it; for example, through expressing it with a symbol as in algebra. Only by analogy can a series be conceived without severing it from its terms. Analogy makes it possible for thought to be, at the same time, absolutely pure and absolutely concrete.³⁰⁷ She argued that the more science progresses by accumulating ready-made combinations of signs the more the mind becomes weighed down to the point where it is powerless to draw up an inventory of ideas that it can handle. The abstract limit of a civilization that continues like this was conceived by Simone Weil as one

"...où toute activité humaine, dans le domaine du travail comme dans celui de la spéculation théorique, serait soumise jusque dans le détail à une rigueur toute mathématique, et cela sans qu'aucun être humain comprenne quoi que ce soit à ce qu'il ferait; la notion de nécessité serait alors absente de tous les esprits..."³⁰⁸

Thus, the separation of thought from action in the individual is the major obstacle to a free society in our day; whether it be in the area of manual labour in which one acts without method in mind; or, in the area of theory, in which one is engaged solely in combining ideas without understanding each idea in itself.

This problem persists in our society today and is perhaps more serious now than in her day. Simone Weil proposes to overcome this problem with a mode of production in which methodical thought is in operation throughout the course of work.³⁰⁹ For this to be possible, it would be necessary for the difficulties that the worker faces everyday to vary. Furthermore the worker would be expected to bear in mind the principle behind the work he/she is doing so that he/she can apply it when needed. Simone Weil realizes that to have such presence of mind while working is quite demanding, for it asks, as Hegel said so well, that the body be rendered fluid through habit and skill. This proposal is, of course, an ideal which may never be fully realized but, as Simone Weil says, with this ideal in mind we could at least expand the sphere of conscious work. As she suggests, "Il suffirait à cette fin

³⁰⁷Weil, "Réponse à une lettre d'Alain", op. cit., p.111.

³⁰⁸Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.103.

³⁰⁹She deals with the problem as it relates to the separation of thought from action in thought itself in later thought on science.

que l'homme visât non plus à étendre indéfiniment ses connaissances et son pouvoir, mais plutôt à établir, aussi bien dans l'étude que dans le travail, un certain équilibre entre l'esprit et l'objet auquel l'esprit s'applique."³¹⁰

Another obstacle to a free society is the existence of other human beings. According to Simone Weil this is the main obstacle. She points out that nature is a force which can break the human being, but as we saw above, nature remains inert and can be understood from the outside. But "other human beings" can never be understood or handled from the outside. Thus, the interdependence between humans can be the cause of much humiliation and degradation for both the oppressed and the person of power alike, although in different ways. The powerful know few limits to their commands. They do not have the clear perception of necessity that is gained when one puts into action one's own commands. Those who carry out the orders of the powerful often do not understand what they are doing.

This power relationship between human beings leads to situations whereby the individual is constantly dependent on the play of collective life. According to Simone Weil, such situations bring into existence social hierarchies. She questions this method of determining the social hierarchy. She claims that when social hierarchies come into existence like this the individual has very little control over the nebulous abstraction; that is, the collectivity. It is inaccessible to both the senses and to the mind: "...l'individu qui en est membre ne peut, semble-t-il, l'atteindre ni la saisir par aucune ruse, peser sur elle par aucun levier; il se sent vis-à-vis d'elle de l'ordre de l'infiniment petit."³¹¹ When this nebulous collectivity directs human society, instead of being directed by ideas, we become directed by opinions; what Weil calls "human arbitrariness". According to Simone Weil's philosophical anthropology, being directed by opinions is equivalent to being directed by pure imagination or by one's emotions. Thus, just as man was not made to be the plaything of nature, he was also not made to be the plaything of blind collectivities. Simone Weil searched for a way to deal with this problem of how to keep the blind collectivity under the control of the individual; in other words, how to direct the collectivity according to thought rather than imagination or human arbitrariness.

³¹⁰ Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.104. Simone Weil gives us a full account of how this could be accomplished in *L'Enracinement*, her last completed work.

³¹¹Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.107.

Simone Weil's analysis of this problem is completely dependent on what is unique about the human being:

...les forces collectives dépassent infiniment les forces individuelles....C'est là du moins l'apparence; mais en réalité il y a une exception et une seule, à savoir le domaine de la pensée. En ce qui concerne la pensée, le rapport est retourné; l'individu dépasse la collectivité autant que quelque chose dépasse rien...³¹²

However, she was careful to point out that the mind is not a "force" *per se*, because all forms of force are material. It is, rather, because mind is not materially indispensable that it can be a force: "...l'homme n'a rien d'essentiellement individuel, n'a rien qui lui soit absolument propre, si ce n'est la faculté de penser...". To this, she forcefully added: "Car tout le reste peut être imposé du dehors par la force, y compris les mouvements du corps, mais rien au monde ne peut contraindre un homme à exercer sa puissance de pensée, ni lui soustraire le contrôle de sa propre pensée."³¹³ Society is, in fact, dependent on the individual insofar as it has need of thought. Thus, we can conceive, in a purely theoretical way, of a free society in which collective life would be subjected to human beings as individuals. Such a free society, Weil proposed, could be achieved if society was organized around the principle that all efforts should be directed by the individual intellect. This meant that each worker would control, by himself/herself, how he/she completed his work and how he co-ordinated with the other workers. In order for this to be possible, technology would have to allow the worker to continually use his/her thought; thus, the workers would have to be technically educated. Each worker would have to understand what the others are doing so as to coordinate their efforts.

One of Simone Weil's main goals in conceiving this theoretical view of society was to replace the fiction of a Golden Age, brought about by Progress, with this ideal standard. This standard, she thought, could act as the basis of analysis and of an evaluation of actual social patterns.

Weil's purely theoretical picture of a free society and understanding of oppression intended to improve on Marx' method of social analysis by offering a method similar to Marx' own. Weil began as Marx had with the relations of production, but her analysis differed from Marx' doctrine in that the modes of production were not, as he conceived of them, classified in terms of output but rather they were analysed in terms of the relations between

³¹²Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.107-108.

³¹³Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.108-109. This is typically existentialist in tone.

thought and action. She argued that for there to be a free society the idea of progress must be replaced by a scale of values conceived outside of time. This analysis cannot be used to design the future in advance. It must be used, rather, to situate the society being studied according to these values.³¹⁴ A certain aspect of social life, taken at a given period, will be analysed in reference to this scale of values. Weil, however, does not develop her view of this scale of values at this time.³¹⁵

Simone Weil thought that by indicating the areas where thought should be exercised or, as she otherwise expressed it, "les zones d'influence de l'individu sur la société," we could reach general views about the various modes of social organization in terms of the ideas of servitude and liberty. She suggested three areas in which thought can play a role in social life: "...elle peut élaborer des spéculations purement théoriques, dont des techniciens appliqueront ensuite les résultats; elle peut s'exercer dans l'exécution; elle peut s'exercer dans le commandement et la direction."³¹⁶ If people, who carry out these social functions, were to exercise their individual capacity to think, then the human aspect would be preserved.

Simone Weil's analysis brings to light other factors that lead to social oppression. In all of these areas what is generally missing is individual thought. First, she argues that the more a person is given the power to coordinate functions which he/she cannot himself/herself carry out the more oppressive collective life becomes for the individual. Second, the degree of social oppression is proportionate to the degree to which the individual is dependent upon society for its existence. The degree of dependence may vary – the greater the dependence, the greater the chance of being oppressed – and the examples Simone Weil offered clearly show her preoccupation with the worker. Third, the individual's position with respect to the method of warfare practised by the society has a great bearing on the degree the individual is oppressed by the collectivity.

³¹⁴ For all this to happen, Simone Weil argued, like Rousseau, that it would be best to keep the collectivity relative to the range of the human mind and that although the individual would be in a position to exercise control over the collective life as a whole, the decisions made would be in accord with the general will [*Reflexions sur les causes*, 110]. See endnote 3.

³¹⁵ In chapter three of this thesis we will thoroughly analyse what Simone Weil means when she refers to this scale of values as conceived outside of time and later calls an "unchanging morality".

³¹⁶ Weil, *Reflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.114.

From the above analysis, we see that Simone Weil defines her conception of a free society in terms of her early conception of human nature and its relation to work with a method in mind. This is clearly stated in the following passage, in which she summed up her idea of the least oppressive society:

...la société la moins mauvaise est celle où le commun des hommes se trouve le plus souvent dans l'obligation de penser en agissant, a les plus grandes possibilités de contrôle sur l'ensemble de la vie collective et possède le plus d'indépendance. Au reste les conditions nécessaires pour diminuer le poids oppressif du mécanisme social se contrarient les unes les autres dès que certaines limites sont dépassées; ainsi il ne s'agit pas de s'avancer aussi loin que possible dans une direction déterminée, mais, ce qui est beaucoup plus difficile, de trouver un certain équilibre optimum.³¹⁷

All of these factors when analyzed with respect to a particular society should, according to Simone Weil's social analysis, present a picture of how oppressed the individuals of the society are; that is, how alienated the individual's actions are from his/her thought. Simone Weil's early dualist philosophical anthropology shows that the human is in essence defined by the relationship of thought to action. Her ideas of oppression and liberty and of a free society are based on her early conception of human nature. As we saw above, the lack of this relationship of thought to action in the individual causes oppression. When the collectivity is the cause of this oppression it is social oppression.

Weil argues that the way to make a society fully human is to have manual labour as its pivot. As Simone Weil said, "...la civilisation la plus pleinement humaine serait celle qui aurait le travail manuel pour centre, celle où le travail manuel constituerait la suprême valeur."³¹⁸

She is careful to qualify this statement. Manual labour, as the supreme value, has nothing to do with the religion of production which reigned in America or in Russia. The object of that religion was the "produce" of the worker. Again, Simone Weil explicitly states her greatest concern – the human being – not the product. "Manual labour" should be the pivot of society because, in order for each individual to give value to life, he/she must come to grips with necessity by relating his/her own thought to his/her actions.

Manual labour should be at the centre of culture. "Culture", Weil argues, should have preparing human beings for real life as its true value—today, she claims, culture has become a means of escaping from real life. For example, science, one of the central activities of our culture today, does not value this relation between the

³¹⁷Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.117.

³¹⁸Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.117. Her vision of such a society is blueprinted in *L'Enracinement*.

individual intellect and the world. Science is regarded, by some, as a mere catalogue of technical recipes and, by others, as a body of pure intellectual speculations, sufficient in themselves. However, these views of science have lost sight of the individual. Simone Weil laments that scientific abstraction loses one of its terms:

La pensée est bien la suprême dignité de l'homme; mais elle s'exerce à vide, et par suite ne s'exerce qu'en apparence, lorsqu'elle ne saisit pas son objet, lequel ne peut être que l'univers.³¹⁹

Weil thinks that science and labour will always be incomplete as long as human beings are not connecting thought and action through the individual labourer: "...on peut concevoir une science qui se proposerait comme fin dernière de perfectionner la technique non pas en la rendant plus puissante, mais simplement plus consciente et plus méthodique."³²⁰ Weil quoted the Bible to point out that her thinking was clearly inspired by the best motives: "cherchez d'abord le royaume des cieux et tout le reste vous sera donné par surcroît."³²¹ This is how Descartes conceived of science -- a method for mastering nature, arranged as a catalogue of concepts, in an order that would be completely clear to the mind. So we see that Simone Weil returned to her original idea, as she conceived it in "Science et perception dans Descartes" that science, as Descartes had conceived of it, should work together with labour, so that each individual in society will have the possibility of confronting necessity, as conceived in *Leçons de philosophie* (Roanne 1933-1934). According to Simone Weil's ideal civilization, social relations would be modelled around the the organization of labour -- small working collectivities in which cooperation would be "the sovereign law":

...chaque moment de l'existence apporterait à chacun l'occasion de comprendre et d'éprouver combien tous les hommes sont profondément un, puisqu'ils ont tous à mettre aux prises une même raison avec des obstacles analogues; et tous les rapports humains, depuis les plus superficiels jusqu'aux plus tendres, auraient quelque chose de cette fraternité virile qui unit les compagnons de travail.³²²

Simone Weil had no illusions about this view being true to life -- she knew that it was completely

³¹⁹Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.120.

³²⁰Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.120.

³²¹ As quoted by Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.120.

³²²Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.121.

utopian. However, she felt that this description, of a Utopia based on manual labour as its supreme value, was needed. Thought has been impregnated with this idea since the Renaissance. Since the miracle of Greece, she claimed, that the idea of labour as a human value has been the only spiritual conquest. Bacon, she thought, was the first to put forth this idea when he said: "L'homme commande à la nature en lui obéissant." Simone Weil understood this to mean that labour is an act of conscious submission to necessity. Furthermore, she claimed many modern thinkers have either explicitly or implicitly expressed this idea: Goethe, Rousseau, Shelley, Tolstoy, Proudhon and, of course, Marx and Descartes.

From the above analysis we see that same concepts continually reappear in Simone Weil's philosophical works: human beings, mastering nature by facing necessity, by obeying nature. Human beings must reflect on what they receive (perceive) from nature through their body and perceive to be certain. In other words, we humans are constantly perceiving, but it is only when we stop and reflect on what we perceive (receive from our bodies) that we can make a judgment and then a plan of action -- invent a way to deal with nature so that we can continue to live. On the other hand, if the society is set up in such a way that it completely prevents the human being from planning his/her actions through reflection and acting accordingly, or it separates thought from action in such a way that some think and others do, then this society is set up to oppress. An individual never faces necessity. Thinkers never encounter the effect of their plan of action -- to see whether, or even, when adjustments need to be made. The actors do not understand the reason for their actions -- this is the extreme of oppression in which the individuals never face necessity, never relate thought to action. Human beings are not given the opportunity to express what is essential to their nature.

In Simone Weil's view, society should be organized for humankind. The mind and body should work together -- there should be no alienation for the mind nor for the body. When Weil presents her analysis of the social order, she presents us with two pictures: the most oppressive society and the perfectly free society. With these descriptions in mind we can work out a way to place our own society, and to strive for a balance between the two. This balance can be met by attempting to prevent social oppression by looking for its causes and by overcoming them, and reflecting on ways for overcoming them and thereby directing society towards liberty. A free society gives each and every individual the possibility of being a balanced human being.

I. FACTORY WORKER

In accordance with her early philosophical anthropology, Simone Weil thought that manual labour should be valued above all other roles in society, therefore, she wanted to become a manual labourer herself. Manual labour allowed the human being to come face to face with necessity. However, as Simone Weil's study of Marx suggested, not all kinds of manual labour would provide this encounter with necessity. Factory owners in capitalist countries and in Soviet Russia are more interested in the "output" from production than in ways of improving the life of the worker. Simone Weil decided to experience the conditions of the worker in order to be able to reflect on and invent a plan of action to solve the problem of improving the life of the worker. In the following pages, I will analyse Simone Weil's "Journal d'Usine" to see what she considered to be the human experience of a factory worker. The conventional analysis of Simone Weil's work treats her factory experience as a dividing point in her philosophy; that is, it is said that this experience changed her philosophy in some basic way.³²³ I will consider whether this is so in relation to her philosophical anthropology.

About the middle of March, 1935, toward the end of her time in the Alsthom factory, she wrote to one of her former students at Le Puy about the effects of this kind of work on the human being:

Un homme, s'il est très adroit, très intelligent et très costaud, peut à la rigueur espérer, dans l'état actuel de l'industrie française, arriver dans l'usine à un poste où il lui soit permis de travailler d'une manière intéressante et humaine; et encore les possibilités de cet ordre diminuent de jour en jour avec le progrès de la rationalisation. Les femmes, elles, sont parquées dans un travail tout à fait machinal, où on ne demande que la rapidité. Quand je dis machinal, ne croyez pas qu'on puisse rêver à autre chose en le faisant, encore moins réfléchir. Non, le tragique de cette situation, c'est que le travail est trop machinal pour offrir matière à la pensée, et que néanmoins il interdit toute autre pensée. Penser, c'est aller moins vite; or il y a des normes de vitesse, établies par des bureaucrates impitoyables, et qu'il faut réaliser, à la fois pour ne pas être renvoyé et pour gagner suffisamment....³²⁴

In the above passage, we see that she remained preoccupied with the idea of the worker working without thought in mind while working on the machines. Furthermore, in her factory journal, she cites examples of situations wherein she experienced and saw the difficulty of thinking while doing the work. One example, given below, is taken from her seventh week of work:

³²³See notably, *Christus Mediator* by Eric Springsted, and this thesis chapter 1, p.45-48.

³²⁴ Simone Weil, *La condition ouvrière* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), p.32. Hereafter, *La condition ouvrière*.

L'épuisement finit par me faire oublier les raisons véritables de mon séjour en usine, rend presque invincible pour moi la tentation la plus forte que comporte cette vie: celle de ne plus penser, seul et unique moyen de ne pas en souffrir. C'est seulement le samedi après-midi et le dimanche que me reviennent des souvenirs, des lambeaux d'idées, que je me souviens que je suis aussi un être pensant.... Je ne suis pas loin de conclure que la salut de l'âme d'un ouvrier dépend d'abord de sa constitution physique.³²⁵

Weil points out how human beings react in such a situation. They do not, as many unions maintain, feel strong enough to revolt. Rarely does this happen:

La révolte est impossible, sauf par éclairs (je veux dire même à titre de sentiment). D'abord, contre quoi? On est seul avec son travail, on ne pourrait se révolter que contre lui — or travailler avec irritation, ce serait mal travailler, donc crever de faim... On est comme les chevaux qui se blessent eux-mêmes dès qu'ils tirent sur les mors — et on se courbe. On perd même conscience de cette situation, on la subit, c'est tout. Tout réveil de la pensée est alors douloureux.³²⁶

Weil writes about the inability to think while working, or even after work, due to fatigue. Weil expresses her views on many practical considerations, such as: the difficulty of the work, what relations were like between people, and how difficult it is to keep to the required speed and to make enough money to survive. Eventually, the work at Alsthom began to bore her so much that she "ne cesse de rêver". However, around the end of her time at Alsthom she managed to reach the required speed but, as she said, the condition for reaching it was continual repetition of the operations and a cessation from thinking. By this point, she felt a profound humiliation and a bitterness of heart. As she writes: "Sens profondiment l'humiliation de ce vide imposé à la pensée. J'arrive enfin à aller un peu vite..., mais l'amertume au coeur."³²⁷

In an article, "Le Mystère de l'usine" Weil also analyses why the factory has this effect on its workers. She wrote her analysis after 15-weeks of work at Alsthom. Weil claims that the machine is a mystery for the worker because most of the workers she met had not studied mathematics. Simone Weil says that this lack of knowledge is the main reason why the worker lacks confidence in using the machine. In the Alsthom factory, she compared the way Guihéneuf, an engineer, handles the machines to how one of the workers handles it:

le tourneur qui, par tâtonnement a trouvé un outil permettant decylindrer a la fois l'acier et le nickel, au lieu de changer d'outil pour passer d'un métal à l'autre. Pour Guihéneuf, c'est une coupe, simplement; il y va carrément.

³²⁵Weil, *La condition ouvrière*, op. cit., p.67-68.

³²⁶Weil, *La condition ouvrière*, op. cit., p.68.

³²⁷Weil, *La condition ouvrière*, op. cit., p.65.

L'autre avec un respect superstitieux. De même une machine qui ne va pas. L'ouvrier verra qu'il faut y mettre telle ou telle chose...mais souvent y fait une réparation qui, tout en lui permettant de marcher, la voue à une usure plus rapide, ou à un nouvel accroc. L'ingénieur jamais.³²⁹

According to Weil, there are three reasons for the worker's lack of understanding: "l'ouvrier ignore l'usage de chaque pièce; 1. la manière dont elle se combine avec les autres; 2. la succession des opérations accomplies sur elle; 3. l'usage ultime de l'ensemble."³²⁹

With these problems in mind, Simone Weil proposes that the following changes in factory operations might improve the conditions of existence of the worker: "Des machines-outils diverses se côtoyant dans un même atelier. Le montage à côté." For factories, in general, she suggests that "La disposition de l'usine visant à donner à chaque travailleur une vue d'ensemble (cela suppose évidemment la suppression du système des régleurs)."³³⁰ Again, we see that her demands for change concern the understanding of the worker so that he/she can act with thought in mind – and even if he/she is not thinking all the time – he/she can always draw on this knowledge when in need of it.

Simone Weil claims her ideas did not change as a result of her work in the factory, as she said in a letter to Mme Albertine Thévenon: "Cette expérience, qui correspond par bien des côtés à ce que j'attendais, en diffère quand même par un abîme; c'est la réalité, non plus l'imagination. Elle a changé pour moi non pas telle ou telle de mes idées (beaucoup ont été au contraire confirmées)". However, in the next sentence she wrote that it altered her perspective on things, her feelings about life: "Elle a changé...mais infiniment plus, toute ma perspective sur les choses, le sentiment même que j'ai de la vie."³³¹ In the same letter, Weil hints at how the experience changed her as a human being – she would always carry a certain sorrow in her heart for the human beings who are degraded by this work: Je connaîtrai encore la joie, mais il y a une certaine légèreté de cœur qui me restera, il

³²⁹Weil, *La condition ouvrière*, op. cit., p.98.

³²⁹ Weil, *La condition ouvrière*, op. cit., p.99.

³³⁰Weil, *La condition ouvrière*, op. cit., p.99-100.

³³¹Weil, *La condition ouvrière*, op. cit., p.9.

me semble, toujours impossible."³³² And she wrote in the same letter: "C'est inhumain: travail parcellaire – à la tâche – organisation purement bureaucratique des rapports entre les divers éléments de l'entreprise, les différentes opérations du travail."³³³ Also, doing this work changed her perspective of politics; she realized the difference between actually working in a factory and being a politician or an activist with the idea of creating a "free working class", as she says to Mme Thévenon:

quand je pense que les grands chefs bolcheviks prétendaient créer une classe ouvrière libre et qu'aucun eux – Trotsky sûrement pas, Lénine je ne crois pas non plus – n'avait sans doute mis la pied dans une usine et par suite n'avait la plus faible idée des conditions réelles qui déterminent la servitude ou la liberté pour les ouvriers – la politique m'apparaît comme une sinistre rigolade.³³⁴

My main concern will be to determine whether her change of perspective includes a profound change of her early conception of human nature or whether it is, rather, a broadening of her philosophical anthropology.

In Simon Weil's account of her experience at the Renault factory (the last of the three factories in which she worked), one notices that she speaks less about being unable to think while working. She dwells more on the details of the actual work and on the relations with the people inside. She had more or less adjusted to this form of labour.

As she says at the end of her journal: "Chez Renault, j'étais arrivée à une attitude plus stoïcienne. Substituer l'acceptation à la soumission."³³⁵ Simone Weil goes from dwelling on the degradation she finds in the factory work towards a more stoic attitude. But how does this change take place and does it involve a change in her view of the human being?

At the end of her journal she gives us a few ideas about how this transformation takes place. She says what she had learned from her factory work experience:

"Gagné à cette expérience? Le sentiment que je ne possède aucun droit, quel qu'il soit, à quoi que ce soit (attention de ne pas le perdre). La capacité de me suffire moralement à moi-même, de vivre dans cet état

³³²Weil, *La condition ouvrière*, op. cit., p.9.

³³³Weil, *La condition ouvrière*, op. cit., p.20.

³³⁴Weil, *La condition ouvrière*, op. cit., p.20.

³³⁵Weil, *La condition ouvrière*, op. cit., p.145.

d'humiliation latente perpétuelle sans me sentir humiliée à mes propres yeux; de goûter intensément chaque instant de liberté ou de camaraderie, comme s'il devait être éternel. Un contact direct avec la vie..."³³⁶

Thus, Simone Weil realizes that direct contact with life can also come about through extreme humiliation -- if one can find the courage and value within oneself to surmount the humiliation.:

J'ai failli être brisée. Je l'ai presque été - mon courage, le sentiment de ma dignité ont été à peu près brisés pendant une période dont le souvenir m'humilierait, si ce n'était que je n'en ai à proprement parler pas conservé le souvenir. Je me levais avec angoisse, j'allais à l'usine avec crainte: je travaillais comme une esclave;...Le temps était un poids intolérable....Et l'objet de la crainte, c'étaient les *ordres*.

Le sentiment de la dignité personnelle tel qu'il a été fabriqué par la société est *brisé*. Il faut s'en forger un autre (bien que l'épuisement éteigne la conscience de sa propre faculté de penser!). M'efforcer de conserver cet autre.³³⁷

In spite of what Simone Weil believes about this other way to conserve the value of oneself -- it is still not clear what this other way consists of, but it seems to be something internal, rather than thought about a plan of action. I will argue in chapter three, that this change of perspective brings about a broadening of Simone Weil's philosophical anthropology rather than an essential change of her early conception of human nature. Even though she herself has become more stoic out of necessity, we will see that she continues to hold her ideal conception of a "free society" as one in which an individual should have the possibility to relate his/her own thought to his/her own action. It is from this point of view that we should see her claim that there is always this need of "external signs" of one's self-worth: "On a toujours besoin pour soi-même de signes extérieurs de sa propre valeur."³³⁸

Simone Weil began her work and factory journals with the idea that a human being obtains self-worth from relating thought to action in work (skilled manual labour); he/she can see how effectively his/her own thought operates to create the conditions of existence under which he/she lives. Furthermore, a human being can re-adjust to meet the ever-new arising material circumstances (these circumstances are always a combination of man's doing and the given material). She had known before that the factory worker could not have this

³³⁶Weil, *La condition ouvrière*, op. cit., p.144.

³³⁷Weil, *La condition ouvrière*, op. cit., p.144.

³³⁸Weil, *La condition ouvrière*, op. cit., p.145.

self-worth because manual labour of this sort did not entail thinking and acting (according to that thought); however, her experience of the humiliation of the worker presented her with a different perspective.

Thus, to conclude, at the end of the factory journals we come to another dimension of the human being — one that is not yet clearly laid out — which seems to co-exist, in Simone Weil's mind, with her original view of the human being. One of her last observations in her journal was: "j'ai toujours trouvé, chez ces êtres frustes, la générosité du coeur et l'aptitude aux idées générales en fonction directe l'une de l'autre."³⁹ This profound experience of humiliation has made Simone Weil realize that her early idea of the human being, worked out in "Science et perception dans Descartes", does not completely account for the total "human being". I will argue that after her factory experience Simone Weil opens herself to this other dimension of the human being without changing her early conception of human nature.

ENDNOTES: Chapter Two, Part Two

1 Simone Weil may have directly addressed these ideas as they appeared in *Manuscripts of 1844*. She does not cite them, but according to Kate Soper (*Humanism and Anti-Humanism* (London: Hutchinson, 1986; 44) they had been published in 1932. Whether Simone Weil read the *Manuscripts of 1844* or not, there are many passages in *Capital* that suggested to her that Marx was more Hegelian than materialist. Her choice and consideration of passages on the division of labour bears this out. An example: in the section *The Factory*, Marx says "...factory work exhausts the nervous system to the utter-most, it does away with the many-sided play of the muscles, and confiscates every atom of freedom, both in bodily and intellectual activity." (from "Capital, Volume 1," *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), p.409 Marx speaks of the capitalist as "master" in the same section.

In the *Theses on Feuerbach*, Marx agrees with both Feuerbach and Hegel in different ways. No doubt Simone Weil took claims, such as the following, to be evidence of Hegel's influence on Marx:

The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism — that of Feuerbach included — is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object of of contemplation, but not as human sensuous activity, practice, not subjectivity.

And in Thesis III:

The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men who change their circumstances....The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionising practice.

And in Thesis XI:

The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it. (from *Theses on Feuerbach*, *The Marx-Engels Reader* 143-145)

However, as John McMurtry has demonstrated, these passages can be interpreted to support a materialist view of human nature. The problem Simone Weil perceived with Marx' theory of human nature will continue to be discussed. For the quality of mind that can lead us towards the "better" might just as well be interpreted as

³⁹ Weil, *La condition ouvrière*, op. cit., p.145.

"spirit" than as merely a function of a highly developed brain. Indeed, this is how Simone Weil interprets mind, as essentially "free activity" — even though she never refers to mind as a "spirit" as does Hegel.

2 For example, Simone Weil asks:

.... pourquoi la division du travail se tournerait-elle nécessairement en oppression? Surtout Marx omet d'expliquer pourquoi l'oppression est invincible aussi longtemps qu'elle est utile, pourquoi les opprimés en révolte n'ont jamais réussi à fonder une société non oppressive, soit sur la base des forces productives de leur époque, soit même au prix d'une régression économique qui pourrait difficilement accroître leur misère; et enfin il laisse tout à fait dans l'ombre les principes généraux du mécanisme par lequel une forme déterminée d'oppression est remplacée par une autre. *Réflexions sur les causes*, op. cit., p.43.

3 Simone Weil raises the possibility of replacing the idea of progress with a scale of values conceived outside of time. This confirms another sign that she was — before her work in the factory — extending her thought to include another, metaphysical, dimension. Perhaps the God of "Science et perception dans Descartes" never was only the instrumental "God of the philosophers", as Pétremont has suggested, but actually the loving God that Weil later addresses. Eric Springstead synthesizes *Leçons de philosophie (Roanne 1933-1934)* and "Science et perception dans Descartes" with this orientation. I prefer to leave that question open, and to acknowledge the unity in her thought.

CHAPTER THREE

SPIRITUAL ROOTS: A LINK TO THOSE MILLINARY TRADITIONS

Part One : The Philosophical Development of Weil's Conception of the Virtues of Humanity

Mûrir, c'est passer de la passion à la compassion. (Albert Camus)

Mûrir, c'est passer de la passion à la compassion (Albert Camus)

The most remarkable change in Simone Weil's thought after 1936, that is, after her factory experience, did not have to do so much with the substance of her thought as with the degree of attention she gave to the relation between the human being and God. Her intense focus on the religious dimension of human nature in her later work does shed "new light" on the other dimensions of her philosophical anthropology. It is this development that precedes Simone Weil's "mature philosophical anthropology," a subject which will be dealt with in the final chapter of this thesis. In arriving at this mature conception of human nature, Simone Weil did change her idea of wherein lies the essence of human nature, but this change was a development of rather than a digression from her dualistic conception of human nature. As Devaux, one of the editors of her *Oeuvres complètes*, points out, my perspective on her thought is in keeping with Simone Weil's own view of her philosophical development:

En respectant aussi scrupuleusement que nous le pourrons l'ordre chronologique de la composition des oeuvres, cette édition nouvelle et intégrale mettra en évidence l'indéniable *évolution* de la pensée de Simone Weil,....Mais le lecteur s'apercevra sans doute bien vite que cette évolution n'a comporté ni point de rebroussement ni reniement, mais bien plutôt un constant approfondissement mettant en leur juste place les éléments nouveaux qu'une inlassable et indivisible expérience de pensée et d'action l'amenait à intégrer à sa vision du monde et à sa conception de l'homme. Simone Weil elle-même a pu dire que le mot de *conversion*, s'il doit signifier changement radical d'orientation, n'a point de sens en son cas. Elle a déclaré à son ami le Père Perrin: "Quoiqu'il me soit plusieurs fois arrivé de franchir un seuil, je ne me rappelle pas un moment où j'aie changé de direction" et nous pouvons l'en croire.¹

As my analysis in Chapter two has shown, Simone Weil thought that work with a method should be valued because it allowed us to express an essential aspect of human nature. However, when she herself encountered human suffering through her factory experience, she realized that what had to be changed if the workers were to have a better life was society's value system. She began to see that morality had to be based on something else also

¹Devaux, André A. Préface. *Oeuvres complètes, Tome I, Premiers écrits philosophiques*, by Simone Weil, ed. André Devaux and Florence de Lussy (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), p.10-11.

essentially human besides work with a method. The latter by itself was not sufficient to define what was at the root of human dignity. She realized that her earlier conception of human nature may have helped her to define what caused human suffering in our society, but it failed to totally account for why human beings must suffer. Simone Weil further developed her philosophical anthropology through a reflection on why human beings must suffer.

Simone Weil began in 1935-36 to analyse what it was that the workers, as human beings, actually suffered in a "bourgeois society" and why this problem had not directly been addressed by the workers' organizations and the intellectuals of these organizations. Because of the suffering of the workers, She questioned the values of the bourgeois society, its history, its science, and finally, its facility for overlooking the morality of the actions it condones. Simone Weil's acutely developed sensitivity and social awareness made her realize the need to distinguish between social morality and another kind of values: those based on a morality that persists through time for at its center is the dignity of the human being. She claimed that this view of morality was not at all new; thus, it had been given expression throughout history. In fact, Simone Weil argued that the only way to become aware of the constancy of this morality was to look for expressions of it in past cultures, in history. She realized that our collective historical past was another essential aspect of human nature. Her search for expressions of this unchanging moral view led her to an analysis of religious texts. Through her efforts to give a contemporary expression of this transcultural and transhistorical morality, Simone Weil was led to reflect on the religious basis of our nature. She was determined to show that morality should be rooted in human nature because human nature is essentially related to the Good/God. Furthermore, she argued that human beings have been bound by this relation to the Good in every aspect of their lives. Science, she claimed, has had the pertinent role of directing the intellect towards truth in preparation for the human beings ultimate union with God. In establishing that this has been the role of science, Simone Weil drew on the Pythagoreans. Pythagoras, she claimed, provided us with the way to re-unite science and religion.

During the period from 1935 until the beginning of the Second World War in 1939, Simone Weil became more deeply aware of the complexity of the human being. She became more intent upon expressing her view that the human spirit has a special relation to the Good and to a whole Universe and not merely to the world of matter and other human beings. Although Simone Weil had, in her early work, always expressed this idea through her

constant concern for morality, she had not focused on what it means to claim that human beings were in essence related to the good and that it was because of this relation that human beings suffered morally like no other creature. This realization added another very significant dimension to Simone Weil's philosophical anthropology -- the relation between the human being and God, and this developed into her religious metaphysics.

In this chapter I will show how Simone Weil's conception of human nature evolved without essentially changing. What remained constant throughout the development of her philosophical anthropology was her view of human beings as essentially dualistic. Thus, although Simone Weil added many dimensions to the human being to complete her philosophical anthropology, I will argue that she did not depart from what was essential to her dualistic conception of human nature.

A. CRITIQUE OF BOURGEOIS VALUES: Humans as Means to an End

Simone Weil was determined not to forget the degradation she experienced as a labourer in the factory and the degradation she witnessed there. This determination led her to do a critique of bourgeois morality. She harshly judged this society's values because what she experienced and saw in the factories suggested that industrial culture either had lost sight of or had simply neglected to consider what was essential to human nature. Bourgeois morality, she claimed, had suppressed our human essence -- our relation to the Good/God. Simone Weil already had some ideas about another kind of morality that would give expression to our relation to the Good/God. As E. Springsted pointed out in *Christus Mediator*, in Weil's early thought morality was defined by the correlation between thinking according to the criteria of "clarity and distinctness" (i.e. having knowledge) and acting virtuously.² However, Simone Weil had not yet been totally clear on how to add to her earlier view of morality (that every human being should have the moral choice to act with "thought in mind" -- to perfect oneself) to her insight into the fact that what truly debased the human morale was some very concrete suffering: such as hunger to the point of starvation. She began to see that it was one thing to define morality with the ideal view that each and every person should have the

² Springsted, *Christus Mediator*, op. cit., p.54-54.

opportunity to think and act with method in mind and quite another to relate this ideal morality to real human beings who actually experienced moral wretchedness in their flesh. She witnessed situations where people were left completely without strength and she realized that to claim they had moral choice or should have had seemed callous and inappropriate to their all-consuming needs. Thus, Simone Weil was searching, at this point in her life, for a way to expand her conception of morality so that people could become attuned to, what she would later call, the *silent cry* which comes from the depths of the human heart.

Simone Weil began to express what she saw to be our culture's failings in some of her letters to Albertine Thévenon, now published in *La condition ouvrière*, and in a lecture she gave to a working-class audience on "La Rationalization," on February 23, 1937.³ In this lecture, Simone Weil concentrated specifically on criticizing the bourgeois society and its values. She argued that society, because it was more interested in production than in the producer, had directed the scientists, the intellectuals, and even the syndicates towards the sacrifice of human lives for the sake of accounts ("des chiffres qui font bien sur le papier, chiffres de budget national ou de bilans industriels"). Science, she noted in "La rationalisation," was at first only a study of the laws of nature until it became very useful to production. However, it was only at the end of the last century that the laws of science were applied not only to the use of natural forces, but also to the use of human forces in work. Thus, she argued, in reality we should speak of two industrial revolutions instead of one: "La première se définit par l'utilisation scientifique de la matière inerte et des forces de la nature. La deuxième se définit par l'utilisation scientifique de la matière vivante, c'est-à-dire des hommes."⁴

The second industrial revolution brought into operation in the factories the system of rationalization. Seen from the point of view of the workers, rationalization was part of a larger problem which was to decide what system would be more desirable in industry for them. This problem, Simone Weil claimed, had not been adequately studied by the intellectuals of the socialist movement, neither by Marx nor his disciples. Even in Proudhon, she suggested, there were only some indications of the problem, the reason being: "Les théoriciens étaient peut-être mal placés pour

³Simone Weil, "La rationalisation," *La condition ouvrière* (1951; Paris: Gallimard, 1979)

⁴Weil, "La rationalisation", op. cit., p.290.

traiter ce sujet, faute d'avoir été eux-mêmes au nombre des rouages d'une usine."⁵ The workers' organizations, on the other hand, never seemed to have the time to study the problem because there always seemed to be more pressing problems to address. However, according to Simone Weil, one reason underlay all the other more superficial reasons of why the question had not been studied. The intellectuals at the head of the workers' movement were living in the atmosphere of a bourgeois society and of the "déformation d'esprit" in which "rien n'a de valeur que ce qui peut se chiffrer en francs et en centimes..." Moreover, "Il est plus facile de réclamer au sujet du chiffre marqué sur une feuille de paie que d'analyser les souffrances subies au cours d'une journée de travail."⁶ It was this same malaise or "déformation d'esprit", she argued, that brought the system of rationalization into the factories.

Simone Weil uncovered the kind of thinking which prompted Taylor to invent his system. Essentially, his intention was to extract as much work as possible from each human being regardless of the physical and moral cost involved:

Son but était d'ôter aux travailleurs la possibilité de déterminer eux-mêmes les procédés et le rythme de leur travail, et de remettre entre les mains de la direction le choix des mouvements à exécuter au cours de la production. Tel était l'esprit de ses recherches. ...son souci primordial était de trouver les moyens de forcer les ouvriers à donner à l'usine le maximum de leur capacité de travail.⁷

She argued that we cannot call a system scientific when it takes as its principle that "les hommes ne sont pas des hommes." Simone Weil could not for any reason accept the view that human beings could be treated like machines. She pointed out that Taylor took it upon himself to make science play the role of constraining the worker, whereas the true role, and primary goal, of modern science in the material organization of work should be to find the best techniques; the goal being that neither the worker nor the producer should be compromised. According to Simone Weil the bourgeoisie mis-used science and directed everything towards their own ends: increasing production and making profit. Thus, work, instead of being an encounter with necessity as it could have been, reduced "les ouvriers à l'état d'esclaves." What they encountered was the suffering that goes with the lowering of their morale

⁵Weil, "La rationalisation", op. cit., p.291. Simone Weil is expressing here her dissatisfaction with the solutions that the socialists proposed to deal with the prospect of rationalisation in the factories.

⁶Weil, "La rationalisation", op. cit., p.292.

⁷Weil, "La rationalisation", op. cit., p.301.

--that is in being treated as a means to an end.

From this essay on rationalization, we see that Simone Weil has perceived the bourgeois value system -- or lack of values -- to be all-pervasive. As the Second World War approached, she became increasingly convinced that the general illness of bourgeois society had to do with their lack of concern for the morale of the individual. They seemed to be unaware of the relation between an individual's morale and her/his spiritual essence.

This "déformation d'esprit" of the bourgeoisie was, according to Simone Weil, also one of the essential causes of war. Not only did this "déformation" manifest itself when the industrialists subordinated human beings to their goals in production, it also manifested itself when political leaders used rhetoric to mask the fact that power was their primary goal. Human beings are then reduced to a means to an end.

The latter situation is a recipe for disaster because, according to Simone Weil, these political leaders are unaware of the blinding effect their desire for power and prestige has. However, as Simone Weil's analysis in "Ne recommençons pas la guerre de Troie (Pouvoir des mots)"⁸ shows, politicians are themselves ruled by their imaginations. The powerful believe that they themselves are outside of the collective imagination and are not affected by their words, used emotively to encourage people to hold them in esteem. However, in order to make others believe what one is saying, one has to believe it oneself and be prepared to defend it. Thus, the powerful are destined to speak in terms of absolutes:

Tout pouvoir repose sur des rapports entre les activités humaines; mais un pouvoir, pour être stable, doit apparaître comme quelque chose d'absolu, d'intangible, à ceux qui le détiennent, à ceux qui le subissent, aux pouvoirs extérieurs.⁹

She argues that much of what we call our historical past is fraught with this imaginary world of superstition -- politically motivated abstractions. The main problem with these abstractions is: "non seulement elles font mourir, mais, ce qui est infiniment plus grave, elles font oublier la valeur de la vie."¹⁰

In Simone Weil's analysis of human nature in *Leçons de philosophie (Roanne 1933-1934)* she has shown that the social nature of language is absorbed mainly by the imagination - in other words, the language we learn

⁸Simone Weil, "Ne recommençons pas la guerre de Troie (Pouvoir des mots)," *Ecrits historiques et politiques* (1960; Paris: Gallimard, 1979).

⁹Weil, "...la guerre de Troie....", op. cit., p.270.

¹⁰Weil, "...la guerre de Troie....", op. cit., p.272.

from our parents, our political leaders, society, etc., gives us thought which comes from the imagination. As we saw above, when the imagination absorbs this thought, then the mind can perceive the concrete reality corresponding to this thought. But when no concrete reality corresponds to thought, according to Simone Weil, a leader, whose desire for power overcomes her/his desire for truth, has to effectively sustain this idea in the imagination through the use of words. These words must create a powerful emotion in order to have the desired effect of preventing the people from realizing that the words do not correspond to a concrete reality.

The powerful, she argued, exploit this mechanism of human nature — the imagination. Simone Weil claims that this use of the human imagination clouds our vision of what is truly valuable. She saw this happening in the time of the Greek Trojan war and in her own time. In making the comparison between the way language was used in the period surrounding the wars of the twentieth century and the way myth was used in the Greek Trojan war, Simone Weil intended to suggest that maybe we should examine our political ideals to see if they share that quality of unreality that makes up such a myth.

In "Ne recommençons pas la guerre de Troie (Pouvoir des mots)," Simone Weil wrote about the futility of wars that have no real objective and the manifestation of this in her time. This article was written in the shadow of the Second World War. She argued that perhaps what people take to be the objectives of war have no concrete reality. The Trojan War was absurd because the Greeks and Trojans massacred one another for ten years on account of Helen. But in the war to come, she pointed out, the conflict is centred around ideas even less real than those which precipitated the war between the Greeks and Trojans. At least they had at the heart of this war the ideal woman with "perfect beauty" who really existed. In the wars of the twentieth century Helen has been replaced with words with capital letters — Fascism, Communism, Capitalism — this is indeed the modern tragedy.

Les mots qui ont un contenu et un sens ne sont pas meurtriers. Si parfois l'un d'eux est mêlé à une effusion de sang, c'est plutôt par accident que par fatalité, et il s'agit alors en général d'une action limitée et efficace. Mais qu'on donne des majuscules à des mots vides de signification, pour peu que les circonstances y poussent, les hommes verseront des flots de sang, amoncelleront ruines sur ruines en répétant ces mots....Le succès se définit alors exclusivement par l'écrasement des groupes d'hommes qui se réclament de mots ennemis; car c'est encore là un caractère de ces mots, qu'ils vivent par couples antagonistes.¹¹

Some examples of these antagonistic couplings are: the opposition between Fascism and Communism, the

¹¹Weil, "...la guerre de Troie....", op. cit., p.258.

struggle between the right party and the left party, and the struggle for absolute dictatorship or absolute democracy.

Simone Weil argues that these political parties and ideologies share two qualities with myths: their tendency towards absolutism and their imaginary goals. Theorists, who make no effort to ground their thought in concrete reality, get lost in abstractions and consequently know no moderation:

...notre univers politique est exclusivement peuplé de mythes et de monstres; nous n'y connaissons que des entités, que des absolus. Tous les mots du vocabulaire politique et social pourraient servir d'exemple. Nation, sécurité, capitalisme, communisme, fascisme, ordre, autorité, propriété, démocratie, on pourrait les prendre tous les uns après les autres. Jamais nous ne les plaçons dans des formules telles que: Il y a démocratie dans la mesure où..., ou encore: Il y a capitalisme pour autant que... L'usage d'expression du type "dans la mesure où" dépasse notre puissance intellectuelle.¹²

The Greeks, she claimed, had something similar to these abstractions – the gods of the Greek mythology. But we, unlike the Greeks, think of ourselves as thorough-going rationalists and so we do not reserve an area in our minds for superstition. However, according to Simone Weil, this has been our major oversight. Since for her, as the above analysis has shown¹³, the mind, in its thought processes, is dependent on the imagination, superstition always remains a part of our nature. As she says: "Mais pour acculer les hommes aux catastrophes les plus absurdes, il n'est besoin ni de dieux ni de conjurations secrètes. La nature humain suffit."¹⁴ What we have to do is to analyse our own use of language and to distinguish our superstitions from the actual or the actually possible.

...le nuage des entités vides....Elles stupéfient les esprits....La *chasse aux entités* dans tous les domaines de la vie politique et sociale est une oeuvre urgente de salubrité publique. Ce n'est pas une chasse facile; toute l'atmosphère intellectuelle de notre époque favorise la floraison et la multiplication des entités....Une élévation générale du niveau intellectuel favoriserait singulièrement tout effort d'éclaircissement pour dégonfler les causes imaginaires de conflit....il s'agit de discriminer l'imaginaire et le réel pour diminuer les risques de guerre sans renoncer à la lutte....¹⁵

In the above example, Simone Weil suggests that communism or democracy can only be something imaginary unless we separate in theory the truly possible from impossible.

Simone Weil insists on this program of analysis because each of these abstract words correspond to an actual human group who are ready to kill and die to obtain the power and prestige that these abstract words pretend to secure; thus, their imaginations mask the reality. For example, the intellectuals and workers in pre-war Germany

¹²Weil, "...la guerre de Troie....", op. cit., p.259.

¹³See my analysis of the role of the imagination in Simone Weil's philosophical anthropology in chapter two of this thesis.

¹⁴Weil, "...la guerre de Troie...." 257.

Weil, "...la guerre de Troie....", op. cit., p.272.

could not see that both communism and nazism were, in essence, equally totalitarian; therefore, they were prepared to kill each other. Simone Weil saw this happening in Germany as early as 1932: "La distinction théorique entre les deux formes de régime totalitaire, fascisme et communisme (Stalin), est imaginaire, mais en Allemagne, en 1932, il existait bien effectivement deux organisations politiques dont chacune aspirait au pouvoir total et par suite à l'élimination de l'autre."¹⁶

Underlying her analysis of how abstractions compel humans to act is the same analysis of the human imagination put forth in "Science et perception dans Descartes" and *Oppression et Liberté*. Once again, she emphasizes the negative and positive aspects of the human imagination. On the negative side, she claims that because the human imagination is so powerful it is vulnerable to being exploited. As the above analysis has shown, words become everything; humans become ruled by their imaginations and are reduced to a means to other people's ends. On the positive side, human society depends upon human beings being ruled to some extent by their imaginations. According to Simone Weil, a leader should use the mechanism of the human imagination as a means to obtaining social order because order is necessary to our existence: "La nécessité qu'il y ait un pouvoir est tangible, palpable, parce que l'ordre est indispensable à l'existence..."¹⁷ In "Meditations sur un cadavre," Simone Weil argues that the motor force of social life, and consequently of history, depends on directing the human imagination.

L'imagination est toujours le tissu de la vie sociale et le moteur de l'histoire. Les vraies nécessités, les vraies besoins, les vraies ressources, les vraies intérêts n'agissent que d'une manière indirecte, parce qu'ils ne parviennent pas à la conscience des foules.¹⁸

Furthermore, she said: "...l'imagination est et restera dans les affaires des hommes un facteur dont l'importance réelle est presque impossible à exagérer."¹⁹ The politician must attend to the movement of the collective imagination and at the same time to the conditions that allow for social equilibrium and stability. A politician must direct the collective imagination towards accepting certain measures which will make social stability a reality.

¹⁶Weil, "...la guerre de Troie....", op. cit., p.269.

¹⁷Weil, "...la guerre de Troie...", op. cit., p. 270.

¹⁸ Simone Weil, "Meditations sur un cadavre," *Ecrits historiques et politiques* (1960; Paris: Gallimard, 1979), p.324.

¹⁹Weil, "...cadavre", op. cit., p.325.

Léon Blum, the Prime Minister of France in 1937, was an example of a leader whom Simone Weil hoped would make good use of the mechanism of the human imagination. He failed she thought to perceive the possibilities accorded him²⁰ because he lacked cynicism, a mode of thinking which has always been essential to clairvoyance in the art of politics. Machiavelli, she argued, should be studied on how to properly guide the people en masse, the collective imagination. Simone Weil claimed that politicians are forced to reduce human beings to matter in practising their art because like artists, they are not capable of working without materials. Also, the people en masse do display one of the essential characteristics of matter — they behave like a blind force.

Although many individuals form the whole of the collective imagination, the collective imagination cannot have power equal to even a single mind. According to Simone Weil an individual gives up her/his independent power upon joining the social body, she/he agrees to obey, and not to direct. She argues in "Méditation sur l'obéissance et la liberté" that only leaders can direct the collective imagination.²¹ Therefore, these leaders constitute the driving force of history; history books are filled with accounts of the actions of individual leaders, the heroes.²² These individuals have been able to command because they have learned the art of establishing and maintaining a cohesion among those who make up the collective imagination. When this cohesion exists among the people, they act as if they are one; however, one who is directed by another.²³ Thus, those who obey are those who make up the collective imagination and they constitute a blind force.

²⁰Weil, "...cadavre" see pp. 326-327 where she recounts an instance of the kind of events in which he made a wrong choice.

²¹Simone Weil, "Méditation sur l'obéissance et la liberté," *Oppression et liberté* (1955; Paris: Gallimard, 1981), p.186-193.

²²Weil, "...l'obéissance et la liberté", op. cit., p.190.

²³There have been fleeting moments in history in which the many (the masses), inspired by a spontaneous emotion which contradicts the social order, have acted as one without these leaders. These moments are rare and they do not last because: "...cette unanimité, qui se produit dans le feu d'une émotion vive et général, n'est compatible avec aucune action méthodique." (Weil, "...l'obéissance et la liberté", op. cit., p.190.) The emotion that goes into these kinds of spontaneous protests cannot be sustained and in a very short time people's needs become more important than the protest. Human beings cannot satisfy their needs for any length of time in a state of protest, because a protest demands an interruption of their daily working habits. People stop acting methodically, they stop producing. Methodical action is not compatible with this moment of oneness because, according to Simone Weil, only the individual mind can act methodically. When people act as a mass in protest, they follow one another. This phenomenon cannot go on indefinitely; in a short time the mass dissolves into individuals and again they will be individuals who obey.

i. Leaders Who use the Mechanism of the Human Imagination Effectively Gain Prestige in the Eyes of the People. Prestige is Equivalent to Power

Simone Weil claims that those in power are obliged to seek prestige because their power depends upon it: "Le prestige, c'est-à-dire l'illusion, est ainsi au coeur même du pouvoir."²⁴ The idea of prestige makes one think about a person who is in some way superior and worthy of respect. A person who wants prestige must find, out of the various avenues provided by society, the way to create this image of being a very important and reputable person. When Simone Weil claims that prestige is an illusion, she is not arguing that the prestigious people of a society are undeserving of respect. However, she is arguing that it is not one's reputation nor one's image in society that defines one's dignity. Simone Weil claims that prestige is an illusion because a prestigious person is not morally superior to a person who has no special reputation in society because: "...les hommes sont semblables ou peu s'en faut...." Nevertheless, prestige has the effect of convincing almost everyone in society that a reputable person is morally superior to a non-reputable person and deserves more respect.

Simone Weil argues that social stability depends on this necessary tension between these two forms of power. On the one hand, the people, without prestige, must constantly devise methods to prevent the powerful from getting too much strength. She argues that they will do this out of necessity when they feel threatened to the point of possible annihilation, but they should not wait for this to happen. The people's struggle should be ongoing because it is necessary to social stability; it keeps the powerful somewhat fearful of them. This is a healthy fear as it provides just enough tension to keep those on top of the social ranks aware of the essential fragility of power. On the other hand, social stability also depends upon those on the top of the social hierarchy defending their prestige and power because, as was pointed out above, their power maintains order; the powerful direct the collective imagination. Furthermore, since power is essentially fragile, it has to be protected. According to Simone Weil, this tension between those at the top of the social hierarchy and those at the bottom of the social hierarchy should provide the necessary balance for social stability; however, the very nature of prestige constantly upsets this balance. Although prestige is the main component of power and thus of order, it is also the main element involved in disrupting order. When a person satisfies his/her need or desire for prestige, he/she prevents another from having

²⁴Weil, "...la guerre de Troie....", op. cit., p.270.

this prestige and/or robs someone of his/her dignity.

La contradiction essentielle à la société humaine, c'est que toute situation sociale repose sur un équilibre de forces...mais les prestiges, eux, ne s'équilibrant pas, le prestige ne comporte pas de limites, toute satisfaction de prestige est une atteinte au prestige ou à la dignité d'autrui...Il semble qu'il y ait là une impasse dont l'humanité ne puisse sortir que par miracle. Mais la vie humaine est faite de miracles.²⁵

Simone Weil, like Sartre, did not think that humanity had overcome the age-old problem of society: scarcity. For as Sartre pointed out: "... the transformations of social relations and technical progress have not freed man from the yoke of scarcity."²⁶ According to Simone Weil, scarcity was intricate to the human condition; therefore, one person's prestige would always be another person's demise. Simone Weil recognized prestige as necessary to and yet disruptive to society. However, she maintained that it was possible for an individual to make good use of the power obtained through prestige.

She pointed out that an individual who is swept along by the yoke of necessity and by the collective imagination rather than by his/her own particular mind can only feel inferior to those on the top of the social hierarchy. This complete lack of control over his/her actions is a sign that he/she lacks liberty; he/she is not free to act with method in mind. On the other hand, the individual who directs the people can only feel superior to them as he/she does have liberty; he/she is free to act with method in mind:

L'esprit humain est incroyablement flexible, prompt à imiter, prompt à plier sous les circonstances extérieures. Celui qui obéit, celui dont la parole d'autrui détermine les mouvements, les peines, les plaisirs, se sent inférieur non par accident, mais par nature. A l'autre bout de l'échelle, on se sent de même supérieur, et ces deux illusions se renforcent l'une l'autre.²⁷

Thus, Simone Weil insists that both feelings are indeed an illusion just as the prestige that sustains these feelings is an illusion. All human beings have an intrinsic and equal value; however, they can only preserve the consciousness of it if there is some external sign of this inward value: "Il est impossible à l'esprit le plus héroïquement ferme de garder la conscience d'une valeur intérieure, quand cette conscience ne s'appuie sur rien d'extérieur."²⁸

Even Christ who had an exceptionally heroic mind showed a loss of faith in himself – a feeling of

²⁵Weil, "...la guerre de Troie...", op. cit., p.271.

²⁶Sartre, Jean Paul, *Search For A Method*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), p.34.

²⁷Weil, "...l'obéissance et la liberté", op. cit., p.190-191.

²⁸Weil, "...l'obéissance et la liberté", op. cit., p.191.

inferiority -- "quand il s'est vu abandonné de tous, bafoué, méprisé, sa vie pour rien, a perdu un moment le sentiment de sa mission...."²⁹ This loss of consciousness became evident from his cry "Mon Dieu, pourquoi m'avez-vous abandonné?" Thus, those who obey consider themselves to be inferior because they receive signs from the external world confirming this belief that they are inferior..

In *A Truer Liberty*³⁰ Lawrence A. Blum and Victor J. Seidler claim that Simone Weil was mostly influenced by Kant in her early moral theory. They note that she brought together her epistemology and her moral theory in much the same way as Kant did. But, the more striking relation between Weil and Kant, they claim, is in their conception of freedom:

Weil's contrast between a determination that comes from "outside" as essentially a source of unfreedom and the "inner representation" as a guarantee of freedom shows the deep influence of Kant.³¹

Although Weil was influenced by Kant's moral theory and conception of freedom, Blum and Seidler argue that because of her factory experience Weil challenges Kant's assumption that because freedom comes from within it is "connected to a sense of individual worth and dignity that can always be sustained."³² For Kant, freedom always remains a choice, but for Simone Weil, Blum and Seidler claim, freedom is defined more in relation to the control a human being has over her/his life to be able to make a choice. They claim that Weil was concerned with the way social conditions could prevent a person from being capable of making a choice. Their claim, I think, is true. Therefore, when Simone Weil made the point that individuals identify with the signs they receive from the world about themselves -- those on the lower ranks of the social scale receive signs saying that they are inferior, so they feel inferior, Blum and Seidler claim that Weil was challenging the heart of Kant's moral theory:

the very basis of the Kantian tradition that sees freedom as essentially "inner" while seeing the "external" as a realm of determination and unfreedom, a realm that includes emotions, feelings, and desires that distract people from ends chosen through the inner light of reason...To say that "every mark of scorn" works to confirm people in their sense of inferiority is to refuse a distinction between the "inner" and the "outer" as independent realms of experience.³³

²⁹Weil, "...l'obéissance et liberté", op. cit., p.191.

³⁰Lawrence A. Blum and Victor J. Seidler, *A Truer Liberty: Simone Weil and Marxism* (New York; London: Routledge, 1989).

³¹Blum and Seidler, *A Truer Liberty*, op. cit., p.88.

³²Blum and Seidler, *A Truer Liberty*, op. cit., p.88.

³³Blum and Seidler, *A Truer Liberty*, op. cit., p.94-95.

Blum and Seidler are right to claim that Simone Weil thought that oppressive social relations could prevent individuals from maintaining their sense of integrity and their individuality.. As I pointed out above, Simone Weil argued that people cannot preserve their sense of dignity when there are no external signs to confirm that they are worthy human beings. However, I disagree with Blum and Seidler in their claim that Weil felt compelled to challenge the very basis of Kant's distinction between the "inner" being our source of freedom and the "outer" being our source of unfreedom. Weil maintained this distinction in the very words she used to describe how society oppresses the individual:

It is impossible for the most heroically staunch mind to preserve consciousness of an inward value when there is no external fact on which this consciousness is based.³⁴

Simone Weil does not say in the above quotation that the person loses this inward value because there is no external fact to confirm this value. What she does say is that a person loses *consciousness* of her/his inward value when there is no external fact to confirm this value. It is one thing to make the claim that one loses consciousness of one's inward value and another thing to make the claim that one loses one's inward value. By suggesting that Simone Weil refuses "a distinction between the "inner" and "outer" as independent realms of experience," Blum and Seidler are implying that she makes the latter claim -- that is that social oppression makes us lose our inward value altogether -- whereas, Weil is simply saying that we lose consciousness of our inward value. Therefore, Simone Weil does not refuse Kant's "distinction between the "inner" and "outer" as independent realms of experience"; nevertheless, she does claim that the "outer" can impinge upon the "inner" to the point of making us feel like we have no dignity and no freedom. In fact, Simone Weil reinforces the Kantian distinction by pointing out that we have to improve social conditions with the idea of protecting human "dignity" as much as possible from such external forces. In other words, human beings can only preserve consciousness of their dignity with the help of society.

In the Anglo-American tradition Kant's distinction between the "inner" and "outer" is often referred to as the "fact-value" distinction. This fact-value formulation of the distinction between the "inner" and "outer" has its

³⁴Weil, "...l'obéissance et la liberté", op. cit., p.144.

origin in Hume's claim made in *A Treatise of Human Nature* that one cannot derive an "ought" from an "is".³⁵ In the following, I will begin by first discussing the distinction between an "is" statement and an "ought" statement or in more contemporary language the difference between a "fact" and a "value". I will then discuss how Simone Weil maintains this distinction and, yet, seriously challenges its parameters.

In a *Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume claims that one cannot derive an "ought"-statement from an "is"-statement.³⁶ In other words, ethical statements cannot be "validly deduced" from factual statements that claim only what is the case. Hume's point is that there is a premise missing for this to be a deductively valid argument. Furthermore, this premise has to be an Ethical premise or an ought statement. It would do no good to add more factual premises and then try to deduce an ethical conclusion. To deduce an ethical conclusion from a set of premises at least one of these premises has to be an ethical claim. The argument would have to be something like this:

Torture causes great suffering

Psychological and physical torture can cause equally great suffering.

That which causes great suffering is wrong.

Therefore, psychological and physical torture are wrong.

In this latter argument, the third premise is an ethical premise; that is, it involves an "ought" statement or a "value-claim" as opposed to an "is" statement or a statement of "fact." Out of Hume's argument concerning the gap between an "is" statement and an "ought" statement came what is now known as the distinction between a "fact" and a "value." In other words, although a "value" is related to a "fact", there is something more claimed in a "value" statement than in a "fact" statement. That something more, more often than not, involves a claim of the rightness or wrongness or the good or evil of an action.

Blum and Seidler do not claim that Simone Weil is adopting an ethical naturalist position when they suggest that she challenges the Kantian ethical tradition; however, it is the ethical naturalists who traditionally oppose

³⁵For the sake of this discussion, I will talk about "is" statements as statements of "fact" as opposed to statements of "value".

³⁶To help me formulate Hume's claims I have used a textbook by Elliott Sober, *Core Questions in Philosophy* (New York, Toronto: Macmillan, 1991), p.395-406.

themselves to Kant's strict fact/value distinction. From Hume's argument above, we saw that making a moral claim was something more than or at least other than making a factual claim/establishing a fact. In an article entitled "Ethical Naturalism", Jonathan Harrison summarizes:

...it is the business of the empirical scientist to give a complete description of what the world is like, but no part of his business to say whether or not the world is good.³⁷

The ethical naturalists, on the other hand, cannot accept this distinction between fact and value. As Harrison says:

"The view that denies this prima facie distinction between establishing facts about the world as it is and making a word estimate of those facts is called "ethical naturalism".³⁸

Their view is that moral judgments are a special kind of fact claim about the natural world: "...moral judgments just state a special subclass of facts about the natural world."³⁹ For example, some of the utilitarians (Jeremy Bentham, James Mill) have claimed that "...judgments about the rectitude of actions are factual judgments about the quantity of pleasure they produce".⁴⁰ Another naturalist, the Evolutionist Herbert Spencer, would argue that:

Moral pronouncements upon a practice or an institution are factual judgments about whether these pronouncements are conducive to the survival of the institution that has them.⁴¹

John Dewey, the pragmatist, claims more or less "...that judgments about goodness are factual judgments about what leads to a permanent satisfaction of conflicting wants".⁴²

All of these theorists privilege the "fact" and reduce all moral judgments to 1) factual claims and 2) factual claims about what these theorists, as metaphysicians, value. The utilitarians value "quantity of pleasure" which can only be a factual claim, no matter how imprecise the measure is. Spencer values "the survival of institutions" and so all moral judgments are reduced to that cause. Likewise, John Dewey values the "majority rules" concept of democracy and so reduces all moral statements to judgments about how to arrive at that goal.

³⁷Harrison, Jonathan "Ethical Naturalism", *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1969), p.69.

³⁸Ibid., p.69.

³⁹Ibid., p.69.

⁴⁰Ibid., p.69.

⁴¹Ibid., p.69.

⁴²Ibid., p.69.

Ethical naturalists speak in terms of facts because they do not realize that their ethical theories are separate from the facts. To judge an action as good or bad in terms of how much or how little pleasure it gives us is in itself not a factual claim. It is a metaphysical claim that desire and the passions should obtain the most satisfaction possible. This metaphysical premise, as the basis of moral judgments, is not a fact. This premise is itself a moral judgment/a value claim. It says that a "quantity of pleasure" is good regardless of the "means" of obtaining it. For example, it might be acceptable for a utilitarian to reduce 10 human beings to slavery as long as 3000 human beings obtained pleasure from doing so. The same argument can be used for Herbert Spencer and for John Dewey. Each one makes a moral judgment in the the premises -- valuing 1) institutions 2) "permanent satisfaction of conflicting wants". Spencer is saying that the maintenance/continuance of an institution is to be valued regardless of the means of obtaining this end; thus, the institution could enslave 3/4 of its patrons and thereby continue to exist. He would deem this good. Thus, the institution is deemed more valuable than the individual bodies and souls of those who form a part of it. Also with John Dewey, it could turn out that the "permanent satisfaction of conflicting wants" meant that society chose to reduce some human beings to vegetables, cripples or machines -- for the purpose of scientific, educational, medical, or A.I. research -- completely against their will/liberty etc., essentially making slaves out of eight per cent of the population. This is, however, a moral judgment on the part of all of these philosophers. Theirs is to value pleasure, institutions and the "majority wants" over the soul/body of each and every individual that forms a part of society. Their choice is to make some human beings a "means" to the "ends" of others.

Kant and Simone Weil would claim that this choice is an *immoral choice* because each and every human being should be considered as a moral human being --each *individual's morale* is of the utmost importance. Kant says no human being should be reduced to a means to an end. Each individual is an end in herself/himself.

Simone Weil admits that her claim that the human being's *morale* is primary is a moral metaphysical claim. It is not a factual claim -- it is a "should or ought" statement. She did not condone human beings' inflicting slavery on other human beings no matter whether it happened today or 3000, 4000, 5000 years or a millenium ago. If this "ought" statement were respected, then it could have "factual ramifications". In other words, if people respected *others like themselves*, then their actions, and therefore their facts, would cohere as much as possible with this *moral*

precept. That is why under no circumstances would she rationalize or condone making a slave out of one individual, let alone out of eight per cent of the population. No scientific, artistic, ecumenical, or any other reason would be a good reason for one individual, a society or an institution, or a nation, or the world, to enslave a human being.

What this says is that "moral judgments" and "moral precepts" are not and never will be factual claims. A scientific assessment is not a moral judgment about things in the world. A moral judgment is not a factual claim about things in the world; it is a premise which claims to value this for whatever reason; each philosopher has long and in-depth arguments to support his/her moral premises.

Thus, Jeremy Bentham and Mill value "pleasure", and when they judge actions, they do so according to how much pleasure these actions produce. Their moral precepts have factual ramifications. Likewise for the premises of Herbert Spencer or John Dewey.

To sum up, Simone Weil always claimed that her moral premise was to value the individual human being because each one has a part of the soul *which is, if one is allowed to attend to it, akin to the Good*. This is not a fact -- it is a moral premise based on *"a scale of values outside of recorded time"*. This premise is not a part of "necessity", because it comes handed down to us as wisdom from God (briefly stated). Thus, there is no "wider sense of fact" to encompass this moral premise. But, as I said above, for Simone Weil, this does have and should have an impact on how humans regard each other in the world: "Love thy neighbour as thyself", not "Kill thy neighbour as thyself".

Now let us return to Simone Weil and Kant. Simone Weil maintains this distinction between "value" and "fact" because as I have argued above she does claim with Kant that human beings have an "inward self" from which each individual draws her/his consciousness of his/her "human dignity." As I have argued in chapter two of this thesis, for Simone Weil, liberty was defined as the freedom to "act with thought in mind" and that this freedom begins in the "mind." Thus, the freedom to act with "thought in mind" is a source of the consciousness of one's human dignity. However, as we saw in the above discussion with Blum and Seidler, social conditions can be so oppressive as to even negate one's consciousness of the freedom and human dignity which belongs to every human being just because he or she is a human being and has been given this "inner self." I do not think this idea that an individual's "consciousness" of his/her human dignity of "inner self" can be negated by extreme social

oppression or otherwise called "affliction" undermines the fact/value distinction but it does suggest that "facts" can be used to totally negate value. In other words, "facts" in the hands of powerful authorities can infringe upon an individual's liberty and therefore dignity to the point of completely negating that individual's consciousness of the "inner self" and the dignity this "inner self" has been given to make "free choices." To exemplify Weil's point I would like to introduce a "thought experiment."

Let's suppose that Computer Artificial Intelligence researchers working with neurologists and robotic researchers came up with "New Technology" that allowed them to completely take over the mind and body of an individual human being. Let's suppose they can do this by using magnetics and electronics in such a way as to control the mind and body of this individual by way of remote control. This new technology would, if it were to exist, be a fact and if it were to be used on a particular individual, then, according to Simone Weil, this would constitute social oppression. In other words, if the government were to authorize the A.I., the neurologists, and the robotics researchers to implement this "new" technology on an individual human being, then the government would be authorizing these researchers to use their factual knowledge to totally negate that individual's consciousness of his/her liberty, dignity, and self-worth as well as that individual's choice to act this way instead of that way. Such a government would be a tyrannical government because to totally negate an individual's "consciousness" of his/her inner self by negating his or her ability to think and to take away his/her "freedom of choice" is to replace "democratic values" with "tyrannical action."

This above thought-experiment brings us to Weil's claim that "mind is a tension towards some value".⁴⁹ What the government chose was to value the "New technology" over an individual human being's dignity ("consciousness of inner self"), freedom to think his/her own thoughts and freedom to choose this act over that act; in other words, the government chose to value "oppression" for the sake of this machinery —new technology. (Whether it be a decision made by one individual or by a few individuals is irrelevant because, for Simone Weil, each individual is responsible for his or her own conscious decision in the decision at hand—for the sake of argument let's say it is the Minister of Health and Minister of Education in consultation with the Premier who made the

⁴⁹This claim comes from a passage in an article called "Some Reflections on the Idea of Value". See Petrement, *Simone Weil A Life*, op. cit., 405-406 for citations from this essay.

decision.) This conclusion follows from Weil's claim that the "mind is a tension toward some value." As I pointed out in Chapter two, Simone Weil had argued that there is a relation between morality and an individual mind's ability to perceive correctly and act accordingly. Now she seems to be making the further claim that the mind in acting or choosing is showing what it values. But I do not think Weil is claiming that every choice or act is a morally worthy choice of value even though the individual in choosing "A" over "B" values "A" over "B", this does not mean that "A" is the morally worthy choice. Rather, I think Weil is claiming two things when she says that "mind is a tension towards value":

(1) That every individual human being thinks that his/her choice of action is valuable when he or she makes one choice over another; thus, each choice is for that individual a choice of value.

(2) But more importantly, I think Weil is saying that the individual human being has the ability to make a morally right choice—the mind can "perceive correctly" and this makes this mind's choice a morally worthy choice. As I pointed out briefly above, Weil agrees with Alain and Maine de Biran that to perceive correctly one has to attend to all that the decision at hand encompasses.

Let us return to the above example in our "thought-experiment" to clarify this point. If we took Weil to be saying simply that every individual choice is a choice of value and that this is how values are decided in the world, then we would be saying that every choice is a good choice and that every "fact" (scientific or otherwise) that develops from choices of research is a "value-laden fact." We would be saying that Weil claims every act and every fact because they were chosen or developed from choices which bring values into the world are valuable just because they were chosen. Knowledge would then be "value-laden." Then the government's choice -- in the above thought-experiment -- to value the new technology over the individual's human dignity, freedom of thought and action etc. (even though tyrannical) and the new technology would be valuable just because the choice was made and the new technology exists. If Weil held this view, then she would be undermining the fact/value distinction as every "fact" and "act/choice" would be both a fact and a value at once. However, I think that Weil is suggesting a distinction between "value-laden facts"/morally unworthy choices and "objective facts"/morally worthy choices. In the above example, I think that Weil would say that "facts" (e.g. new technology that takes over the mind/body of the individual) that infringe upon an individual's liberty to the point of oppression and total affliction are more

often than not "value-laden" facts rather than objective facts. As I have argued in Chapter two, Weil consistently holds the view that there is an independent reality--an objective reality--which can be known. Like Descartes (Maine de Biran, Alain), Weil thought that if "an individual" intellect is truly attentive and honest, this intellect could perceive/know objective facts (therefore morally worthy facts) rather than "value-laden facts" (therefore morally unworthy facts). If an individual intellect is less attentive and gives way to feelings and desires at the cost of intellectual honesty, then he or she would be more inclined towards "value-laden facts" which are maybe very useful, but do not cohere with objective reality.

It may appear that Weil is undermining the fact/value distinction if she is claiming that an "attentive intellect" can know "objective facts" that are morally worthy whereas an "inattentive intellect" can only know "value-laden facts" that are morally unworthy but this is, I think, not the case. What is known is morally valuable because it coheres with what the "attentive intellect"--a truly honest intellect--deems to be true.⁴⁴ Thus, the "value" claim still comes by way of the "inner-self" of the human individual and the "objective fact" has a reality outside of and separate from this human individual. Therefore, Weil maintains the distinction between the "inner" and the "outer" or "Is"/"Ought" or "fact"/"value" as formulated above.

Simone Weil saw Christianity, the myth of Soviet Russia, and the myth of the historically inevitable revolution as subversive action because all three re-introduced this distinction between people's "inward value" and the feelings imposed on them from society. For example, Weil pointed out that Christianity in its early days gave the poor the consciousness of an "inner value," which made them realize that they were equal to the rich. This notion of equality has meaning in a scale of values "qui n'est pas de ce monde." She pointed out that all thought of this nature is in contradiction with the social order: "La force sociale ne va pas sans mensonge. Aussi tout ce qu'il y a de plus haut dans la vie humaine, tout effort de pensée, tout effort d'amour est corrosif pour l'ordre."⁴⁵ It is clear from this example that Simone Weil preserved the Kantian dualism of the inner and the outer realms of human experience; moreover, she searched for a way to give this inward value a firmer foundation. She argued that

⁴⁴Here we are getting in to Weil's mysticism that the human intellect can be granted the truth about "objective reality" by the grace of God.

⁴⁵Weil, "...l'obéissance et liberté", op. cit., p.192.

the humanist tradition, which Kant belonged to,⁴⁶ had not preserved the basis of its central notion of human dignity. However, instead of rejecting Humanism which is the "last vestige of our supernatural vocation," Simone Weil argued that we should look for the spiritual roots of human dignity in the long tradition which forms the heritage of our civilization.

Simone Weil began at this point in her life to place more emphasis on spiritual values which maintain the intrinsic value of all human beings. Since her goal was to ameliorate this situation, she began to reflect on another possible value system, one which had taken individual moral development to be of the utmost importance. Simone Weil sought the basis for this value system in the thought of Christianity. A letter she wrote to Emmanuel Mounier, the Editor-in-Chief of *Esprit* suggested this. She pointed out that she was personally not a Catholic. Nevertheless, she considered Christian thought, rooted as it was in Greek thought, to be spiritually essential to the European civilization. She argued that to renounce Christianity would be to degrade our civilization.⁴⁷

It is this assertion that prompted Simone Weil, from 1937 until her death in 1943, to search in the religious texts for ways of expressing this conviction. No doubt it was because of her mystical experiences that she began to have this conviction. However, in the writings that follow she seems to assume more and more that human value, and human morality "descend from beyond recorded history," and she begins to quote a great deal from religious texts such as the Egyptian Book of the Dead and the Bible (both the Old and the New Testament) to support this view that "...il n'y a peut-être pas une idée morale parmi les hommes qui ne remonte au-delà des temps historiques..."⁴⁸

B. A TRADITION OF IDENTICAL THOUGHT

In chapter one we saw that Simone Weil had decided to fight in the Spanish Civil War of 1936 as an anarchist. After that experience and in relation to what she knew might become a world war, Simone Weil turned her attention

⁴⁶See Weil, Simone "En quoi consiste l'inspiration occitanienne?" *Ecrits historiques et politiques* (1960; Paris: Gallimard, 1979), p.76-77.

⁴⁷As reported in Simone Pétrement, *Simone Weil: a life*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Pantheon, 1976), p.290.

⁴⁸Simone Weil, "Ebauches de lettres (IV)," *Ecrits historiques et politiques* (1960; Paris: Gallimard, 1979), p.116.

to what the use of force does to human beings. Even though she was quite disillusioned by the aspect of human nature discovered through her study of power relations, she was still in search of the essence of human morality. Simone Weil was convinced that there had to be a place for human virtue in relations between persons and nations.

It is important, at this point, to recall some of the aspects of Simone Weil's life which may have a bearing on her general perspective of history and of the tradition of western thought that she draws on. First of all, Simone Weil was trained as a philosopher. She was, as I pointed out in chapter one and two, influenced in her general philosophical direction by her Professor, Alain. This means, as I have shown in chapter one, that Plato's thought was very familiar to Simone Weil. It was also through Alain that she would have learned to interpret philosophically the Greek tragedies and any other pertinent literature. Furthermore, Simone Weil was influenced by Alain's style of writing philosophy. As Pétrement points out Alain saw philosophy as a search for the truth:

C'est surtout en exposant le vrai qu'il réfutait le faux, et la grandeur de son enseignement se trouve dans ce qu'il avait de positif: une analyse profonde de la perception, d'admirables leçons de lecture des grands philosophes(et en général des grands écrivains), une méthode d'apprendre à penser par l'attention sévère portée à l'art d'écrire.⁴⁹

Simone Weil whole-heartedly adopted this method of thinking and writing. Furthermore, she thought that she was following a well established style of doing philosophy which originated, for western thinkers, with Plato, but may also have originated earlier. This method of thought, according to Simone Weil, "is not to ask...whether or not an idea or an assertion ...is true, but to ask what it means..."⁵⁰ It is by considering the meaning of an idea or an assertion that one can discern whether or not it is true. Other philosophers who used this method were Descartes and Kant. Because they used this method of thinking she thought that they were, like Plato, "true masters of thought." Thus, she decided to follow in their footsteps and as the following passage attests to Plato was the example:

...philosophic reflection depends on an effort of detachment that goes beyond the intelligence and involves the whole man; but this is pure Plato. "One must turn towards the truth with one's whole soul." Besides to be original on that point is not to think differently from Plato; it is to do on one's own account what Plato did twenty-five centuries ago, and indeed turn towards the truth with one's whole soul.⁵¹

⁴⁹Pétrement, *Vie*, op. cit., p.72.

⁵⁰Simone Weil, "Philosophy," *Formative Writings 1929-1941* edited and trans. by Dorothy Tuck McFarland and Wilhelmina Van Ness (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), p.287. Hereafter: "Philosophy".

⁵¹Simone Weil, "Philosophy", op. cit., p.288. Although Simone Weil certainly deviates from Alain's way of thinking, she was no doubt encouraged in her independent mode of thinking about Plato and the Greek thinkers and

i. Others Employed a Similar Approach Towards Re-Vitalizing the Christian Tradition

Before we turn to the tradition that Simone Weil thinks Christianity needs to draw inspiration from, it is worthwhile to get some perspective on her method by considering the method of a thinker who was writing in France at the same time, Jean Guitton. In his book, *Le problème de la connaissance et la pensée religieuse*, he took on a project somewhat similar to hers in that he divides the history of philosophy into two main tendencies. And like Simone Weil, he intends to provide evidence for his view that western thought fluctuates between healthy tendencies and corrupt tendencies. Guitton uses two operative terms towards this end: he uses "l'ambiance" to signify the intellectual atmospheres of a vast period of time; and he uses the term "corrompu" to describe when a thought which in its essence has the elements of a balanced way of thinking gets corrupted. Simone Weil, as may already be evident, has a similar way of dividing western thought into intellectual atmospheres that cover vast periods of time; and she argues, although in a somewhat different way, that thought gets corrupted for various reasons. Furthermore, Guitton used his method of delineating western thought to direct the West towards a goal similar to the one Simone Weil took on. Guitton's goal was to determine how "les deux ambiances" and their tendencies towards "corrompu" have affected "le Christianisme Catholique."

In order to do this he proposed to study how the Catholic faith got mixed in with other mode of thinking and to separate them. Also, he proposed to study what it was about modern thought that corrupted this thought. As he says:

Il apparait, en effet, que les modernes ont bien souvent amalgame des théories systématiques avec les faits réels qu'ils découvraient et que le prétendu donne sur lequel ils batissaient était déjà en partie fabriqué par eux.⁵²

Guitton thought that if he could separate out that which corrupted modern thought from that which is not then he could re-unite contemporary philosophical and religious thought with traditional Christian thought. In his earlier text, volume i to iv of the series, *La pensée moderne et le catholicisme*, he established that his work could only be

writers in general by him. For Alain's view on the Greeks, see for instance an essay by Fernand Robert, "Alain, Le Grec et La Grece," Alain, L'Association des amis d'Alain, Bulletin No. 64, Juin 1987, 21-58.

⁵²Jean Guitton, *Le problème de la connaissance et la pensée religieuse*, La pensée moderne et le catholicisme series v (Aix: Impr. d'Editions provençales, 1939), p.9. Hereafter: Guitton, *La connaissance*.

done by way of the intellect; thus, the first thing he deals with in *Le Problème de la connaissance et la pensée religieuse* is the problem of knowledge. Guitton thinks that when we are considering religious "knowledge" we are dealing with knowing the "facts" at the origin of Christianity: one, he will respect and the other, he will defend. As he says:

"D'office, on divisera tout récit de miracle en deux parts, l'une qui sera rejetée dans le légendaire, c'est-à-dire, dans le subjectif; l'autre qui sera retenue dans l'historique, c'est-à-dire dans l'objectif. . ."³³

Guitton proposes to devise a "rational method" by which he can study "les faits exceptionnels" that gave rise to Christianity. Then he thinks we will see that [a true philosophy of knowledge is not opposed] "une véritable philosophie de la connaissance n'est pas opposée à l'acceptation contrôlée des témoignages portant sur ces faits rares et peut-être uniques en leur genre qui sont à la racine de la foi."³⁴

Simone Weil was perhaps concerned about preserving the catholicity of Christianity; nevertheless, she was equally concerned to determine how Christianity was affected by the two intellectual atmospheres she discerns in the west. In the following, I will give a brief account of Guitton's conception of *ambiance* and *corruption*. Simone Weil does not use these terms but, as we will see as chapter three unfolds, she seems to be working from a similar framework.

Guitton begins his work on the study of religious knowledge by describing what he saw to be two kinds of *ambiance* in the history pertaining to Christianity. He defines the term *ambiance* in the following way:

"Chaque époque intellectuelle est caractérisée par une certaine "atmosphère mentale" que j'appellerais une *ambiance*. Nous avons déjà rencontré dans les études précédentes l'idée de *mentalité*. L'*ambiance* est une *mentalité* plus vaste.

³³Guitton, *La connaissance*, op. cit., p. 11

³⁴Guitton, *La connaissance*, op. cit., p. 11.

The second problem Guitton takes up in this work is "le problème du changement." He argues that there are two kinds of change—"evolution" which he takes to mean changes "qui conservent et illustrent le germe" and development which he takes to mean changes "qui le déforment et le corrompent."

Guitton sees the role of the sciences in displacing religion in much the same way as Weil does—as we saw expressed in "Science et Perception dans Descartes." Guitton claims that the dominance of positivistic science has made it difficult for a living catholic faith to persist in the human intellect, as he says:

"Et il est bien difficile que la foi catholique subsiste vivante dans la domaine de l'intelligence. Elle est reléguée dans le sentiment, et dans la coutume. Elle peut se manifester par ses opérations. Elle est privée de sa racine. 13

I will expand in Simone Weil's critique of how contemporary science has "corrupted" modern thought in Part two of this chapter.

Et comme celle-ci, elle s'impose à la raison, qui baigne en elle, qui parfois se confond avec elle."⁵⁵

The first ambiance, the realist ambiance, he thinks, dates back to Socrates and continues until the time of Kant:

"... pendant vingt siècles l'ambiance de la pensée a été réaliste; nous voulons dire que l'humanité a spontanément admis que les choses et les êtres existent indépendamment de notre pensée, de ses lois et de ses règles."⁵⁶

The second ambiance is the "phase moderne." Guitton claims that during this period of thought, the general mentality was to presume exactly the opposite of the realist point of view; that is, we tend to assume that only thought and thinking subjects exist. As he says:

"Ce qui existe, ce ne sont pas des choses, mais des pensées, et comme les pensées à la différence des choses ne peuvent pas exister hors d'un sujet qui les pense ce qui existe ce sont des sujets, des consciences et comme on dit les "représentations" que ces sujets se forment."⁵⁷

In general, this second "ambiance" is a corruption of idealism which Guitton defines:

"La doctrine qui, lorsqu'elle envisage l'opération de l'intelligence qui perçoit, qui conçoit et qui comprend, insiste avant tout sur la pensée, et non pas sur l'être, qui part de la pensée pour aller à l'être, qui part de la pensée pour aller à l'être au lieu d'aller de l'être à la pensée, je la nomme idéalisme."⁵⁸

Guitton defines corruption in the following way:

"corrompu est le contraire de pur. La corruption, dit Littré, c'est la rupture d'un ensemble, c'est l'altération. Et j'aperçois une idée bien importante et bien riche dans cette définition de l'altération par un déséquilibre survenu dans un ensemble."⁵⁹

Guitton saw a natural connection between the first sort of ambiance—"l'ambiance réaliste"—and Christianity. Genesis, he argues, brings forth and assumes the realistic view of the world inherited from the Greeks—Plato and Aristotle. As he says:

La genèse racontait comment Dieu avait fait d'abord les choses, puis l'homme et la femme. Les choses, en comprenant par là l'étendue, la terre et la mer, les luminaires, les oiseaux, les poissons, le bétail, tout cela avait précédé l'homme. A s'en tenir à cet antique récit il y avait en pendant six jours des choses sans que l'esprit humain fut. C'était la preuve par quatre que les choses n'avaient pas besoin de l'esprit humain pour exister.⁶⁰

After some arguments from the Christian tradition of St. Paul to St. Thomas Aquinas concerning the basis of

⁵⁵Guitton, *La connaissance*, op. cit., p. 18.

⁵⁶Guitton, *La connaissance*, op. cit., p. 19-20.

⁵⁷Guitton, *La connaissance*, op. cit., p. 19-20.

⁵⁸Guitton, *La connaissance*, op. cit., p. 35.

⁵⁹Guitton, *La connaissance*, op. cit., p. 19.

⁶⁰Guitton, *La connaissance*, op. cit., p. 23-24.

faith, Guitton begins with the view that God created things and then humans. Then, we turn to the world of things to continue this faith through real contact with things thereby obtaining knowledge of things. In this way, Guitton argues that Christianity is in keeping with the ancient realistic conception of the world held by Plato and Aristotle. For them, too, knowledge only confirmed the relation given to us between that which exists outside of us and the intellect's receiving of it. The intellect could be mistaken, confused or it could know; but, for Plato and Aristotle, as for Christians, the existence of things outside of human beings was not questioned. As Guitton says:

La philosophie antique n'avait point mis en doute la realite de la connaissance. Pour Platon comme pour Aristotele connaitre c'est entrer en rapport avec quelque chose qui n'est pas soi. En nous, il ya l'intelligence' il ya en dehors de nous le reel. Leur relation, c'est la connaissance. Celle-ci peut etre vraie, confuse ou fausse suivant que le rapport de l'intelligence avec la chose se fait bien ou se fait mal.⁶¹

Guitton argues that the realist ambiance is corrupted when human beings begin to take their conception of the world to be the same as the world itself. In other words, human beings fail to realize that sometimes their conceptions do not cohere with things as they exist in themselves. As Guitton says: "Et pourtant, le principe du réalisme pouvait être corrompu. Il risquait de nous faire prendre pour des realités toutes les conceptions de notre esprit." ⁶²

In *Le probleme de la connaissance et la pensée religieuse*, Guitton generally argues that in the history of the era of the xvi-xviii centuries, there has been a general and progressive corruption of realism. This corruption of realism has given rise to idealism which in turn has fallen into a corrupt state. Guitton describes how this corruption comes about in philosophical terms in relation to the sciences and religion.

There are some distinct similarities in these thinkers' method of viewing the history of western thought and it would be possible to compare the two projects, that of Simone Weil's and Guitton's, but it is not in the scope of this thesis to do that. However, Guitton brings out two tendencies in the intellectual atmosphere of his and Simone Weil's time which may help to explain what legitimated her seemingly singular project of drawing spiritual inspiration not only from Greece and Egypt, but also from the Orient. Guitton suggests that it was the revival of idealism that led thinkers of the 19th and 20th centuries to return to the thought of Greece and the Orient with an

⁶¹Guitton, *La connaissance*, op. cit., p. 25.

⁶²Guitton, *La connaissance*, op. cit., p. 25.

open mind. As Guitton points out, after about twenty centuries of the "ambiance réaliste", Kant, and later Hegel, moved the intellectuals towards an "ambiance idéaliste". In some ways this meant a return to Plato and as we know Simone Weil bathed in this light. Some thinkers, Guitton points out, saw this movement as a licence for them to draw on different roots from the past. Professor Léon Brunschvicg, Simone Weil's supervisor at the Ecole Normale, was one of those philosophers who looked to the distant past for new ideas. Guitton points out that Brunschvicg claimed that with idealism Judeo-Christian theology could draw on the religious tradition of Greece and Egypt, as Brunschvicg says:

Nous ne disons pas que la notion religieuse par excellence soit encore à découvrir : c'est le *Verbe* que la Grèce a reçu d'Égypte et qui devait devenir le centre de la théologie judéo-chrétienne...⁶³.

Guitton does not say directly that Catholicism is likely to draw inspiration from the Orient, he simply raises the question of such a possibility. For, he points out, according to Father Congar (a specialist in religious communities) the Orient is "spontanément et intimement platonicien". If Guitton and Weil are right and Western Philosophy is moving in the direction of platonic thought, then perhaps Western thinkers will also probe further into the spontaneous Eastern spiritual thought implicit in Plato's philosophy. With this in mind, Guitton compares the differences between the two tendencies in religious thinking.♣⁶⁴ For my thesis, this is only important to the degree that it suggests that thinking about the religious thought of the Orient was not unheard of in the 1930's and '40's; the Catholics were beginning to take a critical look at their own tradition by making comparisons with others.

Simone Weil came from the same general intellectual atmosphere as Brunschvicg, Guitton, and, as I pointed out in Chapter 1 and 2, Alain. All of these thinkers in their own unique ways took this turn towards mystical thought; the renewed interest in Plato, the Greeks, and the Egyptians. Weil went one step further in her willingness to approach the Orient on common terms. Thus, feeling little or no constraints and in fact being encouraged by those around her, Simone Weil brings together all the diverse formulations of that one universal thought and shows us the terms which unite them and especially how they are at the source of the Christian Revelation.

⁶³As quoted by Guitton, *La connaissance*, op. cit., p. 56.

⁶⁴See Guitton's comparison in *La connaissance*, op. cit., p.47.

ii. Detachment as a Method of Determining Values

Simone Weil developed this idea of detachment in an essay she wrote early in 1941, "Some Reflections on the Idea of Value."⁶⁵ In this paper, she connected her early reflections on how to maintain a morally healthy soul through reflection and acting accordingly to her maturer concern of how we can know the highest values. When the mind is active and directs the body to act methodically instead of according to some whim, the mind shows what it values. According to this view, knowledge is value-laden because, as we saw above in Chapter two, it is the essence of the mind to act and make choices with respect to how to direct the body. When the mind chooses, it values this rather than that. As we saw above, in keeping with this line of thinking, Simone Weil argued in 1941 that "the mind is essentially a tension towards value." The mind is always engaged in making choices of value; thus, the question that Simone Weil posed for herself was: how can the mind which is always involved in defining values for itself begin to place some values over others -- how do we define the standard by which we judge our values? The fact that existence demands that we value things and that it is through our actions that we express what it is we value throws us into a problem of not being able to move outside of ourselves in order to choose what to value; because if we direct our minds away from the world and activity itself, then we show that we value reflection itself. Simone Weil argued that the very act of making the effort to judge for ourselves what are the highest values expresses a value; thus, we are involved in a "vicious circle" when we try to establish a hierarchy of values:

For since the mind is a tension toward some value, how can it detach itself from the value toward which it is straining in order to consider it, and put it at its proper level in regard to other values? This detachment demands an effort, and every effort of the mind is a striving toward a value. Thus, in order to achieve this detachment, the mind must regard this detachment itself as the supreme value. But in order to see in detachment a value superior to all others, one must already be detached from all other values. This is a vicious circle that makes the task of reflection seem to be a miracle....⁶⁶

We see that there is in Simone Weil's reflections on values a recognition that although every act of the mind -- which can only really exist if it is expressed bodily either in word or deed -- is value-laden, it takes another major effort of the mind to put values in their proper order in relation to one another and to define the highest values.

⁶⁵See Simone Pétrement's rendition of and citations from this essay in *Simone Weil: A Life*, op. cit., 405-406. Hereafter: *A Life*.

⁶⁶ Simone Weil, *A Life*, op. cit., p.405.

Previously, Simone Weil had argued that we must value reflection because it allows us to choose our actions and keep that part of ourselves that is prone to chaotic reaction and leaves everything to chance in its proper place under the direction of the mind. Now she wants to take this line of thought a step further and actually define what are the highest values. And as the above passage points out, she thinks that "detachment" is to be taken as the "supreme value." But now we must ask: why? Is it because this is the method by which we can achieve methodical action and thus get the world to bend to our will? How can "detachment" lead us to the highest values? Or, is it itself the highest value?

iii. . Detachment leads to Beauty and God

Simone Weil was beginning at this point her life to bring together her metaphysics and her philosophical anthropology; this fusion had a profound affect on her conception of morality. Like Plato, she could not separate her metaphysics from her conception of morality. As I had argued in Chapter two, implicit in her early conception of human nature was the view that human beings have this unique relation to a transcendent God. It is because we can know the mind's capacity to choose and its capacity through thought to meet necessity on its own terms that we begin to raise the questions about how this could all be possible. Simone Weil had argued, in keeping with her reflections on Descartes, that this could only be possible if there were a God (a Being much greater than ourselves) who could do what to us seems impossible — create the universe in such a way that everything is both limited and unlimited and create us with the ability to see in our own small way the beauty of such a creation. Simone Weil had already appealed, in her early thought, to a way of thinking that she returns to in her later thought. This is that we do not have to rationally prove the existence of God, rather we only have to contemplate our own privileged position in the Universe; that is, that we have been given the ability to perceive the beauty of the universe through our understanding of the marvel of such a combination of the complexity of things with the simplicity of their principle. In this way detachment is related to God and can become the supreme value — we are simply drawn to God by the beauty of the understanding of necessity itself. Yet, as we saw above in Chapter two, no understanding could be achieved without action in the world; here I use the term understanding in the comprehensive sense Simone Weil has given it. Our efforts to establish a hierarchy of values — to separate out what deserves to be considered the

highest of values -- consists of adhering to the beauty which detachment leads us to:

...a sense of beauty...remains rooted in the heart of every man as a powerful incentive....The soul's natural inclination to love beauty is the trap God most frequently uses in order to win and open it to the breath from on high.⁶⁷

Beauty is the only thing in this universe which is good in itself or as Kant says is an end in itself:

Beauty is the only finality here below. As Kant said very aptly, it is a finality which involves no objective....It alone is good in itself....⁶⁸

Yet, Simone Weil argues, even though beauty is a means to nothing else in this world, it does not fully satisfy desire. Instead, beauty acts as God's snare because it leads us to the beyond -- it holds great promise and makes us want to possess it, but because it is not to be possessed it leaves us wanting. It is this want that knows no satisfaction less than beauty and ultimately not in beauty either that leads to God. Thus, God uses beauty to reveal His Goodness to us:

A beautiful thing involves no good except itself...as it appears to us....We do not desire anything else, we possess it, and yet we still desire something. We do not in the least know what it is. We want to get behind beauty, but it is only a surface. It is like a mirror that sends us back our own desire for goodness....We should like to feed upon it but it is merely something to look at....The great trouble of human life is that looking and eating are two different operations. Only beyond the sky, in the country inhabited by God, are they one and the same operation.⁶⁹

Beauty provides us not only with the desire for goodness itself, but it, also, by way of analogy allows us to understand how it is that the good could be indefinable and nothing else but itself. Thus, argues Simone Weil, the good is not relative to any other thing:

Every single thing which has properties is not only good, but something else besides. Everything which has properties is a mixture of good and evil. The good has no property at all, except the fact of being good.⁷⁰ There was in Simone Weil's eyes simply no way to define the good without mixing it with evil. In keeping with her philosophical method, Simone Weil queried: if we cannot attribute any properties to the good; "Is it, then, emptiness; is it negative?" Her answer was that the good does appear to us as "negative" and "empty," at first, and that is why we do not immediately see it as valuable. Nevertheless, she argued insofar as we have to pass through

⁶⁷Simone Weil, *Waiting on God*, trans. by Emma Craufurd (1950; Glasgow:Fount Paperbacks, 1983.), p.118. Hereafter: *Waiting*.

⁶⁸Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.121-122.

⁶⁹Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.121.

⁷⁰Simone Weil, *The Notebooks of Simone Weil Volume II*, trans. by Arthur Wills (1952-5; London & Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), p.545. Hereafter: *The Notebooks II*.

the negative in our thinking process of deliberation or of judging what is valuable, we have inherent to our minds the way to value the good in its negative appearance. Thus, through reflection we practise a kind of detachment which can lead us to the good, but indirectly and only if we continue to practise this method. In other words, as long as we continue to direct the mind towards reflection, we value the good through detachment itself.

God has made us free and intelligent in order so that we should renounce our will and our intelligence. To renounce them means...to exercise them correctly(according to just rules) and in their fulness....⁷¹

It is, thus, only by way of detached thought that we can adhere to the beauty of the higher values. To know these values we must prepare through an apprenticeship which creates an opening through which only God can enter. Until that happens we have this feeling of emptiness, and we must make use of this feeling as a stimulant for seeking, but without ever expecting.

Reflection presupposes a transformation in the orientation of the soul, which we call detachment....Detachment is a renouncement of all possible goals without exception, a renouncement that sets a void in place of the future, as would the imminent approach of death....detachment has always been compared to death and the initiation into wisdom has been regarded as a kind of passage through death....detached thought has as its object the establishment of a true hierarchy among values...; it has as its object a way of living, a better life, not elsewhere but in this world and immediately....⁷²

iv. Detachment and St. John of the Cross: Christian Mysticism

Simone Weil found this method to be the same one described by the Christian mystic St. John of the Cross and as we already noted she first found it in Plato:

But since we are unable immediately to turn the whole of our attention towards this (the good), since a long apprenticeship is necessary, during this time it is negative, empty, and we direct our attention toward the negative and empty. It is this which constitutes the dark night of St. John of the Cross, and which is also found in Plato.⁷³

We saw in Chapter one through Simone Weil's discussions with Father Perrin and Gustave Thibon that they considered her view of Christianity to be very platonic in nature. Also, Simone Weil herself considered the Christian tradition to be more or less her tradition. This would, however, be much too simple an answer to the

⁷¹Simone Weil, *The Notebooks I*, op. cit., p.280.

⁷² As quoted by Simone Petrément, *A Life*, op. cit., p.405.

⁷³Simone Weil, *The NotebooksII*, op. cit., p.545. The brackets have been added by me.

question of why Simone Weil was drawn to Christianity. Given that she drew her spiritual inspiration from many sources and that she was not born into a Christian family, what prompted her to claim that she "adopted the Christian attitude..." and that she "always remained within the Christian inspiration?"⁷⁴ One can also ask: What sort of Christian was Simone Weil? And how does she propose to unite Plato and Christianity?

To begin with, the first of the two questions posed above will be dealt with. In Chapter one we saw that Simone Weil had developed a sensitivity to the suffering and afflictions of others through her political activity, her work with the trade unions, and through her own factory work. Almost her whole life, she identified with the oppressed and as was evident in Chapter two she proposed a conception of a "free society" which was intended to help alleviate their miserable conditions, both socially and morally. However, as the war drew closer and as she felt more and more certain that this miserable condition was about to sweep the whole of Europe, she began to reflect more deeply on the coldness of the hearts of those around her. She was especially disappointed with the Socialists and Communists, whom she thought shared her genuine concern for the welfare of human beings. She was after all raised in the tradition of the humanists; those who sought to replace the violence of the Revolution with some truly human values: truth, beauty, liberty, and equality. Simone Weil had believed that she shared these values with the Communists and the Socialists and that they were the ones who really took the side of the oppressed. But as I pointed out in the first part of this chapter, she learned that human weakness in the face of force, in this case the force of group opinion, was all too prevalent. Thus, alone amongst her comrades, she harboured the bitter experience of being incapable of persuading them that the human beings, they turned their backs on, were, in fact, the reason for their struggle and infinitely more important than remaining true to the imagined goal of the Communist Party and Soviet Russia. As early as 1938, she expressed the idea that helplessness is not always what

⁷⁴Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.29. Although it is important to consider why Simone Weil rejected Judaism, the religious tradition she was born into, I will not be dealing with this question in this thesis. I am not well enough versed with Old Testament scholarship to adequately assess her claims and criticisms therein. As far as I am aware, Simone Weil was unaware of the Jewish mystical tradition; however that is an area which has been researched by scholars recently. See for instance, "La tradition mystique juive et Simone Weil" by Richard A. Freund, published in *Cahiers Simone Weil*, Tome X - No. 3, Septembre 1987, p.289-296. And not so recent, but still being discussed is Wladimir Rabi's article, "La conception weilienne de la Création. Rencontre avec la Kabbale juive" in *Simone Weil, philosophe, historienne et mystique* (Paris: Aubier, 1978), p.141-161.

it seems to be – Christ was soon to be her penultimate example. Already in this passage we get some clues concerning what drew her to Christianity. In a letter to an Oxford Poet she comments on a poem:

Helplessness - I do not mean weakness of character, but utter lack of material force - breathes forth in these lines all its bitterness. For it is bitter; nothing in the world is so bitter. Yet it is better for the soul than triumph and power, because there is truth in it....For instance, the vilest prostitute in the streets is better than a self-righteous woman....Still such misery is shameful; the soul yearns for a truth not mingled with misery, shame and bondage, and dares not think it can't be found in this world, I believe it can....the nobleness of suffering is not to be spoken of lightly....Do you realize there are millions and millions of people on earth who suffer nearly always, from birth to death? It is a pity they have not learned expression; they would say the truth about suffering....The most beautiful poetry is the poetry which can best express, in its truth, the life of the people who can't write poetry.... the soul of genius is caritas, in the Christian signification of the word; the sense that every human being is all-important.⁷⁵

It could be that Simone Weil herself, because of her sense of helplessness, to some degree, identified with Christ's affliction, with that aspect of His detachment; she took Him to have fully suffered like a human being. However, it is not certain that she considered herself to have been among the afflicted. But, she seemed to find in Christ's tormented cry in the midst of His suffering on the Cross an answer to the question that must have tortured her: Why do human beings have to suffer? And even more to the point for Simone Weil, as it was for Job, why must the innocent suffer affliction? In the above-quoted passage, she connected what would seem to be contradictory ideas: the bitterness of not having material force on one's side and the nobleness of suffering. Christ's cry of pure bitterness on the Cross (My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Matt.xxvii, 46) and the nobleness of His suffering perfectly combined these seemingly contradictory feelings. There could be no one as innocent as the Son of God, and yet, He was stripped completely of material force and made to undergo as much torture as a human being could bear. If there was to be an answer to the question of why, if God is purely Good, do the innocent suffer, surely it was to be found through a contemplation on how God could allow His perfectly innocent Son, suffer the Cross. She says in her Notebooks that this cry of Christ's is the proof that Christianity is divine:

Christ curing the sick...; this is the humble, human...part of his mission. The supernatural part is the bloody sweat, the unsatisfied desire to find consolation among his friends, the supplication to be spared, the feeling of being forsaken by God.

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

There lies the real proof that Christianity is something divine.⁷⁶

⁷⁵Simone Weil, "To an Oxford Poet, 1938," *Simone Weil: Seventy Letters*, trans. and arranged by Richard Rees(London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p.104-105.

⁷⁶Simone Weil, *The Notebooks I*, op. cit., p.263.

The question, of course, is: Out of all that Christianity is, why is this combination of the bitter cry of the innocent sufferer with the nobleness of Christ the proof of the divine nature of Christianity? The answer to this question and a preliminary answer to the one raised above: What drew Simone Weil to Christianity? would be that she was inspired by the idea that all those miserably afflicted people that she had encountered may be in their wretched state very close to Christ. Simone Weil saw in Christ's Passion the way that an afflicted person could possibly be loved by God, if only this person could learn to consent. Christ's Passion was about human equality in the eyes of God, and those who suffer affliction and know how to consent have Christ as their closest ally. The second reason why she put the burden of proof of the divine nature of Christianity on the Passion was because the idea of human equality, not only in the face of an unbending and cold force, death, but also, with respect to the way to God's love, emerges from the Passion. A truth she may have learned from St. John of the Cross' reflections on the cross. She probably turned to St. John of the Cross because she realized that to be thrown into affliction before one is prepared is to lose one's soul:

Affliction makes God appear to be absent for a time....During this absence there is nothing to love. What is terrible is that if, in this darkness..., the soul ceases to love, God's absence becomes final....That is why those who plunge men into affliction before they are prepared to receive it, kill their souls.⁷⁷

Thus, St. John of the Cross could teach Simone Weil about the path of apprenticeship in Christianity. She was still in search for a way in which the afflicted could assimilate with God.

Simone Weil was not alone in her study of the Christian Mystics in France during the 1930's. In the previous passage quoted above, Simone Weil relates her view that "every human being is all-important" to the Christian term: 'caritas'. This term was also used by Jacques Maritain, in a book published in 1932, *Distinguer pour unir ou les degrés du savoir*⁷⁸, to show the relation between the mystical thought of St. John of the Cross and Christian theology. He argues that the "equality of love between God and the soul" can also be found in the Christian doctrine of St. Thomas:

⁷⁷Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.80.

⁷⁸Jacques Maritain, *Distinguer Pour Unir ou Les Degrés du Savoir* (1932; Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1959). See Chapters VIII, IX, and especially Appendix VIII and IX. I will restrict my referencing to the two Appendix, as it is not in the scope of this thesis to enter into Maritain's complete discussion of St. John of the Cross' mystical thought. Hereafter: *Distinguer*.

Mais si le langage des deux Docteurs est différent, nous croyons que dans leur pensée il n'y a aucun désaccord, qu'il s'agisse de... (l') égalité d'amour.... réglé par la foi ou réglé par la vision il demeure le même amour. *Charitas nunquam excidit.*⁷⁹

The point of Maritain's claim is that this love is the only love which can unite God and man; so, whether it is expressed in theological terms or in mystical terms, it is the same love which unites God to God Himself by way of man and this can happen in this life:

Alors c'est un amour sans mesure que l'âme rend à Dieu, et c'est dans l'immensité même de l'amour divin qu'a lieu l'égalité d'amour, parce que c'est par l'amour incréé lui-même que l'âme aime Dieu, donnant ainsi à Dieu Dieu lui-même.... Remarquons en effet que voir Dieu comme il nous voit n'est pas possible ici-bas, mais il ne suit pas de là que l'*aimer* comme il nous aime ...soit également impossible ici-bas. L'amour peut aller plus loin que la connaissance....⁸⁰

There really is no way to know for sure whether or not Simone Weil would have known about Maritain's arguments for the similarity between the Christian Mystic, St. John of the Cross' vision of the love which unites the soul and God and that of the Christian doctrine in St. Thomas. However, as early as 1934, her brother André was reading St. John of the Cross' works.⁸¹ He may have heard that people were reading and discussing St. John of the Cross' mystical thought during that period. Given the relation between Simone and André, if he knew anything about this thought, she would also have been aware of this thought. In 1937 through her travels in Italy she became interested in St. Francis of Assisi's experience of states of ecstasy.⁸² Perhaps the reason she was so attentive to the Greek relation between the Order of the world and the Beauty of the world (a relation which will be elaborated on soon) may be because of her contemplation on St. Francis' life and surroundings during her time in Italy. It is, on the other hand, certain that Simone Weil had thoroughly studied the works of St. John of the Cross while she was engaged in her dialogue with Father Perrin in Marseilles.⁸³ Father Perrin, in fact, encouraged her to read St. John

⁷⁹Jacques Maritain, *Distinguer*, op. cit., p.920.

⁸⁰Jacques Maritain, *Distinguer*, op. cit., p.919-920.

⁸¹As Simone Petrément points out in *Simone Weil: A Life*, (op. cit.) André had been travelling in Spain in 1934 and he brought Simone Weil back a book on St. Theresa's mystical writings and was himself interested in St. John of the Cross' writings. See p. 364. However, I do not think that St. John of the Cross was an important influence on her thought until later when she really began to formulate religious thought. Between 1940-1943 she began to write things in her notebooks and refer to St. John of the Cross' "Dark Night of the Soul."

⁸²Another reason we might have for thinking that Simone Weil knew something about Maritain's ideas on St. John of the Cross is because she held the same view of what counts as the true mystical way as Maritain. She made similar comments as Maritain about St. Teresa writings on mysticism. Compare what Maritain says in *Distinguer*, p. 317 to what Weil says in a letter to her brother in *Seventy Letters*, op. cit., 123.

⁸³See McLellan, *Utopian Pessimist*, op. cit., p.180.

of the Cross and to discuss her ideas with him. Thus, if this Dominican priest was open to Simone Weil's religious ideas, to hearing about her mystical experiences, and encouraging her to read St. John of the Cross, the intellectual environment certainly must have been receptive to mystical ideas. In numerous places in her *Notebooks* from that period, Simone Weil refers to St. John of the Cross. She writes to her brother in 1941 or 1942 that reading St. John of the Cross was her "chief occupation."

From what she says in her *Notebooks* about St. John of the Cross, she found encouragement for her emphasis on the importance of the Passion. For instance, she quotes passages from *The Dark Night of the Soul* which describe the "...the period when the soul is already detached from the world without being yet able to attach itself to God: void..."⁸⁴ The other two passages she quotes from St. John of the Cross are meditations on how it is necessary for the soul to suffer the cross to enter into the deepest knowledge -- the wisdom of God.⁸⁵ According to Maritain, only those who would have already entered the path of the spirit would be taking the way of the cross; nevertheless, he claims that there would be serious hardship along the way to a higher love. Referring to St. John of the Cross' demand for complete detachment from all worldly things and affections, Maritain says:

Ces prescriptions doivent être prises dans toute leur force, sans la moindre édulcoration. Mais il faut les entendre. Ce n'est pas seulement un détachement extérieur qu'elles demandent, c'est un détachement intérieur et radical, une mort complète : mais un renoncement radical à la *propriété* et à l'*exercice purement naturel* de nos sentiments, renoncement grâ auquel un amour supérieur les vivifiera....⁸⁶

As I pointed out in Chapter one of this thesis, Simone Weil hesitated when Father Perrin offered to baptise her. This was perhaps because she thought that one had to contemplate the mysteries before one could adhere to them. For this, as we saw in Chapter one, she argued that one could not be asked to believe the mysteries before one had understood them. In keeping with the mystical doctrine as she saw it, Simone Weil adopted the view that the intellect has only a submissive role to play in the obtaining of faith; nevertheless, it must be free to play that role. That is why she argued that "Only that part of myself which is made for the supernatural should adhere to these mysteries(the mysteries of the Catholic faith) this adherence is....a matter of love."⁸⁷ She said very clearly in

⁸⁴Weil, Simone, *The Notebooks of Simone Weil, Vol. I, trans. by Arthur Wills(1952-5; London & Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), p.215.*

⁸⁵Simone Weil, *Notebooks I*, see p. 215 where she quotes long passages from the *Cantique*

⁸⁶Jacques Maritain, *Distinguer*, op. cit., p.926.

⁸⁷Simone Weil, *Notebooks I*, 238. The brackets and what is said inside have been added.

another passage that it is also not the role of the intellect to go to the truth directly but indirectly and she thought that St. John of the Cross insisted on complete detachment:

The role of the intelligence - that part of us which affirms and denies, formulates opinions - is solely one of submission. All that I conceive of as true is less true than these things of which I cannot conceive the truth, but which I love. That is why St. John of the Cross calls faith a night. With those who have received a Christian education, the lower parts of the soul became attached to these mysteries when they have no right at all to do so. That is why such people need a purification of which St. John of the Cross describes the stages.⁸⁸

v. Christian Mysticism and Plato

Simone Weil saw the same ideas concerning the role of the intellect in Plato. In fact, she found in Plato the idea that the intellect could be trained to adhere to the truth through a study of the duality which makes up the Universe; thus, for Plato, the study of mathematics and science was the way to go beyond the intellect:

...Plato knew everything that the human intelligence can represent to itself involves contradictions, which are the lever by which it raises itself above its natural habitat.⁸⁹

As was pointed out above, Simone Weil saw in St. John of the Cross the same method of detachment that she found in Plato; however, Plato's method was to train the soul first through intellectual pursuits. In making the relation between St. John of The Cross and a Sanskrit text of the Gita, she claims that Plato was also a mystic and that he used mathematics towards this end:

Mystical thought is identical in all countries. I believe that Plato should also be included, and that he took mathematics as material for mystical contemplation.⁹⁰

Now, we can answer the question what sort of Christian was Simone Weil? She was or thought of herself as a Christian mystic. However, she may have been an unorthodox Christian mystic due to the fact that she had never been baptised and to her insistence on the relation between Christianity and the Greeks. This brings us to the question of how does she propose to unite Plato and Christianity? As Edouard Bonnaure points out Simone Weil was a Platonist like Saint Augustine, for she also insisted on the view that Plato was a 'latent Christian' in so far

⁸⁸Simone Weil, *Notebooks I*, 238. For a more in depth study of "Jean De La Croix et Simone Weil," by Alain Cugno, *Cahiers Simone Weil*, Tome XI-No 4, Decembre, 1988, pp.299-319. He shows how close Simone Weil's thought is to St. John of the Cross even though they differ in some respects.

⁸⁹ Simone Weil, "Reflections on the Quantum Theory," *Science, Necessity and the Love of God*, edited and trans. by Richard Rees (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p.28.

⁹⁰Simone Weil, "To A. W. 1941-2" *Seventy Letters*, op. cit., 135.

as his thought was a kind of preparation for the coming of God's Son, Christ. As Edouard Bonnaure points out in "La Spiritualité De Simone Weil" she does have her predecessors as there were thinkers before Simone Weil who perceived the common elements in Plato's philosophy and Christianity:

On ne saurait nier cependant l'existence de "convergences" frappantes entre certains traits de la philosophie platonicienne et le Christianisme. Saint Julien le martyr avait lui-même insisté, dans une de ses deux apologétiques, sur l'implicité chrétien dans la philosophie grecque, allant même jusqu'à identifier le "logos universel" avec le Christ. Clément d'Alexandrie, à son tour, déclarait que la sagesse philosophique a été donnée aux Grecs comme la Loi a été donnée aux Juifs. Ces convergences n'avaient pas non plus échappé à saint Augustin...⁹¹

However, as I pointed out above Simone Weil was drawn to Plato because he not only seemed to be a 'latent Christian', but also a mystic. It is for this reason that she shows the relation between the Christian mystic, St. John of the Cross and Plato with respect to the rigorous path each one marks out as the path leading to the mysteries:

The notion of mystery is legitimate when the most logical and most rigorous use of the intelligence leads to an impasse, to a contradiction which is inescapable in this sense: that the suppression of one term makes the other term meaningless and that to pose one term meaningless necessarily involves the other. Then, like a lever, the notion of mystery carries thought beyond the impasse, to the other side of the impenetrable door, beyond the domain of the intelligence and above it. But to arrive beyond the domain of the intelligence one must have travelled all through it, to the end, and by a path traced with impeccable rigour. Otherwise one is not beyond it but on this side of it.... It was because they both felt this that Plato instinctively adopted the form of argumentation and St. John of the Cross the form of classification; those forms are surprising to the reader, but for the authors they represent the necessary counterweight to the mystical....⁹²

She also saw in each of St. John of the Cross and Plato the recognition that there is a part of human nature which belongs to the supernatural realm:

....The intelligence cannot control mystery itself, but it possesses perfectly the power of control over the roads leading to mystery.... Therefore it can recognize, while remaining absolutely loyal to itself, the existence within the soul of a faculty superior to itself and which conducts thought on to a higher plane than its own. This faculty is supernatural love.⁹³

In another passage in which she links Plato, the Greeks, and St. John of the Cross, Simone Weil explains how it is that contradiction can be used as a criterion of error and at the same time as a lever to raise us to higher levels

⁹¹Edouard Bonnaure, "La spiritualité de Simone Weil," *Cahiers Simone Weil*, Tome XV - No. 2, Juin 1992, p.154. Hereafter: "La Spiritualité"

⁹²Simone Weil, "New York Notebooks," First and Last Notebooks, edited and trans. by Richard Rees (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p.131. Hereafter: "New York Notebooks".

⁹³Simone Weil, "New York Notebooks," op. cit., p.131.

of thought. It is through "natural reason" that we take a contradiction to be the sign of an error, but on the level of "supernatural reason", op. cit., p. what seems to be a contradiction for natural reason may not be so. Thus, one must try to determine which contradictions signify an error and which contradictions are only error in appearance:

What is contradictory for natural reason is not so for supernatural reason, but the latter can only use the language of the former....Nevertheless, the logic of supernatural reason is more rigorous than that of natural reason.⁹⁴

Those traditions that show an awareness of these two kinds of reason in their thought are the ones that Simone Weil sought to bring to our attention and to draw information from. She claims that among the Christian mystics St. John of the Cross had known about these two kinds of reason and that that is what connected him to the tradition. Thus, knowledge of supernatural reason is the secret revealed to the elect of which Christ is the key to this knowledge. However, Simone Weil thinks that although Christ was the living Word, this knowledge was had by Plato, who received it from the Pythagoreans, who also inherited it from an ancient tradition:

That is the fundamental doctrine of Pythagoreanism, of Platonism, and of early Christianity....Natural reason applied to the mysteries of the faith produces heresy. The mysteries of the faith, when severed from all reason, are no longer mysteries but absurdities. St. John of the Cross knew that there is supernatural reason, for he wrote it is only by way of the Cross that one penetrates the secrets of the wisdom of God.⁹⁵

Some recent texts on Iamblichus suggest that recent research allows scholars to see in Iamblichus' formulation of Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans a consistent view of Pythagorean thought. Iamblichus, claims Dominic J. O'Meara, gives us reason to think that Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans had this knowledge of "supernatural reason", op. cit., p. and that it was this that was passed on to Plato. As O'Meara says:

Despite the quantity and variety of materials used in *On Pythagoreanism* - Platonic, Pythagorean, Aristotelian texts - a unity of purpose has been found to organize the whole....Pythagoras' soul is in fact one of the souls of the divine company of Plato's *Phaedrus* which parades above the rim of the heavens and contemplates the immaterial Forms, or true being....Pythagoras seems to have communicated many different sorts of knowledge to mankind, but for Iamblichus the specifically Pythagorean revelation consists in the 'most scientific'...⁹⁶

Thus, Simone Weil is a platonist through the eyes of a Christian mystic — albeit an unorthodox Christian

⁹⁴Simone Weil, "New York Notebooks.", op. cit., p.109.

⁹⁵Simone Weil, "New York Notebooks.", op. cit., p.109-110.

⁹⁶Dominic J.O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived: Mathematics and Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p.87-89. Later, I will return to the possibility of Simone Weil having read similar sources as Iamblichus and that is why they seem to have a like interpretation of Plato.

mystic. For, she was prepared to see Plato as carrying on a tradition which links him to his predecessors; thus, they too, would have been mystics; and, as we will see, this is what Simone Weil argued.

vi. An Identical Thought has had Different but Equally Unique Manifestations

Although there is no doubt that Simone Weil sees the traditions of the past from a Christian perspective, it would also be untrue to say that she imposed the Christian Mystical point of view totally on those ancient traditions. Rather, I would suggest that she really made the effort to let the thought of India, China, Egypt, many other civilizations, and especially the thought of the whole Greek civilization live in her and in her thought. Thus, on one level she did see Plato, the Pythagoreans, and the Egyptians as 'latent Christians.' But from another point of view she simply saw Christianity as inheriting one thought (because true thought is always the same) from its predecessors. All knowledge of the mysteries is the same because it comes from the same source, God; what makes each civilization wonderful, unique, and beautiful is that each culture makes life in a whole human environment one of the multitude of ways to express this identical thought. As André Devaux points out in *L'Essence du Religieux*, "Simone Weil hoped that we, too, could revive this thought in our civilization, as we have lost sight of it. He quotes an important text where Simone Weil states her view of the history of where this thought found expression:

"Je crois qu'une pensée identique" (non pas "analogue" seulement, mais "identique," la même) "se trouve exprimée d'une manière très précise et avec des modalités à peine différentes, dans les mythologies antiques; dans la philosophie de Phérékydes" (une des sept sages de la Grèce), "Thalès, Anaximandre, Héraclite, Pythagore, Platon et des stoiciens grecs; dans la poésie grecque de la grande époque; dans le folklore universel; dans Upanishads et la Bhagavad-Gîtâ; dans les écrits des taoistes chinois et dans certains courants bouddhistes; dans ce qui reste des écritures sacrées d'Égypte, dans les dogmes de la foi chrétienne et les écrits des plus grands mystiques chrétiens, surtout saint Jean de la Croix; dans certaines hérésies, surtout la tradition cathare et manichéenne."⁹⁷

What Simone Weil saw in these traditions was a desire for the Incarnation. It was evident the Greeks had the knowledge which allowed them to perfect their desire for the Incarnation; but this remained a desire for, "Platon n'a pas connu le Dieu "révélé."" The *Timaeus* was according to Weil an expression of a calling out for Christ. As Edouard Bonnaire points out, Simone Weil claims that "...cet être que Platon appelle l'âme du monde est le fils

⁹⁷ Simone Weil, "Lettre à Jean Wahl, 1942", As quoted by André A. Devaux, "L'essence du religieux," *Simone Weil: philosophe historienne et mystique*, communications regroupées par Gilbert Kahn (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1978), p.75. Hereafter: "L'essence du religieux."

unique de Dieu."⁹⁸ However, she also found in Plato's *Timaeus* the idea that "The Word is incarnate (already in the order of the world, before the incarnation properly so-called)."⁹⁹ This makes perfect sense because if the Word is what gives order to the Universe, then necessity can only exist if the Word had been given. One of the questions posed by Plato in the *Timaeus*, according to Simone Weil, concerns the relationship of God to the world. She argues that Plato could not prove that the relation between the Father, Soul of the World and Model was not an inherent relation within the being of God.¹⁰⁰ If it is the case that the relationship is inherent in God and God is transcendent in relation to the world, then there would have to have been a way for the Word to have been inscribed in the world at another point in time. This would suggest that there had to have been a previous Incarnation of the Word. Simone Weil suggests this on a couple of occasions. She suggests in relation to Egypt's revelation referring to "one aspect of the supernatural truth" that they spoke of "a God who had lived, suffered, died a violent death, and become, in the other world, a judge and saviour of souls."¹⁰¹ Then again in *The New York Notebooks* she claims in relation to Abraham and his learning about circumcision in Egypt that "The three persons who came to Abraham " were "the Lord and two envoys. " And that:

The Lord does seem to be an incarnation of God. Would it not be Melchizedek? The epoch of Melchizedek corresponds in a singular manner to that of Dionysus who went to India.¹⁰²

Thus, Simone Weil suggests in these passages that there may have been previous incarnations before Christ. Of course, it would be going too far to say on the basis of a few passages that this was Simone Weil's definitive view on the matter. But there is also Simone Weil's essay, "The Three Sons of Noah and the History of the Mediterranean Civilisation" in which she argues that Noah was a perfectly just man. She reads passages taken from Genesis to be saying this. For instance, she claims that the following two passages suggest this:

"God, seeing that the misdeeds of man were multiplied on earth, and that the thoughts of his heart were continually bent upon evil...was grieved inwardly with sorrow." But there was Noah. "Noah was a just man and perfect in his generation, and he walked with God."¹⁰³

⁹⁸Edouard Bonnaire, "La spiritualité", op. cit., p.152-153.

⁹⁹Simone Weil, *The Notebooks I*, op. cit., p.264.

¹⁰⁰Simone Weil, *The Notebooks I*, op. cit., p.264.

¹⁰¹Simone Weil, "The Romanesque Renaissance" *Selected Essays, 1934-1943* trans. by Richard Rees (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), p.45-46. Hereafter: "The Romanesque Renaissance".

¹⁰²Simone Weil, "The New York Notebooks," op. cit., 252.

¹⁰³Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.178.

And she also claims that "The Christian liturgy compares the ark of Noah with the Cross." This would suggest that Noah was equivalent to Christ, the Son of God. What is confusing and unclear is whether Simone Weil takes Noah to be equivalent to Christ in the same way as she saw Melchisedek to be like Christ -- in other words whether they are both incarnations in the way that St. Paul claims that Melchisedek was, that is, born the Son of God¹⁰⁴ or whether Noah was like St. John of the Cross and became a perfect being by "drinking of the wine." And related to this question is whether one who becomes so truly like the Second Person of the Trinity by becoming a "just and perfect man" in this life is then equivalent to the one born as the Son of God or not. If it is so that the one who becomes "just and perfect" in this life is equivalent to the Son of God, then perhaps we should read the "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life..." (St. Paul, Hebrews vii, 2-3.) to mean "immortality" rather than "born the Son of God." This may be what Simone Weil means when she claims that "the Word is incarnate (already in the order of the world, before the incarnation properly so-called); that is, since creation redemption has always been possible for human beings. Perhaps this is what she suggests in two other passages quoted by Devaux:

Si la Rédemption, avec les signes et les moyens sensibles qui lui correspondent, n'avait pas été présente sur la terre depuis l'origine, on ne pourrait pardonner à Dieu - s'il est permis d'employer ces mots sans blasphème - le malheur de tant d'innocents déracinés, asservis, torturés, et mis à mort au cours des siècles antérieurs à l'ère chrétienne. La foi chrétienne, sous les voiles qui en laissent passer la clarté, porte des fleurs et des fruits en tous les temps et tous les lieux où il se trouve des hommes qui n'ont pas la haine de la lumière.¹⁰⁵

It remains uncertain whether Simone Weil claims that to be the Son of God like Christ, it is necessary to be born of a virgin and thus be divinely conceived or not. It would seem that she thinks it is necessary to be divinely conceived to be the incarnate God because she says as much when she agrees that the Greeks knew about the virgin Mother, who was also divine, although not identical with God.¹⁰⁶ It seems that Weil thought that the knowledge of the Word -- the Son of God was known before Christ and this she clearly states in the following passage:

¹⁰⁴This is at least how I interpret Simone Weil's reading of the passage from St. Paul which is: "King of Peace" who, "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God, abideth a priest continually." As quoted in *Waiting*, op. cit., p.179.

¹⁰⁵As quoted in André Devaux, "L'essence du religieux", op. cit., p.76-77.

¹⁰⁶Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.184.

The knowledge and love of a second divine person, distinct from the powerful creator God, and yet identical with him; of a divine person who was both wisdom and love, who ordered the universe, who taught and guided mankind, who, by his incarnation, united human nature to that of God, and was a Mediator, suffering and redeeming man's souls; that was what the nations had found beneath the branches of the marvellous tree of Ham's daughter nation. If that constituted the wine with which Noah was intoxicated when Ham saw him drunk and naked, he might well have lost the shame which is the heritage of the sons of Adam.¹⁰⁷

Since the traditions and civilisations which came before Christianity had this knowledge, then they had before us learned to serve God by loving their fellow man:

It is not *because* the Word became incarnate that we have to serve men in their flesh. (When, Lord, saw we thee an hungred and fed thee...?) (It would be truer, although still incorrect, to say that it became incarnate especially in order to teach us to serve men in their flesh.)¹⁰⁸

Whether or not Simone Weil thought that there were previous incarnations still remains an open question. It is not possible to settle this question without further research which is beyond the scope of this thesis; nevertheless, the uncertainty of the answer to this question does not change the fact that Simone Weil saw in thought of the traditions that came before us the same thing she saw in Plato -- a profound desire for the incarnation and it is this that is the mark of "une pensée identique", *op. cit.*, p. in those civilizations that carried forward the truth by preserving it in their thought. Thus, as André Devaux points out, Simone Weil insisted on giving a new reading to history from this point of view:

...toutes les pensées antérieures au Christianisme - les vraies pensées religieuses - sont regardées comme autant de supplications, plus ou moins énigmatiques hommes appelant l'incarnation de Dieu.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷Simone Weil, *Waiting*, *op. cit.*, p.182-3.

¹⁰⁸Simone Weil, "The New York Notebooks", *op. cit.*, p.280.

¹⁰⁹André Devaux, "L'essence du religieux.", *op. cit.*, p.76.

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C. GOD'S ORDER IS AN EQUILIBRIUM OF CONTRARIES : HUMANS RAISE THEMSELVES BY CONCEIVING THE UNITY AND GIVING IT BODILY EXPRESSION

i. Indian Mysticism and Egyptian Charity Bring Forth Conceptions of Equilibrium

Simone Weil's religious tradition is rich with detail. Since it covers such a range of thought, I will restrict myself to only those ideas that make up her formulation of the unchanging morality which she proposed as the basis for her critique of the western conception of civilization, and therefore, of the western conception of human nature. If she looked to the Orient or more specifically to India or China for expressions of the spirit, it was not to negate Christian thought; rather, it was to bring to light certain accents that had originally been a part of Christianity and for reasons, which we will explore later, seemed to her to be out of sight. For example, Simone Weil was thoroughly delighted with what she had learned about the culture and religion of the people who lived in the Languedoc region of the south of France in the 11th and 12th century. These people, who practised the religion of Catharism, had been influenced by the thought of the Orient; but, what made them great in Weil's eyes was what they had absorbed from this influence. Simone Weil admired the fact that religious thought lived in the hearts and minds of all the people belonging to the region and that it informed their daily activities:

...what above all makes the fact of Catharism a sort of miracle is that it was a religion and not simply a philosophy. I mean that around Toulouse in the 12th century the highest thought dwelt within a whole human environment and not only in the minds of a certain number of individuals....No thought attains to its fullest existence unless it is incarnated in a human environment, and by environment I mean something open to the world around, something which is steeped in the surrounding society and is in contact with the whole of it....¹¹⁰

If her sources on these people's lives were accurate, Simone Weil was probably not mistaken in her claim that the Cathar religion drew this aspect of its influence from the Orient. For, according to Guitton, this was one of the identifiable differences between Christianity and the religions of the Orient, as he says:

Pour l'Orient, l'essence de l'Eglise, c'est la vie divine en tant qu'elle se dévoile dans la vie de la créature ; l'Eglise est donc assumée dans la vie divine, elle est elle-même un sacrement et un mystère....L'Occident préfère voir dans l'Eglise une société qui possède certains pouvoirs, et qui destine à une action conquérante et renouvelante soit en

¹¹⁰Simone Weil, "Letter to Déodat Roché 1941", *Seveny Letters*, op. cit., p.130-131. Simone Weil read an article by Roché, "The Cathars and Spiritual Love", in which he claims that Catharism may be regarded as a Christian Pythagoreanism or Platonism. He seemed to think that Pythagoreanism and Platonism were one and the same. With such a high recommendation, Simone Weil was immediately moved to further study.

elle-même, soit hors d'elle-même, en somme qui se prépare au ciel en illuminant la terre.¹¹¹

It was this idea that all people, not just philosophers or theologians etc., could truly have insights into the highest thoughts known to human beings and have these thoughts be their guide in their daily actions that led Simone Weil to look to the texts of Indian thought, The Bhagavad Gītā and the Upanishads, for ideas and inspiration. By comparing these texts with the thought she found in the Egyptian Book of the Dead, with the thought of the Pythagoreans and Plato, with the New and Old Testament, and the many other sources she cited above, Simone Weil ended up with a comprehensive view of the human virtues that she thought could easily live in the hearts of each and every human being.

Simone Weil uses the term 'religion' in a special way; that is, she uses the term 'religion' in the broadest sense possible. She thinks that religion is philosophy insofar as it expresses the highest thought possible. The sole difference she sees between religion and philosophy is that religion should dwell "within a whole human environment and not only in the minds of a certain number of individuals." This was, as we saw above, what she admired about the Cathar religion and what drew her to the East. Thus, the distinction drawn today between religion and the "cosmological myths" was unknown to Simone Weil.¹¹² This oversight concerning the origin of the term 'religion' does not subtract anything from her proposal and the evidence she gives to support her thesis that there is an identical thought among the ancient traditions cited above. As Schmidt points out, she has contemporary support for her view in Eric Voegelin's conception of the history of "God's self-revelation." Schmidt argues that Voegelin's view of the spiritual tradition as coming to us from ancient sources, from a people who knew before us of God's self-revelation and who passed this on to us is a contemporary echo of Weil's view:

Voegelin made the distinction between compact and differentiated symbolisms, based on his discovery that the history of human order was marked by what he called multiple and parallel "leaps of being"....These leaps of being led to a break with cosmological myth which, prior to the leap, had been the universal mode of symbolizing the participation of consciousness in the cosmos....Society and the cosmos were part of a single encompassing order and were joined at the *omphalos* or world navel where "transcendent forces of being floated into the social order"....though his vocabulary ...would have been foreign to her, Weil would no doubt have agreed with Voegelin that leaps of being which led to the differentiation of symbolism in the Israelite revelation occurred also in

¹¹¹Jean Guitton, *la connaissance*, op. cit., p. 47-48.

¹¹²I learned of this distinction between religion and "cosmological myths" from a paper by Larry Schmidt, "Simone Weil on Religion: A Voegelinian Critique" *Cahiers Simone Weil* (Paris: L'Association pour l'Etude de la Pensée de Simone Weil, Tome XV-No.3, Sept., 1992), op. cit., p.263-273. Hereafter: "A Voegelin Critique".

Christianity, Hellenic philosophy, as well as "in the India of the Buddha and the China of Confucius and Lao Tse"...¹¹³

In Indian thought Simone Weil discovered the conception of the void. The conception of 'Dharma', explained Simone Weil, is the same as the conception of Justice meaning necessity because it signified a balance with unequal arms. This gave Simone Weil the idea that the concept of "Equilibrium" was implicit in the conception of "Dharma". India had the idea of a balance between the weak and the strong. Thus, society would always be made up of a hierarchical order by its very nature so that there would always be the afflicted. However, Simone Weil does not speak about affliction in relation to Indian mystical thought. Nevertheless, she did see their conception of equilibrium as being similar to the Good in Plato:

There are the gunas of prakrita. There is something in the world with which the supernatural is related, to which it is specially linked.... Good is manifested in certain things in the world and in the whole world. Equilibrium, image of the void. Compensated states of disequilibrium of the whole world, image of equilibrium.¹¹⁴

The reason this is so is because equilibrium is the contrary of disequilibrium. In so far as the world is compensated states of disequilibrium, it is, according to Simone Weil, the same as the Greek conception of necessity; therefore, disequilibrium is Dharma. She claims that equilibrium must be related to the Good because the spiritual goal is to make one's world into equilibrium. It is not clear whether Simone Weil is actually claiming that equilibrium is their conception of the transcendent. The fact that one does have to go beyond reason to achieve a stage of equilibrium suggests that it might be in her eyes the same as the transcendent:

Closed vessel. microcosm. Let my world be in equilibrium. Reason - that of the second order - can never provide this equilibrium, but only bring about a redressing of the inner balance by means of stoppages that are sufficiently long and frequent, but not exaggeratedly so.¹¹⁵

By means of this method one arrives at the void and that is when one goes beyond reason. Thus, Simone Weil thought that India's special revelation was "the identification through mystic union of God and the soul when it has reached the stage of perfection."¹¹⁶ This stage of perfection could be achieved through a kind of detachment that was, in fact, somewhat similar to that form of detachment she found in St. John of the Cross, thus found in the

¹¹³Larry Schmidt, "A Voegelin Critique", op. cit., p.267.

¹¹⁴Simone Weil, *Notebooks I*, op. cit., p.98.

¹¹⁵Simone Weil, *Notebooks I*, op. cit., p.98.

¹¹⁶Simone Weil, "The Romanesque Renaissance", op. cit., p.45.

Gospels. This would suggest that Simone Weil thought that Mysticism and this method of detachment originally came from India. Detachment meant to overcome one's desires through successive stages of detachment:

One should become detached from the three gunas (even sattva). Action for action's sake, not for its fruits (even for the fruit of inner perfection). The series of successive detachments with regard to good things each of which seems of the utmost value is the equivalent of the 'shall be added unto you' of the Gospels.¹¹⁷

The method of dealing with desire is not to coerce the body and soul not to desire, but to limit the desires – to remove the factor of insatiability. By this means, desire does not interfere with what in human beings is in contact with the infinite. The following passage suggests that Simone Weil thought that the infinite refers to the transcendent:

It is desire which is the cause of sin. (III, 37)

Desire is illimitable by nature, and this is contrary to nature, because infinity is not in its right place at the level of desire. In the world of objects of desire, which is the world manifested, the infinite does not exist....

It is useless to coerce the body and soul (jivātma) into conformity with the good, all that is necessary is to *withdraw from them the infinite*. They must not meddle with what in man is in contact with the infinite.... Without the infinite they behave otherwise.¹¹⁸

It is through this method of detachment from desires that Mystical thought could live in the people, generally, in India. For, if to limit one's desires means that the desires "behave differently", then detachment would be achieved through limiting more and more one's desires. This principle is both a principle of morality and a mystical method and could easily be taught to the people generally. And, according to Simone Weil, this is the way to virtuous action -- it, in fact, amounts to a study of Dharma:

Either the mind maintains real within itself the simultaneous notion of the contradictories, or else it is tossed about by the mechanism of natural compensations from one of the contraries to the other. That is what the Gita means by 'having passed beyond the aberration produced by the contraries.' It forms the notion of the dharma.... It is the truth of the highest importance for the conduct of life.¹¹⁹

Although Simone Weil does not use the term love to describe the relation between human beings as one of the

¹¹⁷Simone Weil, *Notebooks I*, op. cit., p. 89.

¹¹⁸Simone Weil, *Notebooks I*, op. cit., p. 88-89.

¹¹⁹Simone Weil, *Notebooks II*, op. cit., p. 387. In *The Notebooks I* Simone Weil argues that the Hindus' had knowledge of the Trinity, but since we are here concerned with their conception of virtue we can not go into their conception of the Trinity. See *Notebooks I*, op. cit., p. 264-265.

virtues in Indian thought nor as a description of that which follows after reason, the conception of 'Love' is implicit in their study of necessity, of dharma as that which must be studied to bring about an "equilibrium." In current Indian religious thought, Vishnu has equal love for each and every human being.

Simone Weil attributes the ancient manifestation of the virtue of "love of one's neighbour" to the Egyptians.. Thus, she claims their special revelation was "charity to one's neighbour , expressed with a never surpassed purity; above all, it was the immortal bliss of saved souls after a just life...."¹²⁰ This love of one's neighbour was for the Egyptians the expression of God's love. Simone Weil repeatedly quotes the following passage from *The Book of the Dead* as an example of the ultimate humility that a "soul on the way to salvation" must have:

"Seigneur de la vérité...Je t'apporte la vérité. J'ai détruit le mal pour toi...Je n'ai pas méprisé Dieu...Je n'ai pas mis en avant mon nom pour les honneurs...Je n'ai pas été cause qu'un maître ait fait souffrir son serviteur...J n'ai fait pleurer personne...Je n'ai causé de peur à personne ... Je n'ai pas rendu ma voix hautaine...Je n'ai pas rendu sourd à des paroles justes et vraies."¹²¹

For Simone Weil these words describe the highest in human virtue. The love of one's neighbour as expressed in this passage is equivalent to justice and it is this relation, she thinks, the Egyptians bequeathed to us by way of the Greeks. She argues that this conception of justice is perfect and therefore could never be replaced.

The even balance, an image of equal relations of strength, was the symbol of justice from all antiquity, especially in Egypt.¹²²

The Egyptians sought to transcend the unequal relations between the strong and the weak which made human relations an image of the relation between a human being and matter. In their conception of justice they sought to transcend 'necessity' through the realization that God's love was indiscriminate – God loves the weak and the strong equally and all that is needed is for them to receive this love. Thus, the idea of an even balance suggested to the Egyptians that the "supernatural virtue of justice" could be expressed by an individual renouncing the full use of his or her strength in a relation in which one is strong and the other so weak as to be exceptionally close to the state of matter. In this way, one gives them "the gift of the quality of human beings, of which fate had deprived them". Really only God can give this gift that is why such an act involves God but in secret. Simone Weil claims

¹²⁰Simone Weil, "The Romanesque Renaissance", op. cit., p.45.

¹²¹Simone Weil, "Quelques Réflexions sur Les origines d'hiltérisme," *écrits historiques et politiques* op. cit., p.50-52. Hereafter: "...l'Hitlerisme".

¹²²Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.100.

that the Egyptian revelation was not new as the "image of equal relations of strength" was "the symbol of justice from all antiquity"; thus, they simply gave this conception of justice special attention and special expression.

Simone Weil expresses her understanding of this conception of justice, found in The Book of the Dead:

...justice consists of behaving exactly as though there were equality when one is the stronger in an unequal relationship. Exactly, in every respect, including the slightest details of accent and attitude, for a detail may be enough to place the weaker party in the condition of matter which on this occasion naturally belongs to him, just as the slightest shock causes water which has remained liquid below freezing point to solidify.¹²³

The Egyptians, she thought, had understood that to reduce another human being to the state of affliction was to take away half the soul of that person.

Beyond a certain degree of inequality in the relations of men of unequal strength, the weaker passes into the state of matter and loses his personality. The men of old used to say: "A man loses half his soul the day he becomes a slave."¹²⁴

When the inferior or the weak is reduced by another to slavery in this way, Simone Weil claims that if this person can maintain the consciousness that this treatment conforms with justice in its manifestation as necessity then he will not lose half his soul. The reason is because this person will have already reached that stage of detachment in which the soul is in the hands of God so to speak. Nevertheless, Simone Weil is arguing that when the strong reduce the weak to states equivalent to matter, they are committing unjust acts. The reason she draws the distinction between the supernatural virtue of justice as expressed in charity by human beings and the supernatural virtue of justice which comes in the form of necessity (and supposedly this is what she sees the Egyptians expressing) is because those human acts that reduce other human beings to matter cannot be seen as expressions of God's love expressed through a human being — they cannot be seen as good acts. This is how I read the following passage in which she describes how an inferior should respond to an act other than an act of justice on the part of the strong:

For the inferior treated in a different way (from that of justice), the supernatural virtue of justice consists in understanding that the treatment he is undergoing, though *on the one hand differing from justice*, on the other is in conformity with necessity and the mechanism of human nature. He should avoid both submission and revolt.¹²⁵

¹²³Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.100.

¹²⁴Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.100.

¹²⁵Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.100. I have added the brackets and the italics.

Thus, justice which is an expression of God's love is in total agreement with the Good. When a human being acts justly, he or she gives expression to the good which can only come from God. But when he or she acts unjustly and in accordance with evil, he or she turns away from God. This means that the individual does not understand that unjust acts done out of necessity separate him or her even further from God because the individual refuses to recognize what such acts signify. Thus, not only is the act one of defiance, but also a sign of an unwillingness to see how the act is evil. This is how the screen between the unjust person and God thickens. The one to whom the unjust act was done does receive this evil and it passes into him or her. However, if he or she both understands and consents to the fact that necessity is a perfect balance of good and evil and that this evil is also an expression of God's love in the form of "freedom", then, he or she knows that God is only Good and this consent builds a shield that protects that part of the soul that belongs to God against the evil done to him or her. But, like Christ, the person's other part of the soul and the body still suffer the full impact of the evil inflicted on him or her.

Charity, the expression of justice, is also called by Simone Weil generosity because it is the expression of "the original generosity of the Creator." In response to the one who expresses the virtue of generosity, the one who receives this generosity has the opportunity to express the virtue of gratitude:

Gratitude on the part of the unfortunate, when it is pure, is but a participation in this same virtue, for only he who is capable of it can recognize it.¹²⁶

This conception of justice was, for Simone Weil, both on the side of the strong who give and the weak who receive with gratitude, a pure expression of "humility". It is a recognition that an expression of perspective is not an expression of the highest order; thus, it should be renounced for the sake of that which is of that order. The perspective of the highest order sees all human beings as equal. The only way to have this perspective is to make a space for God's love to enter. The Egyptians knew, claims Simone Weil, that this was only possible indirectly – human beings cannot seek God's love. God loves through us in secret which means that this love is intended for one of God's creatures. As Simone Weil says:

Love is a sign of our misery. God can only love himself. We can only love something other than ourselves. It is not for us to bring ourselves to a state of humility.¹²⁷

¹²⁶Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.101.

¹²⁷Simone Weil, *Notebooks I*, op. cit., p.274.

The renunciation of self that gives way to God is the folly of love which matches God's folly in abdicating himself to create us with a free will and the Universe as separated from him. (Of course this is in no way a complete rendition of the relation between God and His Creation.) One link between God and His Creation is through love and for that renunciation of self which makes space for God's love to enter is the way. Thus, the Egyptian revelation of "charity to one's neighbour" is the Revelation. For Simone Weil, this Revelation of the renunciation involved in the love of one's neighbour is expressed in all true religions in their various languages.

God permitted the existence of things distinct from himself and worth infinitely less than himself. By this creative act he denied himself....God denied himself for our sakes in order to give us the possibility of denying ourselves for him. This response, this echo, which it is in our power to refuse, is the only possible justification for the folly of love of the creative act.

The religions which have a conception of this renunciation, this voluntary distance, this voluntary effacement of God, his apparent absence and his secret presence here below, these religions are true religion, the translation into different languages of the great Revelation.¹²⁸

In defining justice as the renunciation by the strong of some of his/her power in a relationship with another who is in an unduly weak position, the Egyptians had expressed in their language the Revelation which goes with a true religion. Furthermore, they had made clear in their holy book, *The Book of the Dead*, that they had understood that virtuous action can only be expressed through the tender love that one human being shows another human being: Just as there are times when we must think of God and forget all creatures without exception, there are times when, as we look at creatures, we do not have to think explicitly of God. At such times the presence of God in us has as its condition a secret so deep that it is even a secret from us....Modesty is the condition of nuptial love.¹²⁹

And in the *Notebooks*, she says:

The moral philosophy contained in the Egyptian Book of the Dead is a supernatural one....It has a purity....Humility is the only virtue which has no image resembling itself in the moral system of the Great Beast.¹³⁰

D. GREECE'S SEARCH FOR THE PERFECT BRIDGE BETWEEN GOD AND MAN : THE DISCOVERY

¹²⁸Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.102.

¹²⁹Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p. 107.

¹³⁰Simone Weil, *Notebooks II*, op. cit., p.369.

OF THE GEOMETRICAL IMAGE PORTRAYS THE RELATION BETWEEN THE ORDER OF THE WORLD AND THE BEAUTY OF THE WORLD

In these ancient traditions, Simone Weil saw an inexhaustible source of inspiration; nevertheless, she did not think that Europe needed to live like the people in India or the people in Egypt of ancient times. Rather, Simone Weil intends to show us that we have inherited the messages from these traditions; we have simply forgotten how to recognize them because we have blocked them by placing a thick screen between ourselves and them. But, through the spiritual treasures and the scientific knowledge bequeathed to us by the ancient Greeks (which lies embedded in Christian thought), we still have access to these messages. And so it is to ancient Greece that Simone Weil claims we should turn our attention, both as a source of Europe's own spiritual vocation and of an expression of that 'unchanging morality' which it brought forth from Egypt and the Orient:

Greece both received Egypt's message and had a revelation of her own: it was the revelation of human misery, of God's transcendence, of the infinite distance between God and man.¹³¹

What the Greeks studied was the pitilessness of necessity -- especially when it showed its despicable nature through force. They understood that all human beings are subjected to this force insofar as destiny is ever present. Human beings never really know when Zeus' scales are going to tip towards them. That is why, claims Simone Weil, they searched for ways to express their understanding of the impartiality of God.

The Greeks understood that when affliction strikes no amount of understanding, nor even love, can lessen the depth of suffering. However, love expressed by a human being for one in affliction could penetrate to the heart of the afflicted one. If the afflicted one is then able to show gratitude, then the afflicted one consents to God's love. The Greeks understood that this possibility of consent in the midst of affliction was in essence the "dignity of affliction." Thus, what the Greeks inherited from the Egyptians, according to Simone Weil, was their conception of justice and the idea that justice is fused with love. What they have added to this conception of justice was their realization of what miserable creatures we would be without justice and the love that goes with it:

In the eyes of the Greeks also a respect for Zeus the suppliant was the first duty of justice....Only the absolute

¹³¹Simone Weil, "The Romanesque Renaissance", op. cit., p.46.

identification of justice and love makes the co-existence possible of compassion and gratitude on the one hand, and on the other, of respect for the dignity of affliction in the afflicted....¹³²

Simone Weil does not see two conceptions of justice between the Greeks and the Egyptians. She claims that when we divide the term justice into that which manifests itself because of the "abuse of force" (using more force than the circumstances require) and that which manifests itself through the compassionate act of a human being, we cease to understand the purpose for extreme suffering and affliction. We are unable to see "affliction" as "divine mercy," as the expression of God's love for his creature. Affliction from this point of view is a method of purging the human being of evil. Thus, Simone Weil argues that if the sufferer -- the afflicted -- were aware of this and was able to turn towards God with consent then this person would receive the fulness of God's love. It is in this light that affliction must be respected. A true artist must be able to describe the beauty of affliction in all its dignity. For affliction seen as "divine mercy" could only be beautiful. So, whether justice is expressed through the human being in charity/compassion or by way of necessity in affliction, Simone Weil is claiming that God's love is the source of both. Thus, the Greek and the Egyptian conception of justice are the same.¹³³

The Greeks through their science, their tragedies, and their art studied how "necessity" could be a lever to raise us to virtue. Simone Weil argues that this discovery of the valuable use of necessity in all possible ways was their special contribution to the spiritual tradition:

Ce châtement d'une rigueur géométrique, qui punit automatiquement l'abus de la force, chez les Grecs. Il constitue l'âme de l'épopée; sous le nom de Némésis, il est le ressort des tragédies d'Eschyle; les Pythagoriciens, Socrates, Platon, partirent de là pour penser l'homme et l'univers. La notion en est devenue familière partout où l'hellénisme a pénétré....mais l'Occident l'a perdue et n'a plus même dans aucune de ses langues de mot pour l'exprimer; les idées de limite, de mesure, d'équilibre, qui devraient déterminer la conduite de la vie, n'ont plus qu'un emploi servile dans la technique. Nous ne sommes géomètres que devant la matière; les Grecs furent d'abord géomètres dans l'apprentissage de la vertu.¹³⁴

¹³²Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.97.

¹³³But Simone Weil is not saying that it is good to impose affliction/misery on another--that is always unjust and should be punished.

¹³⁴Simone Weil, "L'Illiade ou Le poème de la force," *La source grecque* (Paris : Gallimard, 1953), p.22-23. Hereafter: L'Illiade. I will return, in the next section of this chapter, to Simone Weil's implied criticism of the West's use of these notions as only a study of matter -- that is, I will return to what exactly this criticism is and also to her idea that science could become for us as it was for the Greeks "an apprenticeship to virtue." Although I am aware of the fact that there are many interpretations of Homer's *Iliad*, I will not be comparing Simone Weil's interpretation to these others as that is not within the scope of this thesis. Rather, I will discuss her interpretation of the *Iliad* with the idea of abstracting the "conception of virtue" she found expressed in the *Iliad*.

i. Homer and Human Misery : the Dominion of Necessity and Destiny

Homer was, according to Simone Weil, the first of the Greeks to express an understanding of human affliction – human misery – through his study of necessity in its manifestation as force in *The Iliad*. Homer's impartiality, she thought, was great and 'pure.' He described how all who are subjected to the 'empire of might' take on the same coldness as that which dominates them; a coldness equalled only by the bitterness in their hearts. Bitterness, Weil claims, is the human cry in the face of a violence which is pitiless and kills. But bitterness after some time hardens the soul. Homer, claims Simone Weil, described with exceptional lucidity and justice how this cry turns into self destruction and destruction of 'the other'. Simone Weil comments on Homer's description of force's domination of the human soul:

...the soul that is dominated by war cries out for deliverance; but deliverance itself appears in tragic guise, in the form of extreme destruction.... The soul, which is forced by the existence of an enemy, to destroy that part of itself implanted by nature, believes it can only cure itself by the destruction of the enemy, and at the same time the death of beloved companions stimulates the desire to emulate them, to follow their dark example:

Ah, to die at once, since without my help

My friends had to die. How far from home He perished, and I was not there to defend him.

Now I depart to find the murderer of one so beloved:

Hector. I will receive death at whatever moment Zeus and all the other gods shall accomplish it.¹³⁵

According to Simone Weil, the despair which thrusts toward death is the same despair that impels one to kill:

I know well that my fate is to perish here. Far from my loved father and mother;
but still I will not stop till the Trojans have had their glut of war.¹³⁶

The soul dominated by force no longer belongs to the human race. Thus, Homer shows us that, in war, be it vanquished be it victor, both are driven by the same madness towards annihilation. And both are determined to make an object out of the other. The misery of such a condition afflicts both alike so that the strong and the weak are shown, as in their truth, to be equals. The ravages of death afflict us all; thus, Homer shows the human condition

¹³⁵Simone Weil, "The 'Iliad' or the Poem of Force" *Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks* (1951; London : Ark Paperbacks, 1987), p.42-43. Hereafter: "Iliad".

¹³⁶Simone Weil, "Iliad", op. cit., p.43.

in its nakedness. Homer, Simone Weil argues, shows that we should feel sorrow for those human beings who are reduced to matter before death:

The cold brutality of the facts of war is in no way disguised just because neither victors nor vanquished are either admired, despised or hated....the similes which make them appear...as beasts or things...cannot make us feel either admiration or disdain, but only sorrow that men could be thus transformed.¹³⁷

Homer's genius was, Simone Weil claims, in showing us that the human beings who are dominated by the empire of force should be loved and not despised. It is this notion of, "love thy enemy" – weak or strong – that Simone Weil found expressed in the *Iliad*. In this way, we show that we see in the other the essential human weakness – that is, that we share the misery of the human condition which is to be so distant from God. Thus, it is our common human lot to be subjected to force in its many manifestations, and so, we have to hate the force but pity those who had not the love to resist:

...this poem is a miraculous object. The bitterness of it is spent upon the only true cause of bitterness: the subordination of the human soul to might....That subordination is the same for all mortals....No one in the *Iliad* is spared, just as no one on earth escapes it. None of those who succumb to it is for this reason despised....Here the humiliation of a soul that is subject to constraint is neither disguised....neither is it an object of disdain. More than one being, wounded by the degradation of affliction, is here held up to be admired.¹³⁸

After showing the horror of human degradation in all its artistic beauty, Homer shows, by contrast, how miraculous are pure justice and love. Expressions of pure love show the distance which separates those degraded by force from those who are, with grace, able to love:

...this double ability of turning men to stone is essential to might, and a soul placed in contact with it only escapes by a sort of miracle....The resulting whole would be a dismal monotony were there not, sprinkled here and there, luminous moments, brief and divine moments in the souls of men. In such moments the soul which awakes...awakes pure and intact....In that soul there is no room for ambiguous, troubled or conflicting emotions, courage and love fill it all.¹³⁹

Simone Weil quotes Homer's descriptions of "pure love" by which men and women were able to escape the dominion of force. Some examples are: how the 'tradition of hospitality' takes on one occasion precedence over the 'blindness of combat', expressions of familial love, expressions of fraternal love, pure expressions of love and tenderness between a husband and wife, "the most beautiful friendship that between companions in combat", and

¹³⁷Simone Weil, "*Iliad*", op. cit., p. 50-51.

¹³⁸Simone Weil "*Iliad*", op. cit., p. 51-52.

¹³⁹Simone Weil, "*Iliad*", op. cit., p. 46.

finally,

...the triumph, the purest love of all, the supreme grace of all wars, is that friendship which mounts up to the brim of the hearts of mortal enemies. This quells the hunger to avenge the death of a son, of a friend.¹⁴⁰

What makes the *Iliad* and Homer one of the finest of the Greeks' genius, according to Simone Weil, is that he understands the sorrow of human misfortune. All human beings — whether friend or foe — are seen to be equally precious and their degradation in the face of destiny to be a great sorrow. Homer, she says, has, with pure insight, shown us that 'chance' has delivered millions of human souls to the door of destiny "without preparation." He knew how vast and powerful the dominion of force was and how pitifully weak human beings are in comparison. And yet, it is this very human weakness that must be loved just because it is our common human lot. The strongest person or the weakest is shown by Homer to be nothing in the face of the force which kills. The only thing that makes one person different from another in such circumstances is that he or she may by grace consent to God's love whereas another may not take this grace. The recognition of our fragility which consists of succumbing to force and loving this fragility because it is an expression of God's love is at the same time to renounce the use of force oneself. Those who do not recognize that without grace they, too, if faced with it, would succumb to the dominion of force and could find themselves in a state equal to the afflicted are deceiving themselves.

...the understanding of human suffering is dependent upon justice, and love is its condition. Whoever does not know just how far necessity and a fickle fortune hold the human soul under their domination cannot treat as his equals, nor love as himself those who chance has separated from him by an abyss. The diversity of limitations to which men are subject creates the illusion that there are different species among them which cannot communicate with one another. Only he who knows the empire of might and knows how to respect it is capable of love and justice.¹⁴¹

One way one shows respect for love and justice is by listening to their reasoning faculty even in face of 'the empire of might.' But, as Homer shows, all thought that it would have been more reasonable to live and not seek revenge, to let it go, fell "into the void". For example, Achilles once spoke the words of reason:

Nothing is worth life to me, not at all the rumoured wealth of Ilium, that so prosperous city...
For one may capture oxen and fat sheep
But a human life, once lost, is not to be recaptured.¹⁴²

Achilles, being a leader, could have adhered to the law of limitation by restricting his people and the Greeks

¹⁴⁰Simone Weil, "Iliad", op. cit., p. 47-48.

¹⁴¹Simone Weil, "Iliad", op. cit., p. 53.

¹⁴²Simone Weil, "Iliad", op. cit., p. 39.

to a "moderate use of might". This would have demanded that Achilles appear weak; that he renounce using all his strength. But Achilles did not have the insight to practise this virtue.

Such detachment from appearances takes, as we saw above, a renunciation of desire and force. In these circumstances, as Simone Weil points out, Achilles would have to have had a virtue equivalent to "a constant dignity in weakness". This is, in fact, the virtue which the Greek Stoics perfected. Given Simone Weil's analysis, one could speculate that the Stoics had learned of this virtue from Homer and the other Greek writers, such as Sophocles or Aeschylus, all of whom did not admire force, but showed it its proper respect. They understood that it took all the human ingenuity and virtue possible not to be ruled by necessity. Simone Weil admired the Greeks for their study of the mechanism of force and of the difficulties involved in keeping a detached view of its pull so that one could be open to the reasonable and just way.

Homer's was the first of the Greeks to study the relation between force and human misery and the human virtues, justice and the love that is its condition; however, his genius was, in Simone Weil's eyes, the beginning of a whole culture of writers and artists which drew on the same revelation that seem to live in the hearts of the Greeks generally. For example, in Sophocles' tragedies, she found expressions of the contrary feelings of the bitterness of affliction and the love which thrives even in the void. This is the love of the mystic, especially found in Sophocles' tragedy, *Electra*.

Simone Weil described Electra's affliction and how it caused her undue pain and degradation. She had lost her father, brother, and all that she had known was taken over by strangers. She was most embittered by the loss of her brother, Orestes, who she thought was dead. Electra's love for her brother was the one thing that made it possible for her to live on. Simone Weil described Electra's love as the love of the "dark night of the soul". Nothing could replace this love as she held in horror all worldly riches; therefore, this is the kind of love (love in the void) that waits for God. Simone Weil interprets Orestes reappearance as God's answer to Electra's tears of sorrowful love:

... Orestes, who had taken her for a slave, recognizes her by her tears. He informs her that the urn is empty. He reveals himself to her.

There is a double recognition. God recognizes the soul by its tears, then makes Himself known to it.

Just when the soul is spent and has ceased to wait for God, when the external affliction of the interior aridity forces it to believe that God is not a reality, if then nevertheless the soul still loves, and holds in horror these worldly riches which would take his place, then it is God that comes to the soul, reveals Himself, speaks to it, touches it. This is what St. John of the Cross names the dark night of the soul.¹⁴³

This juxtaposition of affliction and love was what made this tragedy a description of the human condition in its most extreme forms. Weil claims that Homer, Sophocles and other Greek writers brought forth the knowledge of this juxtaposition which constitutes the perfect combination needed to receive God's love, according to the mystical tradition. Simone Weil saw in the Greek epic poetry and tragedies an expression of the human virtues in all their beauty. The Greeks had the ability to see that affliction is the one human condition that has God's love hidden in its depth and for that reason deserves respect.

Simone Weil carries forward into her view of Christianity those human virtues that she finds in the Orient, Egypt, and Greece. We can, she claims, better understand Christ's affliction and His message when we see it from the point of view of the one true tradition, which continues the same message throughout time. The message is the same because it concerns the one transcendent God. Our misery is connected to God's love insofar as we have to span the distance created by our freedom; we have to renounce all that separates us from God. Simone Weil claims that the Greeks help us to receive the true message of the Passion:

Outside the New Testament itself, and outside the liturgy of the Holy Week, nowhere could there be found words so poignant as those of certain passages of this tragedy (Prometheus), words to express the love God bears us and the suffering linked to this love.

Is it not an extremely powerful thing to be able to say this to all the unbelievers: without the haunting of the Passion, this Greek civilization, from which you draw all of your thoughts without exception, would never have existed?¹⁴⁴

ii. The Continuing Discussion around Pythagoras

The Greeks had understood and condoned in their epic poetry and Attic Tragedies the virtues of justice and love. They inherited the knowledge of these virtues from the Egyptians; however, they added to this knowledge their special understanding of the "suffering of love".¹⁴⁵ This suffering was so extreme that Simone Weil thought that it

¹⁴³Simone Weil, "God's Quest for Man" *Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks* op. cit., p.8.

¹⁴⁴Simone Weil, "Prometheus", op.cit., 71.

¹⁴⁵See Eric O. Springsted's development of this theme in Weil's thought in a book entitled *Simone Weil and The Suffering of Love* (Cambridge: Cowley, 1986).

must be seen as the same affliction that Christ suffered. She remarked that the Greeks only gained this understanding of affliction through their study and contemplation of necessity. Not only did they study the manifestation of necessity as force, but also, its manifestation as the order of the world. The Greeks, in their science, studied how the contrary laws of the limited and the unlimited, equilibrium and disequilibrium, etc., applied to everything in the Universe. They applied this knowledge to their study of human nature, to how human beings should conduct themselves in order to live a virtuous life, to their study of the relation between God and man, and of course to their study of the Universe and our place in it. It was, according to Simone Weil, Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans who made the knowledge of the tradition live in Greek science. She was fascinated by the way that they applied what they had learned about necessity to their conduct generally. Simone Weil must have come across this idea of a kind of harmony between one's conceptions of God, of the Universe, and of all aspects of living very early in her life because she expressed this intuition in "Science et Perception". She then followed it as far as she could, to Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans.

As is well known among scholars today, anything that involves Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans immediately throws one into an historical debate over the sources and their authenticity. Simone Weil studied the sources without involving herself in the debate to any great extent. She entered deeply into texts which, since her time, scholars have claimed are of suspect origin. On the one hand, she used passages from the dialogues, the *Symposium*, the *Gorgias*, the *Republic*, the *Theaetetus*, and the *Philebus*; these were and are today commonly attributed to Plato. But, on the other hand, she used passages from another dialogue, the *Epinomos* which was not securely looked upon as one written by Plato, and it is still a matter of debate as to whether or not Plato did write this dialogue. For instance, G. M. A. Grube suggests that it is generally claimed by scholars that the *Epinomos* was not written by Plato.¹⁴⁶ Other more recent scholars have still not decided one way or the other; however, there is some discussion about the *Laws* and *Epinomos* having been written together.¹⁴⁷ As Alan C. Bowen points out in his article, "On Interpreting

¹⁴⁶See J. Harward, *The Epinomos of Plato* (Oxford:1928), p.27-58 for a discussion of its genuineness and also, A. E. Taylor, *Plato and the Authorship of the Epinomos*, proceedings of the British Acad.,XV. I got both of these references in G.M.A. Grube's *Plato's Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958)

¹⁴⁷See Jacob Howland's "Re-Reading Plato: The Problem of Platonic Chronology", *Phoenix*, Vol. 45 (1991) 3, pp.189-214. See especially 194 where Howland discusses Thrasyllus of Alexandria's view of the canon of Plato's dialogues as having been set out in tetralogies, like the tragic dramas.

Plato,¹⁴⁸ the Esotericist school have cast doubt on Plato's dialogues being of any value to us at all in helping us interpret Plato's thought. They take what is called the "oral tradition" as the definitive word on Plato's true thought. The only support there is for this thought is Aristotle's testimony concerning Plato's *Lecture on the Good* and what he says in the *Metaphysics*, as well as what Plato says in the *Seventh Letter*. Of course, there are many scholars who have refuted this view and Bowen also shows that the stylometric method has helped to reinstate almost all of the dialogues attributed to Plato, even the *Timaeus*.¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the problem remains and the debate goes on. Given that almost all of Plato's dialogues have been thrown into question, it will certainly not be possible to settle the debate about the authenticity of the *Epinomos*. However, it should be noted that William Burkert speaks about the *Epinomos* as though there had never been any controversy concerning its authenticity.¹⁵⁰ Kenneth M. Sayre in his article, "Plato's Dialogues in Light of the Seventh Letter"¹⁵¹ argues very forcefully that there is good reason to pay attention both to the oral tradition and the dialogues as a way of understanding Plato's thought. He shows that what Plato says in the Seventh Letter about not having written his doctrine anywhere because of his distrust of written language applies equally to oral language. Sayre argues that Plato distrusted language because of its inadequacy to express philosophical thought. Thus, Plato's purpose in writing the dialogues was to lead the young student in the direction suitable to philosophic reflection. Although Simone Weil did not as far as I am aware know any thing about the Seventh Letter, she did refer both to the oral tradition and the dialogues for her interpretation of Plato as a Pythagorean. She also used some Fragments from Philolaus, who was said to have been taught by Lysis, one of the last remaining Pythagoreans. These Fragments have up until recently been attributed to Philolaus.¹⁵² So, likely she would have agreed with Sayre on this point. Wheelwright seems to think that although the "authorship and exact

¹⁴⁸Alan C. Bowen, "On Interpreting Plato", *Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings*, edited by Charles L. Griswold, Jr. (New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall Inc., 1988).

¹⁴⁹See Bowen, "On Interpreting Plato", *op. cit.*, p.52.

¹⁵⁰See William Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism*, trans. by Edwin L. Minar, Jr. (Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1972), *op. cit.*, p.261.

¹⁵¹Kenneth M. Sayre, "Plato's Dialogues in Light of the Seventh Letter", *Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings*, *op. cit.*, p.93-109.

¹⁵²Philip Wheelwright points out in *The Presocratics*(New York:MacMillan Publishing Company, 1985) that traditionally these fragments were attributed to Philolaus, but that recently "scholars have cast doubts on their authorship." Kirk and Raven, Wheelwright claims, give a summary of the main controversy in *The Presocratic Philosophers*(Cambridge University Press, 1957), *op. cit.*, p.308-331. Hereafter: *The Presocratics*.

date of the Fragments may lay open to question, their Pythagorean character is unmistakeable...¹⁵³ Burkert takes this view even further and claims that "a certain nucleus seems to be discernible: fragments 1, 2, and 4-7, along with the accounts of Aëtius and Boethius, dealing with ontology, astronomy, and music theory."¹⁵⁴ It should be noted that Simone Weil uses three of the Fragments, (3, 10, and 11) still being discussed in her interpretation of the Pythagoreans. This is important because Simone Weil was not content simply to see Plato as a "latent Christian," but she was also claiming that the way for us to understand the Christian message itself was to see it from the point of view of the tradition to which Plato really adhered to and brought forward from Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans, who, in turn, carried on and formulated in their own unique way the very ancient spiritual traditions of Egypt, India, and China.

As I pointed out above Simone Weil argued that the way to philosophize is to do what Plato did: "turn towards the truth with one's whole soul", and when dealing with a philosophic assertion or idea, ask what it means? Simone Weil found this method in the *Philebus* (16c-e, 18b-d, and 23c-25e) ; it was there connected to the Pythagorean method of thinking. Burkert confirms that this way of thinking about "the true philosophical method" was standard thinking among Plato's disciples and the Platonists that followed; some of these Platonists were Iamblichus, Simplicius, Numenius, and Nichomachus. He saw, as Simone Weil had, that among the Greeks the philosophical question was "What does this mean?" Burkert also uses the *Philebus* to make the relation between Plato's method of thinking and that used by the Pythagoreans and that was because for them "...the tradition is set before the philosopher as a task which has to be thought through."¹⁵⁵ Burkert takes seriously the view of the "divine origin" of Pythagorean thought that was generally held among Plato and his disciples; he claims that this was established thought in Plato's day:

And as the ancient claim, that Sparta's constitution came from the god of Delphi, must be taken seriously, the "divine" origin of Pythagorean teachings, too, is more than a *façon de parler*. Aristoxenus tells us that Pythagoras got his doctrines from the Delphic oracle, but Aristotle says that Pythagoras himself was believed to be the "Hyperborean Apollo". Taken together with the *Philebus*, this can only mean that the Pythagoreans, even as early

¹⁵³Philip Wheelwright, *The Presocratics*, op. cit., p.231.

¹⁵⁴ William Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism*, op. cit., p.242. Again we can see from the discussion in Chapter III, 2 of Burkert's book that the debate about the other Fragments previously attributed to Philolaus is still not settled. Hereafter: *Lore*

¹⁵⁵William Burkert, *Lore*, op. cit., p.91.

as those whom Plato knew, understood their own philosophical activities as developments of the basic identical doctrines of their master, the divine Pythagoras....We must suppose, then, that this way of thinking was already established in Plato's day.¹⁵⁶

From Simone Weil's Notebooks, we can see that she used other sources besides Plato, Aristotle, and Philolaus; for example, she quotes from the Platonists such as Nichomachus' *Arithmetic* II, 19,21,23 in a discussion of the geometrical mean, which she later attributes to Pythagoras¹⁵⁷; and in another passage, she claims that Iamblichus says that the knowledge of the harmonic mean came to Pythagoras from the Babylonians.¹⁵⁸

Although this is a subject of great debate, Simone Weil's view of Plato and the Pythagoreans is, with new evidence from Byzantine writers and new ways of viewing the old debates over authenticity of Plato's dialogues, becoming quite plausible. However, by the mere fact that there was and still is so much debate makes us realize how far Simone Weil was willing to go on her own and she herself was not unaware of the exceptional nature of such a study:

Today the depth of Pythagorean thought cannot be perceived except by using a sort of intuition. And one cannot exercise such an intuition except from inside; that is to say, only if one has truly drawn spiritual life from the texts studied.¹⁵⁹

This raises an important question: Given all the doubts and mystery surrounding Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans, why did Simone Weil think that Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans were the mother of the Greek

¹⁵⁶William Burkert, *Lore*, 91. What Burkert is saying here is that since this was the accepted view of Pythagoras among Plato and his disciples, it merits serious study. He does this in his book. It is not in the scope of this thesis to discuss this study. My intention was only to point out that this was a seriously held point of view in Plato's day and for this reason merits attention today.

¹⁵⁷Simone Weil, *Notebooks II*, op. cit., p.388-389.

¹⁵⁸Simone Weil, *Notebooks II*, op. cit., p.456. I mention these other sources because there is recent evidence to support Simone Weil's perspective on Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans and that Plato was a part of the tradition. See Dominic J. O'Meara's book *On Pythagoras Revived* (op. cit.) in which he gives evidence to support the view that Iamblichus' book, *On Pythagoreanism*, had been re-copied, and thus preserved, by a Byzantine writer, Michael Psellus (1018-78). This, as well as other evidence given by O'Meara on other Byzantine writers, supports Simone Weil's idea that the first "Renaissance" took place in the 11th century. What he bequeathed to us from Iamblichus offers new insight into the extent to which the Pythagoreans had developed geometry and that Pythagoras was to have passed on to us "the 'most scientific', unerring forms of knowledge, those having to do with pure, immaterial unchanging realities, namely mathematics and the study of true being and of the divine." (89) Iamblichus attempts, according to O'Meara, to give "a 'Pythagorean' reformulation of Aristotelian physics" (in which Aristotelian criticisms of Pythagorean physics are dealt with) and his ethics, and then to answer Aristotle's criticisms of the Pythagoreans' understanding of the gods as put forth in the *Metaphysics*. Generally this book gives reason to think that Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans had had a revelation which concerned the sciences of geometry and physics (as well as the other sciences) and used this knowledge as a way to purify the soul.

¹⁵⁹Simone Weil, *Intimations*, op. cit., p.153.

civilization and the main bearers of that very ancient tradition that came before them? Although new evidence is being discovered it is still generally held as Wheelwright claims that Pythagoras is "virtually a legendary figure" ; nevertheless, there are some facts about Pythagoras that are considered to be historically accepted. Some of these facts are relevant to Simone Weil's view of the Pythagorean tradition which she thinks we need to draw inspiration from, so it will be worthwhile to summarize these.

Although Pythagoras was born in Samos, 580 B.C., he ended up in Italy and that is where he opened his school. Before that he travelled to Egypt and studied astronomy, geometry, and theology under the Egyptian priests. This is important because Simone Weil claims that the Greeks inherited the spiritual tradition of the Egyptians. She may have learned this from Porphyry's *Life of Pythagoras* if she had read it.¹⁶⁰ And she claimed that what they added to the spiritual tradition came through Pythagoras' study of mathematics, geometry, astronomy, and music. Wheelwright points out that Pythagoras' school was more like a religious sect as they had very strict codes of behaviour as well as ritualistic practises. Simone Weil may also have learned of Pythagoras' emphasis of the "mediatory role of the mathematical sciences" as a bridge between human beings and God from Porphyry as he mentions this in his book, *Life of Pythagoras*.¹⁶¹ According to the legend, the Pythagorean theorem was based on "A special ratio of whole numbers which Pythagoras had learned during his youthful pilgrimage to Egypt...the 3:4:5 ratio..."¹⁶² This is interesting because Simone Weil thought that it was their search for ratios or proportions everywhere in the world that led them to the discovery of the "incommensurate." Wheelwright does not quite go as far as Simone Weil; however, he claims that Pythagoras posed the questions which led to the discovery "that certain ratios between lines were incommensurate." He does not say that Pythagoras discovered the incommensurate.

¹⁶⁰Simone Weil does mention Porphyry's name at least once in her *Notebooks II* (427), so it is possible that she read his *Life of Pythagoras*. She does have his general perspective on Plato if we make the distinction that O'Meara makes between those Neo-Platonists who Pythagoreanize Plato and those who universalize Plato; Simone Weil would be among the latter of which Porphyry represents. As O'Meara says: "Porphyry, then, is not a Pythagoreanizing Platonist, i.e. one who singles Pythagoras out as the fountainhead of all true (Platonic) philosophy, but rather a universalizing Platonist: he finds his Platonism both in Pythagoras and in many other quarters. These conclusions are consistent with what emerges from the most extensive work of Porphyry to have survived, *On Abstinence*. D. O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived*, op. cit., p. 27.

¹⁶¹See Dominic O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived*, op. cit., p.28-29 where he points out that it was Porphyry who claimed this.

¹⁶²Philip Wheelwright, *The Presocratics*, op. cit., p. 205.

Finally, Wheelwright tells us the well-known legend about how the Pythagoreans were so taken with Pythagoras' discovery that the basis of music was number and from this the invention of the theory of harmony that they adopted the metaphysical doctrine that "All is number." They treated this as "top secret." As I will point out shortly, Simone Weil has her interpretation of the Pythagorean idea that "All is Number."

iii. Pythagoras: Geometry, the Science of Physics Imitates 'God, the Perpetual Geometer'

With this idea of the more or less accepted knowledge of Pythagoras' thought, we can attempt to answer the question raised above: Why did Simone Weil think Pythagoras was so significant and a key figure in the tradition she thought to bring forward? First, Simone Weil follows her teacher, Alain, in her efforts to draw the relation between science and religion. She says in her "Pre-War Notebooks":

Science, said Chartier(Alain), was born from religion and not from labour. Labour only manipulates things. The manipulation of signs is necessarily religious to begin with. Their scientific elaboration is the transition from the latter to the former.¹⁶³

We saw in Chapter two of this thesis that in Simone Weil's early thought "work with a method in mind" was the ideal human activity because through this kind of work the human being could relate thought to action. This thought was the result of the manipulation of language through reflection; that is, by means of withdrawing from the world. The scientist makes a plan of action using number and the imagination to chart a path in the world of necessity. In "Science et Perception dans Descartes," Simone Weil analysed how we could use number with the help of our imaginations to act as a bridge between us and the world -- a bridge between the mind and the body. The bridge was method. And already in "Science et Perception" Simone Weil claimed that the value of acting with method in mind -- of encountering necessity -- was not in the fact that we could achieve something in the world but rather in the way that this helped us "to purify our souls" -- to purge our thought of ideas that have no relation to reality, that is, those ideas that were simply the figment of our imagination. That is why she claims in her "Pre-War Notebooks" that:

What is important (for freedom) is not that work should be methodical, but that it should be methodically

¹⁶³Simone Weil, "Pre-War Notebooks," First and Last Notebooks, edited and translated by Sir Richard Rees (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p.205. Hereafter: "The Pre-War Notebooks".

performed. The one thing does not imply the other.¹⁶⁴

If the value of work were simply to attain one's goal -- to obtain what one desires, then it would be enough that work be methodical; factory work allows the worker to obtain what he or she desires(money, goods and services etc.). But for Simone Weil that was not the point of work with a method in mind. The point of this kind of work was to encounter "necessity" -- the relation between order in the mind and the conditions of order. This is what in Simone Weil's view Greek science, that is, the Pythagoreans studied; their goal was first and foremost to purify the soul.

With this view of the goal of Greek science in mind, Simone Weil had a very special interpretation of the Pythagorean dictum "Number is All" and of the whole secretive way they protected their encounter with the incommensurate. It is important to enter into this a bit here to explain what made Pythagoras so significant to the tradition which prefigured Christ according to Simone Weil.¹⁶⁵

The Pythagorean metaphysical conception of "Number is All" was not to be taken literally. Simone Weil argued that number was indeed for Pythagoras the divine favour; number was the intermediary between the human mind and the universe. But, claimed Simone Weil, for something to be an intermediary there must be two terms which cannot relate in any other way except through this intermediary. This means that Number is Not All, but really a relation between two actually existing things: between unity which comes from the intellect and diversity which comes from actual concrete matter -- space as it exists in time. Thus, Simone Weil claimed that number, being a relation, an intermediary, is an idea. Like all ideas, number, although an intermediary, could still only exist through the mind of a human being.

What made Pythagoras so important in Simone Weil's eyes was what his discoveries through geometry symbolized. Pythagoras discovered that number as conceived by the mind was limited in a way that the combination of number as conceived by the mind and as imagined through the use of geometrical figures was not. It was only with the help of the imagined unity as expressed through the geometric figure of the right-angled triangle -- through the use of the world itself -- could Pythagoras show us how to find the mean between two whole numbers such as

¹⁶⁴Simone Weil, "The Pre-War Notebooks," op. cit., p.31.

¹⁶⁵I will enter into Simone Weil's critique of contemporary science and how she uses the Pythagoreans further later in this chapter.

1 and 2. Thus, the mean between two whole numbers can only be thought with the help of the imagination -- with the help of the world. The right-angled triangle is the unity of the infinite and the definite. The infinite is the mark of mind but only by way of God because the conditions of order are always infinitely more than we can conceive. The human mind always runs into its limits, as Simone Weil has argued, and it is in this way that we come to know the infinite. We, like the right-angled triangle cannot exist without our relation to the world, the definite. What the right-angled triangle gives an image of is the perfect relation between that which limits and that which is limited: between 1 and 2. It was through conceiving this image of the perfect relation between 1 and 2 that Pythagoras discovered the number relations: ratios. Everything in the world has this relation of one and two, of unity and diversity -- each thing is an individual thing and related to other things and is it itself one and many. Thus, what makes ratios the perfect expression of the relations between things in the world is that ratios always have inherent in them that which is the mark of necessity: a relation to the one, the infinite; and the relation is always between the one and many, the world. Pythagoras discovered the duality inherent in necessity itself and that human beings through the use of numbers as ratios, through the use of ideas which combine mind and imagination could meet necessity on its own terms.

According to Simone Weil, Pythagoras realized that it was only those number relations that could express the same kind of relation as the "geometric mean" of the right-angled triangle -- that perfect relation between the infinite and the definite -- that could express the relations between things in the world. That is why, as Steven Burns points out, for Simone Weil Pythagoras' discovery really means that "geometry is about numbers" and he quotes Weil on this point:

Geometry...(is) the science of what is today called real numbers, of which the square root of two or of any other number not square is an example...Geometry...(is) the science of irrational square roots.¹⁶⁶

This, Burns also points out, was for Simone Weil about the controversy surrounding the discovery of the incommensurables. It is claimed that when the Greeks, the Pythagorean sect, discovered that the length of the diagonal of the square was incommensurate with the length of one of its sides, they realized that they could not

¹⁶⁶As quoted by Steven A.M.Burns, "Virtue and Necessity", *Laval Théologique et Philosophique*, Vol. XXXII, 3, Octobre, 1976, p. 261-275, 262. This quotation comes from Weil, *Intimations Of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks*, op.cit., 161. Hereafter Steven Burns' paper will be cited as "Virtue and Necessity".

represent a mean between a number and its double numerically; they could not adequately represent the length of the diagonal of the square in numbers. This was apparently a great trauma because according to the legend, as was pointed out above, their metaphysical doctrine claimed that "Number is All". This meant, as Burns says: "...the discovery of the incommensurables - irrational numbers - presented a profound difficulty for Greek rationalism..."¹⁶⁷ It was also claimed in the legend about Pythagoras that he turned to geometry because he could not conceive of an irrational number. Simone Weil disputed both of the above points. We saw above how she disputed the claim concerning "Number is all," and I will return to this point again. But first, let us begin with the former. As Simone Weil argued:

...I am not sure if the discovery of the incommensurables is a sufficient explanation of the obstinate refusal of algebra by the Greeks.¹⁶⁸

In another letter to her brother she says:

I myself quite agree with the Pythagorean saying that God is ever a geometer - but not that he does algebra.¹⁶⁹

Simone Weil is arguing that Pythagoras turned to geometry to solve the problem of the incommensurables not because he could not conceive of an irrational number, rather because it could not be solved using numbers alone. Geometry could do what numbers alone could not do:

...the essential point of the discovery of incommensurables is outside geometry. It consists in this, that certain problems concerning numbers are sometimes susceptible of solution and sometimes insoluble; such as the problem of a geometrical mean between two given numbers.¹⁷⁰

There simply was no way to conceive of the mean between a number and its double in a way that the mind could comprehend without geometry. Simone Weil argues that Pythagoras discovered this first of all. He discovered that number is limited. Pythagoras, she claims, probably conceived that there was no rational number to mediate between a whole number and its double before he "evolved his doctrine":

But as regards the Pythagoreans....they studied numerical proportions and every kind of numerical mean It must have seemed to them difficult to find a rational number for the geometrical mean between a number and its double.

¹⁶⁷S.A.M. Burns, "Virtue and Necessity", op. cit., p.262.

¹⁶⁸Simone Weil, "To A.W. 1940", *Seventy Letters*, trans. and arranged by Richard Rees, (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p.113. Hereafter: "To A.W. 1940".

¹⁶⁹Simone Weil, "To A.W. 1940", op. cit., p.112.

¹⁷⁰Simone Weil, "To A.W. 1940", op. cit., p.116.

But they called arithmetic 'the science of even and odd', which suggests that they must have asked themselves whether a number formed in a given manner is even or odd.

Consequently one may suppose that they asked this question about the geometric mean between a number and its double, when this mean is a whole number. They could easily prove that it is an even number and also an odd number; for this it is sufficient to know that only the square of an even number can be even, which is obvious almost at first sight, especially if one represents a square number with dots. Therefore this mean (as a whole number) never exists. It can easily be deduced from this that it never exists as a fraction either.

That the root — the square root of $n \cdot 2n$ — does not exist may have been a cause of distress. But there was nothing to prevent Pythagoras from knowing this *before* he evolved his doctrine.¹⁷¹

It was only when he realized that he could not, with clarity of mind, give expression in numbers alone to the geometrical relation between one segment of the line of the diagonal of the square to another segment of the same line. Only then could he turn to seek rational expression of this relation through "the geometrical procedure for finding geometrical means (height of right-angled triangle)".¹⁷²

Pythagoras, according to Simone Weil, rejected algebra and sought a solution to the incommensurables in geometry because that allowed them to express what, otherwise, would have been incomprehensible to them. As Burns points out, this is how Simone Weil understood the Pythagorean theorem:

The importance of the Pythagorean Theorem for the Greeks, Weil tells us, was that it solved the problem of the incommensurables; it permitted rational expression in terms of geometry(...) of the magnitude which is irrational in terms of numbers (the square root of two).¹⁷³

Simone Weil also saw that the Greeks had another reason for rejecting algebra; it did not allow them to "conceive more and more clearly an identity of structure between the human mind and the Universe". Algebra did not allow them "to imitate God".¹⁷⁴ According to the Greeks, God inscribed an Order in the Universe and it was, therefore, up to human beings "to imitate God" by conceiving of this Order. Thus, argues Simone Weil, for the Greeks:

Purity of soul was their one concern; to 'imitate God' was the secret of it; the imitation of God was assisted by the study of mathematics, in so far as one conceived the universe to be subject to mathematical laws, which made the geometer an imitator of the supreme lawgiver.¹⁷⁵

Geometry, the science of real numbers, allowed the Greeks to express how "irrational numbers" could be

¹⁷¹Simone Weil, "To A.W. 1940", op. cit., p.119-120.

¹⁷²Simone Weil, "To A.W. 1940", op. cit., p. 116.

¹⁷³S.A.M. Burns, "Virtue and Necessity", op. cit., p.262.

¹⁷⁴Simone Weil, "To A.W. 1940", op. cit., p.117.

¹⁷⁵Simone Weil, "To A.W. 1940", op. cit., p.117-118.

expressed "rationally" and this was for them "a marvel...not of human but of divine origin".¹⁷⁶ Thus, as Burns points out, the discovery of the Pythagorean Theorem had also to do with the relation between science and its role in the relation between God and human beings; it had to do with faith:

In its proper context, this assumes religious significance. It was a confirmation of the faith: that the elements of numbers are the elements of all things, and that the universe is intelligible....Faith is not a matter of imperfect knowledge, or of commitment in the absence of adequate evidence. It is the certainty that comes with the clear vision of what is absolutely and eternally necessary.¹⁷⁷

This was top secret information for Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans, according to Simone Weil, not because the discovery of real numbers by way of the incommensurable did not fit into their metaphysical theory that "All is Number"; but rather, because what is precious can be the stimulant for the best and the worst: just as gold can be used by the artist to mould the most beautiful statue perceivable by the human eye, it can also be the stimulant for misguided action. The scandal and the distress surrounding the incommensurable, Simone Weil thought, must have been the result of "minds of inferior scientific and philosophic formation" having popularized the information. This she claims had grave consequences:

Most certainly, there was a drama due to the incommensurables and its repercussions were immense. The popularization of that discovery brought the concept of truth into a discredit which still endures today; it brought, or at least assisted in bringing, to birth the idea that it is equally possible to prove two contradictory theses; this point of view was diffused among the masses by the sophists, along with a learning of an inferior quality, directed solely towards the acquisition of power; as a result of this there arose, from the end of the 5th century, both demagoguery and the imperialism that goes with it, which brought the Hellenic civilization to ruin...My conclusion is that the gods did right when they destroyed in a shipwreck the Pythagorean who was guilty of divulging the discovery of the incommensurables.¹⁷⁸

Pythagoras had discovered the secret of how to perfectly imitate God, who in the act of creating conceived of an order, then brought it into existence and withdrew leaving that order to be at once independent of and dependent on God. Necessity needs God to continually conceive it for it to continue to exist. God is absent and not absent in relation to His Creation. According to Simone Weil, what Pythagoras had learned through the discovery of the incommensurable was that the way in which human beings imitate God is by using their minds as intermediary between order as God conceived of it and matter. This order is inscribed in the world of necessity. Thus, human

¹⁷⁶Simone Weil quoting from the apocryphal *Epinomos* of Plato (990d).

¹⁷⁷S.A.M.Burns, "Virtue and Necessity", op. cit., p.262-263.

¹⁷⁸Simone Weil, "To A.W. 1940," op. cit., p.115.

beings are limited to only being able to conceive of the order of necessity with the help of the image — through the human imagination. The human imagination plays a significant role in permitting the intellect to conceive the order of necessity. The only way Pythagoras was able to discover the dual relation which is inscribed in the necessity of the relation of the ratio 1:2 and any other ratio after this was by way of the image provided by the geometric mean of the right-angled triangle, and the discovery of the diagonal of the square. The mind cannot know the relation between one point and another point without the help of the imagination to provide the image of the line that can join them:

...in order to imagine the ratio, one must begin with number and pass on to angle, because whole numbers do not as easily lead to ratios as they do to additions; usually they do not provide the means of expressing mean proportionals....the subject of Greek science is in the relation between order and the conditions of order. The order in question is perceptible to human senses and consequently man is never absent from the relation. ♣¹⁷⁹

What Pythagoras discovered was that human beings by being dependent on the image to know order are themselves a part of that order; however, human beings are also not a part of that order as they have been given the exceptional privilege of being able to perceive God's Order. For Simone Weil, Pythagoras had discovered the reason why the relation between order and the conditions of order can be no other than a relation between necessity as it is inscribed in the world and the same necessity as it is thought by the mind. Order in the mind is only possible by thinking about order in the world. We are limited insofar as we are dependent on the image, but we have been given a particular way of sharing in the unlimited in that we can conceive an order and give that order existence. We have the privilege of imitating God. Thus, Simone Weil argues that Pythagoras helps us to understand the dictum on the door of Plato's Academy:

'None enters here unless he is a geometer.'
and he said 'God is ever a geometer'.¹⁸⁰

It is at this point that we have a choice; we can consent to conceive God's order as prescribed for us and act accordingly or we can impose our own order and act accordingly. Herein lies our free will. Our choice does not change the order of the world or the universe, but it does have a profound bearing on the individual's soul.

...the Greeks attached no value to a method of reasoning for its own sake...their sole aim was to conceive more

¹⁷⁹Simone Weil, "Classical Science and After," *On Science, Necessity, and the Love of God*, op. cit., p.19.

¹⁸⁰Simone Weil, "To A.W. 1940," op. cit., p.116.

and more clearly an identity of structure between the human mind and the universe. Purity of soul was their one concern; to 'imitate God' was the secret of it; the imitation of God was assisted by the study of mathematics, in so far as one conceived the universe to be subjected to mathematical laws, which made the geometer an imitator of the supreme lawgiver.¹⁸¹

Thus one of the main reasons Simone Weil wanted to return to the Pythagoreans for inspiration was to overcome the schism that had developed between science and religion. Finally, as I pointed out above, Simone Weil was intent upon reconnecting the mystical traditions of the West and the East; thus, she thought that the Pythagoreans, along with Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles and especially Plato, linked the two. The Greeks' study of necessity in their epic poetry and tragedies, but especially in their science, was in Weil's eyes their claim to greatness and at the same time the way that they became a bridge between the spiritual traditions of the past and those which followed.

As was pointed out above, Simone Weil saw in the thought of the Greeks, in Plato, and in Pythagoras, a desire for Christ, God incarnate; she saw them to be 'latent Christians'. What Pythagoras' discovery of the 'geometric mean', the 'unity of contraries' in numbers allowed him to demonstrate was how the one and the many, the limit and the limitless could be harmonized to make up the order of the world. In fact she claims: "Harmony is proportion. It is also the unity of contraries."¹⁸² With this discovery of the Pythagorean Theorem, the Pythagoreans not only found a way 'to imitate God', but also they found a way to demonstrate the "certainty of divine verities" with their geometry. Simone Weil argues that it was really the "desire for Christ" that led them from algebra to the science of demonstration:

It is marvellous, it is inexpressibly intoxicating, to think that it was love, and the desire for Christ, which caused the invention of demonstration to spring up in Greece....

The Greeks had such a need of certainty of divine verities that even in the simple image of these verities they had the maximum of certainty....

The notion of real number, arrived at by the mediation between any number and unity, was matter for just as severe demonstration, as clear as anything in their arithmetic.... Here is an admirable introduction to the mysteries of faith.

¹⁸¹Simone Weil, "To A.W. 1940," op. cit., p.117-118.

¹⁸²Simone Weil, "The Pythagorean Doctrine", *Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks*, op.cit.,p. 166. Hereafter: "Pythagorean". Also, for French quotations I will be citing from Simone Weil, "A propos de la doctrine pythagoricienne," *Intuitions pré-chrétiennes* (1951: Paris: Fayard, 1985). Hereafter: ... "la doctrine pythagoricienne."

...It includes the *précis* of the necessity which governs sensible things and the images of divine truths.¹⁸³

Simone Weil saw that the Pythagoreans with their demonstrations of the 'mean proportional', and how this applied to harmony, really were speaking about a rigorous demonstration of the Mysteries of the Trinity and Creation, the Incarnation, and the Passion. As well, they were able to use this knowledge of 'harmony as the unity of contraries' and of the Mysteries to demonstrate the relation between God and human beings, humans and humans, the continual relation between God and created matter. As Eric Springsted points out for Simone Weil "...mathematical mediation is a deliberate Pythagorean image for theological mediation."¹⁸⁴

I do not intend to go deeply into a discussion of Weil's own demonstration of how the Pythagorean conception of mathematical mediation (mean proportional, harmony of contraries) has been applied to the Mysteries. That has already been done by Eric Springsted in *Christus Mediator*. What concerns my thesis is simply how this application of the 'geometric mean' to the 'divine verities' made, for Simone Weil, "...the appearance of geometry in Greece" not only "...the most dazzling of all the prophecies which foretold the Christ...."¹⁸⁵, but also the way to re-unite science and religion:

In the indifference which, since the Renaissance, science has shown for the spiritual life, there seems to be something diabolic....for in science, as in art, all true novelty is the work of genius, and true genius, unlike talent, is supernatural. Neither does science belong to the domain of nature by its action upon the soul, for it confirms in faith or diverts from faith and cannot be indifferent from it.¹⁸⁶

In order to show the relation between science and religion and how science is a way to the purifying of the soul – a way to become virtuous, it will be necessary to include a brief and by all means incomplete discussion of how the Pythagoreans demonstrated the Mysteries. Only then will it be possible to show how Simone Weil conceives of overcoming subjectivism by demonstrating how the the virtue of "love thy neighbour" is not only intuitively certain, but also intellectually certain. The Greek conception of necessity, Simone Weil thinks, coheres with the findings of contemporary science; thus, it, too, could have the value of turning science in the direction of the truth. Therefore, it is important to secure our understanding of how she conceives their conception of necessity and the

¹⁸³Simone Weil, "Pythagorean", op. cit., p.163-165.

¹⁸⁴Eric O. Springsted, *Christus Mediator*, op.cit., p.169.

¹⁸⁵Simone Weil, "Pythagorean", op. cit., p.171.

¹⁸⁶Simone Weil, "Pythagorean", op. cit., p.171.

relation between God and necessity implied by Creation; she sees the Greek conception of Creation to be the same as the one put forth in Genesis.

iv. The Pythagoreans: a Link between Greek Geometry and The Christian Mysteries

In the following brief discussion of Simone Weil's understanding of how the Pythagoreans conceived of the Mysteries through an application of the harmony of contraries, I will not be focusing on the conception of mediation per se; however, since this conception is integral to this conception of the Mysteries, I will use Springsted's expertise on the idea of mediation to give a more complete analysis of Weil's use of the Pythagoreans. It is important to remember that we want to draw from this analysis an understanding of the importance of Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans to Simone Weil's conception of the spiritual tradition. So, rather than engaging as Springsted does in a discussion of all the intricacies of the logic of such a conception of the Mysteries, I will be emphasizing what Simone Weil's analysis herein adds to the tradition she wants to bring forth from the Greeks.

Simone Weil claims that the whole conception of the Trinity can be understood through two formulas related to us by the testimonia of Diogenes Laertius and the fragment of Philolaus. From Diogenes Laertius she uses the idea: "L'amitié est une égalité faite d'harmonie"; and from Philolaus she adds to the above quoted passage the definition of harmony as: "la pensée commune de ce qui pense séparément"¹⁰ [B 61].¹⁷ In other words, harmony is defined as the "geometric mean" which mediates between numbers that are "incommensurable". Taken all together, the formula is: "Friendship is an equality made of the common thought of separate thinkers." Simone Weil claims that if one thinks about this formula rigourously there is only one example of separate thinkers who can think together, and that is the Trinity.

The distinction Simone Weil is making here involves trying to see God's action as exclusively an act of love and of goodness. She explains that in order to see God as love and good only, we must conceive of God as the one who acts. As human beings, if we think of God as the act or, a subject who acts, then, applying our rules of

¹⁷Weil, "...la doctrine pythagoricienne" 113. Also for the passage by Diogène Laerce see 118. Weil's passages come from the German text H. Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, Berlin, 1903. B.N. in-8, R. 18. 658). She did her own translations.

language, the subject needs an object to act on. If God, the 'one who acts', creates his creation, then his creation would be objects: they would, according to Simone Weil, be necessity and not love. As Springsted points out we need a harmony of contraries here because "... in human conceptuality ...our own subject arises through contact with an object and if, therefore, we can establish an analogy for God's perfection we must do so by conceiving the one God as being both pure subject and object. The contraries arise from the need to think of God as one, yet two things."¹⁸⁸ According to Simone Weil, God is "Pure Act." This means: "... Dieu est essentiellement sujet, pensant et non pas pensée. Son nom est "Je suis." C'est son nom en tant que sujet, c'est aussi son nom en tant qu'objet, c'est aussi son nom en tant que contact du sujet et de l'objet." Simone Weil explains what she means when she says that "I am" is God's name as object and God's name as the contact with the subject and the object; the object of God's thought is a "thinking thought," a being who thinks. As Simone Weil says: "La dignité divine empêche que le mot pensée, quand il s'agit de Dieu, soit jamais pris au passif; le verbe penser, au sujet de Dieu, ne peut être pris qu'à l'actif. Ce que Dieu pense est encore un être qui pense."¹⁸⁹

Springsted argues that Simone Weil saw that if this were human thought there would be a gap between subject and object. But, as he says:

In God, however, who is ever active thinking, while each one of these terms can be represented in the divine thinking, the divine dignity "exacts that these three be each one a Person, although there be a single God."¹⁹⁰

The Trinity is a mystery which the intellect can only adhere to; however, Simone Weil has attempted to clarify it through the idea of mediation -- the mean proportion. As far as the mean proportion applies to things in the world there is always a mediation between two terms. But in this case, there are not two terms, there is only one term. The Trinity has two relations because when the "Father begets the Son" there is no loss of self; there is a relation of 1:1. As Springsted points out: "When the Father begets the Son, He begets a Being who Himself actively wills to be the Father's Son." It is the same relation with the Holy Spirit: "In the same way, the Spirit which is the thought between the Father and the Son also wills to be that thought." The "mean proportional" thus applies as

¹⁸⁸Eric O. Springsted, *Christus Mediator*, op. cit., p.170.

¹⁸⁹Both citations Weil, "...la doctrine pythagoricienne", op. cit., p.128.

¹⁹⁰Eric Springsted, *Christus Mediator*, op. cit., p.170.

"...as the ideal unity of three terms, namely $1/1 = 1/1$."¹⁹¹

The way that Simone Weil brings in the aspect of the harmonizing of "separate thinkers" which is the idea of the Three in One is equally difficult to comprehend. Springsted claims that it is because "acting" requires more than one term and so "God's eternal and infinite action...is therefore trinitarian."¹⁹² There is in the relationship of the Trinity a 'mediation in God Himself' – this is the mediation between unity and plurality ; there is perfect harmony and perfect friendship in this unity:

L'égalité est l'égalité entre un et plusieurs, entre un et deux; les contraires dont l'harmonie constitue l'unité sont l'unité et la pluralité, qui sont le premier couple de contraires....(Platon avait sans doute aussi dans la pensée la Trinité comme harmonie première quand il nomme les termes du premier couple de contraires le Même et l'Autre, dans le *Timée*.)¹⁹³

The second pair of contraries: the opposition between the creator and the creature comes about because in God there is a unity between the ordering principle of limitation and that which is limitless, inert matter. Simone Weil points out that this idea of creation is very similar to the one in Genesis in that when God creates he brings "matter...into order...and this ordering action consists of imposing limits."¹⁹⁴ But, as Springsted points out when the "formless and limitless chaos or void" is completely contrary to God; it has "no reality." Thus, "in creating God goes outside Himself and imposes limits on the limitless, giving it number and thus form and substance and being."¹⁹⁵ It is from Plato that Simone Weil learns of the way that "number" mediates between the one and the limitless. In the Trinity – in the first pair of contraries – number appeared as the second term of the contraries of unity and plurality. Weil claims that in the Trinity the second term of the opposition is identical to the first term and number appears in the second term; therefore, number is also identical to the first term. In interpreting Plato's passage from the *Philebus*(16b) that 'Number is the intermediary between the one and the limitless.', Simone Weil claims that "One is God", and it is "He who limits." Thus, Number is the intermediary between the one and the

¹⁹¹All three of the above quotations come from Eric Springsted, 171. This is a difficult relation to comprehend and I would not have managed to draw this out of Simone Weil's thought without Springsted's analysis. He points out that the way to understand this relation comes from her commentary on a passage in the *Timaeus* 31c. I found this very helpful. See the passage cited in *Christus Mediator*, 171 and also in Simone Weil's "Pythagorean Doctrine", op. cit., p.157.

¹⁹²Eric Springsted, *Christus Mediator*, op. cit., p.167.

¹⁹³Weil, "...la doctrine pythagoricienne", op. cit., p.129.

¹⁹⁴Simone Weil, "Pythagorean", op. cit., p.168.

¹⁹⁵Eric Springsted, *Christus Mediator*, op. cit., p.172.

limitless because 'Number can be identified with the limited':

The limit and the unlimited, that is creation whose root is in God. The one and the many is the Trinity, the first origin. Number appears in the Trinity as the second term of the opposition, and if it is identified with limit, it appears in the principle of creation as the first term. It is then indeed something like a mean proportional.¹⁹⁶

It is the role that Number plays in Creation(and as we saw above in necessity) that makes science essentially religious for the Pythagoreans, according to Simone Weil. As Springsted points out this general method of mediation can be applied at any ontological level. Weil claims following Plato's *Philebus* that the order of this "primordial heirarchy" of the harmony of contraries should be reproduced in all study and all technique. Therefore, all things must have a relation to the one through mediation and use number to impose limits.

Simone Weil conceives of God's act of Creation as a Renunciation of Self; thus, the method of mediation is essential to her idea of the relation between God and His Creation. As Springsted argues it is by means of the method of mediation that she overcomes the dualism involved in her idea that God in Creating withdraws from the Universe, thus allowing for its existence. For Simone Weil there is a dualism and there is not a dualism; God is All; His Creation would not continue to exist if He did not continually and eternally think it. God thinks His Creation and yet, He has withdrawn from it in order to allow it to exist. As Springsted points out Simone Weil thinks this is only possible through the mediation of the Son, Who at the very act of withdrawal "is coincidentally 'crucified' upon the whole of time and space and thus mediates between God and the formless non-existent, giving the latter form and establishing in Himself a relation between it and God."¹⁹⁷ There cannot, however, be any relationship to God whose terms are not Persons, that which mediates must be at once a Person and a thing. Christ is this Person at the moment when He is nailed to the cross and He cries out the eternal cry: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' At this moment, says Simone Weil, the Father and the Son are as separate as possible and yet there is an incomprehensible love between these separate thinkers that unites them as one. It is this burning love which unites - mediates between the Father and the Son:

Si cet esclave est Dieu, s'il est la seconde Personne de la Trinité, s'il est uni à la Première par le lien divin qui est la troisième Personne, on a la perfection de l'harmonie telle que la concevaient les Pythagoriciens, l'harmonie où il se trouve entre les contraires le maximum de distance et le maximum d'unité. "La pensant commune des pensants

¹⁹⁶ Simone Weil, "Pythagorean Doctrine," op. cit., p.168.

¹⁹⁷ Eric Springsted, *Christus Mediator*, op. cit., p.174.

séparés.¹⁹⁸

Thus, it is love which mediates between God and Christ on the cross. This is the ontological proof - the proof by perfection, says Simone Weil, which provides Faith with certainty of God's reality and the reality of the dogma of the Trinity: "Dieu n'est parfait que comme Trinité, et l'amour qui constitue la Trinité trouve sa perfection seulement dans la Croix."¹⁹⁹ This is the Second Person of the Trinity which Plato refers to as the 'Soul of the World' in the *Timaeus*. As Springsted says Weil is here bringing in Plato's idea of Creation as a Work of Art. There are two parts to this, which I will quote from Springsted because they are relevant to the idea that the Word is incarnate through the "Soul of the World" and this is separate from the Incarnation of Christ as a human being: ...the "Soul of the World" is not something which comes into being with a created world but is that which, although eternally a blessed Person in the Trinity gives his life to that which had none before....

...What Weil is saying is that the motivating reason and purpose of creation (the Father's goodness), that which is the life, beauty and the truth of creation (the Son) and the model or inspiration of creation which is the link between the artist and his work (the Spirit) all exist in God in unity and actuality before a world ever comes into being.²⁰⁰

According to Springsted, for Simone Weil, there is another side to this artistic theory; it is that in the same way as God's Creation is a work of art -- in the same way as God created out of his own being and life (which is a Renunciation of Self), human beings should 'imitate' God's Renunciation of Self in artistic creation, in science, and in work. This is done when human beings put aside their 'self-centred' perspective; as Springsted says:

The good artist, that is, the person who practises a good (Techné) well imitates on his level the activity of God.... when he ceases to reproduce his own self-centered perspective, choosing instead to produce the perfection of reality with which he has been inspired....When he thus embodies and incarnates the Beauty of the World, through his actions he bears a mediated bond with God.²⁰¹

This is one of the main bridges to God the Greeks have discovered -- this imitation of God's Creative Act through the study of the Order of the World and recreating its beauty through art and through the understanding of it as Pythagoras had by means of the "geometric image".

The Incarnation of Christ as a human being and the Passion is also a "unity of contraries" using the same

¹⁹⁸Weil, "...la doctrine pythagoricienne", op. cit., p. 131.

¹⁹⁹Weil, "...la doctrine pythagoricienne", op. cit., p.132.

²⁰⁰Eric Springsted, *Christus Mediator*, op. cit., p.175.

²⁰¹Eric Springsted, *Christus Mediator*, op. cit., p.176.

formula: "Friendship is an equality made of harmony."²⁰² The contraries united in this mediation are the uncreated part of human beings and God. Christ, the Incarnate man mediates here because there cannot be a direct relation between God and man. Simone Weil claims that this mediation is what St. John of the Cross means when he talks about a spiritual marriage and what St. Augustine means when he claims that 'God was made man to the end that man might be made God.' She argues that there are two relationships involved in the equality between man and God:

Harmony is the principle of this sort of equality, harmony which is the bond between the contraries, the mean proportional, the Christ. It is not directly between God and man that there is something analogous to a bond of equality, it is between two relationships.²⁰³

Thus the 'geometric mean' applies to the Incarnation of Christ as the Mediator, as she says in the sense of two ratios: $a/b = b/c$ or $\text{God/Christ} = \text{Christ/man}$. The human being must go through something of the affliction of Christ to attain equality with God. According to Simone Weil the application of the Pythagorean definition of the harmony of contraries to the relation between God and man, by way of Christ, brings together the Pythagoreans and the Gospel of St. John:

'Friendship is an equality made of harmony.' If one takes harmony in the sense of geometric mean, if one conceives that the only mediation between God and man is a being at once God and man, one passes directly from this Pythagorean equation to the marvellous precepts of the Gospel of St. John. By assimilation with the Christ, who is one with God, the human being lying in the depths of his misery, attains a sort of equality with God, an equality which is love.²⁰⁴

The extent of this love was expressed by Christ on the Cross when He "...emits that eternal cry: 'My God, my God, Why hast thou forsaken me ? This moment is the incomprehensible perfection of love. It is the love which passes all understanding.'²⁰⁵

It was also this study of the "dignity of affliction" that she found in the Greek epic and tragedian writers that convinced her that the Greeks not only foretold the Incarnation, but also the Passion:

As for us men, our misery gives us the infinitely precious privilege of sharing in this distance placed between the

²⁰²In this interpretation of the Incarnation and Passion as a separate mediation from the creator-creation contraries, I used Springsted's analysis: "Weil employs a definite and deliberate distinction between the mediation of human souls in the Incarnation and crucifixion of Christ." Springsted, *Christus Mediator*, op. cit., p.176.

²⁰³Simone Weil, "Pythagorean", op. cit., p.170.

²⁰⁴Simone Weil, "Pythagorean," op. cit., p.170.

²⁰⁵Simone Weil, "Pythagorean," op. cit., p.169.

Son and his Father. This distance is only separation, however, for those who love. For those who love, separation, although painful is a good, because, it is love. Even the distress of the abandoned Christ is a good. There cannot be a greater good for us on earth than to share in it. God can never be perfectly present to us here below on account of our flesh. But he can be almost perfectly absent from us in extreme affliction. This is the only possibility of perfection for us on earth. That is why the Cross is our only hope.³⁰⁶

The next form of harmony which is that between human beings allows Simone Weil to show how the "love of thy neighbour" shown through the attention given to the afflicted, in doing justice, and in friendship can be openings by way of Christ to God. As Simone Weil says:

If Iamblichus has not over-exaggerated, the Pythagoreans recognized, and applied among themselves to an admirable degree, a commandment similar to the last which Christ left to his disciples: 'Love one another.'³⁰⁷

Relying on the definition of friendship as "L'amitié est une égalité faite d'harmonie," the fourth form of harmony, friendship between humans, is also enclosed in the Pythagorean definition of friendship. However, this last form of friendship is not exactly like the others, as the friendship between humans does not appear as though it should be a unity of contraries. But Simone Weil argues that although all humans are "of the same species, of the same root, and of the same rank, they are not all of the same 'thought.'" For, "...chaque homme, lui-même est je, et les autres sont les autres. Je, c'est-à-dire le centre du monde; cette position centrale est figurée dans l'espace par la perspective."³⁰⁸ Because "perception" gives each individual human being the illusion that he/she is at the centre of the world, friendship between human beings does result from harmony. Also, says Simone Weil, true friendship between human beings demands that each individual renounce the illusion of perspective and recognize that the true centre of the world is God and that the individual human being is no more than "un petit fragment" in the world, like all the other things in the world. But, as she points out, if this illusion is given up for a false god, such as the collective perspective, then the human being renounces his/her own perspective for the wrong reason and moves even further away from any true friendship. Again Simone Weil emphasizes a point she has previously made: the individual should not renounce the power to say "I" in order to say "We," as a requirement of collectivity. For the collectivity that demands that the individual renounce his/her power to say "I" even further removes the possibility of the harmony of friendship, because, according to Simone Weil's dualistic philosophical

³⁰⁶Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.86.

³⁰⁷Simone Weil, "Pythagorean," op. cit., p.172.

³⁰⁸Weil, "...la doctrine pythagoricienne", op. cit., p.135.

anthropology, there has to be a distance, an irresolvable gap between one individual, who says "I" and another individual who says "I" for there to be mediation between them: "Ils sont liés par eux-mêmes et sans médiation. Il n'y a pas de distance entre eux, pas de place vide entre eux où puisse se glisser Dieu."²⁰⁹

The true reason to abandon one's power to say "I" is so that one can follow the Christ. It is only in and through Christ that two individuals can have friendship because Christ can mediate between the contraries of oneself and an other: "Quand on applique aux hommes la formule: "L'amitié est une égalité faite d'harmonie," harmonie a le sens d'unité des contraires. Les contraires sont moi et l'autre, contraires si distants qu'ils n'ont leur unité qu'en Dieu."²¹⁰

Simone Weil also calls this unity, justice, in the sense in which the Egyptians used the word: a renunciation of the use of all of one's power.

Only the true renunciation of the power to think of everything in the first person, the renunciation which is not a simple transference, grants to man the knowledge that other men are his fellows. This renunciation is the love of God, whether or not the name of God be present to the mind.²¹¹

We also saw above that justice has love as its condition; therefore, it requires mediation as well. Simone Weil claims that "Friendship between human beings, and justice, are one and the same thing...."²¹²

Ceux que le Christ remercie pour lui avoir donné à manger quand il avait faim sont nommés les justes.... Un acte de justice est un éclair d'amitié qu'une occasion fugitive fait surgir entre deux hommes.²¹³

A friendship which is a harmony of opposites allows human beings to express their 'love of God' by loving another human being. Simone Weil claims that God mediates in the relationship between oneself and another because in renouncing 'the power to think in the first person', one makes a space for God's love to enter. The relation is one of the geometric mean $a/b = b/c$ applied to friendship. It is in this way and only in this way that one can love an afflicted person, which as we saw above allows for compassion and its complement, gratitude.

There is another kind of friendship which also brings a kind of justice between two human beings and which does not include a renunciation of thinking in the first person. Simone Weil calls this 'natural friendship'; in this

²⁰⁹ Weil, "...la doctrine pythagoricienne", op. cit., p. 140.

²¹⁰ Weil, "...la doctrine pythagoricienne", op. cit., p.139.

²¹¹ Simone Weil, "Pythagorean," op. cit., p.175.

²¹² Simone Weil, "Pythagorean," op. cit., p.175.

²¹³ Weil, "...la doctrine pythagoricienne", op. cit., p.139.

case, neither person is subjected to the other; both consent to a mutual need of each other. Thus, "Each one then, without ceasing to think in the first person, really understands that the other also thinks in the first person. Justice then occurs as a natural phenomenon."²¹⁴ Simone Weil finds this latter "form of justice" in the claim Thucydides puts in the mouth of the Athenians when they were about to massacre the people of Melos:

The human mind being made as it is, the justice of a matter is examined only if there is an equal necessity on both sides.²¹⁵

The last form of harmony is not a harmony made of friendship, although God is the principle of this harmony as well. The contraries of this harmony we have already come across with the Incarnation, the principle which limits -- God, and that which is limitless or that which receives its limits from outside -- inert matter. Simone Weil points out that the intermediary of this harmony is limit, is God. There is a mediation between God, the principle of limit, and inert matter, that which receives limits from the outside. It is "mathematical necessity" that mediates between God and things. It is this same necessity which mediates between one thing and another thing, thus constituting the "order of the world". This is how Simone Weil understands Anaximander's famous passage (much discussed by Nietzsche and Heidegger): "It is starting from the indeterminate that the birth of things is accomplished. It is by a return to the indeterminate that their destruction comes about in conformity with necessity; for they submit to a chastisement and make reparation to each other, because of their injustice, according to the order of the time." The 'necessity' which rules the universe is a combination of equilibrium and immobility, according to Simone Weil. The immobility comes about because each rupture is limited by an "equal and inverse rupture" of equilibrium.

Simone Weil explains how this is possible by drawing from another fragment from Philolaus. He claims, she says, that it is number which gives things body. Number, as we saw above is equivalent to the Second Person of the Trinity; it is the Soul of the World, that which limits. We also saw above Pythagoras discovered how everything in the world is unity and diversity at once. He saw how number gives us a passageway into the world because it corresponds totally to the necessity which things are submitted to in the world. Inert matter only has relationships insofar as it has been mediated by number, so that what defines it is both limit (the order which relates it to God) and the limitless (matter without order). We can say to ourselves with certainty that despite the various

²¹⁴Simone Weil, "Pythagorean," op. cit., p.173.

²¹⁵Simone Weil, "Pythagorean," op. cit., p.174.

appearances(its limitlessness) which an object can give me it is one object. Simone Weil gives the example of gnomon to show how number allows us to see the relationship in things. Perhaps she uses this example because the root of the term is related to the Greek word for "to know" and "to perceive." The gnomon is the vertical stem of the sundial. The gnomon remains stationary -- immobile while the shadows change according to the movement of the earth in relation to the sun. Thus we have here the variation of shadows and the invariant of the gnomon (or the vertical stem of the sundial). It is because of the relation between the "group of variation" and the invariant that we can tell the time.

The human mind in perceiving uses this same relationship between the invariant and the variant. Simone Weil claims that "Reality is for the human mind contact with necessity." She argues that we are here presented with a contradiction. On the one hand, human beings must have actual physical contact, through perception, with necessity to know reality. Yet, on the other hand, "necessity is intelligible, not tangible." That is why Simone Weil claims that "the feeling of reality" constitutes a harmony of contraries: a harmony between relationship and matter; she also calls this "quantitative relationships" and she claims that these "quantitative relationships" "do indeed constitute the body of the object." This was Pythagoras' discovery because he showed us how the things in this world could only exist by being mediated by God; the relation between 1 and 2 is only possible because it is an image of the relation between the Father and the Son. Pythagoras showed us that although the relationship is purely intelligible we need the image to make the relation. And as we saw above, mathematics is both arithmetic and geometry; it is both an intellectual as well as a visible operation. Thus, it is the contact with necessity that allows us to perceive reality, and we do feel reality with our bodies. This is why Simone Weil claims that:

...le sentiment de la réalité constitue une harmonie et un mystère. Nous nous persuadons de la réalité d'un objet en en faisant le tour, opération qui produit successivement des apparences variées déterminées par la fixité d'une forme autre que toutes les apparences et extérieure à elles, transcendante à leur égard. Par cette opération nous connaissons que l'objet est une chose, non un fantôme, qu'il a un corps.²¹⁶

Necessity must have a support; it must be tangible as well as intelligible: "Il lui faut un support, car la nécessité par elle-même est essentiellement conditionnelle. Sans support, elle n'est qu'abstraction".²¹⁷ The perplexing part of this idea of necessity has to do with the fact that Simone Weil claims that "the reality of the universe is necessity"

²¹⁶Weil, "...la doctrine pythagoricienne", op. cit., p.142.

²¹⁷Weil, "...la doctrine pythagoricienne", op. cit., p.143.

and yet this universe of necessity would not have existence without matter to give it support; thus, necessity combined with matter "constitutes the reality of creation itself." Simone Weil claims that we have no conception of the "basis" of necessity, but the Greeks had a conception:

However the Greeks had a word..., which means at once unlimited and indeterminate. This is what Plato calls receptacle, the matrix...the mother of all things and at the same time always in tact, always virginal. Water is the best image of this because it has neither form nor colour even though it be visible and tangible. On this subject it is impossible not to notice that the words matter, mother, sea(mer), Marie resemble each other to the point of being almost identical. This character of water takes into account its symbolic use in baptism...²¹⁸

So, in a sense matter insofar as it is subjected to necessity takes the form of necessity and is necessity. The appearances of a thing always produce the form of the thing. That is why perception is a contact with necessity: a unity of matter and form. Just as the Father and the Son are One (because the Son Wills to be thought by the Father) and yet, two (because the Son is also the Soul of the World and separated from the Father through the Incarnation and the Cross), so too, necessity and matter are one (because matter perfectly submits to necessity -- that is how it is perfectly innocent) and yet, two (because matter remains appearance and necessity remains form). What this means is that the necessity which is in our minds does correspond with the "contact with necessity" we have in perception which combines appearance and form. It is because matter(appearance in our minds) completely conforms to necessity that necessity is the same whether it is encountered in the world or in our mind.

The unity of contraries between God and matter also concerns man insofar as man is a thing. She claims that the whole of man is a thing except for his/her faculty of free consent. Thus, what are things in man are the body and the soul: "...l'homme est une chose, c'est-à-dire tout l'homme, corps et âme, sauf la faculté de libre consentement."²¹⁹ Simone Weil claims that what we normally consider to be "the self" and take to indicate personal identity is a thing: "Elle (la chose) englobe par suite ce que chacun nomme moi."²²⁰ Thus, the whole natural part of human beings belongs to the realm of necessity.

Human beings have with "necessity" three sorts of relationships. In the first way, necessity is not an enemy for humans. This is when human beings act methodically. Simone Weil has described this kind of activity in "Science et perception dans Descartes" and she continues to hold that this kind of human activity is a correlation

²¹⁸Simone Weil, "Pythagorean", op. cit., p.179.

²¹⁹Weil, "...la doctrine pythagoricienne", op. cit., p.141.

²²⁰Weil, "...la doctrine pythagoricienne", op. cit., p.141.

between mind and body. Now she describes this relation between mind and body that produces methodical action as a point of equilibrium between the human mind and necessity, as she says:

Dans l'action méthodique il y a un point d'équilibre où la nécessité, par son caractère conditionnel, présente à la fois à l'homme des obstacles et des moyens par rapport aux fins partielles qu'il poursuit, et eu il y a une espèce d'égalité, entre le vouloir d'un homme et la nécessité universelle.²²¹

This point of equilibrium can best be understood through the image of the balance; if we imagine that our understanding of the necessity which defines the universe is exactly that point which allows for the balance of two objects of equal weight. We can imagine how necessity in the mind (the actions that follow from it cohere with necessity in the mind) is that point of equilibrium which defines methodical action and how it can perfectly correspond to necessity in the world; thus making for methodical action in the world. This is possible only because mathematical necessity in the mind is the same as necessity in the world:

As the horizontal place is the unity of the upper and the lower surfaces, necessity is for matter the intersection of obedience to God and of the brute force which subdues creatures. At this same level of the intersection, necessity participates in constraint on the one hand, and on the other participates in intelligence, in justice, in beauty and in faith. The share in constraint is evident. There is for example something hard, metallic, opaque,...in the connection between the different properties of the triangle and of the circle.²²²

What makes for the ultimate duality is that although methodical action can bridge the gap between mind and body, the gap remains always and defines what Simone Weil calls the "negligible." An analogy to Simone Weil's conception of the relation between God and man may make this point clearer. As we saw above human beings can only go to God by passing through Christ, as He said: 'No one cometh unto the Father except by me.' So we have the geometric mean: $\text{God/Christ} = \text{Christ/man}$. In a similar sense we have this geometric mean in the methodical action that forms the relation between necessity in the mind and necessity in the world: $\text{necessity in the mind/methodical action} = \text{methodical action/necessity in the world}$.

Just as the Christ is, on the one hand, the mediator between God and man, and on the other the mediator between man and his neighbour, so mathematical necessity is on one hand the mediator between God and things, and on the other between each thing and every other thing. This necessity constitutes an order whereby each thing, being in its place, permits all other things to exist.²²³

The way that we can act methodically also makes our ordered action an image of Christ in His role as the ordering Word:

²²¹Weil, "...la doctrine pythagoricienne", op. cit., p.144.

²²²Simone Weil, "Pythagorean," op. cit., p.187.

²²³Simone Weil, "Pythagorean," op. cit., p.185.

...just as the order of the world, in God, is a divine Person which may be called the ordering Word, or the Soul of the World, so in us, the younger brothers, necessity is relationship - that is to say, thought in action.²²⁴

Also, in the same sense man can choose to respect this knowledge that the way of Christ is the way to God; thus, respecting all that this entails in word and deed or not. Of course the latter choice entails turning away from God. Likewise, human beings can choose not to respect the relation that methodical action makes between necessity in the mind and necessity in the world. They can choose to ignore that this point of equilibrium is only possible between two equals: mathematical necessity in the mind and the necessary relations that exist between things in the world:

Necessity is ...the principle of coexistence. And basically the supreme justice for us is acceptance of the coexistence with ourselves of all creatures and all things which make up the existent....

There is an analogy between the fidelity of the right-angled triangle to the relationship which forbids it to emerge from the circle of which its hypotenuse is the diameter, and that of a man who, for example, who abstains from the acquisition of power or of money at the price of fraud. The first may be regarded as a perfect example of the second. One can say as much, when one has perceived mathematical necessity in nature, of the fidelity of floating bodies in rising out of water precisely as much as their density exacts, no more and no less.²²⁵

When one contemplates necessity, one exercises the "faculty of consent." This faculty of consent is what is referred to above as the infinitely small portion of man that does not belong to this world. This is liberty. Simone Weil's idea of liberty, at this point, is to consent to think "necessity" or not. Thus, mathematical necessity, when we consent to think it, is what mediates between the whole natural part of the human being and the faculty of consent. The faculty in the human being which allows us to consent to necessity, is the same as that which allows us to love. It is love which prompts one to consent to necessity. However, one is never certain what one is loving, all one knows is that it is out of love that one consents:

C'est pour l'amour de quelque chose qui n'est pas une personne humaine, et qui pourtant est quelque chose comme une personne. Car ce qui n'est pas quelque chose comme une personne n'est pas objet d'amour....où il y a consentement complet authentique et inconditionnel à la nécessité, il y a plénitude de l'amour de Dieu....Ce consentement constitue la participation à la Croix de Christ.²²⁶

The second kind of relationship between man and necessity is when human beings think necessity has become a slave to them in dreams and in the exercise of social power. This is the illusion of power as described above in Part One of this Chapter. The third relationship is contrary to the second; necessity is a horrible and absolute master

²²⁴Simone Weil, "Pythagorean," op. cit., p.187.

²²⁵Simone Weil, "Pythagorean," op. cit., p.189.

²²⁶Weil, "...la doctrine pythagoricienne", op. cit., p.149.

when one is suffering or in affliction. This is when human beings face necessity as force; when human beings are reduced to the state of matter. Now we can summarize Simone Weil's cosmology.

The first premise of her cosmology is that God has created by withdrawing Himself, thus allowing a part of being to be other than God. This is so because, as was pointed out above, God is Mediation. This withdrawal of God is referred to as the "divine renunciation." Creation answers to the divine renunciation by being obedient: "L'univers tout entier n'est pas autre chose qu'une masse compacte d'obéissance."²²⁷ Within this compact mass there are "points of light": "la partie surnaturelle de l'âme d'une créature raisonnable qui aime Dieu et qui consent à obéir."²²⁸ The remainder of the soul is a part of the compact mass. The other reasonable beings, who, she says, do not love God, are also wholly obedient and a part of the mass "mais seulement à la manière d'une pierre qui tombe." These beings, with all of their illusions and their revolts, are merely phenomenon that are rigorously determined. Even the evil they do is a part of the order of the world and of the beauty of the world: "Considérez ainsi, comme matière inerte, les pires criminels font partie de l'ordre du monde et par suite de la beauté du monde. Toute obéit à Dieu, par suite tout est parfaitement beau."²²⁹

It can be seen that the faculty of the human being that is able to consent to universal love is that of attention, the faculty of consent: the eternal part of the soul. The carnal part of the soul includes both that which is at the level of obligation (intellect and will) and desire. The carnal part of the soul when the soul is completely turned towards God consents to necessity. For the intellect, consent is to think pure relations and to direct the body to act only when necessary. Simone Weil claims that attention is linked to desire and that the intellect is linked to attention: "L'amour instruit les dieux et les hommes, car nul n'apprend sans désirer apprendre. La vérité est recherchée non pas en tant que vérité, mais en tant que bien. L'attention est liée au désir."²³⁰ Also to be able to pay attention is to participate in the virtue of humility: "Dans le domaine de l'intelligence, la vertu d'humilité n'est pas autre chose que le pouvoir d'attention."²³¹

²²⁷Weil, "...la doctrine pythagoricienne", op. cit., p.161.

²²⁸Weil, "...la doctrine pythagoricienne", op. cit., p.161.

²²⁹Both quotations come from Weil, "...la doctrine pythagoricienne", op. cit., p.162.

²³⁰Weil, *La pensanteur*, op. cit., p.120.

²³¹Weil, *La pensanteur*, op. cit., p.130.

In "A propos de la doctrine pythagoricienne," Simone Weil does make one important change in her philosophical anthropology. She no longer claims, as she had in her early writings, that the soul is not divided into parts.²²

Simone Weil continues to claim that the soul is in the body, but now the body is just the receptacle of the soul. Which is to say that the body is completely informed by the soul, in all its passions, desires and appetites. Nevertheless, there is still a dualism in her idea of the human being because we can still only act through this body, and we can only act on an object that is outside of ourselves. Her whole metaphysics is dualistic. God separates himself from his Creation, leaving it as a system of "necessary connections." Simone Weil's view of necessity remains Kantian in so far as it is the human mind which makes the connections between things, makes relations through mathematics and geometry. These relations cohere with the order in the world as God thinks it. By thinking these necessary connections, human beings give existence to reality. Nevertheless, there is a necessity, an order which things obey and humans must also obey "to give birth to reality". So, like Kant, the "thing in itself" is there. This necessity also separates God from his Son, as the ordered Word, Who always remains united to Him by the Holy Spirit(love), but at the same time separated by necessity. We are separated by this same necessity, and we have the privilege of having the Spirit live in us if we consent to it. The soul is further divided into the carnal part of the soul and the eternal part of the soul. The carnal part of the soul is in the body, but the eternal part of the soul is transcendent in relation to the body.

E. PLATO'S METHOD OF ORIENTING THE SOUL TOWARDS GOD²³

²²See especially *Leçons de philosophie (Roanne 1933-1934)*, p.99-100.

²³Indeed, a major theme Weil sees in Plato's way of orienting the soul towards God has to do with the conception of mediation and how it relates to Christ and Springsted has fully developed this theme. However, this is not my concern with Weil's interest in Plato's method; rather, I am interested in how she perceives this method to cohere with a dualistic philosophical anthropology and a dualistic religious metaphysics. It is Plato's reflection on this dualism that describes everything in Creation and yet mysteriously permits of relation that Weil also found expressed in his argument that although it is the mind which knows, it is desire which makes it possible so that it takes both the body and soul to make the relation possible; thus, Love which is the basis of all desire is the basis

Simone Weil traces the origin of Christian thought to that long line of thinking which came through the Greeks, as well as the others examined above, the Egyptians and the Ancient East Indian thought, and many others not examined above. It would be impossible to leave the Greek tradition without considering what Simone Weil found in Plato's thought²³⁴ which prepared the way for Christ. From Plato's thought Simone Weil analyses the rigorous path that the soul must follow in order to reach the stage of assimilation with God. I will concentrate on how she understands Plato's method of overcoming the two obstacles that stand in the way of the two paths that are rigorously defined as those (one or the other that is) which the human being must take to God.²³⁵

As we saw above, in Simone Weil's analysis of what the Pythagoreans had bequeathed to us of the spiritual tradition, human beings have an extra role to play in the order of the Universe because the human being is a reasonable creature. Our role is to imitate the image of the Son of God, and in imitating this image, we act as the mediator between God and the material universe. It is through the human being's consent to follow Christ in His absolute obedience that God is able to enter the universe as points of light. If the human being does not consent to play this role, then she/he does not receive grace of God and she/he remains very much a part of the compact mass of material things:

*Cette masse compacte est parsemée de points lumineux. Chacun de ces points est la partie surnaturelle de l'âme d'une créature raisonnable qui aime Dieu et qui consent à obéir. Le reste de l'âme est pris dans la masse compacte. Les êtres doués de raison qui n'aiment pas Dieu sont seulement des fragments de la masse compacte et obscure. Eux aussi sont tout entiers obéissance, mais seulement à la manière d'une pierre qui tombe.*²³⁶

Simone Weil learned from Plato and the Greeks that human beings have been given the special privilege to imitate Christ or Prometheus, Dionysus, Love, and the Perfectly Just Man, who is Mediation itself:

Le consentement à obéir est médiateur entre l'obéissance aveugle et Dieu. Le consentement parfait est celui de Christ. Le consentement en nous ne peut être qu'un reflet de celui du Christ. Le Christ est médiateur entre Dieu et nous d'une part, d'autre part entre Dieu et l'univers, et nous aussi, dans la mesure où il nous est accordé d'imiter le Christ, nous avons cet extraordinaire privilège d'être à quelque degré médiateurs entre Dieu et sa propre

of the relation also. Thus, my concern is how Weil finds in Plato the dualism which is the human condition.

²³⁴We have already considered what Plato added to her understanding of Creation from the *Timaeus*.

²³⁵Actually, there is a difficulty in claiming that there are two paths to follow because in the final analysis the paths converge. It is love which directs the two paths all the way along and it is to love that one arrives at the end. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the path of the Philosopher-King is not at all the same as the path taken through the limiting of desire or of the love in the void of someone like Electra as described above(which is also a limiting of desire as she totally turned away from all earthly wealth).

²³⁶Weil, "...la doctrine pythagoricienne", op. cit., p.161-162.

création.²³⁷

Although the idea of the human being as a mediator between God and the Universe (but only as the reflection of the Mediation itself) is comprehensible to us in an abstract way, when it comes to knowing how to go about consenting and being this reflection, it is a different matter because we may think we understand something in abstraction but we show our understanding in our actions. Simone Weil, by interpreting Plato, shows us that the ways to go about consenting and being this reflection are already very much a part of our nature as human beings. It is to Simone Weil's analysis of Plato's *Republic*, *Symposium*, and *Phaedrus* that we learn that it is by following the way of the faculty of supernatural love which is highest in us, that is, the eternal part of the soul, that we get the other parts of our nature to follow.

Simone Weil distinguishes in relation to Plato's thought between that morality which has its basis in time and space and "true morality" which has its basis in an order from outside of time and place. This distinction helps to clarify her views on the social realm.

I agree with Mary G. Dietz's argument that we must understand Simone Weil's claims about the social world being the Great Beast in spiritual terms, in other words as a lament over our loss in modern society of that "desire" for "supernatural love" which may give to some the grace which permits them to have access to a "supernatural" morality. Blum and Seidler, in *A Truer Liberty*, ignore that aspect of Simone Weil's political writings.²³⁸ Mary Dietz gives more attention to this point by comparing and contrasting Simone Weil's moral theory to Kant's moral theory and by concentrating on the "method of attention". But she, too, continually tries to make Simone Weil's perspective palpable to the modern secular audience. However, I think by avoiding any discussion of the Pythagoreans, as Mary Dietz does, we lose the basis of Simone Weil's conception of *metaxu* (that is, as the harmony of contraries) and of her intention, as a mystic, to direct individuals - as many as possible - towards God. Dietz apologizes for Simone Weil's "modified Platonism," her turning away from the world, in claiming that

²³⁷Weil, "...la doctrine pythagoricienne", op. cit., p.163.

²³⁸Lawrence A. Blum and Victor J. Seidler, *A Truer Liberty: Simone Weil and Marxism*(New York; London: Routledge, 1989).

Simone Weil "redeems" herself in *L'enracinement*.²³⁹

What I will argue is that, for Simone Weil, the mystical dimension remains necessary and is at the centre of her political thought in *L'enracinement*. Simone Weil's analysis of the relation between mystical thought and politics begins in the following analysis of the paths to God because as should become evident the social element plays an essential role in either misdirecting or properly directing the individual.

i. Two Obstacles/Paths to God

Toutes les choses créées refusent d'être pour moi des fins. Telle est l'extrême miséricorde de Dieu...
Ce monde est la porte d'entrée. C'est une barrière. Et, en même temps, c'est le passage.²⁴⁰

The two obstacles to the orientation of the human being towards God are the desires of the body (the carnal part of the soul) and society. Simone Weil finds in the *Republic*, the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, a full description of these two obstacles.²⁴¹ What I wish to show in this section is how, according to Simone Weil, these two obstacles can become intermediaries leading to God, and that this can only happen with the help of the grace of God.

It is important to underline that, for Simone Weil, these obstacles cannot become "intermediaries" without a supernatural love in one's heart: "Seul celui qui a aimé Dieu d'un amour surnaturel peut regarder les moyens seulement comme des moyens."²⁴² Otherwise, we might miss the reasons why Simone Weil reads the Platonic dialogues (especially the *Republic*) from her mystical point of view, rather than in a "more explicitly political light," as Mary Dietz remarks.²⁴³

²³⁹Mary G. Dietz, *Between the Human and the Divine: the political thought of Simone Weil* (New Jersey: Rowman & Littlefield, 1988), p.138-140.

²⁴⁰Weil, *La pensanteur*, op. cit., p.146.

²⁴¹In *Réflexions sur les causes de la liberté et de l'oppression sociale*, and in the historical essays, Simone Weil continually refers to Plato's description of the "collectivity" as the "Great Beast". Thus, we are familiar with this barrier.

²⁴²Weil, *La pensanteur*, op. cit., p.147.

²⁴³Dietz, *Between*, op. cit., p.109. Also, on the same page, she speaks about Simone Weil's interpretation of Plato's dialogues as "merely one more indication of the extent to which Weil takes flight from the "social order" in these writings." She claims that Simone Weil ignores "the 'political Plato' who wrestles with the relationship between the soul and the state, the virtuousness of the citizen, the harmony of the social order..." Dietz does recognize that for Simone Weil, Plato should be read as one who is rooted in "the heavenly." But what she does not seem to realize is that Simone Weil interprets the 'political Plato' also as rooted in the heavenly. The only way

What can be learned from Plato's works is a method, which relies on human nature, for orientating the soul towards God. He considers the way of desire for beauty and the way which inspires the intellect. Actually these ways are the same way, as one cannot be inspired intellectually without the desire for beauty as we saw above. Thus, there are two obstacles in Plato's conception of the way. The first obstacle, to the desire for beauty, is the body, including all bodily needs. Laws analogous to those of physical gravity control all natural movements of the soul. Plato, says Simone Weil, compares the flesh and the "carnal part of the soul," the seat of desire, to an urn which has been pierced. Those who are ruled by this kind of desire continually pour in all that they can, without ever being able to fill the vessel.²⁴⁴

The second obstacle to inspiring the desire for beauty through the intellect is the social. The social element is, likewise, controlled by laws analogous to those of physical gravity, unless through some individual (or individuals) it has been infused with another kind of energy, one that lifts up the soul. Only those "illuminated by grace" have access to the supernatural morality.²⁴⁵

ii. The Way of Desire/Love/Intellect

Simone Weil interprets a passage from the *Symposium* (205e)²⁴⁶ as asserting that human beings cannot be egoists because all desire, love is mediation, love by God. Simone Weil argues that the fact that Socrates speaks through Diotima indicates that what is said in this work comes from a religious tradition rather than from philosophical reflection. Diotima represents a priestess of the Eleusinian religion. Diotima tells Socrates that love, which is the desire for good, for beauty and for wisdom is neither good, nor beautiful, nor wise. Simone Weil suggests that Diotima gives love many different identities: the first identity is to be synonymous with God; the second, is a being

to harmonize the soul and the State so as to have a social order that can be a *metaxu*, is if the leader has an understanding of "mediation" as Plato develops it from the Pythagoreans and applies it in the *Republic*. According to Simone Weil's interpretation of Plato, "Politics is a means, a *metaxu*" as well, and it is the art of harmonizing the contrary needs of the soul. I will return to this point in my final chapter.

²⁴⁴Simone Weil, "Dieu dans Platon", *La source grecque*(1953; Paris: Gallimard, 1963), p.83.

²⁴⁵Weil, "Dieu dans Platon", op. cit., p.85.

²⁴⁶Simone Weil made her own translations of Plato from Greek texts. Passages are here identified by standard numbering and rendered into Weil's translated French from Simone Weil, *Intuitions pré-chrétiennes*, Nouvelle édition (1951; Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1985), or English from Simone Weil, *Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks* (London, Ark Paperbacks of Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987.)

who is something similar to an angel -- above man, belonging to the supernatural world, but is beneath the divinity; the third, is as a "demon" as we understand it -- a devil; and the fourth which she claims Diotima also calls a demon, is an intermediary between the mortal and the immortal. It is this last identity that Simone Weil thinks is the true one for Diotima. She quotes the passage in the *Symposium* (202e) where Diotima says this explicitly.

From the myth of the birth of love in the *Symposium* (203b and 204b) Simone Weil interprets love to be the author of the most complete harmony, in the Pythagorean sense: "the unity between the contraries which themselves are the most contrary possible, known as God and Want." What these passages mean to Simone Weil is that love of God is the foundation of being. Thus, everything that we think we love, other than the Good (God), is the result of "mistaken identity," or "a defect of perspective." Either way, the error is serious and one must try to escape the false perspective.

Diotima describes the six stages of the way through beauty (love) in the *Symposium*:

Les étapes du progrès de l'âme décrites ici mènent de la considération de la beauté physique chez un être à la considération de la beauté physique partout où elle se trouve; de là à la beauté des âmes, de là à la beauté dans les lois et les institutions, de là à la beauté dans les sciences, de là on parvient à l'accomplissement de l'amour, à la contemplation de la beauté elle-même.²⁴⁷

The stages are "spiritual preparation," she claims, for the revelation -- which is a mystical experience. Simone Weil claims that this last stage can be called an experience because: "La beau absolu est quelque chose d'aussi concret que les objets sensibles, quelque chose qu'on voit, mais par la vue surnaturelle."²⁴⁸ This is the last stage because "Absolute Beauty" is God and is beyond all evil. This means that the one who reaches this stage of contemplation has achieved assimilation.

The stages begin with the pleasures of the body -- the instinct of reproduction -- also aroused by beauty, carnal beauty. In relation to an earlier passage in the *Symposium* (189d), Simone Weil explains why carnal desire is one of the stages. She claims that carnal desire is a degraded form of this hunger for completeness. As she has maintained in her examination of the the Pythagorean doctrine, our misery is to be separated from God -- in a state of duality. The division of the sexes, a visible image of this duality, she claims, and thus carnal union is the

²⁴⁷Simone Weil, "L'amour divin dans la création," *Intuitions pré-chrétiennes*, Nouvelle édition (1951; Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1985), p.86.

²⁴⁸Weil, "L'amour divin....", op. cit., p.89.

"deceitful appearance of a remedy."²⁹ Nevertheless, "...le désir de sortir de l'état de dualité est la marque de l'Amour en nous...."³⁰ But it is not through love of another human being – in carnal love, nor even in Platonic love, or friendship that one can achieve the ultimate unity. These kinds of unity remain spurious even though friendship is a "higher image" than carnal love.

The second stage is "moral beauty," the beauty of four virtues: justice, temperance, courage and wisdom. To define these virtues Simone Weil uses the *Discourses* of the tragic poet 'Agathon' of the *Symposium*, (196b,c, and d). She claims that the divine love that is the perfect model of justice is so because "il est soustrait à tout contact avec la force." This is what Ariston says in 196c of the *Symposium*. As we know from Simone Weil's essay, "The 'Iliad' or Poem of Might", she found it fascinating how well the Greeks understood force and that "perfect justice" could have nothing to do with force. This is the same conception of justice bequeathed to us by the Egyptians. Thus, only those beings, who have transported a part of themselves in God out of love, are able to escape this contact with force. It is, she claims, the Greeks who have transmitted to us this idea that the principle of justice in the human soul belongs to that faculty of the human soul which force or might cannot touch – the faculty of consent to the good, the faculty of supernatural love. Plato, she says, expresses this in 196b. This same idea is expressed in the New Testament in the words of Christ when he speaks of the "Father who sheds the rain and the light of the sun equitably overall." Thus, when a human being is just, she/he is an image of divine justice. This state is only possible for a human being who has totally consented to love God's order.

Temperance is described by Simone Weil, as the acceptance that one has, and will always have, of an "unfulfilled yearning" that can only be satisfied by love. When one accepts this, one has achieved restraint, temperance. Simone Weil claims that in exercising this virtue we must act on only what is obligatory:

Being creatures of flesh and caught in necessity, we can be constrained by a strict obligation to transmit the violence of the mechanism of which we are a wheel; for example as leaders over subordinates, as soldiers over enemies. It is often very difficult, painful, and agonizing to determine just how far strict obligation goes.³¹

²⁹However in another passage Simone Weil claims that "...the union of the sexes is the image of supernatural love...." Simone Weil, "The 'Symposium' of Plato", *Intimations*, op. cit., p.123. Hereafter: "The 'Symposium'".

³⁰Weil, "L'amour divin....", op. cit., p.46.

³¹Simone Weil, "The 'Symposium'", op. cit., p.120.

This is the same as the Christian idea of purity. This is, claims Simone Weil, the virtue of obedience. She claims courage, too, needs a pure love to inspire it. Simone Weil suggests that courage has inherent in it a union of contraries. I see no other way to understand this analysis of courage, otherwise, what she says is at best ambiguous: "L'amour n'exerce jamais la force, il n'a pas d'épée en main, et pourtant il est la source où ceux qui tiennent la glaive puisent leur vertu."²²

Wisdom, the final virtue, is expressed in 196d of the *Symposium*. All inspiration, according to this passage, is claimed to have its immediate source in supernatural love. This includes all creativity, such as poetry and the other arts, and all invention in techniques. Thus, Simone Weil argues, all of the truly great works do not come from talent, nor effort, will, nor work – they come from the desire for beauty, which is the same thing as "attention:"

Ce n'est pas la capacité naturelle, le don congénital, ce n'est pas non plus l'effort, la volonté, le travail, qui infusent dans l'intelligence l'énergie susceptible de la rendre pleinement efficace. C'est uniquement le désir, à savoir le désir du beau. Ce désir, à partir d'un certain degré d'intensité, et de pureté, est la même chose que l'attention. A tous degrés, il est la même chose que l'attention.²³

Thus, we see that the intellect, the faculty connected with attention takes all of its inspiration from supernatural love. So for Simone Weil, the method of attention is dependent on the mediation of supernatural love and in the human being, intellectual attention is only possible with this intense desire for beauty in one's heart which brings joy when this beauty reveals itself: "l'intelligence ne s'exerce que dans la joie. C'est même peut-être la seule de nos facultés à laquelle la joie soit indispensable."²⁴ It is for this reason that I wish to maintain that we cannot understand nor apply Simone Weil's method of attention without acknowledging its mystical basis at all times.

This brings us to the third stage of the soul's progress toward God: the beauty in laws and institutions. It is at this stage that we encounter, according to Simone Weil, either "the morality of the Great Beast," or "supernatural morality." This accordingly determines whether souls will be properly directed or not. The whole of Simone Weil's last book, *L'Enracinement*, attends to the setting up of a collectivity with laws and institutions that could be infused with a supernatural morality. She implies that social morality would always exist side by side with laws and institutions which are infused with a "supernatural morality." To help us to understand what an immense task it is

²²Weil, "L'amour divin....", op. cit., p.60.

²³Weil, "L'amour divin....", op. cit., p.61-62.

²⁴Weil, "L'amour divin....", op. cit., p. 62.

to escape the influence of the morality of the Great Beast, Simone Weil uses Plato's metaphor of the cave.

She argues that it is a mistake to think that the metaphor of the cave relates to knowledge and that sight signifies the intellect. Rather, she claims, the sun is the good and sight is the faculty which can relate to the good, that is, the eternal part of the soul. The things in the cave are unreal because these things cannot be objects of love. These "unreal objects" are the objects which please the Great Beast, and a society which is ruled by a morality that has no relation to love. Simone Weil quotes Plato's familiar description of the sophistic moral teachings that takes its cue from what the people want and need, without giving any attention to the good:

Call whatever pleases this animal good, and whatever displeases him evil, and they have no other criterion. They call righteous and beautiful those things which are necessary, being incapable of seeing, or of showing others, to what degree the essence of the necessary differs from that of the good. (*Republic* VI, 493c)

Thus, Simone Weil points out, all the things which bring social prestige are claimed to be beautiful and good even though they belong to the realm of pure illusion. These are "le désir amoureux... Les plaisirs de la gourmandise, de la boisson... La richesse, le pouvoir, l'avancement, les décorations, les honneurs de tout espèce, la réputation, la considération..."²⁵

The most notable is power because, as Simone Weil says, ninety percent of it is prestige. This is remarkable because power "détermine tout en ce monde." Thus, most of power is an illusion which, as Simone Weil has so aptly pointed out in her commentary on the *Iliad*, deludes those who have it on their side; and this leads them to believe that their power is more than prestige so they carry it into war. But, war is also a thing of prestige - it is only real for its victims: at the point of death.

As Simone Weil had concluded in *Réflexions sur les causes de la liberté* and reminds us here: "La valeur sociale suprême, ou plutôt unique, est le prestige."²⁶ However, she now has a slightly different analysis of prestige, but still seeing it as a kind of necessity.

Still using the metaphor of the cave, she claims that prestige is the shadow of the puppets which are reflected on the walls of the cave. The puppets, she thinks, are not intended to be real, but artificial things and they represent social institutions. Social institutions provide a collectivity with conventional good as well as the shadow, prestige.

²⁵Weil, "L'amour divin....", op. cit., p. 75.

²⁶Weil, "L'amour divin....", op. cit., p. 76.

Simone Weil uses an example to make this clear: the miser sees in gold the shadow of gold, prestige and desires gold for this reason. However, the social convention makes of gold a means of exchange — thus, in this sense, gold has a conventional value — it is a "purely conventional good." The conventional good has a certain reality in the sense that relative good takes its reality from the Good. But the shadow of this good, prestige has no reality: it is an illusion. That is why Simone Weil claims that "Il y a une grande différence entre illusion et convention."²⁵⁷ Furthermore, in order to recognize this difference and the good of social conventions one has to turn away from prestige, the shadows of the cave. Only then can one recognize that "Dans toutes les institutions humaines on trouve en fait des images de vérités d'ordre surnaturel...."²⁵⁸

Simone Weil thinks that even a bad social order must be obeyed and be the object of charity because it still provides images of the truth of a supernatural order:

L'obéissance au grand animal conforme au bien, c'est là la vertu sociale.
Est pharisien un homme qui est vertueux par obéissance au gros animal.
La charité peut doit aimer dans tous les pays tout ce qui est condition du développement spirituel des individus, c'est-à-dire, d'une part, l'ordre social, même s'il est mauvais, comme étant moins mauvais que le désordre....²⁵⁹

Yet there is a difference between those who obey the Great Beast as a Pharisee and those who obey the Great Beast in spiritual nakedness as Christ did. The first, remain consumed by the desire for prestige, whereas, the latter, totally renounce all prestige. It is this total renunciation of prestige which according to Simone Weil, makes Christ a Perfectly Just Man: "C'est l'absence de prestige, et non pas la souffrance, qui est l'essence même de la Passion."²⁶⁰

Plato, says Simone Weil, understood this and that is why he made the laws and social institutions the intermediary between a legitimate leader, "a man stripped bare," and the Great Beast in the Statesman. The laws and social institutions can mediate because if they are legitimate they provide an image of the supernatural order. That is why they constitute an equilibrium, which she defines as: "L'équilibre est la soumission d'un ordre à un autre, ordre transcendant au premier et présent dans le premier sous la forme d'un infiniement

²⁵⁷Weil, "L'amour divin....", op. cit., p.76.

²⁵⁸Weil, "L'amour divin....", op. cit., p.77.

²⁵⁹Weil, *La pensanteur*, op. cit., p.164.

²⁶⁰Weil, "L'amour divin....", op. cit., p.78.

petit.²⁸¹

Plato, she thinks, defined the laws and institutions as constituting this kind of equilibrium, which is a harmony in the pythagorian sense:

Les lois et les institutions comportent un autre équilibre qui est comme à l'intersection de la vertu et de la nécessité naturelle. Mais il est presque impossible de deviner ce que Platon a exactement dans l'esprit: si c'est la cité comme métaphore, comme image grossie de l'âme, telle qu'elle est étudiée dans la *République*, ou une étude de l'harmonie propre aux rapports sociaux, telle qu'on la trouve dans le *Politique*. En tout cas, la notion pythagoricienne d'harmonie comme union des contraires et la combinaison de ce qui limite et de ce qui est illimité, doivent dominer ces trois études successives.²⁸²

Whatever Plato had in mind in the *Republic*, we can see from what Simone Weil says about social harmony that the legitimacy of laws and social institutions and/or combined with a legitimate leader would be a harmony of contraries:

Hors de ces moments de brassage, partager la force entre les forts et les faibles n'est possible qu'avec l'intervention d'un facteur surnaturel.

Ce qui est surnaturel dans la société, c'est la légitimité sous sa double forme: loi et attribution du plus haut pouvoir... Mais il ne peut y avoir de légitimité sans religion.

L'obéissance à un homme dont l'autorité n'est pas illuminée de légitimité, c'est un cauchemar.

La seule chose qui puisse faire de la légitimité pure, idée absolument dépourvue de force, quelque chose de souverain, c'est la pensée: cela a toujours été, cela sera toujours.²⁸³

However, if at the stage of making laws for the State, one can see the images of the truths of a supernatural order in the laws and social institutions, then, according to Simone Weil, one must be one of the elect few:

"Car tous, sauf quelques élus, nous sommes dévorés d'attachement au prestige."²⁸⁴

For the elect few the laws and social institutions can be something of beauty and something to love even if undue pain is inflicted on one by them - as in the case of Christ. This is indeed one of the stages of the soul's progress and no doubt the most difficult stage. For this is the stage when the elect have to endure affliction. Finally, the last stage of the soul's progress is to contemplate the beauty of the world through the sciences. This stage has been thoroughly discussed in the section on the Pythagorean doctrine on necessity – the fifth form of harmony, and will not be repeated here.

²⁸¹Weil, *La pensanteur*, op. cit., p.171.

²⁸²Weil, "L'amour divin....", op. cit., p.90.

²⁸³Weil, *La pensanteur*, op. cit., p.173.

²⁸⁴Weil, "L'amour divin....", op. cit., p. 77.

Nevertheless, it is only through the elect few that a society can have access to the supernatural morality. But we chance to completely ignore those that have been converted or as Christ, treat them like a common criminal. Because the only way that they can appear here below is completely devoid of all prestige and we are taken up with prestige. In fact, it is a mark of the human condition that reality can only appear in this world completely veiled. Thus, to encounter this reality we must get beyond all appearances; the only way is to denounce all social prestige.

iii. The Way of Desire/Love/Affliction

Thus, the laws and social institutions are supposed to maintain an equilibrium of forces, between authority and obedience: "Une société bien faite serait celle où l'Etat n'aurait qu'une action négative, de l'ordre du gouvernail: une légère pression au moment opportun pour compenser un commencement de déséquilibre."²⁶⁵ But the laws and social institutions would not be perfectly just because "(l)e modèle de la justice pour les hommes, c'est un homme juste."²⁶⁶ Also, she points out that "(n)otre monde est la royaume de la nécessité. L'apparence de la justice est de ce monde. La justice réelle n'en est pas."²⁶⁷

In her commentary on Plato, Simone Weil speaks about the elect few as does Plato but I am not sure how she understands this idea; in other words, what she says in *Waiting on God* about the afflicted being closest to Christ suggests either that she understands the term the "elect" to mean those who have received God's grace and/or that she is inclined towards the commonly held Christian view that the affliction of the poor (or those who for other reasons are outcasts of society) is a way to assimilation to God. The latter view would certainly cohere with her claim that actual poverty is a privilege.²⁶⁸ In any case, the perfectly just man could only appear

²⁶⁵Weil, *La pensanteur*, op. cit., p.173.

²⁶⁶Weil, "L'amour divin....", op. cit., p.82.

²⁶⁷Weil, "L'amour divin....", op. cit., p.84.

²⁶⁸It is important to be clear about what Simone Weil is saying about the privilege that the poor have because otherwise one might imagine that she means to condone inflicting poverty or taking a blind eye towards the poor thus legitimately ignoring giving them bread when needed. What she argues follows from the idea that she learned from her reading of Homer and Pythagoras etc., that is, that misery is the human condition because of the distance which separates us from God. The poor feel and know both in their body and soul this distance; thus, if they can recognise it and still desire to love, Weil claims that they will see the Beauty of the World in the way that St. Francis had. It is because the social is not blocking their sight that Weil seems to suggest that they are closest to

here completely devoid of his reality – as Christ had been deprived of his reality and was treated like a common criminal, a condemned criminal. This relation between the perfectly just man as depicted in the

Republic(361b-e) was, for Simone Weil, a clear indication that Plato is referring to the divine incarnation:

The passage concerning the perfectly just man demonstrates the idea of divine incarnation more clearly than any other Greek text....in order that a man 'in no way differs from justice itself', should be the same in all respects as justice, 'divine Justice, from beyond the skies, must descend upon earth' ²⁹⁹

Simone Weil argues that Plato "...refused to demonstrate that such a thing could be possible." However, she

Christ's way of the "perfectly just man" as described by Plato. Also, the following passage suggests that poverty has a privilege because the poor cannot try to possess beauty which those who have can try to do by having luxurious surroundings; thus, if the poor are able to see the beauty (which has the condition that the horror of poverty does not consume them), the fact that they have no means to possess it makes their encounter be one of 'looking and seeing':

"Luxury is the finality of riches. moreover luxury itself represents beauty for a whole class of men. It provides surroundings through which they can feel in a vague fashion that the universe is beautiful, just as St. Francis needed to be a vagabond and a beggar in order to feel it to be beautiful. Either way would be equally legitimate if in each case the beauty of the world were experienced in an equally direct, pure and full manner; but happily God willed that it should not be so. Poverty has a privilege. That is a dispensation without which the love of the beauty of the world might easily come into conflict with the love of our neighbour. Nevertheless, the horror of poverty – every reduction of poverty – and every reduction of wealth can be felt as poverty, even its failure to increase – is essentially horror of ugliness. The soul which is prevented by circumstances from feeling anything of the beauty of the world, even confusedly, even through what is false, is invaded to its very centre by a kind of horror....The love of power amounts to a desire to establish order among the men and things around oneself, either on a large or small scale, and this desire for order is the result of a sense of beauty. In this case, as in the case of luxury, the question is one of forcing a certain circle into a pattern suggestive of universal beauty; this circle is limited, but the hope of increasing it indefinitely may often be present. This unsatisfied appetite, the desire to keep on increasing, is due precisely to a desire for contact with universal beauty, even though the circle we are organising is not the universe. It is not the universe and it hides it. Our immediate universe is like the scenery in a theatre....Art is an attempt to transport into a limited quantity of matter, modelled by man, an image of the infinite beauty of the entire universe. If the attempt succeeds, this portion of matter should not hide the universe, but on the contrary it should reveal its reality to all around." Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.122-123.

It is because the afflicted in their poverty have this special free space that is not cluttered with false images that they can receive with gratitude and see as beautiful an act of compassion which is the act of one who gives them bread with God's Love in their hearts. It is only because of this relation between affliction and how it reflects the Beauty of God's Order as seen in Christ's affliction, that is as one who goes the furthest distance and loves the impossible love that affliction can be seen as beautiful and that the afflicted have the privilege of having at their fingertips the way to love the impossible love as Christ. Thus, the poor have the appearance of absolute wretchedness and they are on the point of seeing the reality of the Beauty of the universe which by way of desire is Love. Thus, I think it is from Simone Weil's understanding of the Greeks and of this passage of Plato's that she understands how the afflicted are the the way of Christ and how poverty is a privilege. However, as we saw above, the love of thy neighbour is one very important way for the afflicted to see the Beauty so that Justice and Charity are essential to the way of the afflicted. But, as we saw in the above quoted passage, Weil does not exclude the idea of an afflicted person seeing this beauty of the universe in nature itself and, in fact, in *L'enracinement*, she argues that it is the workers who take necessity into their bodies who have a privileged view of the beauty of the world.

²⁹⁹Simone Weil, "The 'Republic'", *Intimations*, op. cit., p.140. Hereafter: "The Republic".

thinks that his thoughts were that of the incarnation because:

...the centre of his inspiration is the ontological proof, the certainty that the perfect is more real than the imperfect.

The ideal model for relatively just men can only be a perfectly just man. Relatively just men exist. If there model is to be real, he must have an earthly existence at a certain point in space, and at a certain moment of time. There is no other reality for a man. If the ideal cannot have this existence, it is nothing but an abstraction....The divine model, the perfectly just man, is the mediator between just men and God.²⁷⁰

The perfectly just man is, therefore, the mean proportion in the Pythagorean sense. This is what Simone Weil is claiming that Plato argues in the *Republic* because in a sense he is saying that just men can only assimilate with God by passing the way of the perfectly just man. She argues that one has to bring in a passage from the *Theatetus* to realize this:

One must be careful to notice how Plato clearly affirms that justice in itself is not a sufficient model. The model of justice for men is a just man.

It is he, doubtless, who is also the divine and blessed ideal spoken of in the *Theatetus*. When Plato speaks of assimilation with this model, ...the word assimilation in Greek, and especially for such a Pythagorean as Plato, is a geometrical term which refers to the identity of relationships, to proportion....No proportion is possible between men and God except by mediation. The divine model, the perfectly just man, is the mediator between just men and God.²⁷¹

So, according to Simone Weil, human beings are not innocent; we are afflicted by the original sin. What this means is that our human condition is to be faced with this incompatibility between appearance and reality.

C'est à cause du retournement opéré dans les choses humaines par le péché originel qu'il y a cette incompatibilité entre l'apparence et la réalité qui oblige la justice parfait à apparaître ici-bas sous la forme d'un criminel condamné. Si nous étions innocents, l'apparence serait la couleur même du réel et non pas un voile à déchirer.²⁷²

Simone Weil quotes extensively from Plato's *Republic* to demonstrate that he agrees with her interpretation that the human condition is such that we are faced with this contradiction that the perfectly just person must appear naked without honour and unrecognizable - because then the perfectly just person would have the appearance of injustice:

Take the just man, let us show him forth by our words. Simple and generous, desiring, as Aeschylus says, not the appearance but the reality of the good. Let us take away all appearance... let him be shown naked of all things except justice, ...that while committing no injustice he may have the greatest reputation for injustice in

²⁷⁰Simone Weil, "The 'Republic'", op. cit., p.141.

²⁷¹Simone Weil, "The Republic", op. cit., p.141.

²⁷²Weil, "L'amour divin....", op. cit., p.85.

order that this may be a touchstone for his justice....(*Republic*, 361b)²⁷³

Each way of the soul's progress involves a turning away from the appearance towards the reality hidden by the appearances. At each stage the appearance is both the barrier and the way through. It is this method which Simone Weil had developed in her earlier works and it is this same method which informs her religious metaphysics. The method involves facing the contradiction between appearance and reality and waiting for the mediation of Supernatural Love. This is Simone Weil's "method of attention." We see that Simone Weil has developed this method through her analysis of Plato's thought, which she takes to be the carrying on of a long tradition of mystical thought and a foretelling of the Christ. She says this explicitly:

En somme, le bon larron seul a vu la justice telle que la concevait Platon, discernée parfaite et nue à travers l'apparence d'un criminel.
Platon, en allant jusqu'à supposer que le juste parfait n'est pas reconnu comme juste, même par les dieux, pressent la parole la plus perçante qu'il y ait dans l'Evangile: "Mon Dieu, pourquoi m'as-tu abandonné?"
La raison que donne Platon à la souffrance du juste parfait est différente de celle de rachat, de substitution du châtiment qui apparaît dans le christianisme.....Mais il y a un lien entre les deux idées.²⁷⁴

The link is, as we have seen, that the appearance masks the reality. Only true humility can pierce the screen of appearance and receive reality. This is why Christ is the key because he consented to be reduced to nothing, in order to assimilate with God: "The Father is the creation of being, the Son is renunciation of being... Humility is the consent to this reduction."²⁷⁵

F. ISRAEL'S REVELATION OF THE ONENESS OF GOD: THE IDENTICAL THOUGHT CARRIED FORTH

Simone Weil claims that Christ carried on the spiritual tradition of the Greeks²⁷⁶, the Egyptians, India, and the others not discussed here, by way of Israel. As Schmidt points out in "Simone Weil On Religion: A Voegelinian Critique", Simone Weil's approach to the role Israel played in bringing the Christ into existence is

²⁷³Weil, "The 'Republic'" 138. I have quoted only part of the passage. She also quotes from 361e, 367b, 367e and Book V 472b, as well as from the Theaetetus, 176a, 176b, 176e]

²⁷⁴Weil, "L'amour divin....", op. cit., p.84-85.

²⁷⁵Simone Weil, "New York Notebook (1942)," First and Last Notebooks, tr. Richard Rees (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p.102.

²⁷⁶Although I do not consider the Stoic virtues in this thesis, it should not be thought that Simone Weil ignores them and their contribution to the expression of and carrying on of the spiritual tradition. She especially praises their understanding of the kind of indifference one needs to have towards necessity in order to appreciate the beauty of the world.

somewhat similar to Voegelin's analysis. As Schmidt explains:

The leap of being that broke through the cosmological order of the Ancient Near East was the historical order of Israel. Voegelin...described the process by which the Israelites were drawn away from the cosmological myth...to what he called the covenantal order. Voegelin argued that in the person of Deutero-Isaiah, Israel completed "the movement from the order of the concrete society to the order of redemption".²⁷⁷

As Schmidt points out there are many differences between Voegelin and Simone Weil on this point, but they both see Israel as playing an important mediating role between the myths of Orient and what became known as the religion of Christianity. However, as we now see, Simone Weil emphasized the similarities between them because she saw that they shared one 'identical thought'; whereas Voegelin focused more on their differences.

Israel, claimed Simone Weil, also had a "revelation": "...it was the oneness of God". She had mixed feelings about Israel because of their attachment to the idea of "the promised land". Simone Weil could not accommodate the idea that a whole nation of people could be chosen as "the elect". This view is completely contrary, in her eyes, to the idea of "assimilation to God". According to this view which Simone Weil saw as the traditional view only an individual can be assimilated because only an individual can imitate the model of the perfectly just man. Israel, as we saw above, had this knowledge of the way through various sources.

Simone Weil claims that because the sons of Ham had received inspiration from the Egyptians and the Greeks, as well as from other sources, Israel had received the knowledge of the way and was able to give birth to Christ. For example, she argues that Daniel "...was initiated in the wisdom of the Chaldeans during the exile and was a friend of the Kings of Medes and Persians." Simone Weil learned from Herodotus that:

...the Persians...under the name of Mithra ... adored the celestial Aphrodite side by side with Zeus. It was probably she who appears in the Bible under the name of Wisdom.²⁷⁸

Simone Weil claimed, as we saw above, that of the descendants of Noah only Ham out of the three brothers was open to receiving the inspiration. Consequently, the true spirit of Christianity comes through only this one son, Ham; all those who descend from Ham receive the inspiration. As the following passage makes clear Simone Weil does not mean this literally (that is, in terms of blood relatives):

²⁷⁷Lawrence E. Schmidt, "A Voegelin Critique" op. cit., p.267.

²⁷⁸Simone Weil, *Waiting*, both quotations above come from page 185 of this text.

All those who truly share in the wine of Noah and Melchisedec and in the blood of Christ, whether they do so in a greater or lesser degree, directly or indirectly, consciously or implicitly, they are all brothers of Egypt and Tyre, adopted sons of Ham.⁷⁹

This is, then, how Christ came to be born in Judea: the Want was present in Israel through the sons of Ham. It was in this way that the Israelis protected the Greek conception of "mediation"; this was how the Greek vocation became the Christian vocation in spite of the Romans:

Rome destroyed every vestige of spiritual life in Greece.... with one exception. Unlike those of the other countries, Israel's revelation had been a collective one, and therefore much cruder but also much more resistant; it alone was able to withstand the pressure of the Roman terror. Under this shield there germinated a little of the Greek spirit which had survived on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean. So, after three barren centuries, amid the burning of thirst of so many peoples....(t)he idea of mediation achieved full realization...divine Wisdom became visible, as Plato had hoped, to mortal eyes. In this way the Greek vocation was perfected by becoming the Christian vocation.⁸⁰

Among all the luminous thoughts related through the Old Testament, Simone Weil especially focuses on the the Book of Job because Job's expression of "affliction" is an expression of the desire for the "Mediator" between God and man. Job's affliction is the prefiguring of Christ. Simone Weil argues that Job's questioning of how God could let the innocent suffer affliction is similar to Christ's despairing question of 'My God, Why hast thou forsaken me?':

Affliction forced a just man to cry out against God...more so, perhaps, if Job is less a historical character than a figure of Christ. "He laughs at the affliction of the innocent!" This is not blasphemy but a genuine cry of anguish.⁸¹

According to Simone Weil this cry was signification that Job was passing through the 'dark night of the soul'. Job was prepared for affliction as he was innocent; thus, all he had to do was go on loving through the darkness. His cry was the cry which implored God to bear witness to his innocence. This is the waiting period to which God one day responds with recognition:

Affliction makes God appear to be absent for a time....what is terrible is that if, in this darkness where there is nothing to love, the soul ceases to love, God's absence becomes final. The soul has to go on wanting to love....Then, one day, God will come to show himself to this soul...as in the case of Job.⁸²

⁷⁹Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.189.

⁸⁰Simone Weil, "The Romanesque Renaissance", op. cit., p.op.cit., 46. For a complete analysis of Simone weil's conception of Christ as the living realization of platonic mediation see Eric Springsted, *Christus Mediator: Platonic Mediation in the Thought of Simone Weil*, op.cit., Chapter II.

⁸¹Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.79.

⁸²Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.80.

Job was ready but, argues Simone Weil, "those who plunge men into affliction before they are prepared to receive it, kill their souls."²³ To inflict evil onto another is, according to Simone Weil, to poisoning oneself with evil: "to strike or be struck is one and the same defilement."²⁴

There was, then, in Israel all the conditions for the birth of Christ. Nevertheless, Simone Weil claims, from the point of the West and from the human point of view, Israel was an unfortunate place for the birth of Christ; this meant that Christianity was divided from its beginning because the other sons of Noah, Japheth and Shem had refused the inspiration and thus were not receptive to Christ. This, she claims, accounts for the wars among Christians themselves:

Christianity which came to birth in Judea...has in it the spirit of all three sons of Noah at once. Hence there have been wars between the Christians where one side was moved by the spirit of Ham and the other by that of Japheth....the spirit of the sons who refused their share of inebriation and nakedness is to be found among Christians.²⁵

Simone Weil is clearly claiming that there is in Christianity a link to a pure and unsullied spiritual tradition and the "living Christ" is the apex of this tradition. Christ answers to all the imploring and desires for the Incarnation expressed by the Greeks, and that line of people in Israel who came from Ham. It must be noted before we turn to Christianity that Simone Weil really does mean to say that all of these spiritual traditions which precede Christianity are in essence, in their own thought, Christian just as Christianity is in essence Hindu or Egyptian. If the thought is identical there is no need for conversion from one tradition to another.

G. CHRIST: THE INCARNATION AND PASSION

Simone Weil argues in her analysis of Plato's conception of the "perfectly just man" in the *Republic* that for Plato to conceive of a perfectly just man was not enough. She claims that Plato, as was pointed out above, argues in the *Timaeus* that in order for a man to be 'in no way different from justice itself' "divine justice must descend upon earth". In the *Republic* Plato describes how it would be if a "perfectly just man" were to descend to earth. Simone Weil claims that Plato's description perfectly demonstrates the divine incarnation and shows

²³Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.80.

²⁴Simone Weil, "The Romanesque Renaissance", op. cit., p.49.

²⁵Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.187.

that Plato understood that for human beings to have a real model for justice itself this model would have to live among them in space and time. She claims that "There is no other reality for a man. If the ideal cannot have existence, it is nothing but an abstraction."³⁶ Simone Weil thought that Plato's desire for Christ was the definitive asking for God to send His only Son to earth.

Simone Weil analyses the idea that Christ's Mission on earth was to suffer for us and cure us of the "Original Sin". She does this by comparing The 'Dissertation of Aristophanes' in Plato's *Symposium* to Christ's Mission because Aristophanes talks about how Love is the only thing that cure men of their misery. Simone Weil takes Love to be referring to the Love which mediates between man and God. Also, Aristophanes claims that Love is the only physician for man because it is only through Love that the human being can overcome the affliction of duality. Christ also compares His Mission to the work of a physician.

Aristophanes' dissertation, claims Simone Weil, is a myth about the original sin. He tells the story of how man was once a "complete being" and therefore much happier. Simone Weil says this is where the idea of the "felicity of the primitive men" comes from. But then he committed the sin of "pride" and the desire to be like God; this was the original sin. Man wanted to have all the same powers as God. As the myth goes, Zeus got very angry and wanted to chastise man for overstepping his bounds. Simone Weil claims this is very similar to what happened to Adam and Eve. However, in Aristophanes' myth the point that human misery has to do with their duality and ultimately their separation from God is very clearly stated. For originally, according to Aristophanes' story, the human being was at once male and female and a much more capable being in all respects; he or she was complete and had no need for the other being both same and other at once. But, after the sin, Zeus chastised man by cutting him in half; thus, human beings became man and woman. Simone Weil's analysis of Zeus' choice to chastise man rather than to completely destroy him was completely an act of Love and a desire to be loved by man: "God wants to be loved by him".

Simone Weil claims that for the Greeks man or woman was a symbol of a man or woman and each one sought the corresponding symbol: "the other half". She claims that the quest was in each one a quest for Love

³⁶Simone Weil, "The 'Republic'", op. cit., p.141.

as it was only Love that could re-unite the two halves. Without this Love which unites man to his other half, he always feels a great lack and insufficient in himself; consequently he always desires Love and a reunion:

Love in us is therefore the feeling of our radical insufficiency in consequence of sin, and the desire coming from the sources of our being to be reintegrated into the state of completion.²⁸⁷

Simone Weil argues that this myth is the story of our the human condition; of our misery as that of being in a state of duality while always desiring completion. She claims that we should desire completion as that was our state before sin and that is what we should be:

Our vocation is unity. Our affliction is to be in a state of duality, an affliction due to an original contamination of pride and injustice.²⁸⁸

She argues that the use of the division of the sexes is really only meant to give us a "sensible image" of our dualistic condition; therefore, carnal union should not be mistaken for a remedy to that condition. Human beings encounter duality in all aspects of their lives and their goal in each case is to try and overcome this state of being. But we cannot:

...duality which is our affliction is the division by which he who loves is the division by which he who loves is other than that which is loved, he who knows is other than that which is known, the material of action other than the one who acts, it is the separation of subject and object. Unity is that state wherein the subject and object are one single and the same thing, the state of him who knows himself and loves himself. But, only God is thus, and we cannot become thus except by assimilation with God, which the love of God accomplishes.²⁸⁹

Any desire to escape from the state of duality is, according to Simone Weil, a sign of love in us. However, it is very important as we saw to properly direct that desire. This is why human beings needed the model of the "perfectly just man"; for the original sin was an indication that man had lost sight of Justice and of the way to achieve unity.

Thus, Christ's Mission in healing the original sin is to show us the way out of our affliction of duality. Simone Weil claims that in the myth "Love is the physician" and in the Gospels Christ is the physician. So, in the same way as Love in the myth was "the right physician" to cure us of our duality and the redemptive god, Christ was equally "the right physician" to heal our illness of duality, for He came to earth to be our Redeemer.

²⁸⁷Simone Weil, "The Symposium", op.cit. 108.

²⁸⁸Simone Weil, "The Symposium", op. cit., p.110.

²⁸⁹Simone Weil, "The Symposium", op. cit., p.110.

Christ, claims Simone Weil, in His extreme afflicted state on the Cross was separated from His Father by the greatest possible distance; thus, He was, at this point, the example of absolute duality.

...God cuts in two the Soul of the World. This represents duality (in the Hindu sense). The Cross is this duality. In order to find the One, we have to exhaust duality, go to the very extreme of duality. This means crucifixion.²⁹⁰

Christ, as Plato had foreseen, had to go the infinite distance to be the model — to show man the way to escape their duality and be united with God. To do this, Christ had to give up all, to renounce all that existence entailed.

It is this total renunciation that makes Christ the reality of Plato's "perfectly just man". What identified the "perfectly just man", according to Simone Weil, was the total absence of "prestige" in his life. Christ, she claimed, could have had this "supreme social value", prestige; but, he did not take the devil up on his offer: "all this power and the glory of them is delivered to me." Simone Weil points out that Christ chose "the total renunciation of all prestige," what St. John of the Cross calls "spiritual nakedness"; this is the reason Christ said: "The Father who is in secret" who is "the Father who is in heaven." Thus, Christ like the "perfectly just man" showed the ultimate faith by consenting not to have social prestige and to prefer "the Father who is in secret":

Christ, throughout his life, had very little prestige. He was totally stripped of it after the Last Supper. Even his disciples completely abandoned him.²⁹¹

The Passion was exceptional, argued Simone Weil, because God's only Son died on the Cross like a common criminal, totally degraded and without any prestige whatsoever. Thus, she says, as Plato taught us:

...the real and perfect justice must be without prestige. It is the absence of prestige, and not the physical suffering, which is the very essence of the Passion.... A suffering of penal character was required, for man is not truly stripped of all participation in social prestige until penal justice has cut him off from society. No other type of suffering has this character of irreducible, ineradicable degradation which is essential to the suffering inflicted by penal justice.²⁹²

The reason Simone Weil claims that the suffering is not the essence of the Passion is because then it would seem that the suffering itself is important, but, she claims, "Suffering has no significance. There lies the very

²⁹⁰Simone Weil, *Notebooks II*, 436.

²⁹¹Simone Weil, "The Republic", op. cit., p.137.

²⁹²Simone Weil, "The Republic", op. cit., p.137.

essence of its reality." So, for Simone Weil, if Christ had not suffered on the Cross as a common criminal, He would not have achieved His Mission because then it would seem that He was offering His suffering to God. This would mask the reality of suffering and, according to Simone Weil's analysis, Christ chose not to console Himself because "To turn suffering into an offering is a consolation, and it is thus a veil thrown over the reality of suffering."²⁹³

Thus, Christ suffered in complete nakedness. This is what makes the Passion so beautiful as it is the complete and absolute renunciation which matches God's renunciation in Creation. To be a human being and to completely consent not to have any earthly power nor wealth, and then to completely consent not to exist, that is the supreme expression of the folly of love. In consenting to be stripped bare of all prestige and undergo total degradation, Christ, claims Simone Weil, teaches us about the virtue of humility: how to see oneself and all that one is, including all of one's suffering, as nothing. Humility, she claims, is the "queen of virtues" as "Humility consists in the refusal to exist."²⁹⁴ It was this complete and absolute renunciation of all that distinguishes Christ from the martyrs:

For all that Christ may have been in a certain sense the first of the martyrs, their master and the model for them all, in another sense it is still more true to say that he was not a martyr at all. He was ridiculed like those madmen who take themselves for kings; then he perished like a common criminal. There is a prestige belonging to the martyr of which he was entirely deprived. Also he did not go into his martyrdom in joy, but in a swoon of all the powers of the soul...²⁹⁵

The Passion is the harmony of the union of contraries. Simone Weil claims that such extreme suffering is the reality of the union of the contradictories of man-God. Man cannot be united with God without death because any union between man and God denotes a unity with God. God in creating the Universe withdrew from it and man and all other creatures were given existence by this abdication. This allowed man to have "free will." Thus, any union between man and God on this earth would be a contradiction; it would be a union of Being and not-being. This means that God must not only be Mediation Himself but also a Mediation of Mediation. This is what Simone Weil calls a "spiritual quatering" which is passion. God could only do this out

²⁹³Simone Weil, *Notebooks II*, 483-484. Both of the above quotations come from these pages.

²⁹⁴Simone Weil, *Notebooks II*, 485.

²⁹⁵Simone Weil, "The 'Republic'", op. cit., p.138.

pure Love for His creature:

The union of contradictories means a spiritual quartering. It is itself a passion, and is impossible without extreme suffering.²⁹⁶

The reason God appeared on earth under the appearance of extreme injustice was because the reality of the God-man union could only manifest as a union of contradictories: the reality of extreme justice combined with its exact opposite the appearance of extreme injustice. Simone Weil claims that the Passion bears witness to the fact that true contradictions lead us to God:

The perfectly just man: a union of extreme justice with the appearance of extreme injustice. Christ did not simply suffer, he suffered a penal form of suffering....Extreme justice combined with the appearance of extreme injustice is an example of that contradiction which leads to God.²⁹⁷

Simone Weil claims that although suffering itself has no significance, suffering does point to what does have significance; it points to reality itself as long as human beings don't lose sight because of the suffering itself. We must see suffering as the necessary effect of the contradiction which makes up creation itself; Christ gives us the "perfect image", a Model through the crucifixion of the relation between extreme suffering and contradiction. If we can see the reality behind suffering, it can, claims Simone Weil, have redemptive value for us:

We must use suffering qua contradiction that has been experienced. By using it in this way it acquires a mediatory, and consequently a redemptive, value. We must use it qua spiritual quartering.²⁹⁸

There was, however, a difference between suffering per se and the kind of suffering which Christ experienced. Simone Weil distinguishes the suffering of "malheur" or "affliction" from other human suffering. The difference is really one of the degree of reality which the suffering denotes. For suffering to be an image of "spiritual quartering" and therefore an image of the Passion thus signifying a contradiction leading to God, this suffering must be one of a penal character as it was for Christ and it must completely efface the person in every respect. But most important of all is that the human being be totally stripped bare of all prestige: total social degradation:

²⁹⁶Simone Weil, *Notebooks II*, 385.

²⁹⁷Simone Weil, *Notebooks II*, 385.

²⁹⁸Simone Weil, *Notebooks II*, 387.

There is not real affliction unless the event which has seized and uprooted a life attacks it, directly and indirectly, in all its parts, social, psychological and physical. The social factor is essential. There is not real affliction where there is not social degradation or the fear of it in some form or another. Thus, the afflicted are like Christ in His afflicted state on the cross.²⁹⁹

The greatness of Christianity in Simone Weil's eyes is that it saw suffering and affliction to be in keeping with God's Order; thus, they understood that human beings must not seek in God a remedy for affliction or suffering, rather they must use suffering to bring them closer to Christ. This is, however, very difficult because as Christ shows us, everyone almost without exception turns their back on the afflicted; the afflicted are treated by others with disdain and disgust. Furthermore, because they are human, they themselves begin to hate and be disgusted by themselves. Simone Weil claims that by the laws of sensibility human beings are repulsed and disgusted by the horror of a human being reduced to the state of a thing: it is the worst possible state imaginable to the human being. Thus, without even being conscious of it we treat the afflicted with disdain:

Men have the same carnal nature as animals. If a hen is hurt, the others rush upon it, attacking it with their beaks. This phenomenon is as automatic as gravitation. Our senses attach all the scorn, all the revulsion, all the hatred which our reason attaches to crime, to affliction. Except for those whose whole soul is inhabited by Christ, everybody despises the afflicted to some extent, although practically no one is conscious of it.³⁰⁰

Christ on the Cross is the "perfect image" for the afflicted because they, like Christ, are not criminals; they are innocent, and yet they suffer a distance almost as far as the 'infinite distance' which separates Christ on the Cross and God. And also like Christ, they are capable of loving God through this distance because God created them to love. It is important, however, that they know this:

God created through love and for love. God did not create anything except love and the means to love....He created beings capable of love from all possible distances. Because no other could do it, he himself went to the greatest possible distance, the infinite distance. This infinite distance between God and God, this supreme tearing apart, this agony beyond all others, this marvel of love is the crucifixion....Men struck down by affliction are at the foot of the Cross, almost at the greatest possible distance from God.³⁰¹

²⁹⁹Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.81.

³⁰⁰Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.81.

³⁰¹Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.82-83.

CHAPTER THREE: PART TWO

SIMONE WEIL'S CRITIQUE OF MODERNITY : THE IDENTICAL THOUGHT CONDONES EQUILIBRIUM OVER MASTERY OF NATURE AND HUMAN NATURE

With this view of the spiritual tradition in mind, Simone Weil turned her attention to the struggle at hand — the struggle to raise the morale of human beings who were about to be reduced to slavery by Germany's hunger for domination. Thus, Simone Weil proposed that we take a critical look at our past; that we distinguish those peoples who maintained a sense of justice in their thought from those who were willing to follow their adoration of force to the end. Simone Weil sees that the ideology of mastery and domination which is all-pervasive in the western civilization is deeply embedded in our past; however, there is another mode of thinking, as we saw above, in the tradition which gave rise to Christianity, and this thinking which is our spiritual past remains completely outside of the ideology of mastery and domination; to draw on this tradition, argues Weil, is like nourishing ourselves with fresh roots. Thus, from 1937 until well into the Second World War, Simone Weil sought to delineate the tradition out of which we could draw inspiration to replenish our roots from the tradition which knows little other than mastery and domination; this latter tradition understands better than any other how to manipulate nature and human nature to fulfil its desires, but as Weil's analysis attempts to show its tendency to use all of the force in its power so as to be in total control of all that exists is its very weakness; that which knows no limits has limits imposed on it from the outside unless it finds the way to impose limits on itself.

The tradition which Simone Weil thinks we can draw fresh roots from has been presented above, so I will only refer to that tradition by way of contrast as I present the main currents of thought which she and other thinkers such as George Grant and Leo Strauss, who consciously or unbeknownst to at least Strauss have come close to Weil in their analysis, see to be stifling western civilization.¹ In the following, I shall first present the perspective Grant

¹Although there are, in fact, many differences between a thinker like Leo Strauss and Simone Weil, they do share the common view that Greek political theory has achieved an analysis of 'tyranny' and the causes of it which defy the boundaries of time and place. They both gather this insight, as does Grant, through their critique of the overriding tendencies of modern thought which we will be exploring. However, it is not in the scope of this thesis to do a full scale comparison of Strauss', Grant's, and Weil's thought; I intend only to use Grant and Strauss to help give a clear view of what Simone Weil is criticizing and opposing in western thought.

and Strauss share with Simone Weil. Secondly, I shall use this general philosophical critique of our predicament and by contrast Weil's preferred tradition to throw light on Weil's philosophy of history. Finally, the same critique of modernity and appeal to the ancient tradition will, again, give perspective to her philosophy of science. It will become clear as the analysis proceeds that Weil's philosophical anthropology is the underpinning of this analysis.

A. GRANT, STRAUSS, AND WEIL ON MODERNITY : THE LOSS OF THE RELATION BETWEEN CHRISTIAN REVELATION AND GREEK CONTEMPLATION

Simone Weil argued that western thought has been developing the view that the role of human beings is to master or dominate, whether it be nature or human nature or both, from the time of the Romans; they were the first to go to the extreme of completely negating all conception of justice. This, she claimed, created such a disequilibrium in the balance of order between the profane and the spiritual that we have not yet discovered how to bring things back to an equilibrium. The reason for this, she argued, is because the conception of domination itself belongs to the realm of necessity. In this realm, force and chance are the supreme rulers; thus, the balance is achieved by natural justice that one year gives force to the Athenians or the Carthaginians and the next year to the Romans. It has also happened that force strikes its balance through natural disasters. The essential point is that when necessity rules through force, human beings are as much controlled by necessity as matter; even though we may deceive ourselves into believing that we have mastered her, what we have really done is overstepped our bounds. There is, argued Weil, a way to meet necessity on her own terms; however, for this, we must not only obey her laws, but also learn what Pythagoras has to teach us which is that it is only by the mediation of Divine Love that we can come to understand the limits of necessity; this implies that these limits are sacred, as we saw above, and should be respected and loved as such.

What Weil saw in western civilization was a complete disregard for these limits as with the Romans and the barbarians or the opposite tendency; the use of force to terrorize anyone who appeared to have no regard for the natural law or the Divine as it was conceived by the Christians. She argued that the Christians had equally overstepped their bounds and were themselves operating under the force of necessity in these actions. Thus, the Gothic Middle Ages was in her terms "an essay in totalitarian spirituality" because "spirituality is necessarily

degraded by becoming totalitarian."² Yet, there was a short period before the Gothic Middle Ages in which Christianity achieved something of its vocation which was to carry forth the tradition, but especially the Greek manifestation of it:

By the end of the tenth century stability and security were restored, and Byzantine and Oriental influences could circulate freely. Then the Romanesque civilization arose....This was the true Renaissance. The Greek spirit was reborn in the Christian form.³

Even the crusades, claimed Weil, did not entirely destroy the exchanges of spiritual influences which marked the period of the tenth to the thirteenth century. What she admired about the Romanesque civilization was the way that all things, "the past, the outside world, and the future bathed in the supernatural light of Christianity."⁴ Weil's conception of the ideal Christian civilization is apparent in the way she conceives of the relation between the life of the people and religion in this period as one in which the people were inspired in their daily life by the supernatural, but not at all oppressed by it:

The supernatural did not mix with the profane, did not overwhelm it, did not attempt to destroy it. Leaving the profane intact, the supernatural thereby retained its purity. It was recognized as the origin and the destination.⁵

After the Romanesque civilisation the link with any other "millenary tradition" such as India or Egypt was completely destroyed. What made the Gothic Middle Ages "an essay in totalitarian spirituality" was the way that it attempted to control people's minds by not giving the "profane", as Weil said, "rights any more"; thus, she claimed, "That is not what Christian civilization is. Christian civilization is the Romanesque civilization...."⁶ There was, however, according to Weil, another attempt to rekindle the unified Greek and Christian spirit again in the seventeenth century through what she called the "false Renaissance". She claimed that this Renaissance did have "a point of equilibrium", but that it was false because it produced humanism; this showed that these people had not understood that the Greek spirit and the Christian spirit were one and the same:

People thought that they could turn away from Christianity towards the Greek spirit, although the two are in one and the same place. From then onwards, the spiritual element in the life of Europe has diminished until it has almost shrunk to nothing.⁷

²Simone Weil, "The Romanesque Renaissance", op. cit., p.48. Hereafter: "Romanesque".

³Simone Weil, "Romanesque", op. cit., p 47.

⁴Simone Weil, "Romanesque", op. cit., p 48.

⁵Simone Weil, "Romanesque", op. cit., p.p.48.

⁶Simone Weil, "Romanesque", op. cit., p.48

⁷Simone Weil, "Romanesque", op. cit., p.47.

Both George Grant and Leo Strauss share Simone Weil's view that the Greek and Christian spirit are one, but that the Europeans have not always seen them as the same. O'Donovan outlines how Grant perceives the claimed differences that caused the struggle:

The Greeks, as represented by Plato and Aristotle, laid down 'contemplation as the height for man'; the Christian revelation laid down 'charity (as) the height'....The dynamic relation of these two claims has given European life its form. 'Indeed the meeting of these two in men's lives, the manifold attempts to see them as one, to bring together contemplation and charity, the fact that they were seen by some to be antithetical and so either one or the other condemned, the way that each was interpreted and misinterpreted in terms of the other and used against the other in the building of a civilisation which was new and which was neither, these inter-relations formed the chief tension out of which Europe was shaped'....⁸

On the one hand, as Grant says,

Greece lay behind Europeans as a first presence The Greek writings bared a knowledge of the human and non-human things....Most important, Plato and Aristotle presented contemplation as the height for man. Until Nietzsche, Socrates was known as the peak of Greekness.⁹

However, on the other hand, Grant saw that through the Christian revelation 'charity' was given priority over contemplation; thus, contemplation was directed towards the primary goal of the giving to 'the other', i.e., charity:

To repeat, western Europe had inherited that contemplation in its use theologically, that is, under the magistry of revelation. Within that revelation charity was the height and therefore contemplation was finally a means to that obedient giving oneself away.¹⁰

⁸Joan E. O'Donovan, *George Grant and The Twilight of Justice*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), p.98-99. Hereafter: Grant. I have first learned of the relation between Grant and Strauss from reading the book by O'Donovan on Grant. This led me to draw the connection on their views concerning the philosophy of history with that of Simone Weil's. Also, O'Donovan's book certainly helped direct my reading on Grant himself for this thesis. Also, see George Grant, *Technology and Empire*, (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1969), 127ff. George Grant is a Canadian philosopher of this century. He is best known as a political philosopher but is also widely read as an ethicist, and theologian. Among the Canadian public, Grant is best known for his book on Canadian nationalism, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (1965). Internationally, however, Grant's other works are read with keen interest; for example, *Time as History* (1969); *Technology and Empire: Perspectives on North America* (1969), and *English-Speaking Justice* (1974). Grant was influenced by Leo Strauss' perspective on "history" and "historicism." Leo Strauss is an American philosopher also of this century. Like Grant, Strauss is known for his political thought; however, both Strauss and Grant considered metaphysics, education, human nature and many other philosophical issues to be of prime concern in dealing with political thought. In this respect, Grant and Strauss were in different ways defenders of classical political philosophy. Strauss was not the first political philosopher to consider the origins of our western preoccupation with history and his reflections on this subject do compare with those who came before him. See Strauss' reflections on history and "historicism" in *What Is Political Philosophy?* (1959) and *Natural Right and History* (1953).

⁹George Grant, "In Defence of North America", *Technology and Empire*, (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1969), 18. Hereafter: "In Defence".

¹⁰Grant, "In Defence", op. cit., p.35.

The tension arose, according to Grant, when theologians began to look towards the Greeks as philosophers who might help them to better understand the Christian revelation:

Nevertheless, it was necessary for some to think revelation and the attempt to do so led the theologians continually back to the most comprehensive thinkers that the west had known. Augustine spoke of 'spoiling the Egyptians' but in that use of philosophy to expound revelation, the spoilers were often touched by that which they would use as something they could not use. In that continual tasting of the Greeks, some men were led back to thought determined by revelation, and therefore to a vision of contemplation not subservient to charity, but understood as itself the highest.¹¹

This oscillation in Europe between the two traditions, claims Grant, as O'Donovan points out, can be seen as the main tension which constituted "Europe's destiny":

Indeed the meeting of these two in men's lives, the manifold attempts to see them as one, to bring together contemplation and charity, the fact that they were seen by some to be antithetical and so either one or the other condemned, the way that each was interpreted and misinterpreted in terms of the other and used against the other in the building of a civilisation which was new and which was neither, these inter-relations formed the chief tension out of which Europe was shaped¹²....

According to Grant, Strauss saw modern thought to be rooted in this same tension between Greek thought and Christianity. If Grant's depiction of how Strauss saw this tension in the history of Western thought is faithful to Strauss we could suggest that Strauss saw the way thinkers from Machiavelli to Nietzsche appealed to the Greeks as over against the Christians to be very much in keeping with how Simone Weil described the 'false Renaissance':

The degree to which the Greeks was primal for Europeans can be seen in the fact that those theoretical men, from Machiavelli to Nietzsche, who delineated what modern Europe was to become when it was no longer explicitly Christian, made an increasing appeal to the Greeks as primal, while Christianity became for them either a boring, although necessary, convention, or an avowed enemy. Even as their delineation was founded on an increasingly radical criticism of Greek thought, authentic account of what the ancients had meant than that held by their immediate predecessors.... The ways of modern Europe have often been described as a species of secularized Christianity. However the ambiguity remains: the formulations of modernity have often been made by men who claimed to be returning behind Christianity to the classics, and yet laid out a fundamental criticism of the classical accounts of science, art, politics etc.¹³

The 'false Renaissance' was, according to Weil, a mixed blessing; on the one hand, we inherited the whole Greek civilisation, but on the other hand, we failed to understand that the whole Greek civilisation, her religion, art, philosophy, and science, was developed as "many bridges between God and man". We, she claimed, failed to perceive that the bridges were not made to be lived in, but rather only to be crossed. This was, according to Weil,

¹¹Grant, "In Defence", op. cit., p.35.

¹²As quoted by O'Donovan, "In Defence", op. cit., p.18.

¹³Grant, "In Defence", op. cit., p.18-19. See p. 19, footnote #10 of the same essay where Grant expresses his indebtedness to Mr. Leo Strass for his "understanding of this history."

the essential break with that unified Greek and Christian tradition which was the last vestige of that "identical thought" which united the 'true religion' of the West to the "mystical thought" of the East. This latter break with our spiritual roots was, in her eyes, another movement towards a disequilibrium which again deceived us into thinking that we could possess what is essential to our sustenance without "Divine Love". This made us think that we could bring equality to everyone and thus the Christian virtue of charity would live even better without the supernatural:

Humanism was not wrong in thinking that truth, beauty, liberty, and equality are of infinite value, but in thinking that man can get them for himself without grace.¹⁴

Grant, as O'Donovan points out, describes the modern tendency to break with the Greek conception of contemplation with an equal understanding of the human desire to release human beings once and for all from the yoke of necessity:

Charity,...(Grant) connects ... with man's striving to liberate himself 'for happiness' from the necessities of nature, for instance, 'the old necessities of hunger and disease and overwork, and the consequent oppressions and repressions'... "Compassion before thought"...¹⁵

And, as Grant says, technology, run by men who believe in it, is supposed to bring us charity through liberation:

At home the ruling managers move 'towards the year 2000'. . . what makes the drive to technology so strong is that it is carried on by men who still identify what they are doing with the liberation of mankind. Our ruling managers are able to do what they do just because among sufficient of them technology and liberalism support each other as identified. It is this identification which makes our drive to technology still more dynamic than the nihilistic will to will which is emptied of all conceptions of purpose. It may be (to use the indicative would be claiming to have grasped the very heart of what is) that this drive to practicality moves to become little more than a will to mastery governing the vacuous masses. But this is not yet how we understand our present.¹⁶

Strauss, as we saw above, had suggested that the moderns, in the process of separating Greek thought from the Christian revelation, had developed a "radical criticism of Greek thought." Grant attempted to discover the source of this 'radical criticism'. According to O'Donovan, he found the source of it in "the hidden depths of Biblical religion".¹⁷ This gave rise to another conception of Christianity, "modern historical theodicy". O'Donovan

¹⁴Simone Weil, "Romanesque", op. cit., p.53.

¹⁵Joan o'Donovan, *Grant*, op. cit., p.100-101.

¹⁶George Grant, "In Defence of North America", *Technology and Empire*, op. cit., p.27

¹⁷Joan O'Donovan, *Grant*, op. cit., p.99.

pointed out that, according to Grant, there was in Biblical religion a distinct challenge to "classical natural law" which is a clear testimony to "modern historical theodicy"; the idea that there is within creation itself an unfolding order that will, with the help of human beings, at some historical time complete itself:

Hegel's thought had something of this:

The fundamental assumption of Hegelean logic (is) . . . that being creates itself throughout the course of history and that eternity is the totality of all historical epochs.¹⁸

The idea that necessity is not yet a completed order and that order comes about through human beings objectifying themselves in accordance with the infinite spirit does certainly challenge the conception of necessity and God's relation to necessity that Simone Weil sees in the Greeks. In her view of the Greek conception of necessity, the Order is complete with Creation and God does not have the power to intervene and this is by His own Will. In the view of "modern historical theodicy", God not only has the power to intervene at any time, but also every time nature is brought into order by human beings God is acting through His co-creator.¹⁹ So, really it is human beings who bring God's order into existence. Grant points out that "modern historical theodicy's" main success is the identification of "necessity and goodness" which philosophically conflates "the doctrines of progress and providence" so that we are encouraged to think that we are spiritually superior to all other civilizations which have come before.

Before discussing this position, I must dissociate myself from a common philosophic assumption. I do not identify necessity and goodness. This identification is widely assumed during an age of progress. Those who worship "evolution" or "history" consider that what must come in the future will be "higher," "more developed," "better," "freer" than what has been in the past. . . . They identify necessity and good within the rubric of providence. From the assumption that God's purposes are unfolded in historical events, one may be led to view history as an ever fuller manifestation of good. Since the tenth century of the Christian era, some Western theologians have tended to interpret the fallen sparrow as if particular events could be apprehended by faith as good. . . . Does this not make us cavalier about evil? The screams of the tortured child can be justified by the achievements of history. How pleasant for achievers, but how meaningless for the child.²⁰

Not only has it proven to be dangerous to the Christian religion to believe that all actions that the latest civilisation carry out must be good for humanity because they are the latest of God's directors of history, but it also

¹⁸George Grant, "Tyranny and Wisdom," *Technology and Empire*, op. cit., p.90. I have added the brackets and their contents. Hereafter: "Tyranny."

¹⁹Does this mean that God intervenes through His co-creators? It is not really clear as far as I can see how grace operates in this system nor whether salvation in the Greek or Christian sense would have any place in such a system.

²⁰Grant, George, *Lament for a Nation*, (Toronto, Montreal: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1965), p.88-89.

tends towards the contradiction of making force the supreme good to be worshipped; as Grant argues history is driven on by 'force' thus: "if history is the final court of appeal, force is the final argument ... To take a progressive view of providence is to come close to worshipping force."²¹ Simone Weil argues that we must maintain the distance between necessity, especially in its manifestation as force, and goodness, otherwise not only do we "come close to worshipping force" but we come close to arguing that God directs us to do evil; as she argues: "The spectacle of this world is another, more certain proof (of God's transcendence). Pure goodness is not anywhere to be found in it. Either God is not almighty or he is not absolutely good, or he does not command everywhere where he has the power to do so." So, by making providence the director of both good and evil, we are saying in essence that God gives His blessing to using evil(force) as a means to good which would contradict the purity of God. Grant did not condone this tendency to make "history. . .the final court of appeal." He remained critical of the "religion of progress" and the universal and homogeneous state it promises.

In a discussion about religious education in the schools, Grant puts forth his view of what the "religion of progress" tends towards:

Indeed there is only one group in our society to whom the question is easy of solution, namely the believers in the religion of progress, mastery and power. Assuming their religion to be self-evidently true to all men of good will, they are forceful in advocating that it should be the public religion. They work for the coming of the universal and homogeneous state with enthusiasm; they await its coming with expectation. Such a belief, of course, appears nonsense to those of us (Christian or non-Christian) who hold the conservative principle that belief in a "higher" divine power is a minimum public necessity if there is to be constitutional government. And it seems nonsense not only on the basis of what has been said about the matter in the traditional political philosophy, but also because of the evidence of the nature of the most advanced industrial societies.... How can we escape the fact that the necessary end product of the religion of progress is not hope, but a society of existentialists who know themselves in their own self-consciousness, but know the world entirely as despair?²²

Besides the major difference between the two ways, that is, the way of "historical theodicy" and the Greek/Christian way of conceiving the relation between humans and nature which I will return to shortly, there is a distinct change of point of view with respect to the Incarnation and the Passion. Why did Christ suffer on the Cross? Why did He die a common criminal? Simone Weil claims that Christ came to redeem us of our original sin, to be the Model of the "perfectly just man" so that we would "know" that the way to God is "the way of the Cross".

²¹As quoted by Joan O'Donovan, *Grant*, op. cit., p.98.

²²George Grant, "Religion and the State", *Technology and Empire*, op. cit., p.57-58.

This means that Christ gave up for the Love of His Father all "prestige". Christ chose to renounce all of his power and all the power that He was offered by the devil; He did not take the devil up on his offer: "all this power and the glory of them is delivered to me". Instead, Christ chose "spiritual nakedness" as St. John of the Cross called "total renunciation" of all worldly goods. Thus, Christ chose to renounce the 'possible' for the Love of His 'Father who is in secret'; therefore, what are we to make of Christ's choice to die on the Cross as a common criminal out of Love and to refuse the 'possible'. If Christ is our Model, the "Key", then His refusal of the "possible" is significant. Justice and Charity mean renunciation of "power" and "prestige" by the strong for the sake of giving some of it to the weak.

By making it the human role to bring God's Order into existence by externalizing the internal through nature, that is, by realizing the potential of the infinite in history, "modern historical theodicy" makes the "mastery" of nature our prime goal in life. This view challenges the "classical view of nature" and adopts a "non-teleological view of nature" and at least part of the reasoning was to create equality among human beings on earth. The assumption was that after human beings create, either as co-creators or simply as creators, order and beauty through art we would then marvel at our own creations or God's creation as enacted by us. The beauty of nature in itself was of no significance as long as it could be used by humans to build their bridges higher and better than the Greeks or to make it into weaponry to deter all possible invaders etc. One wonders if the co-creators have any "Notion" of God's Order in mind or if we are now simply involved in mastery of nature because we do not know any other way. As Grant says:

The dynamism of technology has gradually become the dominant purpose in western civilisation because the most influential men in that civilisation have believed for the last centuries that the mastery of chance was the chief means of improving the race. It is difficult to estimate how much this quest for mastery is still believed to serve the hope of men's perfecting, or how much it is now an autonomous quest. Be that as it may, one finds agreement between corporation executive and union member, farmer and suburbanite, cautious and radical politician, university administrator and civil servant, in that they all effectively subscribe to society's faith in mastery.... The chief job of the universities within the technological societies is the cultivation of those sciences which issue in the mastery of human and non-human nature.²³

Our freedom is at stake, we must master nature and chance even if it has never been done before and even if with all of our technology, there is still "natural disaster"; to say nothing of "human accidents". Simone Weil had

²³George Grant, "The University Curriculum", *Technology and Empire*, op. cit., p.113-115.

argued, as we saw in Chapter two of this thesis, that not only did technology tend towards building a Technocracy in which only the specialists could participate, but also that it tended to take away even our choice to work; to make a living by means of submitting our bodies to the laws of space and time and thereby encountering 'necessity'. O'Donovan shows that for Grant "freedom from nature" is beginning to be more of a burden and obstacle to living:

It is the loss of purpose in 'the nature of things'...that bestows the awful burden of creative autonomy on human freedom....Grant examines the two horns of the dilemma of autonomous freedom: on the one hand, existential despair, and on the other immersion in the objectified world.²⁴

In the modern world steeped as we are in the thought of the Historical Process, we do not consider any other relation to nature but the one which will further our progress in history. Both Simone Weil and George Grant see "our conception of progress" or as Grant calls it, the "religion of progress", to be the main reason why the Greek/Christian vocation, which bequeathed to us the idea that 'necessity as the order of the world' is to be loved because it is God's creation, and the virtues of Justice (Charity) and Love cannot find root in our civilisation. In 1941, Simone Weil wondered when we would see that, if we are imperfect in the present, then, the chances of this situation changing without the influence on us of something better than ourselves are quite improbable; the laws of the spirit are quite like those of nature:

For several centuries we had lived upon the idea of progress. Today, suffering has almost totally eradicated that idea from our minds The idea of progress is the idea of the gradual coming to birth, in the course of time, of the better from the less good. Science demonstrates that an increase of energy; that a transformation of low-grade energy into high-grade energy only takes place in virtue of at least an equivalent transformation of high-grade energy into low grade. The descending movement is always a condition of the ascending. Spiritual things are controlled by an analogous law. We cannot be made better except by the influence upon us of what is better than we are.²⁵

To be driven towards the future is equivalent, according to Weil, to expecting our imaginations to direct us to that which is better than we are now; because the future can be, in the present, none other than a figment of our imaginations. It hardly seems sensible to put our spiritual well-being into the hands so to speak of our imaginations. Grant, in the late 1960's, seems to have seen the problem in even more sombre terms as he, in the midst of the Cold War struggle, saw the progressive spirit as feeding human imperialistic tendencies rather than liberating human beings:

²⁴As quoted by Joan O'Donovan, *Grant*, op. cit., p.89. See, also, Grant, *Technology and Empire*, op. cit.

²⁵Simone Weil, "Romanesque", op. cit., p.44

'Imperialism, like war, is coeval with human existence. But the increasing externalised view of human life which is the very nature of the progressive spirit has given and will continue to give an impetus to imperialism ... the dominant tendency of the western world has been to divide history from nature and to consider history as dynamic and nature controllable as externality.'²⁶

In spite of Kant's prudent warnings, that, although it appears as though humanity is progressing towards a better state of affairs, there is really no way to concretely prove that an event in history is an act which is necessarily moving humanity forward spiritually, the Historical Process took hold of the moderns and progress in history became that which replaced all other transcendent ends.²⁷ This is because the force of modern political philosophy had already taken root and not even the prudent words of Kant could prevent the making of history from becoming the human purpose. As O'Donovan points out Grant sees the history of modern political thought from Strauss' perspective which claims that 'from Machiavelli to Hegel' that:

The progression of political thought...is the progressive extension of the non-teleological view of nature to include human nature, to which earlier thinkers such as Hobbes and Locke had still clung as something permanently given. The doctrine of history that emerges in the eighteenth century is, as we already know, an attempt to restore a transcendent purpose to human thought and action in the absence of metaphysical givens, that is, in the absence of natural law.²⁸

Thus, we have become so enthralled with ourselves and what we were and what we are becoming that we now have to study the history of how we became historical beings and nothing else; as Grant says, we believe 'that man is essentially an historical being and that therefore the riddle of what he is may be unfolded in those studies.'²⁹ This is where historicism takes us, we cannot ignore how our historical conditioning affects our whole conception of reality. Thus, we are totally and absolutely enclosed in time. We cannot study the future because it is not yet and

²⁶George Grant, "Canadin Fate and Imperialism," *Technology and Empire*, op. cit., 72. I came across this quotation in O'Donovan's book on Grant.

²⁷See Maryvonne Longeart-Roth's article, "Kant philosophe de l'histoire: Critique ou visionnaire?" where she shows that Kant although in some senses the first one to begin the philosophical speculation on what history tells us about the moral progress of the humanity, he was equally aware of the difficulties involved in interpreting an event as a sign of progress. As she points out: "Ne dit-il pas dans *Le Conflit des Facultés* que celui qui glane dans des signes historiques de la réalisation d'un plan de la nature en accord avec les principes de la moralité est semblable au malade qui guette les signes de sa guérison et "se meurt à force d'aller mieux...." She continues on to say that Kant would likely have agreed with Löwith that "To the critical mind, neither a providential design nor a natural law of progressive development is discernible in the tragic human comedy of all times." See pp. 345-346 of her article in *La philosophie de l'histoire et la pratique historique d'Aujourd'hui* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1982). Hereafter: *La philosophie de l'histoire*.

²⁸Joan O'Donovan, *Grant*, op. cit., p.89.

²⁹George Grant, *Time as History*, The Massey Lecture, 9th series, Toronto: CBC.4. I first came across this quotation in O'Donovan's book on Grant.

the present is always becoming the past, so to study ourselves we can only study our past. But we are truly in a predicament because historicism tells us that we are constantly being conditioned by the present; thus, historical beings can never really stop the process long enough to get any substantial view of themselves.

Grant contrasts our conception of history with that of the Greeks to show that theirs was more concrete and less involved than ours:

Certainly the Greek original 'historie' was used to denote some kinds of human inquiry. It is easy to see how the word for inquiry moved in the direction of the study of human affairs. If you wanted to inquire about an event far away in time and space, you went and asked an old person of somebody in another country.³⁰

He shows how our contemporary conception of history has come to encompass the whole reality:

The modern concentration on man as historical is but an aspect of a whole way of conceiving temporality, which, it is claimed, allows us to understand more adequately the story not only of our own species, but of everything... The word 'history' does not mean a particular kind of reality, because it is used about all forms of reality.... Perhaps it may be said that the greatest difference between the ancient and modern accounts of knowledge is this modern concentration on the genesis of something in order to know it. History (call it, if you will 'process') is that to which all is subject, including our knowing, including God, if we still find reasons for using that word.³¹

What we get from history today is many 'historical facts' which dare not make any judgments about the human acts being presented to us or whether or not these acts denote progress. As David Carr points out the 'new history' is immersed in the debate about what counts as a 'fact' of history.³² And historians who want to talk about Greek history, for instance, cannot rely on 'traditional history' because those historians did not use our modern methods of determining facts; but nor can the new historians use our modern methods without applying the historicist criticism that they themselves are imposing their modern day scientific world views and techniques on the past.³³ Between the historian-scientist demand for 'facts' and the historicist demand that we not impose our world view and methods on the people of the past, the open space from which to view ourselves in the past becomes very narrow and the past becomes very short. It would seem impossible for a philosopher of history to say anything about human beings while respecting these demands. Nevertheless, we might suggest, adopting Grant's critique of the

³⁰George Grant, *Time as History*, op. cit., p.4.

³¹George Grant, *Time as History*, op. cit., p.5.

³²David Carr, "History, New and Old", *La philosophie de L'histoire*, op.cit., 377-381.

³³See Paul Langham, "The Athenaeum Theory of Historical Facts", *La philosophie de L'histoire*. op.cit., Langham presents the debate of what the 'new history' is subject to in this essay. See especially pp. 310-315. For an example of the historicist point of view see again Paul Langham's article, "The Athenaeum Theory of Historical Facts". op. cit., p.309.

modern notion of fact, to the "new historian" that his/her search for the real facts is bound up with the view that "mastery of the object" is the only value ; but on the basis of what do we assess the established "fact." By taking this new approach to history, the historian now reduces our human past to the status of nature seen as that "meaningless other" which must be subjected to the determination of his/her will. As O'Donovan points out, for Grant, the way we idolize facts as the only common factor between us tells us that "mastery" is our "only good":

...According to Grant, our 'common world' is increasingly a totality of 'facts,' that is, of abstracted objects, scientifically conceived. In so far as 'man cannot help but imitate in action his vision of the nature of things,' the very objectivity of the world has become the standard of our practice. The only universally recognized goal for action in modern society is mastery - determining and controlling the object....(T)he modern notion of 'fact' is not silent about what is good: it intends mastery as the only good.³⁴

Both Simone Weil and Grant perceived that contemporary societies in western civilization operate under this view that there are no 'universal values' to guide the individual. Thus, human beings turned to 'scientific facts' hoping to find some guidance, but a fact does not suggest any course of action and so humans are turned back on themselves:

...when we use this language of 'freedom' and 'values' to ask seriously what substantive 'values' our freedom should create, it is clear that such values cannot be discovered in 'nature' because in the light of modern science nature is objectively conceived as in different to value.³⁵

The problem for Grant is that the whole language of 'values' in modern thought arose from the tradition of historicism bequeathed to us by the Europeans--particularly Nietzsche. Thus, "value" is itself a relativistic term in its origins"

...what would North American rhetoric be without the word 'values'? But even those who use the word seriously within theoretical work seem not to remember that the word was brought into the centre of western discourse by Nietzsche ...For Nietzsche the fundamental experience for man was apprehending what is as chaos; values were what we creatively willed in the face of that chaos by overcoming the impotence of the will which arises from the recognition of the consequences of historicism...Nietzsche's politics... stated that democracy and socialism were the last debasements brought into the world by Christianity as it became secularised. The universal and homogeneous

³⁴Joan O'Donovan, *Grant*, op. cit., p.p.90.

³⁵Grant "In Defense", op. cit., p.33. But even moral relativism cannot contain the human tendency to desire to go beyond the "manifoldness of values" towards a "universal value": Thus, in the world today, the "universal values" of the "virtues of humanity" have been replaced by what the "religion of progress" claims as its highest end: a technology which can solve all human and natural problems and as Grant points out it is the Americans who have taken this end as their highest achievement; as he says: "The American supremacy is identified with the belief that questions of human good are to be solved by technology' that the most important human activity is the pursuit of those sciences which issue in the conquest of human and non-human nature." George Grant, "Canadian Fate and Imperialism," *Technology and Empire*, op. cit., p.71

state would be made up of "last men" from whom nobleness and greatness would have departed... The languages of historicism and values which were brought to North America to be the servants of the most advanced liberalism and pluralism, now turn their corrosive power on our only indigenous roots-the substance of that practical liberalism.³⁶

Simone Weil also perceived that historicism leads to moral relativism; she rejected this modern tendency which instead of appealing to the "virtues of humanity" that were well expressed in the ancient traditions, continued to worship "mastery" as their only good. However truly good-willed thinkers like Dilthey and others like him were, they simply refused to take into account how much of the human reality is ruled by that part of their nature that is driven along by the force of necessity. What is important for our study of Simone Weil's perspective on history and her critique of modernity through her study of the human past is the way that she moves completely outside of the "dominant modes of thought" which from the time of Hobbes have been fostering none other than mastery of nature and human nature through science and history. Simone Weil avoids our slavish adoration of "historical facts" by considering how the "losers" of history might have felt about being subjected to the ideology of "mastery" which in its historical form becomes the "domination of one nation/state" over all others. To do this, Simone Weil adopted a method which is also foreign to our own time and to which the "historicists" violently object and that was to take the classical political thinkers' study of tyranny seriously. In this she is very close in her hermeneutical method to Leo Strauss and his defence that it is possible to transcend one's own time and have knowledge of past thinker's "conscious intentions" by taking what they say at face value. Grant in his analysis of Strauss' criticism of Kojève's views for the future state points to Strauss' defence of taking the classical political philosophy seriously:

Strauss' most general criticism of this account of western history is that it is based on the assumption that "the universal and homogeneous state is the best social order" and "this social order will be built by man" will be shown to be true... I must comment on what this general criticism by Strauss shows about the form of his argument as a whole. It is clear that in saying that Hegel's philosophy of history depends upon a universal proposition about all social orders, Strauss is speaking within the assumptions of classical philosophy; namely, that political philosophy stands or falls by its ability to transcend history, i.e., by its ability to make statements about the best social order the truth of which is independent of changing historical epochs and which therefore cannot be deduced from any philosophy of history which makes positive statements about the historical process...For the Hegelian, political philosophy does not stand or fall by its ability to transcend history, but rather by its ability to comprehend all history. Strauss knows that the difference between Hegel and the classics about the place of "history" in the whole depends upon and illustrates a profound difference between them about the object, method and standpoint of the study of philosophy in a more than political sense....His [Strauss] first concern is not to refute Hegelianism but to show that the classical account of the relation between tyranny and wisdom is required by the classical account of philosophy; that is, that there is consistency between what the classics say about the whole and about politics, and

³⁶Grant, "In Defense", op. cit., p.38-39.

that therefore classical political philosophy is not to be judged as the first phase of the subject, which has been left behind as mankind has progressed.³⁷

Years after Weil, Strauss defended the view that this outside perspective that the classic writers give us on "tyranny" is not only the sole way modern thinkers have of taking critical distance, but also that we might in fact be wrong in thinking that the manifestation of tyranny in each different age displays characteristics that are totally and absolutely unique to that age. As Grant points out:

...Strauss says that what distinguishes modern tyranny from ancient tyranny is the presence in the modern world of a science that issues in the conquest of nature and the belief in the possibility of the popularization of philosophy and science. Both these possibilities were known to ancient philosophers. "But the classics rejected them as 'unnatural', i.e., as destructive of humanity. They did not dream of present day tyranny because they regarded its basic presuppositions as so preposterous that they turned their imaginations in entirely different directions." Classical political science was not familiar with modern tyranny, but it was familiar with the assumptions which distinguish it from antique tyranny.³⁸ Strauss is obviously asserting that tyranny is a form of government common to all ages and that the political philosopher can have knowledge of what is common to these governments of disparate ages so that he can correctly call each of them tyrannies....Strauss says that what distinguishes modern tyranny from ancient tyranny is the presence in the modern world of a science that issues in the conquest of nature and the belief in the possibility of the popularization of philosophy and science. Both these possibilities were known to ancient philosophers. "But the classics rejected them as 'unnatural', i.e., as destructive of humanity. They did not dream of present day tyranny because they regarded its basic presuppositions as so preposterous that they turned their imaginations in entirely different directions." Classical political science was not familiar with modern tyranny, but it was familiar with the assumptions which distinguish it from antique tyranny.³⁸

Thus, with a compassionate eye on the implicit sentiments of and sometimes explicit expression of indignation of the "losers of history" and her conception of tyranny as drawn from the Greek thinkers and writers, Simone Weil, with the spirit of a free mind, turns to our western past to show how the methods used by "the Great Beasts" are always and everywhere the same, based as they are on our common human lot, which is, to be weakened in our thinking in the face of the dominion of force. What the directors of the Great Beasts fail to see is that they themselves are not immune to that which afflicts the common human lot, they are only immune to the appeals of the human heart which always and everywhere cries out that good and not evil should be done to them. Weil claims that it is to this cry that we must attend to in our past as it is the "eternal cry" of Christ: "My God, Why hast thou forsaken me?" It is only this cry that can remind us how to respond to force: "to reject it with loathing and contempt" — as it kills the virtues of humanity.

³⁷Grant, "Tyranny", op. cit., p.92.

³⁸Grant, "Tyranny", op. cit., p.85. The quotation from Strauss comes from *What is Political Philosophy?*, op. cit., p.96.

B. PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

Simone Weil argues that throughout the human past the nation/states or civilisations, who thought of themselves as the Masters of the world because they had force in their hands and thus took it upon themselves to be the directors of force by dominating others, had to use some method to make their people immune to humanity; otherwise, the people would not use force to torture and brutalize others. Those driven by the desire for Mastery and Domination, claims Weil, use the method of 'idolatry' or as Weil acknowledges Plato says, they foster 'the cult of the great beast'. She defines 'idolatry' as such:

The method consists in delimiting a social area into which the pair of contradictories, good and evil, may not enter. In so far as he is contained within this area, man is freed from the two contradictories.³⁹

There is a fine distinction to be drawn, according to Weil, between those civilisations that still have some awareness of the virtues of Justice and Love and those that are completely lost to idolatry. Simone Weil describes those who still have some awareness of these virtues as a people who had once known the living reality of charity (supernatural justice) but have been reduced to relying on 'natural justice'. Her example from history of the latter people is the Athenians of the fifth century B.C. She claims that Thucydides describes how the Athenians, in the war with Sparta, behaved towards the inhabitants of Melos when they appealed to justice as a way of preventing the Athenians of reducing their town to rubble:

It was in vain that the men of Melos, faced with the ultimatum of the Athenians, invoked justice, imploring pity for the antiquity of their town. As they would not give in, the Athenians razed their city to the ground, put all their men to death and sold all their women and children as slaves.⁴⁰

The Athenians, before they essentially annihilated the people of Melos, they answered their cries, as they had heard the human cry but did not heed, with an appeal to 'necessity':

"Let us treat rather of what is possible.... You know as well as we do; the human spirit is so constituted that what is just is only examined if there is equal necessity on both sides. But if one is strong and the other weak, that which is possible is imposed by the first and accepted by the second."⁴¹

³⁹Simone Weil, *Selected Essays (1932-1943)*, "A War of Religions", op. cit., p.212. Hereafter: "Religions"

⁴⁰Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.98.

⁴¹Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.98.

It was the Athenians appeal to 'necessity' that Simone Weil found so clear-sighted. She did not admire their choice to use the force that they had in power; but, she saw in their words a clear demarcation of the distance that separates the realm of the possible (necessity) and the realm of justice (the good). As she argued:

Possibility and necessity are terms opposed to justice in these lines (of the above quotation). Possible means all that the strong can impose upon the weak. Supposing it to be known, it is certain that the strong will accomplish his purpose to the extreme limit of possibility. It is a mechanical necessity.⁴²

The fact that the Athenians were aware that the ultimatum that they had imposed on the people of Melos was unjust distinguished them, in Weil's eyes, from the 'idolaters'; at the very least, they knew that their actions were unjust:

Such lucidity of mind in the conception of injustice which comes immediately below that of charity. It is the clarity which sometimes remains where charity once existed but has become extinguished.⁴³

Those who know that their actions are unjust can still choose because they do not totally deceive themselves into believing that the cause of the strong is Justice; however, the state of mind of the 'idolaters' is that of those who are totally deceived by their strength. They inhabit the state of mind which comes immediately below that of the Athenians:

Below comes the darkness in which the strong sincerely believe that their cause is more just than that of the weak. That was the case with the Romans....⁴⁴

The Romans were the supreme idolaters and they set the example for the Western nations; it was, in Weil's view, the way that they exempted themselves from all 'moral responsibility' for their actions that prevented the Christian revelation, which was linked to the tradition of 'identical thought', from living among the people. What made the method of idolatry so successful was the fact that they made the Romans completely exempt from the contradictions of good and evil:

For complete freedom, the area from which good and evil are banished must be such that it can contain the whole man....A nation can do this.... Once a Roman had divested himself in his own eyes of every quality except that of being a Roman he was emancipated from good and evil. He was controlled by no law except the completely animal urge to expansion and had no duty except to rule other nations as absolute master....The means to be employed were judged solely from the point of view of their efficiency.⁴⁵

⁴²Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.99.

⁴³Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.99.

⁴⁴Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.99.

⁴⁵Simone Weil, "Religions", op. cit., p.213.

There are two main characteristics which make idolaters dangerous to humanity: first, their self-deception contaminates all of those involved so that what is highest in human beings is completely destroyed; second, they sacrifice everything — justice, love, and intellect — to considerations of prestige. With respect to the first characteristic, Simone Weil argues that when a people give up their humanity to be a party to the self-deception of idolotry, they feel that, at least, they should be compensated for this loss. The first form of compensation is usually personal gain; however, it is the second form of compensation that makes idolatry dangerous to others and that is that these people take pleasure out of torturing the weak:

He never loses this immunity, this armour, unless he suddenly turns back into a creature of flesh and blood, or a man with a soul, that is to say, into something other than a piece of the great body. Yet so precious is the privilege of emancipation from good and evil that many men and women, having chosen once and for all, can stand firm against love, friendship, physical suffering, and death....But they pay a high price for this immunity and it is not surprising that by way of compensation they should enjoy torturing the weak.⁴⁶

Although there is always a limit to the force at the disposal of idolaters what is to be lamented is that they plunge so many human souls into their own condition. That is why, Weil argues, from the point of view of providing human beings with a social life that allows for "the development of the soul" a nation of idolaters is dangerous to humanity; they bequeath to posterity the darkest side of human nature.

The second dangerous characteristic of idolaters is that they sacrifice everything to prestige. Although Weil recognizes that prestige is a necessary element in every State, she argues that there should be some limits placed on the State's methods of gaining prestige both with respect to its own people and with respect to its relation to other nations. These limits would provide the balance so that people could have the freedom to recognize their human duties. However, when a State knows no shame and gives everything to aggrandizing itself, then human duties are sacrificed to the power of the State. Weil argues that the western nation/States have learned from the Romans how to successfully sacrifice everything to the State. It is for this reason that, she claims, we must take a close look at ourselves and our methods through a people from a distant past — to change this tendency which characterizes centralized States we must diagnose its ills.

Simone Weil argues that not only have we adopted, since the eighteenth century, the centralized State and are thus subject to its tendencies, but that we also use the methods that are common to idolaters everywhere; so that,

⁴⁶Simone Weil, "Religions", *op. cit.*, p.213.

each State is ready, if or when the force should be in its court, to take the road to Domination and Mastery. As we saw above, modern States have even more weapons at their disposal as Mastery of nature and human nature is already claimed to be the "only good" and the guide to all action. Thus, by way of the Romans, the French, and the Germans, Simone Weil proposes to analyse the universal methods used for Mastery in its form as Domination – World Dominion.

This critique attempts to show how Simone Weil applies her conception of an "unchanging morality" that issues from that 'identical thought' bequeathed to us from the ancients and Christ. Thus, Weil argues from the point of view that Justice/Charity is the moral guide to human actions; this means that to maintain the balance between the strong and the weak, the strong have to follow Christ and renounce using all of the power/force they have in their grasp. To use all of the power/force in one's grasp by doing unjust acts and thus not nurturing that attentive love which permits one to respond to those in need when called upon to do so or to contemplate the beauty of the world is to sacrifice the virtues of humanity for the sake of the worship of force and World Dominion. The only way for human beings to bring justice into reality is to conceive of what could be done to give the gift of humanity to those who destiny has denied humanity (like the afflicted) and to act accordingly; however, argues Weil, to take the contrary course of action thus to conceive of every way possible to brutalize and dominate those whom destiny has denied the virtue of humanity is simply to apply more weight to the imbalance which already exists – this kills the human virtues. Simone Weil takes this one step further; she argues that even by admiring in history the use of the methods of brute force, we condone the thought which is contrary to the thought which issues from the divine inspiration of the tradition of 'identical thought; and since thought and action are so intimately related we are most likely to behave like those we admire when the opportunity to do so arises:

There is no ground for believing that morality has ever changed....no one can judge an action, whatever its date, according to any conception of virtue except the one that sets the standards for his own behavior. If I admire, or even excuse, a brutal act committed two thousand years ago, it means that my thought, today, is lacking in the virtue of humanity. Man is not divided into compartments, and it is impossible to admire certain methods employed in the past without awakening in oneself a disposition to copy them as soon as there is an easy opportunity to do so.⁴⁷

the virtue of humanity simply because they were inflicted on our ancestors or because Hitler and the Germans lost

⁴⁷Simone Weil, "The Great Beast", *Selected Essays (1932-1943)*, op. cit., p.131-133. Hereafter: "Beast".

the battle for World Dominion, and to implicitly condone, by supposedly simply presenting the facts, the way the Romans or any other historical civilisations have successfully applied these methods.⁴⁸ Thus, Weil argues that the methods are evil and lack in the virtue of humanity whether they are applied today or were applied forty thousand years ago and that they should be portrayed in this light:

No other method exists for acquiring knowledge of the human heart than the study of history coupled with the experience of life.... It is our duty to supply this food to the mind of youth, of Man. But it must be a truth-giving food. Facts must not only be correct, so far as one is able to verify them, but must be shown in their true perspective relatively to good and evil.... History is a tissue of cruel and base acts in the midst of which a few drops of purity sparkle at long intervals. If such is the case, it is first of all because there is very little purity among men; and secondly because the greater part of what little there is remains hidden. One must try and seek out if possible *indirect testimony* of its existence.⁴⁹

i. Rome's Glory Unveiled

With Simone Weil's view of justice and her conception of history in mind, we shall now turn to her analysis of the methods used by the Romans, and then re-used by the French and the Germans. As was pointed out above, the characteristic idolaters display is the conviction that they are, by rights, the Rulers of the World (of being born a "superior race") and so this exempts them from the pair of contradictories of good and evil. The Romans, Weil claims, perfected this characteristic in their methods of domination. They used two main methods. The first, she argues, was the art of perfidy combined with cruelty. This method would be unsuccessful without the second method which was to mask their actions by keeping up the appearance of legitimacy by building a 'thick screen of hypocrisy':

⁴⁸Note how many historians today are prepared to take a moral attitude to the atrocities perpetrated by the Germans in the Second World War or by Stalin now that the power of the Russians is waning. I will simply mention one I have recently come across but there are ample to choose from: Michael Balfour's *Germany: The Tides of Power*, (London: Routledge, 1992). See esp. chpts. 1, 2, and 4. I would like to mention here that Simone Weil was dependent on "traditional history" for her critique of the Romans, the French, and the Germans (actually for the Germans in World War II she probably mostly relied upon experience newspapers and other sources of current events'news). It is really difficult to say how she would have dealt with the "new history", although as I think she would agree with some contemporary historians who, "suggest that it is disingenuous to characterize traditional history as being defended by an aged and entrenched establishment unable to change its ways." David Carr, "History New and Old", *La philosophie de L'histoire et La pratique historique d'aujourd'hui*, op. cit., p.379. Also in this essay Carr points out that it continues to be a "raging debate" as to which style of writing history is superior.

⁴⁹Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots: prelude to a declaration of duties toward mankind*, trans. by Arthur Wills (1952; New York: Octagon, 1979), p.232. Hereafter: *Roots*.

The Romans conquered the world because they were serious, disciplined, and organized....because they successfully employed the most ruthless, premeditated, calculated, systematic cruelty combining and alternating it with cold-hearted perfidy and hypocritical propaganda. With unswerving resolution, they always sacrificed everything to considerations of prestige.³⁰

Weil presents a number of examples from Roman history to support her claim that they perfected the art of perfidy combined with cruelty, but I will concentrate on the one that she thoroughly analyses and that seems to show this method with her analysis most clearly: the Romans conquering of the Carthaginians.

Weil claims that the Romans understood how to avoid the two disadvantages which treachery could cause: "it arouses indignation and it prevents people from believing you in the future...."³¹ The Romans, she argues, managed to avoid these disadvantages by only using perfidy when they were certain that they could annihilate the people betrayed. This had the value of using the human emotions to their advantage; the neighbours of those annihilated watched with horror and fear knowing that destiny may bring the Romans their way too. This would not have made the Romans masters of the world had they not understood the effect that the horror of such brutality would have on the human psyche, feelings:

The Romans knew how to play upon men's feelings. It is the way to become master of the world. Every growing power evokes a variety of feelings among its neighbours; if it evokes, by skill or good luck, those feelings which can be played upon so as to promote its own growth, it will go far. Those who lived on the borders of Rome's territory experienced at one time or another, like all men, the emotions of fear, terror, anger, indignation, hope, tranquillity, torpor; but at any given moment they experienced whichever of them was most convenient for Rome....³²

Strategically, Weil claims, it was most important that the Romans decide and control peoples' emotions because if, by mistake, they caused a people to feel indignation; this might have given these people the strength to resist and plot against them. Thus, the Roman's method of terrorizing all spectators had the desired effect of making them vulnerable and thus compliant; Rome made allies out of the fearful spectators. Weil describes this mechanism of human nature in the face of force:

...terror makes the soul credulous, the very perfidy of the Romans had the effect of strengthening rather than weakening their neighbours' inclination to believe them. People are eager to believe whatever they very much hope is true.³³

³⁰Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.102.

³¹Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.103.

³²Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.102.

³³Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.103.

According to Weil's analysis, the spectators were not spared because the Romans really only made them their allies so that they could make use of them; thus, they engaged them in their battles against others or simply commanded them to disarm so that they would pose no threat. In either case, she claims, the end result was the same; when it suited the Romans, they would break the treaty and massacre the whole population. Weil argues that the Romans did this until they felt certain that everyone knew they were the Masters. Weil quotes an instance of this from Livy. After defeating the Macedonians in the usual manner, Paulus Aemilius, the Emperor of Rome, asks Perseus, the King of Macedonia : " 'Tell me, Perseus, having learned in your father's time that the Romans are such good allies and such terrible foes, why did you choose them as foes?' " ⁵⁴ With this attitude of righteous Masters, the Romans, she claims, proceeded to punish the people conquered as 'legitimate masters punishing rebellion'. This self-deception led them to formulate the most amazing pretexts to cover up their hypocrisy and to mask the reality from themselves and others. Weil argues that we must carefully examine this phenomenon because those who claim boastfully to be the good guys more often than not are the very ones to commit the most atrocious acts and call this the spreading of civilisation:

Just as a person who is always asserting that he is too good-natured is the very one from whom to expect, on some occasion, the coldest and most unconcerned cruelty, so when any human group *sees itself* as the bearer of civilisation this very belief will betray it into behaving barbarously at the first opportunity. Nothing is more dangerous from this point of view than belief in some racial or national group, or in some social class or political party. ⁵⁵

The Romans used three main tactics to establish their prestige. The first was to establish that their Will was supreme. The other side of using people's emotions for gaining power over them was the determination to be totally dis-affected by any kind of human emotion. According to Weil, the Romans perfected this as well. They made sure that everyone knew that the Will of a Roman was Absolute; no human appeal to justice, pity, or any kind of emotion touched them; no prayer or appeal to the gods got any further. For them, every massacre and success in domination was accurately devised as a means to "heightening prestige". Weil demonstrates this in the example to follow with the Carthaginians. The second tactic they used was to disguise their 'abuse of force' with "plausible pretexts". Simone Weil argues that this was exceptionally important both to maintaining their own self-deception

⁵⁴As quoted by Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.114. Livy, Book 45, Chapter 8.

⁵⁵Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.143.

that 'might is right' and to giving those weakened by the sight of destiny an excuse to turn a blind eye to injustice. Pretexts, she argues, "give cowards an excuse for flattery and the indifferent an excuse for inertia; and they allow the conqueror to forget that he is a criminal...."⁵⁶ The Romans were experts in creating pretexts:

That is why, ... they were nearly always very careful to appear to respect treaties or to find a pretext for breaking them, and to give the impression of being everywhere on the defensive.♣⁵⁷

But their most effective tactic of disguising the policy of the 'big lie' that 'might establishes right' and of creating pretexts was, Weil argues, through the use of 'propaganda'. She does not think it is necessary to have technological machinery to be effective propagandists; rather, Weil claims that idolatry and force are machinery enough to spread the word that this or that nation or civilisation is the greatest and must be praised as such. As she points out, every Roman was a "natural propagandist" because to be a Roman was to be convinced of one's innate superiority. There was nothing that superceded the Will of the Romans. Weil claims that "spiritual life at Rome was hardly anything more than an expression of the will to power."⁵⁸ As we saw above, she takes the Romans to be mainly responsible for misdirecting the people concerning the "true" Christian message which issues from the tradition described above. They did this by using force to impose Christianity on the conquered people; this was unfortunate, she argues, because force necessarily defiles that which comes in contact with it. In other words, one cannot be forced to love Christ and thereby God; this is a contradiction. As Weil sees the true Christian message, it is only by acts of love and attention that one can teach or spread this message. However, she does see a place for the Church in keeping the word of God and in maintaining religious practises.⁵⁹

ii. An Analysis of the Methods Applied

It is not important to analyse all of Weil's historical examples of how the Romans skillfully applied their methods, so we will consider only the most revealing one. We must remember that Weil is here attending to how

⁵⁶Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.115.

⁵⁷Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.115.

⁵⁸Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.116.

⁵⁹See Simone Weil, "Beast" 128 where she talks about how the Romans were not all that tolerant of other religions. She was, of course, insensed by the way that the Pythagoreans were persecuted by the Romans. She cites the historian, J. Carcopino, who wrote a book on the historical struggle of the Pythagoreans which must have been available to her. See J. Carcopino, *De Pythagore aux apôtres* (Paris: Flammarion, 1956).

the 'losers' of history feel as displayed in the words of the historians Appian and Polybius; if I understand her correctly she hears the echoes of the "eternal cry" from the victims of the Romans. Simone Weil thoroughly analyses the Romans' methods and portrays the losers' cries in the defeat of the Carthaginians. Another important point to remember, for the sake of balance, is that Weil is careful to recognize that the Carthaginians were also an imperial power who conquered other people such as Spain and more. However, she argues and attempts to prove that among the ancients there was a certain universal morality that claimed that a civilisation once reduced to a conquered people and thus rendered harmless were to be spared from total destruction.

Weil claims that it is the Carthaginians who out of the battle between them and the Romans ended up with a 'reputation for perfidy' and according to her the reason for this is:

... the Romans were able to claim a reputation for loyalty; because...it is possible to keep up appearances if one's evil-doing is the result of cool resolution, whereas those who fall into evil-doing unintentionally will always provoke a scandal.⁶⁰

After the Romans first conquered the Carthaginians, she was granted a treaty and was allowed to live with city and arms in tact; but, she had to promise not to engage in any war without Rome's permission. This also meant that the Carthaginians were not to protect her city against invaders unless the Senate of Rome conceded that the attack warranted defense. The Carthaginians, claims Weil, abided by the terms of the treaty in spite of the fact that for fifty years "her territory was continually invaded and pillaged by the Numidians". Also, during this time she fought for Rome in three wars. Finally, the Carthaginians reached their breaking point; this came after Rome refused to help defend Carthage against the Numidians even though, according to Weil, the treaty between Carthage and Rome entitled the Carthaginians to protection from the Romans. Simone Weil describes how the Romans ceased their opportunity because the Carthaginians broke their word in defense of themselves:

At last, tried beyond endurance by an exceptionally threatening raid, Carthage took up arms against the Numidians and was defeated; her army was completely destroyed. Rome chose this moment to declare war, on the pretext that Carthage had taken up arms without permission⁶¹

What follows is for Simone Weil the ultimate display of how the Romans, by means of intimidation and cruelty, could inspire confidence; that is, how they used the emotions to completely paralyse the mind. The

⁶⁰Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.103.

⁶¹Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.104.

Carthaginians, already having been defeated by the Numidians, were reduced to desperation at the thought of war with the Romans; so, they begged for peace. As Simone Weil points out the Romans agreed to grant them peace but with no real intention of keeping their word; thus, they generously offered them dispensation:

The Senate offered Carthage its liberty and laws and the enjoyment of its territory and all its public and private wealth, on condition that three hundred nobles' children were handed over within a month as hostages, and that orders were taken from the Roman consuls.⁶²

The Carthaginians, in good faith, agreed to the terms and trusted the Romans; they sent the children only to find that there were more conditions to be met. When the consuls from Rome arrived in Carthage with their army, they further demanded that the Carthaginians hand over all of their arms and military equipment. Again, in good faith, the Carthaginians obeyed. Then, the Romans ceased the moment to apply the "art of perfidy" – to break their word with impunity. This was an instance of using perfidy when they could annihilate their victims and horrify her neighbours. Weil's description shows more than anything her contempt for the "abuse of force" :

The Romans had never been rivalled in the shrewd employment of cruelty....cold, calculated, systematic cruelty, never mitigated by change of humour, prudence, shame, or pity – cruelty that can neither be stayed by courage, dignity, or force, nor mollified by submission, supplication, and tears – cruelty of this kind is an incomparable weapon of domination. Blind and deaf like a force of nature and yet clear-sighted and fore-sighted like a human intelligence, this monstrous duality paralyses men's minds as with a presentiment of fate.♣⁶³

As Weil's analysis of the feelings of the Carthaginians shows if Appian and Polybuis are reliable sources the Romans used this degree of cruelty on the Carthaginians. Once disarmed and defenceless, the Romans commanded them to move their citizens inland as their city was to be "razed to the ground". The Carthaginians were incredulous; and so they began their human appeals. As is evident from Appian's description of the Carthaginians chiding themselves for trusting the Romans, human beings who do not wear the armour of idolatry feel themselves to be stupid and naive for having acted in good faith:

"While he was still speaking they lifted their hands to heaven, calling the gods to witness their betrayed faith; repeatedly and virulently they cursed the Romans They flung themselves on the ground and beat it with their hands and heads. Some of them even tore their clothes and lacerated their flesh as though to punish their own folly in having been deceived".⁶⁴

The Roman consuls, however, argues Weil, were unmoved by their afflicted state; they were deaf to the

⁶²Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.104.

⁶³Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.106.

⁶⁴As quoted by Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.105.

echoes of the "eternal cry". There was to be no justice shown to these people's afflictions. As Appian further points out, the Carthaginians could see that the Roman consuls were deaf to their cries that good and not evil be done to them; nevertheless, they continued to appeal to the morality understood by all people of honour – the terms of a treaty were to be respected, but especially when a people had completely submitted without a struggle:

"Nothing gives more force to an appeal than the terms of a treaty. Nor can we take refuge in anything else than words, since we have given over to you all the power we had.... If you refuse even to hear our arguments, then we leave them aside and have recourse to prayers and tears, the last refuge of the unfortunate.... We propose an alternative much more desirable for us and much more honourable for you. Spare the city which has done you no harm, but, if you please, kill us, whom you have ordered to move away.... Do not defile your reputation by an act so horrible to do and to hear, and which you will be the first in history to perform. Greeks and barbarians have waged many wars, and you, Romans, have waged many against other nations, but no one has ever razed to the ground a city whose people had surrendered before to fight, and delivered up their arms and children, and submitted to every other penalty that could be imposed upon men".⁴⁵

Weil's point that the Romans were determined to show that their Will was supreme and completely unaffected by human emotions is clearly shown by this passage from Appian. The Carthaginians are appealing here to that universal morality that is meant to establish limits to the injustices perpetrated even by the Masters. The Romans showed themselves to be the supreme idolaters as they unlike the Athenians, according to Weil, did not even admit nor show any awareness of the injustice of their actions; they destroyed all thought of the virtues of justice and love. Weil argues that brute force does kill spiritual values and what is left when conquered peoples do survive oppression and brutalization of the kind inflicted by the Romans are nationalities which become "frigidly inhuman fanaticisms".

Finally, when it came to completely destroying the Carthaginians, after they, out of indignation, found the strength to struggle for three more years, the Romans made it seem as though the Carthaginians, as legitimate Masters, were simply being punished for their rebellion. As Simone Weil's analysis shows, the Romans were careful to maintain their hypocritical stance that they were doing justice in annihilating them; therefore, they told them that "the order to demolish the city had been made in the Carthaginians own interest".⁴⁶

And in keeping with Weil's analysis, she claims that Polybius suggests that when they finally wiped out the city and its people, the Romans made sure that all the neighbours were spectators to the atrocities so that they

⁴⁵As quoted by Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.105-106.

⁴⁶Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.106.

would show their gratitude for having been spared and in hopes of being spared in the future:

Publius sent the larger part of the soldiers against the town's inhabitants, according to the Roman custom, with directions to kill everyone they met, and to spare nothing; and not to begin looting until they got the order to do so. The object of this is, I suppose, to strike terror. Accordingly, one may often see in towns captured by the Romans, not only human beings who have been put to the sword, but even dogs cloven down the middle, and the limbs of other animals hewn off. On this occasion the amount of slaughter was exceedingly great because of the number of inhabitants....⁶⁷

What Weil is arguing is that if we were to attend to the feelings and the echo of the 'eternal cry' in these events of the past in which conquerors unjustly and unconsciously destroy the vanquished, then we would present history in the light of the 'eternal cry' and this would preserve the thought of the human virtues of justice and love. Instead, history is dominated by the thought bequeathed to us by "modern historical theodicy". As we saw above, Grant saw Hegel's vision of 'Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht' to have begun the development of "the historicist mood" of our time "which identifies necessity and goodness". And history everywhere in the West is dominated by the philosophy of history that began with Kant to some degree, but more seriously with Hegel. As Fernand Ouellet, an historian himself, points out we are becoming conscious that the Hegelian mode of seeing history as a continual progress (in which in Weil's terms acts of political necessity are implicitly seen to bring about good) has for some time now dominated the way historians write history and also the way it is taught to our youth. ⁶⁸ Weil argues, as was pointed out above, that this view of history prevents us from seeing how "the modes of behaviour" when enclosed in "the thought of Mastery and Domination" are essentially the same in whatever century they appear. The Romans, however sophisticated they were technologically, were equally able to use all of their ingenuity and force to horrify and dominate the minds and hearts of the Carthaginians, the Greeks, the

⁶⁷As quoted by Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.107. Polybius, *Histoires*, Book 10, Chapter 15. It seems that Montesquieu also saw the "perfidy" of the Romans to be from the point of view of Justice none other than "the implacability and barbarity of conquest". See the long passage quoted by Albert Sorel, *Montesquieu*, (London: Routledge, 1887), p.64-65 in which Montesquieu the perfidy of the Romans in terms very similar to Simone Weil's.

⁶⁸ See Fernand Ouellet's article, "La Philosophie de l'histoire et la pratique historique d'hier et d'aujourd'hui", *La philosophie de l'histoire et de la pratique historique d'aujourd'hui*, op. cit., p.215 where he confirms that this view of history is dominated by the view that history is an historical process, as he says: "Presque partout, ... lorsque l'enseignement de l'histoire avait été institutionnalisé et incarné dans les programmes cohérents, ceux-ci avaient presque toujours comporté un fort ingrédient de philosophie de l'histoire.... Critique ou justificatrice de l'historienne et de ses façons de faire et de dire, cette forme de philosophie s'était imposée à lui plus ou moins comme une sorte de lointaine et inaccessible référence méthodologique. C'est.... la domination exercée ... par certains chefs-de-file de la philosophie de l'histoire, tels Vico, Hegel, Carlyle, Spengler, Croce et Tonybee...."

Gauls, and many more and to reduce their civilisations to nothing or to colonisation.

Weil proposes to show that if we compare the methods used in Domination by the Germans and the French to those of the Romans, we would see the methods are the same because they depend upon the manipulation of human emotions which when reduced by the sight of force as destiny to the mechanical laws of nature are as manipulable as the trees and the rivers. The human intellect, ingenuity were applied to the techniques and methods of mastery and domination four thousand years ago to the same degree as they are today. Simone Weil is arguing that the results are the same because the same immorality is applied : the Strong take their cause to be Justice; therefore, their Will is taken to be supreme and their actions are only limited by a stronger force. What is lost sight of are the acts of generosity and love that although weak in terms of force are the only way for human beings to move outside of the domination of force and employ human ingenuity for the nurturing of life rather than solely with the view of being stronger and better than the strongest. As Simone Weil argues, Christ's Passion taught us that only Love is unsullied by force and the message of the Passion tells us that we must listen to the cry which echoes through eternity in the hearts of all the miserable human beings who are exposed to the ravages of force. That Hitler and the Nazis payed no heed to this cry makes them the same as the Romans who equally payed no attention to the echoes of the eternal cry for Love. Their methods were the same because they were directed by the same modes of thought and the same lack of respect for the "human virtues" -- the rule of necessity is all they know. One might say that they are blind in the face of the human heart that still desires love; so, they need to be re-educated because not to be moved by the echo of the eternal cry for love is to be ignorant and sullied by force:

Everything that is subjected to the contact of force is defiled, whatever the contact. Everything in the world is exposed to the contact of force, with one single exception, which is love.⁶⁹

Simone Weil argues that no one, since the Romans, have used the "monstrous duality" which combines force and human intelligence as a means to domination like Hitler and the Nazis in their attempt at being Masters of the World. The Romans, she claims, were Hitler's main model in the use of the method of "the art of perfidy" which combines the breaking of treaties with the skill of employing cruelties that would terrorize all the neighbouring spectators. Perhaps because of the time she was writing this essay, 1940-41, she makes very little

⁶⁹Simone Weil, "Romanesque", *op.cit.*, p.49.

explicit mention of Hitler's atrocities but she did draw a few comparisons between the Roman use of perfidy and cruelty and Germany's use of these methods. For example, Simone Weil shows how Hitler's act of breaking the treaty with Czechoslovakia, at the beginning of the Second World War, and the cruelty with which he forced President Hacha to sign away his people's independence and then reduced them to colonial status(and all that that entailed) was, although to a somewhat lesser degree because he did not annihilate them and their country, similar to the way that the Romans used the art of perfidy and cruelty in their humiliation of the Carthaginians as described above. As we know, President Hacha fainted out of grief for his country and people after he signed their independence away. As Simone Weil says with the same attentive eye to the losers; hearing the echo of the eternal cry:

...Hitler took Prague, in time of peace, amid the tears of its inhabitants, and in defiance of a recent treaty by which, in theory, definitive frontiers had been established.⁷⁰

Similar conditions existed in each case : a treaty had been signed that had established the respect for each country's liberty and unjustly broken because one country had the force to reduce the other to slavery ; and the leaders and people of the country which violated the treaty chose to turn a blind eye to the human cries and appeals for justice; mastery and domination ruled their actions. Although Simone Weil does not give us many examples of how Germany applies this method of perfidy combined with cruelty which had the effect of horrifying and making compliant all of the neighbouring spectators, There are probably so many examples that we could quite reasonably agree that what Simone Weil says in the following passage applies not only to the Romans, but also to the Germans: "It would take too long to make a list of all of the examples in Roman history of perfidy and violated faith; what they all have in common is premeditation and calculation."⁷¹ The intellect is used to serve the passion of domination and to kill the bond of trust which is only held together by respect for the humanity of the other.

Although, as we know, Hitler perfected 'the art of propaganda' and formulated many pretexts to deceive himself and his people that the Germans were indeed a "superior race" which were born to be the Masters of the World. Again, though the actual machinery of propaganda(newspapers, radio, etc.) used was somewhat different from what the Romans had to spread their propaganda that does not change the fact that what was being said was

⁷⁰Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.93.

⁷¹Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.103.

in its essence the same: We are the "superior people born of superior race" (we are aware of how he used the persecution of Jews as a means of raising the German race up) and it is in us to dominate the World for betterment of humankind; Our Will is supreme and whatever we say or do is just and good because we said it and did it. Simone Weil as we now know, labels this mode of thinking when it is adopted by a nation/State "State idolatry" and it underlies the all-pervasive propaganda used by the Romans and the Germans. We are somewhat aware of how the Germans through Nazism perpetrated this mode of thinking; but what Simone Weil and Grant are suggesting is that we may not yet be totally aware of how much this mode of thinking is embodied in our whole modern culture and modern form of the "centralized State".

iii. The Centralized State: Is it in its Inception Totalitarian?

Simone Weil argues that our idea of the centralized State comes originally from Rome. She claims that Rome's methods were all possible and brilliantly applied because, as she saw with Montesquieu, she had built herself a centralized State. As we saw above everything was sacrificed to the prestige of the Roman State which meant that absolutely nothing was set in place to limit her power:

... at Rome it was not the emperor as a man, it was to the Empire, that everything was subject; and the Empire's power consisted in a highly centralized and efficiently organized administrative machine, in a large and on the whole disciplined permanent army, and in an all-pervading system of control. In other words, the source of power was the State and not the sovereign....⁷²

She argues that there was, in Rome, the same tendency as in the modern States : when there was civil strife or problems among the people with the State, the method of dealing with the situation was "not to change the relations between the State and its subjects", but rather "to change the person at the head of the State".⁷³ The reason Rome was like this was because of her ambition for absolute power and conquest; the State had to be the unquestionable authority on all matters:

⁷²Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.127. It should not be thought that I am here presenting Weil's view of history as a coherent whole (so to speak), I am analysing Weil's philosophy of history which means that I am using only some of the events of history she cites to make what I see to be her point concerning the origins of the modern State and its tendencies. Thus, it is not to be thought that I take this to be the definitive history of Rome, France, or even Germany, rather I intend it to be a conceptual analysis that exaggerates the negative by bringing the unseemly events together to make what I see to be her point.

⁷³Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.127.

...the absolute power of the State could not be questioned, because it rested upon no convention, no conception of loyalty, but upon the effects of power — which paralyzes the human spirit.⁷⁴

As we saw above, the Roman Emperors and State machinery had to convince Roman people that it was worth their while to participate in her conquests to such an extent; Weil claimed that she had a sophisticated system of propaganda. Weil argued that during the years of the conquest of Carthage and of all of the Greek countries, the Romans enslaved many talented minds, especially from Greece, and put them to the service of praising the State of Rome. Thus, Weil is arguing that literature and other cultural activities in Rome were dominated by her need to aggrandize the State: "Spiritual life at Rome was hardly anything more than an expression of the will to power.... Ennius, Virgil, Horace, Cicero, Livy and even Tacitus wrote always with a political bias and whatever their policy, it was always imperial."⁷⁵ Weil claims that this State idolatry encompassed all of the thought and actions of the people of Rome; and the administration of the State was so well organized that once it was firmly established, nothing could stop it from continuing its ways except its own decay from within. It is, she thinks, worthwhile to analyse how a State of this nature absorbs all of the life of the people into itself.

The problem with a State that commands absolute obedience because of its absolute power is that the people only obey it as long as it has that power. A people who consistently suppress all emotions for the sake of dominion are incapable after a certain point of having any feelings; the glory of conquest does not inspire any true feelings as 'pride' dies when the glory dies. As Simone Weil points out the Romans did not know what it meant to have "human feelings" the ambition for conquest did not permit them to be touched by the human emotions. The State of Rome did not encourage the people to love her as something precious that could only continue to exist with the support of her people; Rome, as we saw Weil argue above, thought of herself as the absolute Will and she fostered this view among her people. But, argues Weil, when a State that rules its own people by power and the glory of its conquests ceases to be able to sustain this glory, when it reaches its limit, the people have nothing to admire — the absolute Will and all her glory have ceased to exist; as far as the people are concerned there is nothing left to sustain them in the State of Rome; all personal gain for which they had stood by Rome has ceased:

...glory only acts as a stimulant among the lower orders of society at times when everyone can, while looking

⁷⁴Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.128.

⁷⁵Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.116.

forward to his country's glory, look forward at the same time to having as large a personal share therein as he can wish for.⁷⁶

Rome had the same problem as all centralized States: everything went into building the capital and little was left for local and regional life. The State and the capital drained the life of the people. It set itself up as that which must be worshipped; therefore, it knew no law as a limit to its power. Simone Weil argues that the Romans destroyed the 'very essence of law'. For the public authorities of the State to be obeyed in a way that is needed to protect the public good, the people must have the true feelings that they rule 'in accordance with law'; that is, the public authorities of the State take on a kind of sacred character for the people so that the obligation to obey them becomes the only appropriate response. Like Montesquieu, she thinks that it is not the fact that there are books of written laws that give laws that respect among the people and the authorities; rather, it is that both the people and the authorities see and act as though the laws of the country are a 'sacred contract' between them. If those who write or re-write the laws, she claims, pay "attention" to the feelings of the people, then the laws will reflect not only the common need of all societies for safety, protection, and order, but also the 'specific needs' of the people being governed.

The Romans, claims Weil, although they were jurists, did not respect 'the sacred character of a contract'. The way that they practised the 'art of perfidy', she argues, showed how they disregarded international contracts when it suited them to do so. But also, she argues, everything was sacrificed to the 'sovereign State'; thus, the Romans were indifferent to the conception of law as that which limits the power of the State in relation to the people:

It would be extremely difficult to find textual support for the argument that the Romans conceived law as emanating from individuals and as limiting the State's sovereignty in its relation between them.⁷⁷

However, Weil argues, there is textual support to show that what the authorities on the State thought should

⁷⁶Simone Weil, *Roots*, op.cit., 175.

⁷⁷Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.129. No doubt Weil is touching on a delicate issue here given the way French laws are based on the Roman system of law. However, it seems that she only intends to say what her philosophy stands for: thought and action go together; as we saw, she thinks that action is the definitive telling point of what a human being thinks or of the thought that directs the people of a nation's actions. Admittedly, the evidence she gives for this claim is minimal; however, it is important to her argument that law be seen as that which makes good relations which are always tenuous but precious.

be done was done even at the unnecessary expense of the people. There was, she claims, only one thing that limited 'the sovereignty of the State' and that was 'the sovereignty within the family'; but as Rome became increasingly totalitarian even the family ceased to be an area where the State could not intervene. Weil gives an example of this:

The emperor, in fact, had the power to compel married men to divorce their wives and to render the wills void; which is why so many rich Romans bequeathed a great part of their property to the emperor, so that their families might be allowed to inherit the rest. Does this not sufficiently prove the subordination of private rights to the supreme authority?⁷¹

In spite of the essentially totalitarian character of the Roman State, Simone Weil recognized that she did have her "occasional oasis of vitality" or "sparks of lights". For example, she saw with Montesquieu and many others that the 'dynasty of the Antonines' was culturally alive; during this time there was a literary revival and Greek Stoicism appeared in the Roman culture. Also, the Gospels were written sometime during the reign of the Romans; and, claims Weil, something of the true Christian spirit survived in the thought of St. Augustine and with the Fathers of the Greek Church.

Thus, Simone Weil is arguing that the Roman Empire began by idolizing itself and putting everything into aggrandizing itself and this, as we saw above, naturally leads to a totalitarian State:

Sixty years after the destruction of Cathage, Rome suffered at the hands of Marius and Sulla, and their soldiers and slaves, all the outrages experienced by a conquered city; and she submitted in silence....What was finally produced by the fixed idea of domination, by cruelty, and by baseness of soul, was what we call today a totalitarian State.⁷²

Thus, Simone Weil saw that history, as it portrays the human condition, shows us that the laws of human nature remain the same and strictly rule the human condition. She perceived in French history the reappearance of the same Will to domination as in Rome and she saw that the same methods were used: "the art of perfidy combined with cruelty" and "State idolatry". Assuming that these methods are familiar to my readers, I shall not repeat Weil's understanding of them. What is important to us is that France through her ambition to be Masters of the World returned to the Roman model of the State — of glorifying and aggrandizing the State. Therefore, Weil claimed, it is important for the west to see that the State as it was conceived by the Richelieu and brought into being by him, Louis XIV, and Napoleon was already totalitarian; thus, the modern State, in its modern inception in France, carried

⁷¹Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.129-130.

⁷²Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.125.

on with the Roman tendencies of not respecting any limits to its power.

Simone Weil claims that it was Richelieu who brought the Modern State into existence through his actions; he was prepared to sacrifice everything to the power of the State and thus to re-instate the Roman style of State idolatry. She argues that Richelieu was the first one in all of Europe since the Romans to give himself and the people of France, body and soul, to the aggrandizement of the State:

But the true precursor of Hitler, the first since antiquity, is without a doubt Richelieu. It was he who invented the State. Before him were kings, like Louis XI, capable of establishing a strong power; but it was their crown that they were defending. There were subjects who showed civic qualities in handling affairs; but they were acting for the public good. The State to which Richelieu gave himself body and soul ...was not the crown still less was it the public good; it was the blind and anonymous machine for manufacturing order and power... which...is worshipped.⁸⁰

Richelieu, Weil argues, used the same methods as the Romans; he violated treaties in international affairs and he 'prolonged indefinitely the most atrocious wars'; he did all of this for the sake of the prestige of the State of France. One of the examples she gives shows to what extent Richelieu was willing to go to increase France's prestige:

... he deliberately and pitilessly fostered the wars in Europe, with or without French participation. In his passionate desire to bring down the Austrian dynasty he prevented all hope of peace in Germany; and it is impossible to exaggerate the horrors endured by that wretched country in the interminable war — all crops burned or consumed by wandering armies, mills destroyed, whole towns put to the sword....On the other hand, it was small consolation to French peasants that the war was not on their land, when it reduced large numbers of them to such poverty as to eat grass.⁸¹

Richelieu, Weil argues, also used the method of propaganda to enslave the minds of the people of France; she claims that this can be seen in Corneille's writings. Thus, she argues, Richelieu in his thought and in his actions brought the Roman State to life in France :

His devotion to the State uprooted France. His policy was to kill systematically all spontaneous life in the country, so as to prevent anything whatsoever being able to oppose the State.... All one needs to do is to read Corneille's dedicatory prefaces to realize what file depths of servility he managed to reduce people's minds.... His conception of the State was already totalitarian. He applied it as much as he was able to by subjecting the country, to the full extent by means of the time allowed, to a police regime.⁸²

Richelieu placed the State above all else; like the Romans, he placed the interest and prestige of the State above the soul of the individual. Thus, Weil argues, Richelieu's conception of the State uprooted the people of

⁸⁰Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.94.

⁸¹Simone Weil, "Three Letters on History", op. cit., p. 87-88.

⁸²Simone Weil, *Roots*, op. cit., p.16-117.

France from their spiritual past; there was among the French at one point in history that she mentions – especially around the tenth and eleventh century – a strong connection to the virtues of humanity (and these reappeared periodically after that time). But, she points out, Richelieu who believed himself a Christian should have realized that the State is not an absolute value; thus, he, in following his Roman counterparts, killed the true spirit of Christianity by committing the people of France to State idolatry.

Simone Weil could not conceive of how the French could imagine that 'force' – the actual brutalizing of whole civilisations -- was the means by which 'peace' and 'freedom' could be brought to the whole world. The Romans, who were known to persecute the early Christians, did not consider the Christian virtues as their own until after they had conquered the then thought of known world so 'State idolatry' was easily appropriated by them. But the French who considered themselves Christians, argued Weil, should have seen that State idolatry and the infliction of suffering and affliction was contrary to the Christian virtues of justice and charity. Richelieu failed to see this contradiction and that is why he could foster the misconception that force could be used to liberate humans. In two revealing passages Simone Weil helps us to see how this contradiction arose in Western thought through historical action:

Richelieu who possessed the intellectual clarity so common to that time, defined in luminous terms the difference between politics and morals, over which has subsequently arisen so much confused thinking. Here is more or less what he said: We should beware of applying the same rules to the welfare of the State as to that of the soul; for the welfare of souls is attended to in the world above, whereas that of States is only attended to in this world.

That is cruelly exact. A Christian ought to be able to draw therefrom but one conclusion: that whereas to the welfare of the soul, or in other words to God, a total, absolute, and unconditional loyalty is owed; the welfare of the State is a cause to which only a limited and conditional loyalty is owed.

But although Richelieu believed himself to be a Christian, no doubt sincerely, his conclusion was a totally different one, namely, that a man responsible for the welfare of the State and the men under him must employ to this end all useful means, without any exception, and, if necessary, sacrifice thereto their own lives, their sovereign, their people, foreign countries, and any and every species of obligation.

It represents -- but in a much nobler form -- Maurras' doctrine, "Politique d'abord." But Maurras with the perfect logic, is an atheist. The Cardinal, in postulating something whose whole reality is confined to this world as an absolute value, committed the sin of idolatry.... The real sin of idolatry is always committed on behalf of something similar to the State. It was that sin that the devil wanted Christ to commit when he offered him the kingdoms of this world. Christ refused. Richelieu accepted.²⁵

²⁵Simone Weil, *Roots*, op. cit., p.115-116.

Thus, according to Simone Weil, the essential contradiction between 'force' and 'liberation' were, from Richelieu to Hitler, portrayed as if they were somehow compatible; but this defies reason and is used for the purpose of maintaining the dream that the future holds for us everything that the past and the present could not give us. It is this dream which is fostered, but says Weil:

Conquering the world and liberating the world are, in fact, two incompatible forms of glory, but which can easily be reconciled with one another in reverie⁴⁴

For this reason, Weil argues, Germany's Will to domination should be of no surprise to the Western world; she simply took the conception of the centralised State that was re-born with Richelieu to its logical extremes. Weil argues that it was conceived for the purpose of domination; thus, we should not be surprised each time it reaches its pinnacle :

The claim is made that Napoleon propagated, with his sword, the French revolutionary ideas of liberty and equality; but what he chiefly propagated was the idea of a centralised State, the State as the sole fount of authority and object of devotion. This conception of the State, which was invented, so to speak, by Richelieu and carried to a higher degree of perfection by Louis XIV and higher still by the Revolution and then by Napoleon, has reached its ne plus ultra by Germany....but let us not forget that the conception originated with us.⁴⁵

If I am not mistaken the view that we hold of the large centralised Nation/State was not common to the people of Europe before the rise of Nationalism which began around the 18th century. Simone Weil claims, however, that it has its roots in the Roman conception of the State. Since she was writing her critique of history during the Second World War, the ideas of 'eternal France' and 'unchanging Germany' were current among the French and the Germans; thus, Simone Weil criticized the idea of any Nation, and in particular the French and the Germans, having "permanent and unchangeable" characteristics. Weil argues through her historical analysis that there is no evidence in history for the view that Nations are "unchangeable"; she claims that some national characteristics seem to endure through time and yet, others, that live for awhile, die, and are replaced by new ones. For example, "Don Quixote still lives in Spain..."; but, she argues, "who would think that Spain in the sixteenth

⁴⁴Simone Weil, *Roots*, op. cit., p.113.

⁴⁵Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.91-92. There is no doubt that Simone Weil hoped that the French, having been reduced to a colonised country throughout the war, would have recognised in their misery a different conception of the State; a State conceived as a human community set up for the purpose of nurturing what is highest in human beings -- the ability to love. I will return to her idea of this latter kind of State in the final chapter.

century was so ambitious and powerful as to threaten the world's freedom?"⁸⁶ Likewise, between the ancient Romans and the medieval Italians, she claims there was very little resemblance:

The sole superiority of the Romans was in arms and in the organization of a centralised State. The Italians of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance were incapable of unity, order or administration....And yet, at this time, the Italians seemed to be what the Romans, with all their efforts of slavish imitation, never were, the direct heirs of the Greeks in all the graces and powers of the mind.⁸⁷

What the history of nations shows, Weil argued, is that there are "examples both of permanence and change". She thought that in 1940 the French, who were then under German occupation and had themselves lost their liberty to the new conquerors, would have been able to see that the aggrandizement of the State through conquest did not bring them liberty and equality; therefore, there was no reason to think that France, in her past conquests, had brought liberty and equality" to any of the countries she had subjected to her domination. Thus, argued Simone Weil, "(t)here is no such thing as 'eternal France', at least as far as peace and liberty are concerned. Napoleon terrified and shocked the world as much as Hitler, and rightly so."⁸⁸ Something had gone astray and that something, she discovered, was that the State conceived and brought into being by Richelieu, being rooted in the Roman conception of the State did not orient the French people towards stability, liberty, and equality; rather, it oriented them towards being the Masters of the World. As will become evident in the next Chapter, Simone Weil thinks that there is an historical basis for this view of herself as having stood for the values of "liberty and equality", but, it is obscured by her "Will to Domination".

It was not sufficient for France (nor for any State which has a history of conquest) to tell herself while she was on the other side, so to speak, that is, weak and conquered, that she had always stood for peace and liberty; rather, Weil argued, France (and Germany for that matter) had to do something concrete to show that she was ready and also actually willing to change her orientation and become a different kind of State.

Thus, argues Weil, even those Nations which were, in their own view of themselves, born with the "hereditary right to World dominion" change from being the Masters of the World whose conceptions of reality reign supreme to being either wiped out by the new Masters or subdued to more or less peaceful nations who take

⁸⁶Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.89-90.

⁸⁷Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.90.

⁸⁸Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.91.

up the conceptions of reality propagated by the force of the new Masters. But worse than that is what Weil claims about our modern conception of the State: that is, that it shows itself in history to be entrenched in the ideology of mastery and domination from which it only emerges by means of the limitations imposed on it from the outside by the force of others.

But Simone Weil, being hopeful, thought we could draw on the tradition which also belongs to us, as we saw above, and which offered another conception of the State. Thus, she looked to the Greek conception of the State; but, she was not suggesting that we imitate the Greeks, only that we draw inspiration from the way that they showed in their tragedies and epic poetry that Love was above and beyond the State; Antigone died for the love of her brother as her conscience told her that what was being done to her dead brother's body was unjust; Homer, according to Weil, showed in the *Iliad* the futility of the domination of force, and yet, the necessity with which force ruled human beings' minds both among the strong and the weak. Simone Weil saw in law a way to place limits on the State; but, for this to be the case, law had to be conceived in such a way as to bring about in public life a harmony of liberty and obedience. However, she argues, this Pythagorean harmony can never come about by means of any kind of force; that is why she looked to the laws when seen by both the authorities of the State and the people as the limit to action can bring about this harmony of liberty and obedience -- conscience being the only reason to disobey the law. As Weil points out this was the Greek ideal and Socrates was prepared to die rather than break this law; nevertheless, he spoke out; as she says:

The Pythagoreans said that harmony or proportion is the unity of contraries, *qua* contraries. There is no harmony if the contraries are brought together forcibly, nor if they are mixed; the point of unity has to be found.... Liberty was loved. Obedience was loved no less. The unity of these two contraries is the Pythagorean harmony in society. But harmony is only possible between things that are pure.... Purity in public life means the completest possible elimination of everything which is force, that is to say, of everything collective, of everything which proceeds from the social beast, as Plato called it. The social beast alone possesses force. It exerts it as a crowd, or deposits it in certain men or in one man. But law, in itself, possesses no force; it is only a written text and yet it is the sole bastion of liberty. The civic spirit that conforms to this Greek ideal, to which Socrates was a martyr, is perfectly pure. A man also, whoever he may be, considered simply as a man, is totally lacking in force. If he is obeyed in this capacity the obedience is perfectly pure. Such is the meaning of personal fealty in relationships of subordination; it in no way violates self-respect. But to obey, with or without love, simply as the repository of a collective power, is to degrade oneself.⁹⁹

⁹⁹Simone Weil, "Beast", op. cit., p.51.

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C. CLASSICAL SCIENCE ABANDONS HUMAN PERCEPTION: CONTEMPORARY SCIENCE ABANDONS NECESSITY

Above we saw that Simone Weil argued that the Renaissance of the 17th century was not the 'true Renaissance', but rather the 'false Renaissance'. She claimed that although the people of the 17th century did return to Greece in science, art, poetry, etc., they did not maintain the unity that exists between the Greek vocation and the Christian vocation. They thought, she argued, that they could turn away from Christianity to the Greeks, but as we saw the two are one and the same thought as they issue from the tradition of 'identical thought'. So, although the Renaissance "...had a point of equilibrium at which the unity of the Greek and Christian spirit was felt....very soon it produced humanism".⁹⁰

Weil saw this turning away from Christianity towards the Greeks to be due to the excesses of the Gothic Middle Ages which imposed the spiritual on people to the point of using 'force'; thus, as she says, this period was like an "essay in totalitarian spirituality". This was a problem for the sciences because the 'profane' did not have a voice. This caused a disequilibrium because Necessity which rules over the Universe maintains a perfect balance between the spiritual and the profane so that an excess in either direction will be "a lack of proportion" which is "neither comely nor just". That is why, she argues, people went to extremes in the other direction and denied the spiritual thus bringing humanism and secular culture -- only the profane. Humanism brought with it the "enlightenment" which considered "merely natural knowledge and faculties". Thus, Weil argues that the science that arose during this Renaissance differed from the Greek science that remained true to Pythagorean thought.

Humanism had high ideals -- "truth, beauty, liberty, and equality" -- but, Weil argued, they did not realize that cut off from their source in the "supernatural" these high ideals cannot be sustained. That is why, the science which came out of this Renaissance adopted a degraded notion of the truth. Classical science took scientific truth to be the only truth. In her early thought, Simone Weil raised the question of whether classical science in "liberating" us from religion had brought us the use of our own reason or had they simply replaced the priests of the Gothic Middle Ages:

⁹⁰Simone Weil, "Romanesque", op. cit., p.47.

Did it replace tyrannical priests who ruled by means of the tricks of religion with true priests who exercise a legitimate authority because they really have access to the intelligible world?....did this revolution replace inequality with equality by teaching us that the realm of 'pure thought' is the sensible world itself, that this quasi-divine knowledge that religions sensed is only a chimera....(?)⁹¹

As we saw above, in the critique of Modernity especially pertaining to history, Simone Weil and George Grant argued that the idea of progress had dominated since the 18th century; thus, it came with classical science. This led to the tendency of subjecting "religion to scientific criticism and declar(ing) it false."⁹² Thus, both Weil and Grant saw that human reason had usurped the place of "supernatural reason" in the process of making scientific truth the basis upon which humans should accept the existence of God. For example, David Hume, among others, argued that there simply is no reason to believe in the existence of God and such argumentation was common in the 17th and 18th century. However, by making faith dependent upon 'rational argumentation', these thinkers merely confirmed the dominance of human reason over supernatural reason and faith among the European Christian community. For Christians, Weil argues faith precedes reason although it does not suppress reason. Faith is the realization that "...if we ask our Father for bread, he does not give us a stone."⁹³

Humans realize their faith by directing their faculties properly. What this means for science is that by contemplating the Order of the World, we direct the intellect towards an understanding of the laws of nature for the purpose of developing the "faculty of attention". Through the development of this faculty, we begin the turning of the soul towards the truth. The intellect has a special relation to the faculty of attention; but, if as classical science had argued the truth is in necessity itself -- that is, natural knowledge -- the intellect which may have developed a certain attention will fill the opening with the desire which became so prevalent: the mastering of nature and all the prestige involved in each new discovery because of what could be done to relieve human misery. Contemplation of the order or beauty of the world, on the other hand, naturally leads to a transformation and an orientation of the soul towards the truth because the desire which moves the intellect is pure desire to comprehend

⁹¹Simone Weil, "Science and Perception in Descartes", *Formative Writings 1929-1941*, edited and translated by Dorothy Tuck McFarland and Whlhelmina Van Ness (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1987.), p.32. Hereafter: "Science and Perception".

⁹²Joan O'Donovan claims that Grant saw this happening through the rise of the science which equipped itself to master nature to the point of rejecting her laws. See *Grant*, op. cit., p.66.

⁹³Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.68.

necessity. As Weil argues the effort of attention has to have no other "incentive" but the desire for the "truth":

...every time a human being succeeds in making an effort of attention with the sole idea of increasing his grasp of truth, he acquires a greater aptitude for grasping it, even if his efforts produce no visible fruit. An Eskimo story explains the origin of light as follows: "In the eternal darkness, the crow, unable to find any food, longed for light, and the earth was illumined." If there is a real desire, if the thing desired is really light, the desire for light produces it. There is a real desire when there is an effort of attention. It is really light that is desired when all other incentives are absent.⁹⁴

Thus, for Weil, the 'truth' does not depend upon reason's confirmation of it because truth is the very basis of necessity. Truth will manifest itself in the very mysteries involved in the relation between human perception and action; that is, both the mind and body are necessary to perceive the order and beauty of the world and every desire requires a physical effort to satisfy it which is a manifestation of our duality. Also, this duality causes us to suffer the blows of necessity even to satisfy a simple desire.

Simone Weil argues that science should want to understand the duality that afflicts us and defines the order of the world. Weil learned from reflecting on the scientific method at the origin of Greek science that the Greeks of the sixth century B.C. and earlier never let go of the relation between the intellect and the physical, sensible realm. What she sought to understand even in her early thought was how science was a meditation on our relation to the world. She perceived, like others (Hegel, Husserl) had, that our connection with necessity was essential to our understanding of ourselves. But, she also perceived that Greek science had, in spite of our efforts to re-discover their method, remained alien to us. In "Science et Perception dans Descartes", as I pointed out in Chapter Two, Weil implicitly argued that this had to do with the significant relation that geometry or the mathematical imagination had for them. Descartes, she pointed out, had perceived this but he hesitantly chose to take the other direction thus leaving the mathematical imagination behind. Weil's major argument which unites her critique of both classical and contemporary science was that Descartes and those who followed him chose wrongly. The use of the imagination in perception and in geometry is the most important link, for the scientist, between the human intellect and the order and beauty of the world. The Greeks understood that without the "image" we lose the connection between the order of the world and the beauty of the world. Weil's focus on this loss of the geometrical image and the mathematical imagination directs her critique of both classical and contemporary (each in their particular way) science's

⁹⁴Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.68.

suppression of one of the two terms that make up the order of the world. It is their delusion that they believe that they can resolve the duality which is inscribed in the very order of the universe; and the source of this delusion is in their separation from the geometrical image. Modern science made this essential break.

The reason the geometrical image is so significant is because it links the thought which goes into our reconstruction of the order of the world to our physical awareness of this order. Weil argues that we can only reconstruct the order of the world in our minds if our "mental, psychic, and bodily structure" have a relation to this order. She claims that a true reconstruction of the order of the world involves constructing an image of this order. This image is a way to represent our relation to the "divine wisdom" inscribed in the World at Creation; Weil argues that "The beauty of the world is the co-operation of divine wisdom in creation"⁹⁵ It is only by means of reconstructing the image and contemplating this image that the scientist can maintain the relation between the order reconstructed and the beauty of the world:

The contemplation of this image of the order of the world constitutes a certain contact with the beauty of the world. The beauty of the world is the order of the world that is loved.⁹⁶

Although this was the Greek revelation, that is, that the "beauty of the world" is the image of divine wisdom and that we inherited this revelation through Christ, Weil claims that somehow the Christian tradition issuing from the Middle Ages did not seem to have received this message.⁹⁷ Thus, she suggests, this may be one reason why the people of the 17th century, when they turned to the Greeks for inspiration "...hardly took anything but the secondary products of ancient civilisation, art, science, and curiosity regarding human things." She claims that they "...hardly touched the fringe of the central inspiration....(They)failed to rediscover any link with the beauty of the world."⁹⁸ This was the great tragedy of the second Renaissance because without this link to the "beauty of the world", they were led to believe that their work had only to do with 'mastering' nature which was determined to lead them further away from that link. That is why they occupied themselves with perfecting their instruments.

⁹⁵Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.120.

⁹⁶Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.125.

⁹⁷Of course Simone Weil recognizes that St. Francis of Assisi and St. John of the Cross were exceptions to this generalization. See *Waiting*, op. cit., p.116 where she remarks on this lack in the thought issuing from the Middle Ages.

⁹⁸Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.117.

As we saw above, in contrast to the contemplation of the beauty of the world, the object of Greek science, the people, thinkers, and scientists of the 17th century understood the project of science to be the realization of "Charity"; and, as Grant and Simone Weil argued, they thought it was necessary to master nature to achieve this goal. Their goal was to liberate human beings from, as Grant points out, "the old necessities of hunger and disease and overwork, and the consequent oppressions and repressions" ⁹⁹ Thus, mastery of nature had its Christian goal of "human equality" by means of the hard work and charity of the scientists. This goal was, as we saw, thoroughly elaborated in the philosophy of Hegel in 'modern historical theodicy' and in the thought of Marx and the Marxists and we cannot ignore that the Capitalists, as can be seen in Adam Smith's thought, think of this as their goal as well. The young Weil, who was very much a part of the Marxist tradition as we saw from her life and early thought, argued that this was neither the true nor viable Christian goal. Her claim is that Christianity is cut off from its source in being made party to a science which takes as its goal the mastery of nature:

Christianity will not be incarnated so long as there is not joined to it the Stoic's idea of filial piety for the city of the world, for the country of here below which is the universe. When, as the result of some misapprehension, very difficult to understand to-day, Christianity cut itself off from Stoicism, it condemned itself to an abstract and separate existence.¹⁰⁰

Charity, as we saw above, was for Weil the "attentive giving" of one person to another. The contact through attention of one human being with another is the most essential aspect of this giving; the material aspect is important, but without compassion the giving of bread to a hungry person does not involve giving the gift of humanity – the compassion and its complement, gratitude is the relation which makes the bread a gift of humanity. Without this relation, the giving is a cold act and does nothing to transform the soul of the afflicted; the only way to transform the soul of the afflicted is with God's Love which passes by means of one human being who gives with attention to the other who is afflicted. The giving of the gift of humanity got lost even though we attempted to provide food and other necessities because we cut the relation between the spiritual and the profane in separating science from the supernatural truth and making its goal merely a practical one. In other words, science and technology cannot cure what is essentially a human failing which is to direct one's desire towards power, glory, and

⁹⁹Joan O'Donovan, *Grant*, op. cit., p.101.

¹⁰⁰Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.129-130.

domination rather than towards justice and charity(which must go together), love, and the gentleness which waits to see what nature is suggesting or needing. Science in its conception of human nature and nature and the relation between the two must choose between these two directions because it is the director of the intellect which directs the action of daily life. Weil is arguing that it can choose to reconnect to that from which it broke: the Christian tradition which is connected to the tradition of 'identical thought'.

Thus, for Weil, it is not only the separation of science and religion that she sees as the main source of what she calls the crisis of science, but also as we saw above the separation of Christianity from the connection to the beauty of the world which was maintained in the Christian Revelation which issues from the Greeks and the tradition of "identical thought". That is why, she argues, Christians cannot follow science in its claim that the development of science precedes and makes possible Justice and Charity. Justice and Charity have Love as their condition and without this precondition there can be no Justice and Charity. Thus, to make transformation of matter the precondition of Justice and Charity, and thus Love, is to reverse the Order; and this upsets the balance because we can no longer understand that the limits inscribed in necessity cohere with Justice and Charity. This defiance necessarily springs back like any force taken beyond its limit. Weil's argument is that it is not in keeping with Order for us to take our imaginary power seriously, but rather to see the balance of power which respects the limits and permits us to know the Order and see the beauty of the world and act in accord with it:

Science has as its object the study and theoretical reconstruction of the order of the world -- the order of the world in relation to the mental, psychic, and bodily structure of man. Contrary to the naive illusions of certain scholars, neither the use of telescopes and microscopes, nor the employment of the most unusual algebraic formulae, nor even a contempt for the principle of non-contradiction, will allow it to get beyond the limits of this structure. Moreover, it is not desirable that it should. The object of science is the presence of Wisdom in the universe, Wisdom of which we are the brothers, the presence of Christ expressed through matter which constitutes the world.¹⁰¹

i. Greek Science : The Image relates the Order and the Beauty of the World which leads by Desire to God's Love

Simone Weil regarded early Greek science as the ideal conception of science because, as we saw above, she thought that Pythagoras had, through his discovery of the "geometric mean" and its connection to ratios, seen and understood that the point of balance between whole numbers was an "image" of Mediation -- the Word which

¹⁰¹ Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.124.

was the connection between the Order and the Beauty of the World. That is why it is most important for science to reconstruct its theoretical order in relation to the "geometrical image" which connects it to beauty of the world. Pythagoras had his revelation through the study of the order and beauty of necessity which was that the Act of Creation itself was, as we saw above, the result of a Mediation within God Himself -- an abdication so as to allow for a distance between Himself and the universe of necessity; yet, God constantly and forever thinks with Love the existence of necessity so that it remains the Perfect Order of good and evil. Human beings, made in God's likeness, have the capacity to think God's Order through the theoretical reconstruction of the idea of necessity which can only be truly conceived by means of the "geometrical image" which links it to the beauty of the world. This was essentially Pythagoras' revelation: what the discovery of the "geometrical mean" revealed to Pythagoras, and the reason he saw it as issuing from "divine love", Weil thought, was that by means of the "image" of number to the second power one or unity could be "seen" to be at the source of two or diversity; thus, the unity of the contraries of unity and diversity was what made up the Order of necessity. It is the human being who in conceiving and perceiving necessity through science can know this secret.

As we saw above, Simone Weil interpreted Pythagoras' discovery of the "geometrical mean" from the theological point of view, that is, the Second person of the Trinity is the Mediator which at Creation is the Ordering Principle as well as the perfecting of it in creating the Beauty of it. The Greeks, she thought, took Pythagoras' discovery of the significance of the "image" of geometry to be the height of their whole civilisation because of how it revealed with certainty the relation between the Beauty and Order of the world as inscribed by God and perfected by His Son at Creation. Weil argues that the Greeks had understood the relation between the "point of balance" seen by means of the 'geometrical image' and the 'Model'(Image of God Who appeared on earth as the "perfectly just man") that created the Beauty and directs one's desire towards the truth of this relation between the Order and Beauty that presides in Necessity; thus, with the image in mind, they refused to engage in the 'science of algebra': The Greeks possessed and manipulated and applied the notions of generalized number and function, but they would never express them in the form of equations; the only symbols they would allow for algebraic relations were the geometrical figures. We ought very probably to see this as a deliberate decision, connected with their general

conception of science.¹⁰²

They were content to search in nature and make as the principle of their art, the number which could act as an intermediary between unity and diversity: ratios or generalized number. Ratios or proportions always had this relation to the "geometric mean" and the "image" and thus they could be seen as "A just blend of unity with that which opposes unity"; this just blend, as we saw in the discovery of the geometric mean "is the condition of the beautiful". ♣¹⁰³ As we saw earlier, Weil claims that Pythagoras could not have fully conceived of these numbers without the 'image'; although he had the perfect idea of these numbers first, he had to pass to the image to arrive at an understanding of how these numbers could be a just blend of unity and diversity:

Each ratio involves quantities which may increase indefinitely while maintaining a perfectly definite relation, just as angle, starting with a point embraces an area which extends indefinitely beyond the most distant stars. And, in order to imagine the ratio, one must begin with number and pass on to angle, because whole numbers do not...provide the means of expressing mean proportionals.¹⁰⁴

By making geometry the science of physics the Greeks, she claims, were rigorous and exact in their attempt to direct the soul towards truth by means of the study of necessity; because, once they discovered how equilibrium -- the point of balance -- was the Ordering Principle of the universe, they were careful to make every effort not to stray from that principle:

The Greeks, among whom what we call our science was born, regarded it as issuing from a divine revelation and as destined to lead the soul towards the contemplation of God. It has deviated from this destination not through excess but through deficiency of scientific spirit, exactitude and rigour. Science....has no object of study except the action of the Word or, as the Greeks said, of ordering Love. Science alone, and only in its purest rigour, can give a precise content to the notion of Providence, and in the domain of knowledge it can do nothing else. The object of science, as of art, is beauty.¹⁰⁵

Pythagoras' discovery was, Weil thought, the height of Greek civilisation because through his revelation which connected the Order and the Beauty of the world science, as we know it, originated for the purpose of bridging the distance between humans and God. She realizes that the notion of equilibrium and limit had been at the heart of Greek culture as they had inherited these notions from the tradition of "identical thought". These notions

¹⁰²Simone Weil, "Variant: Meditation on Greek Science", *On Science, Necessity, and the Love of God*, op. cit., p.46. Hereafter: "Variant".

Simone Weil, "Classical Science and After", *On Science, Necessity, and the Love of God*, op. cit., p.17. Hereafter: "Classical Science".

¹⁰⁴Simone Weil, "Classical Science", op. cit., 19.

¹⁰⁵Simone Weil, "Romanesque", op. cit., p.52.

directed the whole of Greek culture towards virtue -- the virtues of Justice and the Love which is its condition:

The idea of equilibrium, for example, had always been at the centre of Greek thought;.... for centuries and centuries the balance was the symbol of equity, in their eyes the first of all virtues.... There are a few lines in the *Gorgias*, perhaps the most beautiful, which strike the same note, where Socrates blames the advocate of injustice for ignoring that the order of the world is determined by concord and harmony, and for forgetting geometry. The idea behind such words is the same which, under the name of disequilibrium, constitutes Greek physics.... On the other hand, the idea of equilibrium dominates every form of authentic art....¹⁰⁶

We have lost sight of this notion of equilibrium in our thought; but, Weil thinks we could recover it again through our science by re-connecting to its original direction towards the contemplation of the Order and Beauty of the world.

ii. Classical Science lost sight of the Beauty of the World which led to the Suppression of One of the Terms: the Discontinuous

As we saw above, Simone Weil argued that classical science began with Greek science, but it lost sight of the main focus of Greek science -- 'the beauty of the world'. This affected the way 'classical science' conceived of necessity and of truth. Instead of conceiving of 'necessity' as God's Creation which contained the Ordering Principle, they conceived of it as simply a tissue of mechanical, necessary relations. They had learned from the Greeks and rediscovered for themselves, Weil argues, that the universe is composed of unity and diversity; however, they did not realize how important the 'geometrical image' was to the maintaining the link to 'equilibrium', the ordering principle of necessity. In other words, she claims, that classical scientists, being as they were directed towards the mastery of nature rather than the contemplation of nature, did not realize that the unity of unity and diversity which is presupposed in the straight line is a unity of contraries which is only possible by means of the ordering principle issued at Creation; only God in the Act of Creating could inscribe this principle in the world so that we could with the help of pure ideas and the image which links the order and the beauty of the world see His Design.

Simone Weil saw that Descartes was not totally blind to this, but for some reason he, too, let go of the 'image'. Weil claims that by separating mathematics and geometry classical science lost sight of the 'image'. This

¹⁰⁶Simone Weil, "Classical Science", op. cit., p. 14-15.

led them to suppress one of the terms which makes up the tissue of necessity: the 'discontinuous' or otherwise called number. In my analysis of how Weil thinks this came about and what its significance is, I will be presuming my analysis, done in Chapter two, of Weil's conception of perception and her idea of the central role the imagination plays in allowing us to perceive and act in the world. There, I argued that Weil found in Descartes evidence for the view that mathematics could only be done properly with the help of the imagination, thus with the help of geometrical images. But, she equally found evidence for the more widely accepted view that Descartes was the Father of modern physics which took algebra as the mathematics most suitable to physics.

If, as Weil claims, the 17th century scientists learned of the ratio and the 'geometrical image' which issued from the Greeks, then Descartes by using these had a direct connection to this 'ancient science'. But, she argues, Descartes saw no reason to constrain himself to the geometrical image, even though, as was pointed out, he thought this was the superior way to do mathematics; he (as Weil shows and as my analysis in Chapter Two showed) tended to contradict himself on this point of the way to practise science. Descartes was the first one to sever the ties with the Greeks in their tendency to restrict themselves to a reliance on geometrical figures which provided the image and helped them to conceive of how their ideas could relate to nature. As Weil points out:

Descartes was the first to understand that the sole object of science is the quantities to be measured.... After this brilliant insight, geometers from Descartes onward ceased to condemn themselves, as the Greek geometers had done, to making a mathematical expression of whatever degree correspond only to a form of extension having a corresponding number of dimensions – lines for simple quantities, surfaces for the products of two factors, and volumes for the products of three.¹⁰⁷

This major move, according to Weil, made it seem as though "all figures" had "dissolved" so that all that was left was the "straight line". Thus, it was no longer important for them to understand the importance of the image obtained through geometrical figures and how these images maintained a relation to the beauty of the world for the Greeks. Weil argues that, by reducing the goal of science to the measurement of quantities, Descartes released future generations of scientists from constructing geometrical images of particular figures which had particular quantities thus discovering for themselves the theorems they would be using and thereby synthesizing scientific knowledge rather than memorizing it. As long as it was only the results that he was concerned about rather than the understanding of the process, each 'figure' could be thought of as a 'given' – something we assume and

¹⁰⁷Simone Weil, "Science and Perception in Descartes", *op. cit.*, p.39-40.

use. This had the tendency of flattening the whole idea of the figure and its image; once we know that 3:4:5 is the ratio of the lines of a right-angled triangle, it matters little to us that, for Pythagoras, this was a revelation that became the principle of the unity of contraries and all the religious significance that has; also it matters little to us, Weil points out, that this principle is at the very basis of classical and contemporary science. Weil claims that for us ratios have no relation to the figures from which they issued:

Although Archimedes had measured the area enclosed by a segment of the parabola, this wonderful discovery was still of no help at all in similar investigations concerning, for example, ellipse, for it was the particular properties of the parabola that made this measurement possible, through a construction impracticable or useless for any other figure. Descartes was the first to understand that the sole object of science is the quantities to be measured or rather the ratios that determine this measurement – ratios that in geometry, are found only as it were hidden in figures, in the same way that, for example, ratios could be hidden in movement.¹⁰⁸

Thus, it was no longer, among classical scientists, a matter of looking for these ratios in the movements of the world and constructing images of them from the idea that these ratios or proportions suggested to the mind. Classical scientists dropped the images they no longer needed for the most part and applied their ratios directly to the world measuring everything from the point of view that the straight line could be considered equal to the unity between the number one and two(without any concern for the divine love which Pythagoras attributes this to); every other geometrical figure related back to this simple unity which acted like the number one – the fixed point of the balance from which all others could be measured. In this way, classical algebra subsumes the Greek knowledge of the relation between ratios and geometrical figures :

... the relationship of one straight line to another that is parallel to it plays the role of the number one. The relationship between two straight lines that intersect is the next in the order of complexity; the distance between the straight line is no longer constant, but changes like the series of numbers: now is the time to state Thales' famous theorem on which analytical geometry is based(Parallel lines cut proportionate segments on other lines.). All other lines are defined in the same way, in relation to the straight line, by their distance at each point from the straight line. This is how the sequence of numbers – in other words, arithmetic – is applied to geometry. Actually, it is not appropriate to apply arithmetic itself to geometry; rather, we must use an arithmetic carried to the second power that has ... (a) relation to the second type of series(which is said to be appropriate for gaining knowledge of the world) This... is called algebra, (it) is formed by substituting multiplication for addition as the generative principle of the series.¹⁰⁹

Weil argues that Descartes ceased to make the 'geometrical image' an essential part of the application of science to the world in much the same way as the Greeks of the sixth century did – as they too ceased to make the

¹⁰⁸ Simone Weil, "Science and Perception", op. cit., p.39.

¹⁰⁹ Simone Weil, "Science and Perception", op. cit., p.74-75.

object of science the search in the world for proportions and ratios as the Greeks of the 5th and 6th century B.C. had done. She claims that the Greeks of the sixth century made this conscious move of re-directing science because they were seeking knowledge of nature rather than doing science as a way of contemplating the Order and Beauty of the world – a way of re-orienting the soul towards the truth:

So far as is known it was in Greece in the sixth century that the method of mathematics began to be applied to number alone, and this is done by taking the continuous as its object.¹¹⁰

Thus, Descartes and the classical scientists of the Renaissance, Weil argues, preserved not only the science bequeathed to them by Pythagoras and Plato, but also the science of algebra that came from Babylon. The Renaissance, by taking their science from the Greeks of the sixth century, preserved both traditions in one.¹¹¹ The algebra of the Renaissance, Weil argues, is the modern equivalent of the algebra used by the Greeks of the sixth century and, like them, the classical scientists took the continuous to be the object of science. This means that they saw things in the world in terms of the unity between them; the juxtaposition of objects and their movement was not considered significant. In this way, Weil argues they suppressed the discontinuous, the other term in the relation of the 'unity of contraries' – unity and diversity or one and two – that defines necessity. Each thing in the world is at once one (a whole) and number (it has parts); this is the relation between unity and diversity in the world; and necessity as a whole is an Order or an equilibrium by which unity has an edge over diversity – this is the point of balance which issues from 'divine love'. The human mind with the help of the senses has the capacity to conceive this unity which is the Order(equilibrium) of the world but not without the two terms – the discontinuous and continuous or number and space:

...the human mind cannot make do with number alone or with continuity alone; it oscillates between the two. And there is something in nature which corresponds to each of them, for otherwise man could not exist as he is, with a mind which thinks always in terms of number and of space.¹¹²

Weil claims that classical science took human work as its model; and not the human work that acts with method in mind, but the other form of human work that is driven by desire from A to B. However, their model of human work was complicated by the fact that it was driven by desire and it had method hidden in it; it had a

¹¹⁰Simone Weil, "Classical Science", op. cit., p. 4.

¹¹¹See Simone Weil, "Classical Science", op. cit., p. 4-5 where she gives this historical analysis.

¹¹²Simone Weil, "Classical Science", op. cit., p. 5.

direction. The workers always have a direction to their movement. This is the unity that only the human perceiver can see or think; nevertheless, Weil claims the image of it comes from the world. So, the unity of the contraries of unity and diversity or order was taken from the mind of the perceiver and embedded in matter. This differs from the Greeks of Pythagoras in that the unity does not issue from divine love but now from the human mind and yet it dropped both. We can, Weil argues, conceive of the world on the model of human work, but, she says:

I cannot quite succeed in imagining work with no worker, an obstacle which opposes nothing, conditions which do not condition any undertaking.¹¹³

What classical science did was suppress the human mind and perceiver behind their model:

Therefore, in order to establish the analogy between the phenomenon of nature and work it is necessary to eliminate one of the terms by which work is defined and without which it cannot be conceived.¹¹⁴

Weil argues that human work is reduced to a function of distance and weight. Distance is measured by the fact that there is a distance for the human being to cover in order to satisfy any desire whatsoever. For instance, in order to go from my house to the store I have a certain distance to walk. The idea of weight, on the other hand, is derived from the way gravity or the obstacle constrains human action. Both conceptions of distance and weight involve the human perceiver; however, classical science dropped the human perceiver and kept the conception as "functions". To add to this abstraction, the nineteenth century scientists borrowed another idea from the necessity which, together with human work, weighs heavily on human existence: time. Time for human beings, Weil points out, has a direction so that it is never a matter of indifference to them what transformations take place. Simone Weil underlines the importance of time in the social context, an importance which is difficult to translate into algebraic formula: "Cette nécessité qui nous enchaîne étroitement se reflète dans la contrainte social, par le pouvoir qu'elle procure à ceux qui savent brûler des champs et tuer des hommes, choses rapides, sur ceux qui savent faire surgir le blé et élever les enfants, choses lentes".¹¹⁵ They took this necessity and embedded it in their notion of energy. Simone Weil points out that although the notion of time is very significant to human beings, it does not mean

¹¹³Simone Weil, "Classical Science", op. cit., p. 7.

¹¹⁴Simone Weil, "Classical Science", op. cit., p. 6.

¹¹⁵Simone Weil, "La science et nous" *Sur la science*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1966.), p.128-129. Hereafter: "La science".

anything to space: "Or l'espace ne l'exprime d'aucune manière, lui qui est indifférent à toutes les directions."¹¹⁶ That is why classical scientists had to add "entropy" to their notion of energy in order to complete the analogy between work and the phenomenon of nature. Clausius first deployed the notion of entropy and in 1855, he found an algebraic formula to express the relation of entropy to energy. It was the triumph of classical science, Weil claims, and comparable to that moment in antiquity when Eudoxus discovered the integral calculus. Weil argues that what is laudable in classical science is its purifying aspect:

...elle qui cherche à lire à travers toutes les apparences cette nécessité inexorable qui fait du monde un monde où nous ne comptons pas, un monde où l'on travaille, un monde indifférent au désir, aux aspirations, et au bien; elle qui étudie ce soleil qui brille indifféremment sur les méchants et sur les bons.¹¹⁷

They conceived of blind necessity just as the Greeks had. Weil claims that the discovery of the relation between energy and entropy still did not lead to a complete account of the universe. Creation is made up of nature and human nature; thus, a conception of the universe that fails to account for that aspect of human nature that is something other than blind necessity is incomplete. The human worker or manual labourer is not a machine which only supplies energy to move matter; the human worker is not simply a will that desires to go from A to B. The human worker is something else besides all of these. As Weil says in classical science:

The universe it describes is a slave's universe, and man, including slaves, is not wholly a slave.... We are ruled by a double law: an obvious indifference and a mysterious complicity, as regards the good, on the part of the matter which composes the world; it is because it reminds us of this double law that beauty pierces the heart.¹¹⁸

Descartes' dualism of mind being a share in "pure Act" and matter being solely mechanical necessity was, in Weil's eyes, too simplistic; it failed to account for the beauty of the universe and the complexity of the human soul which is complicit with both the good and blind necessity; the human intellect can conceive of method or of a reconstruction of the universe, but if it is not directed in its thought towards the truth, it will not acquire a greater ability to receive the truth.

By leaving out of their conception of the universe all relation to the mysteries granted to us by the grace of God at Creation, classical science's conception of the truth remained defective and incomplete. This was, as we saw above, the source of the separation between science and religion:

¹¹⁶Simone Weil, "La science", op. cit., p. 129.

¹¹⁷Simone Weil, "La science", op. cit., p. 131.

¹¹⁸Simone Weil, "Classical Science", op. cit., p. 11-12.

If Greek science is already classical science it is also at the same time something quite different....What people went to Plato for was a transformation of soul, so that it could see and love God; who today would dream of employing mathematics for that purpose? In Christian Europe, the period when more than any other time men sought for God, the period we call the Middle Ages, came to an end when the study of mathematics was revived; and Pascal, when he was on the point of discovering the algebraic form of the integral calculus, abandoned algebra and geometry because he desired contact with God....What is the most remarkable point is that if we consider, each in turn, the scientific, artistic, and religious ideas of the West since the Renaissance, it appears each time that Greece was the source and model. But appearances are deceptive, because science, art, and the search for God were united for the Greeks and they are separate for us.¹¹⁹

Thus, classical science which began with what Weil calls the 'false Renaissance' caused a disequilibrium in the sense that it directed humanity towards the profane at the cost of the spiritual, as Weil says: "...it is impossible to undo the fact that we have been brought up in an environment almost exclusively composed of profane values."¹²⁰ We have developed she points out, but "in the way a plant can do without chlorophyll" because it gets no light.

As Grant and Simone Weil argued between modern historical theodicy and the various political movements taken up with leading the people through the process, there were hardly any voices left among Christians who were not taken up with the prospects of the equality and charity science could bring. Weil remarks on the state of affairs among Christians in a review of an essay by Rev. Père Sertillanges in which he quotes Renan claiming that the spirit will only reach its height when nature is totally mastered. Weil questions the idea of wanting to master nature, even though for her it is impossible. She wonders how humanity could have so misinterpreted the "original sin":

Thus the Rev. Père Sertillanges, in an essay full of good sense, points out that no man of talent has ever been altogether a scientist, because the limitations of science are obvious. But he adds: 'Renan was right when he said: "The great reign of the spirit will only begin when the material world is entirely subject to man." And that is the task of science.' Very probably Father Sertillanges means no more than to say that the contemplative life demands leisure and that technology is one of the preconditions for leisure. But what he actually says is quite different; and one is tempted to ask him whether the domination of the world by the human spirit was not the definition of the earthly Paradise and whether man's subjection to flesh and matter, which imposes work upon him among other burdens, did not begin at the moment when he became a sinner, and whether the effects of sin can be undone by anything but grace.¹²¹

Not only did the scientism of the 19th century misdirect the attention of Christians away from the truth,

¹¹⁹Simone Weil, "Variant", op. cit., p.47-48.

¹²⁰Simone Weil, "Romanesque", op. cit., p.53.

¹²¹Simone Weil, "Scientism: A Review", *On Science, Necessity, and the Love of God*, op. cit., p.65-66.

Weil argues, but also its view of necessity led to the 'scientism' of the 20th century which totally contradicts the view of nature that at least the Church takes as part of her Dogma; there are "laws of nature" because God is transcendent and immanent. If God is immanent, according to this view, then, His laws are inscribed in the universe. Twentieth century science is not sure about this as their instruments suggest otherwise. This new conception of nature seems to be heading in a direction totally alien to a love of the beauty of the world. However, Weil argues that Christians have totally lost their way to the truth with Contemporary science:

In the present crisis there is something compromised that is infinitely more important than science; it is the idea of truth....¹²²

iii. Contemporary Science Oscillates between Two Conceptions of Necessity : The Contradiction Remains Unrecognized and Necessity is Compromised

Contemporary scientists recognized the faults in 'classical science' by means of a succession of experiments and discoveries. The first fault, Weil argues, was that classical science did not include the human perceiver, the human worker as the one who sees and thinks; the one who provides the unity which gives direction to movement. According to the analogy with human work, classical science supposed that matter had direction analogous to the directed movement of a human body. This, it was discovered was an unwarranted assumption. Weil argued that classical science left out of its account the relation that the imagination establishes, although tenuously, between the intellect's ideas and the world. Contemporary scientists argued that perspective is always a part of the data of an experiment. This gave rise to the second fault of classical science's conception of the universe: their conception of necessity as absolute space was perceived to be incorrect. Contemporary scientists, with their more refined instruments, discovered that nature was not composed of continuity, but was, rather, discontinuous.

Weil argues that it was a good thing that contemporary scientists discovered the discontinuous and the role of human perception in science. Contemporary scientists, Weil argues, perceived the problem accurately but they did not think it through so as to find a reasonable solution. Thus, they carried on without revising anything with respect to classical science and this created an even greater imbalance. Weil does not therefore, not dispute the

¹²²Simone Weil, "Reflections on Quantum Theory", *On Science, Necessity, and the Love of God*, op. cit., p.63. Hereafter: "Quantum".

"return" to recognizing the discontinuous, but rather the way it was done:

What is disastrous is not the rejection of classical science but the way in which it has been rejected. It wrongly believed it could progress indefinitely, and it ran into a dead end about the year 1900; but scientists failed to stop at the same time in order to contemplate and reflect upon the barrier...instead they rushed violently past it, leaving classical science behind them.¹²⁹

Contemporary science, Weil thinks, did not seem to consider the possibility that to conceive of the universe, we need the two terms as the Greeks had perceived earlier. Instead of considering that perhaps it is not for us to try to resolve the duality which afflicts all aspects of necessity, they went to extremes by completely rejecting the continuous or the order inherent in necessity. Weil wonders why it never occurred to them to bring the two together or to recognize that when humans encounter a contradiction, the way to deal with it is not to ignore it as if it could dissolve on its own but rather to confront it with thought. She argues that if physicists considered their study of the world as a way of directing the soul towards the truth, then the idea of contemplating this contradiction would not have been foreign to their thinking. But classical science had left this conception of science behind. As we saw above, the method by which human beings do science always involves a renunciation of the world so as to contemplate what we have received from the imagination through perception. If what we perceive contradicts all that has been known to be true not only theoretically but concretely and coheres with all the ancient knowledge of the universe, then it would seem that one would want to be very certain of the decisions one takes in this regard. Weil attempts to temper our jump into the future with a little looking back. Human nature has not changed and so it is worthwhile asking ourselves if we really want to abandon the principle of non-contradiction. Weil argues that to rush ahead thus turning our backs on reason and our past without due consideration of all that is involved is to make the wrong choice. She claims that whether we choose to ignore the contradictions or recognize them remains our choice; but it has been known throughout all the ancient traditions that for the soul there is only value in recognizing them. That is why she argues Plato and the geometers of the sixth century kept their eye on the equilibrium and contemplated each contradiction until they found the point of unity between the contradictory terms; in this way they could remain faithful to the physicists image of Justice. Weil points out that Plato reminds us of the method of dealing with contradictions and of the value of this method:

¹²⁹Simone Weil, "Quantum", op. cit., p.60.

...man cannot release himself from the contradictions, he can only make good use of them; as Plato knew, everything that the human intelligence can represent to itself involves contradictions, which are the lever by which it raises itself above its natural habitat.¹²⁴

iv. A Mis-application of the Conception of Energy

Weil points out that classical science had reduced physics to the study of energy; thus, it was natural that the physicists with greater precision of instruments would be brought to the study of the atom and would have to deal with the way classical science had developed the notion of energy. As we saw above, the notion of mechanical energy is based on an analogy of human work. Humans cannot work at the microscopic level — among the chaos of the constant movement of particles; thus, this model was not suitable at this level. But, argues Weil, the physicists did not seem to consciously realize why the model was deficient as she agrees it was. So, instead of taking a look at this model itself and conceiving of a new model which could accommodate their findings, Weil argues, the physicists carried on with the old model and put their findings into it. For this Weil judges them harshly because the human worker has no place in the atomic world:

...the scientists forged ahead without revising anything, because any revision would have seemed a retrogression; they merely made an addition. When they ran into the discontinuous they still went on reducing everything to variations of energy; they simply put the discontinuous into energy which deprived the latter of all meaning.¹²⁵

Weil claims that Planck was really the one who brought about this revolution in science through his discovery of the quanta. The now well-known Quantum theory tells us that "energy, or rather action, the product of energy and time, ... (is) a quantity which varies discontinuously, in successive jumps, and these jumps are what is known as quanta."¹²⁶ Weil's argument with the new physics is that we cannot conceive of mechanical energy in this way without changing the notion of mechanical. All mechanical energy is based on the idea of the straight line which as we saw above was based on the idea that when the human being thinks about, say, going from home to the supermarket, he or she thinks of the straight line — even though he or she must pass through every intermediary point along the way, the thought is to go from A to B or A _____ B. Thus, necessity or mechanical energy was defined in terms of the necessary relation that connects a movement that starts in one place to an end point.

¹²⁴Simone Weil, "Quantum", op. cit., p.60.

¹²⁵Simone Weil, "Quantum", op. cit., p.61.

¹²⁶Simone Weil, "Quantum", op. cit., p.50.

Although this movement was continuous, it had a beginning and an end. Weil points out that the same principle was found to apply to all forms of energy discovered between Descartes and Joule; thus, kinetic energy and potential energy were thought to be equivalent to mechanical energy in so far as they could be measured in relation to the balance:

The great idea of the nineteenth century was to assimilate changes other than displacements to work, by means of numerical equivalents....After many experiments...nineteenth century scientists pronounced that in every phenomenon there is an increase or decrease in energy which is equivalent to mechanical energy....The fundamental principle of nineteenth-century science is that it should be possible, in the case of every phenomenon, to represent to oneself, at least theoretically, either the production of the phenomenon by means of displacement of a weight or else the displacement of a weight by means of a phenomenon. That is the only meaning of the word energy...¹²⁷

Thus, Weil argues, mechanical energy had always had a relation to the lever or balance and thereby to the conceptions of the equilibrium, ratio, proportion, and limit which were the notions Greek science bequeathed to us; and which, although it is not sure how, they inherited from the ancient traditions that preceded them. Although, as we saw above, Weil claims that classical science by taking the continuous as their conception of necessity makes a break with Pythagorean science which defines necessity as 'a just blend of unity and that which opposes it', they, nonetheless, at least maintained a link by making the balance and the straight line which is the balance without the arms the basis of their measurement of energy. This is the reason she argues that Planck's break with the past is a situation of crisis which demands that we trace our steps a bit and reflect on what it means to cut off the past.

Planck's discovery of the quanta now asks us to adopt a different mode of thinking of the conception of mechanical energy from that conceived by the nineteenth century. In other words, it was claimed that mechanical energy at the macroscopic level works the way it always had but with one difference: this way of thinking about energy can no longer really represent the true notion of energy. In other words, the notion of atomic energy defines the way things truly are; things are made up of discontinuous movements. So, we have one conception of energy for the macroscopic level and one for the microscopic level; but, the true one is the microscopic notion of energy. Yet, as Weil shows us we cannot really conceive of a human being being able to move in the way it is claimed energy moves at the atomic level; human beings cannot skip over or magically jump from one place to another without passing by all of the intermediary points in between. A quantum leap claims that we should be able to go

¹²⁷Simone Weil, "Quantum", *op. cit.*, p.51-52.

from A to B by making "successive jumps". But this is impossible for us to do and that is why we now have two conceptions of necessity and two conceptions of energy which contradict each other. The question is: Do we have two universes in one? Weil questions how we could allow these contradictions to direct our actions without considering even the lack of common sense involved. How could my body only be parts really? Am I missing something when I think that there is a necessary relation between the movement of my eyes which sees something and wants it and the movement of my body to get up and get it? Should I think that the link is only probable?

Weil argues that we cannot think of ourselves living in a world of only atomic energy; so, although we use this notion we have to have the other notion as well. She questions Planck's method of arriving at this new conception of energy which contradicts mechanical energy. It was in his study of black body radiation at the macroscopic level that he discovered the conditions which led him to introduce the discontinuous into energy. Weil wonders whether it may have been because Planck used in his calculations the notion of probability that he introduced "whole numbers into his formulae". She shows by way of an analogy to a "game of dice" how she thinks "atomic energy" brought the notions of probability and whole number into the equation thus replacing necessity and unity (as the reality).

She points out that chance has always been a component of physics because our minds are not and never have been the same as the world. But, Weil claims, this is "not because the phenomena is indeterminate. It is because I do not know all the data of the problem."¹²³ The '*feeling* of chance' does not come from ignorance but from the way things appear to us as presenting so many possibilities. We 'imagine' all that could be and so we begin to think of the chances of this happening rather than that. Weil explains how people in 'games of chance' use the notion of probability to calculate the chances of predicting what their next move should be in order to be successful. She uses the game of throwing dice to make her point that 'atomic physics is, by basing its calculations on probability, like a game of chance.

Weil points out that dice are constructed so that "they can fall in six ways"; thus, the combinations of numbers that can come up are limited, but the ways the dice can be thrown are not limited and cannot be determined

¹²³Simone Weil, "Classical Science", op. cit., p. 24-25.

by us. However, the more times we throw the dice, the more likely we are at arriving at a more probable "aggregate of possible combinations of numbers". So Weil points out: "If I make a thousand throws, the fall of the dice will be distributed in six classes numerically related to one another."¹²⁹ Because it is not possible to so determine the way the dice are thrown, we imagine that chance plays a major role in the outcome of the different throws. So, she claims, we have the image, while throwing, of all the different possibilities of throws which although differing slightly could be used in bringing about the "effects" which are "distributed in six classes". Thus, Weil points out games of chance demonstrate how the "unknown" suggests to us the element of chance even though strictly speaking there is really no chance because every movement of the game is strictly determined. So, the game of dice demonstrates how it is possible to have chance at the same time as necessity. But, it is only because it is impossible for us to determine the way that we throw the dice that we feel that the results can only be predicted as probable. Chance is involved in the same way in both cases. Thus, Weil is arguing that when we cannot know all the conditions involved and therefore cannot fully determine the results we call our predictions probable and so the chances of being wrong increase. The thrust of her point is that lack of knowledge of all the conditions involved does not necessarily imply that the possible combinations of numbers are infinite instead of limited. Instead, the possible combinations of numbers are limited by necessity; however, they have the image of the infinite.

Atomic physics, Weil argues, can be seen in a similar light. The person throwing the dice can imagine that the way the dice can be thrown is unlimited (although it is not really) and this person will then think (because of the unknown condition) that the best that can be done is to calculate the probabilities of getting the desired number. This is true but only because of the unknown and that is why it is a game of chance. Likewise, Weil argues, the same factor of the "unknown" causes the human observer to think of 'atomic physics' in terms of the probable and to be like games of chance, rather than in terms of a necessity which is strictly determined:

If I conceive of an aggregate of atoms in movement, such that each movement is strictly determined, and call it the universe, and if I ask myself what the development of phenomena will be on a scale inaccessible to the eyes of the observers to whom the atom is invisible, I can conceive absolutely no reason why this development should present any appearance of constancy, regularity, or co-ordination, or why it should be possible to repeat the experiment a second time. And...if it is impossible to repeat the experiment there can be no physics. The conception of atoms immediately makes the success of physics on the human scale appear to be chance.¹³⁰

¹²⁹Simone Weil, "Classical Science", op. cit., p. 24.

¹³⁰Simone Weil, "Classical Science", op. cit., p. 25.

Thus, on the human scale, we cannot be certain about things we do not see; so, that is why physicists, when trying to reconstruct a model of the atom, had to introduce the notion of probability which is inseparable from chance. But, for chance, in relation to probability, to become "an experimentally controllable conception", Weil points out that we have to control the conditions of the experiment because otherwise our abilities to predict the results remain completely chance. This is because probability always implies a distribution between equal probabilities. Weil illustrates how this works in relation to games of chance:

When I consider, in games of chance, the continuous totality of causes and the small number of categories among which the effects are distributed, I recognize that although each effect is rigorously linked to a cause, there is absolutely nothing in the totality of causes which corresponds to those categories, and this is to recognize chance. So all the categories have an identical relation to the causes, which is equally indifferent to all of them; and this is what I mean when I say that they are all equally probable.¹³¹

The way to get unequal probabilities so that we can predict and thus control chance is to control the data being worked with and she illustrates this with the dice. Weil claims that if we control the numbers that we put on the sides of the die by making five of the sides a 1 and the remaining side a 2, then we would get "unequal probabilities". This is how we can experimentally control chance. In the Laboratory, Weil argues, whether scientists are working with the conception of necessity or the conception of probability, they are doing the same thing — trying to control chance by trying to determine the cause- effect relationship which vary according to a function. Thus, she suggests that in the laboratory it makes no difference whether we claim to be looking for necessary relations or probable results. What does make the difference is the reason why we call it probability instead of necessity. Scientists of the twentieth century feel that they must use the conception of probability because they are working with something they do not see, feel, or touch; thus, we have the situation that we saw Weil described above when comparing atomic physics to games of chance. Thus, Weil claims: "The link between atomic physics and the physics of perceptible phenomena can only be established by probability."¹³²

She uses the example of a stone to illustrate her point that we really cannot determine how much energy the stone contains in itself with the model of energy of classical physics; yet, we have no other because as we saw Planck did not change the conception of energy, he simply replaced the idea of continuity with the idea of

¹³¹Simone Weil, "Classical Science", op. cit., p. 25.

¹³²Simone Weil, "Classical Science", op. cit., p. 25.

discontinuity. Weil points out that if we take, as in classical physics, a stone to be a single atom and we calculate its energy on the basis of how much energy it takes to move the stone from A to B, we get a clear measurement of the energy of the stone. But, she argues, if we try to reconstruct the calculation of the energy of the stone given by classical physics by using the new physics' conception of the stone as an indeterminable number of combinations of movements which is affected by the indeterminable number of combinations of movements that make up the air, then we can do nothing else but introduce into the calculation "the notions of chance, probability, average, and approximation". And this is only because of the unknown as in the game of chance. Weil claims it is not because the relations and possibilities are undetermined, but rather, because we feel (because we cannot see) that the possibilities are undetermined due to all the unknown conditions involved. However, in moving between the two scales the physicists did not come to this conclusion. They, instead, thought that the unknown conditions indicated indeterminable conditions that could at best be said to work in accordance with another kind of necessity -- quantum jumps -- that is how we came to have a conception of necessity that contradicts the notion of necessity used to mean order for all the previous centuries known to us. How can we now understand David Hume when he throws doubt on the "necessary connections" between things in the world? The term necessary does not have this meaning any more. This becomes very perplexing to the human mind. Weil could not phantom the idea:

It... becomes necessary either to establish some link between the two physics or else to abandon one or the other completely; ... but it is not what happened. It has been possible to establish a link by *assuming* that atoms are subject to necessities different from those of classical physics.¹³³

Weil claims that this was an unwarranted assumption. First, because the way that Planck established the constant was by means of an experiment that was not a study of "microscopic phenomena, in which thresholds can be measured by experiment, but through the study of macroscopic phenomenon, black body radiation."¹³⁴ Second, she questions why he needed to introduce the notion of probability into his calculation when he was dealing with a macroscopic phenomenon. As she says:

The physicist, Boltzmann, Planck's contemporary, had interpreted (by means of the notion of irreversibility which led to the idea of probability)...such irreversible phenomena as the transformation of mechanical energy into heat energy by friction. Planck tried to reconstruct, by the use of probabilities, while conforming to the data of the

¹³³Simone Weil, "Classical Science", op. cit., p. 26.

¹³⁴Simone Weil, "Quantum", op. cit., p.52.

experiment, the phenomenon known as black body radiation, and it was in the formula for these probabilities that he discovered discontinuity. He introduced discontinuity into energy because these probabilities are functions of energy.

One cannot help wondering whether he was obliged to do this. The experiment certainly did not oblige him, because the measurements, not being microscopic, could not give thresholds but only points of reference between which it was necessary to interpolate. It is always possible to interpolate by means of functions, either discontinuous or continuous. It would seem that Planck might have found functions, which would admittedly be different from those required by classical mechanics since the experiment contradicted the latter, but nevertheless continuous.¹³⁵

Third, Weil suggests that by his choice to use the notion of probability, he was forced to introduce whole numbers into energy because as we saw with the game of dice the calculation of probability can only be done by using whole numbers:

One is tempted to ask whether it was not the very nature of the calculation of probabilities -- which starts from the game of dice and consequently from numerical relations -- which led Planck to introduce whole numbers into his formulae.¹³⁶

Weil illustrates her points by an analysis of Planck's account of his experiment on black body radiation. He used black body radiation because he was looking for "an expression for the relationship between temperature and energy". To do this, he controlled the conditions by looking at a case in which "the conditions for exchanges between bodies would depend on temperature alone and not on the nature of bodies."¹³⁷ So, he used black body radiation because it had this neutral like mode; that is, it is an enclosed space with uniform temperature which has no existence except in the laboratory. Therefore, Planck could vary the temperature and use black body radiation as a constant to see how the raising or lowering of temperature affected a particular case of this body. Then he could reconstruct it mathematically. After using Hertzian oscillators to help him reconstruct this mathematical formulae and not succeeding, he decided that instead of looking for the relationship between energy and temperature that he would look for the relationship between energy and entropy. Weil points out that "he found the second derivative of entropy with respect to energy is proportional to the energy."¹³⁸ But experiments showed that there was a discrepancy between the verification of this relationship in long-wave radiation and short-wave radiation. However, Weil claims that Planck had no trouble finding a formula to overcome this discrepancy, but, for some reason "he was not satisfied". Thus, he decided to reconstruct his formula. It was at this point that Planck decided to consider

¹³⁵ Simone Weil, "Classical Science", op. cit., p. 53.

¹³⁶ Simone Weil, "Quantum", op. cit., p. 53.

¹³⁷ Simone Weil, "Classical Science", op. cit. p. 27.

¹³⁸ Simone Weil, "Classical Science", op. cit., p. 27.

the relation of entropy to energy in relation to black body radiation. Now this is where Weil seems to think Planck made a choice which the experiment did not demand. She claims that he chose to use the idea that in relation to atoms the measurement of entropy is a measurement of probability and to apply this to his experiment with black body radiation. This is how he ended up moving between scales without changing his conception of energy.

Weil is suggesting that black body radiation which is a body on the macroscopic scale perhaps did not demand the introduction of the measure of probability which introduces the discontinuous(number) into the formula in the same way as atoms demand an introduction of this notion. Thus, her claim is that he introduced an element of uncertainty where there was perhaps no reason to, except for the sake of convenience of experiment. He had two constants in his reconstruction of the formula for black body radiation that established the relation between entropy and energy that he was looking for: the mass of the atom and the "constant h" which is the measurement of the entropy we get when we suppose that the molecules of the atom function like humans do so that there is this relation between energy and time just as there is for humans. But because the atom is at a scale we do not see we can only calculate the measurement using the notion of probability as in the game of dice. Now Weil's argument is that at the macroscopic level the constant h is meaningless because classical physicists did not use the measure of probability to calculate energy; or, in other words, classical physicists did not conceive of energy as a number of moving molecules which have only aggregates of relations of equal probability which give rise to a measure of entropy that is in the same way equally probable. Weil quotes Planck saying that he got his formula because he introduced into the calculation a measurement of probability:

Such a constant was meaningless in terms of classical science, but 'it was only thanks to it that the fields or intervals indispensable for the calculation of probabilities could be known'; because 'the calculation of the probability of a physical state rests upon the enumeration of the finite number of equally probable particular cases through which the state in question can be realized'.

It is clear from these words of Planck that the introduction of discontinuity at this point is not the result of any experiment at all (though experimental methods must necessarily have played a part in determining the figure...(of the constant h)), but is solely the result of using the conception of probability.¹³⁹

Thus, what she is saying Planck did was to apply the notion of energy defined in terms of discontinuity or quantum leaps as if it were a notion of energy defined in terms of continuity which caused a contradiction. But,

¹³⁹Simone Weil, "Classical Science", op. cit., p. 27.

rather than recognizing this contradiction and wondering about it or as Weil suggests looking for a function that was not discontinuous and thus did not demand that he introduce into his calculation the notion of probability. Planck and those to follow, she claims, made the assumption that the stone, the simple example Weil gives, really is not an atom in itself whose energy can be determined by measuring how much energy it takes to move it from A to B; rather, the stone, it was assumed, was only moving parts — many atoms — that had no certain relation between them and therefore we can only obtain a probable measure of its energy. But it was not the measuring that really concerned Weil, rather, it was the fact that reality became defined as discontinuity which was somehow necessity itself and that the realm of continuity became appearance or as they now call it the realm of the probable; however, worse still the realm of necessity became the unknown which we could only work with in terms of probability:

In general way, a system that is defined on our scale is not so on the molecular scale; one is obliged on our scale to assume a system of atoms which would appear, to resemble some given system. But, if this kind of correspondence is established, then more than one combination of atoms will correspond to a single well-defined system on our scale; and consequently, if necessity is introduced among atoms, each of these possible combinations is liable to induce, later on, a different state of the system. Thus, when once necessity has been introduced among atoms, the relation between two states of a system, as defined on our scale, is no longer a necessity but a probability; and this not on account of any hiatus in causality, but solely as an inevitable effect of the oscillation of thought between two scales, and by a process analogous to the game of dice.¹⁴⁰

Weil's problem was not with the idea of the discontinuous but with the idea that the physicists were so quick to replace continuity with discontinuity rather than coping with the contradiction involved. Weil's view is that when one encounters a contradiction, one stops and reflects until the point of balance between the two contradictory terms appears to the mind, then one proceeds. However, this is not what happened and by the use of calculation by probability, physics, Weil is suggesting, has become like a game of dice.

Like games of dice, we measure the atoms as though they had a necessary and finite number of possible aggregations; and we know that there are factors involved that are not controllable by us; therefore, we introduce the idea of probability because we realize that due to the uncontrollable factors any combination of atoms is equally probable. Now to predict what combination of atoms would match a given state of a system on the human scale, the physicist would have to calculate all the possible aggregates of atoms that would correspond to that state of the system. Then, Weil points out, the probability of the given state would be a function of the sum of all these possible

¹⁴⁰Simone Weil, "Classical Science", *op. cit.*, p. 28.

aggregates of atoms of the given state of that system. What happened with the dice was that we calculated that there were six classes of possible combinations of numbers and due to the uncontrollable factor we knew that our possibility to predict only increased by the number of throws. Likewise the probability of the desired number coming up, it was discovered after a thousand throws, is a function of the aggregate of the six classes of possible numbers. Even so because of the unknown factor the chances of predicting are still not high in the case of the dice. The important point here is that the calculation involves whole numbers -- that is, we calculate the six classes on the basis of the number of throws. This is done by adding each throw of the same number together. That is why Weil claims that probability introduces whole numbers into any calculation of measurement. In finding ratios or proportions one is not adding numbers, one is multiplying or as Weil says one is using generalized numbers or numbers to the second power.

Now in the case of trying to predict the aggregate of atoms involved in a state of a given system physicists, since Planck, have been measuring the probability of predicting the aggregate of atoms which correspond to the state of a given system by entropy. But, Weil claims, the principle of entropy was introduced into classical physics to account for the fact that not all the energy that is produced when work is converted into heat energy is usable; in other words, when my body in work produces heat, I lose some energy. Thus, there is in my body a tendency towards decay; and the principle of entropy also applies to tools which produce mechanical energy, that is, heat energy. However, Weil claims that the problem arises when physicists apply the principle of entropy to atoms because the energy lost as a result of heat energy may not at all occur at the level where there is atomic movement. She argues that this notion was applied to the idea of the energy lost because of the way the movement produced heat and thus entropy was a function of mechanical energy which was, as we saw above, always defined by continuity or continual movement and measured as such -- the energy it took to go from A to B. Weil is arguing that entropy cannot be assumed to be applicable to the kind of energy produced by movement alone, that is, the movement between atoms which does not produce heat but produces cold for instance. She claims that to our human senses there is not a difference of degree but of kind between heat and movement. So, to take the stone as an example, we would have to imagine that the amount of energy it would take to move the stone from A to B and the loss of energy involved when the body or machine gets hot is similar in kind to the movement of the atoms

inside the stone — whether the stone is hot, cold or otherwise. But, what Weil is claiming is that it is not so: there is no reason to assume that the movement that produces heat in the human body or in a machine is the same in kind to the movement of the atoms in a stone or in any other thing in nature. Thus, she claims entropy cannot be defined in relation to the movement of the world of atoms; therefore it cannot be the means to measure what aggregate of atoms is most probable for a given state of a system:

It is because there is only movement, and not heat, in the purely theoretical world of atoms that entropy has no meaning in that world, considered by itself; and this is why, in order to give it meaning in relation to that world and our world when considered together, it was necessary to introduce the probability which destroyed classical physics. It was not the change of dimensions that was responsible, but the attempt to define entropy, which is a notion alien to movement by movement alone.¹⁴¹

Entropy, Weil points out, was in classical physics a function of energy measured in terms of continuous movement and in atomic physics it has become a function of energy measured in terms of discontinuous movement. But, according to Weil, there is no reason to think that entropy would result from even the combinations of atoms (totalities) called discrete because entropy cannot be a function of number. This means that the calculation of a probability is based on the idea that there are combinations of atoms called discrete and the sum of these adds up to a whole number. Thus, entropy is thought to be the result of these discrete totalities of atoms (or as Weil says of these numbers) which emit no heat energy. But this is impossible, claims Weil, because entropy is a function of energy which produces heat and not of the movement of a number of discrete totalities which do not produce heat energy. Thus, entropy in being a function of mechanical energy was measured in relation to weights and distances, but, Weil argues, in the atomic world, these discrete quantities of energy have no relation to weights or distances:

...since the calculation of probabilities is a numerical calculation, it has to be assumed ...that these combinations of atoms are, as it is called, discrete and that their sum is a number; thus entropy becomes the function of a number, although it was defined, when it was invented, as a function of energy, which increases when the energy assumes, at least partially, the form of heat. This is the same contradiction as it would be if we were to assume, for example, that a quantity could be defined as a function of the distance covered by the runner and that this same quantity is a function of the number of strides he takes. This is the contradiction which appears in the idea of quanta or atoms of energy....¹⁴²

Essentially Weil is arguing that the notion of entropy has a relation to human beings due to the fact that time has a direction for us; thus, the degradation of human energy has a special significance for the human being

¹⁴¹Simone Weil, "Classical Science", op. cit., p. 31.

¹⁴²Simone Weil, "Classical Science", 29.

that it does not have for matter. For human beings, because of the part of the soul that is an opening to God, we are consciously aware that the loss of our energy over time means that we may be approaching death unprepared. But, the degradation of energy does not have any meaning nor does it necessarily denote any real loss of energy. Thus, for Weil, the idea of attributing to matter or to atoms an irreversible direction which suggests that it is tending towards decay or total chaos has no basis in the reality of necessity as defined by 19th century physicists, nor as we saw above does it to the atomic world. This irreversible direction only has meaning to the human soul which has as its essence the choice of a direction -- either to orient itself towards God's love or not. That is why Weil claims that the decay of the body means something to us, but it means nothing to nature:

... nineteenth-century science...invented a new idea by translating, so as to apply it to energy, that necessity which, together with work, weighs most heavily upon human life. It is a necessity connected with time ...and it consists in the fact that time has a direction, so that it is never in any circumstances a matter of indifference in which direction a transformation takes place. We experience this necessity ...in the process of growing older, which slowly and unceasingly compel us But this necessity finds no expression whatever in space, in which all directions are indifferent. Nor is it expressed in weight, for the weights in dynamics are elastic and they never fall without rebounding....¹⁴³

Thus, Weil does not accept the view that the planet earth is constantly losing energy due to entropy and thus is tending towards chaos or decay. However, it seems that she is definitely arguing that science's tendency towards the mastery and domination of nature and refusal to confront the contradictions involved in applying the notion of entropy to atoms of energy is causing a serious disequilibrium that does manifest itself in nature as it could not do otherwise.

v. The Clash with Reason and Truth

Contemporary science's clash with reason came about because they thought that a change of scale -- introduction of the atom -- meant that there was "a radical transformation of the laws of nature", but Weil argues: "reason requires that a change of scale should alter magnitudes but not ratios between magnitudes."¹⁴⁴

Like Grant, Simone Weil saw that contemporary science had brought us to the situation of seeing 'facts' as our ultimate value. But, these facts no longer have any necessity about them -- they are only probable. Weil

¹⁴³Simone Weil, "Classical Science", op. cit., p. 8.

¹⁴⁴Simone Weil, "Classical Science", op. cit., p. 30.

argues that "probability divorced from necessity is meaningless". All we have when facts have been rendered probable, Weil claims, is a "résumé of statistics"; this means that science is now totally directed towards "utility".

Weil argues that by directing science and human thought towards utility, we have first, lost 'the idea of truth'; second, the intellect has become the servant of utility, desires. This happened in two stages. With 'classical science', scientific truth became, generally speaking, the only truth; then, with the decline of classical science and the clash between the two sciences, the idea of 'necessity' which classical science's conception of truth was based on, disappeared and with it, all vestige of 'the idea of truth'. As Weil says:

In the present crisis there is something compromised which is infinitely more precious than science; it is the idea of truth, which had been very closely associated with science in the eighteenth century, and especially in the nineteenth. The association was very erroneous, but the habit has persisted with us. The disappearance of scientific truth appears to our eyes as the disappearance of truth, thanks to our habit of mistaking one for the other.¹⁴³

As was argued above, for Simone Weil the human effort must always have a direction towards something; thus, the human being is always directed towards some thing. For the human intellect involved in theoretical study, Weil argues, that what should be value is the "truth". But, when the idea of truth no longer lives among us, then the effort made by the intellect is directed towards utility. This means that, as Hume thinks is the proper order, 'the intellect serves the passions'; but, what Weil is arguing that the intellect's role is to serve Love via the effort to grasp the truth. And when it serves the passions, it loses its capacity to make clear judgments and to grasp the truth of the Order and its link to the Beauty of the world.

Thus, the high hopes of the humanists of the eighteenth century that we could have liberty, equality, truth, and beauty without grace, she thinks, has turned out badly; the idea of truth has disappeared; the intellect is not autonomous but is instead the slave of the passions and 'public opinion'. This is so because the intellect cannot be autonomous as it has been designed to submit to the truth and when the truth is no longer in its grasp, then the power of another human being or of public opinion is all that is left for the intellect to be directed towards; for, "man always submits his thoughts to some higher control which is superior either in value or else in power."¹⁴⁴ Weil's claim is that science lost sight of the truth because it had not inherited from the Greeks an understanding of how the Order of the world is connected to the Beauty of the world. Without this connection to equilibrium and

¹⁴³Simone Weil, "Classical Science", op. cit., p. 63.

¹⁴⁴Simone Weil, "Classical Science", op. cit., p. 64.

Justice, human beings have no understanding of limits and how to direct the soul to virtue. That is why she thinks that our science has led to a great imbalance which manifests itself in that we have in almost every domain turned away from that which can lead us towards assimilation with God:

...the scientism of today...has lost its rigidity but by a strange paradox is still as narrow as ever(as classical scientism). It is perfect compatible with anti-nationalism, with anti-intellectualism, with surrealism – in fact with absolutely everything except what is authentically spiritual.¹⁴⁷

By reducing science to the service of utility, humanity has taken the path of the giant in the fairy tale who hides his soul in an earthly hiding place. Like the giant though, the hiding place will one day be discovered and the giant will lose his power because he made no effort to act in accordance with Justice. But, Weil thinks, "The mistake of the giant was to put his soul in an earthly hiding-place, in this world....To be safe, one must hide the soul elsewhere."¹⁴⁸ According to Weil, those who hide their souls in an earthly hiding-places commit the sin of idolatry and this generally happens by means of one group setting aside " a social area into which the pair of contradictories, of good and evil, may not enter."¹⁴⁹ Weil points out that:

"Scientists and artists often make science and art a closed area within which there is no place for virtue or vice, whence they conclude that in their capacity of scientist or artist they are absolved from all moral responsibility."¹⁵⁰

Simone Weil suggests that contemporary science has, due to lack of direction towards the truth, fallen prey to idolatry. She argues that they have not taken responsibility for the contradictions they have caused in their clash with classical science (she thought contemporary science was correct to challenge classical science, but not in the way that it did). This, she claims, is not only a great misfortune for Western civilisation, but also for themselves because humans can only go towards the truth by examining their own souls:

As for the scientists themselves, they are naturally the first to pass off their opinions as if they were deliverances of an oracle, for which they have no responsibility and cannot be called to account. This...is intolerable, because it is not legitimate. There is no oracle, but only the opinion of scientists, who are men. They affirm what they believe they ought to affirm, and they are right to do so; but they themselves are the responsible authors of all their affirmations and are accountable for them. They render no account; but this is wrong of them, and in the first place they wrong themselves, because they refuse to be accountable even to themselves.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷Simone Weil, "Scientism: A Review", *Science, Necessary, and the Love of God*, op. cit., p.65. I have added the brackets.

¹⁴⁸Simone Weil, "Religions", op. cit., op. 214.

¹⁴⁹Simone Weil, "Religions", op. cit., p.212.

¹⁵⁰Simone Weil, "Religions", op. cit., p.212.

¹⁵¹Simone Weil, "Quantum", op. cit., p.58-59.

Weil argues that this self-deception can clearly be seen in Planck's own writings. One of the main characteristics of this self-deception is that, as we saw with the Romans and Richelieu, they themselves firmly believe in what they advocate; but, she argues, that is because their thinking is not in accord with Justice or in the case of science with equilibrium; in the case of the Romans their thinking was obscured by their desire for domination, to be the Masters; but, in the case of the scientists their thinking is obscured because it had been directed away from the truth and replaced by utility. This is why, she claims, a man like Planck who was a man of belief and greatly attached to religion did not see that his actions contradicted reason and that his thoughts were contradictory. He did not see that, for Christians, the laws of nature must correspond to the Order and Beauty of the world which do not change with each new generation of scientists. For example, she points out that he says, on the one hand, that "science is something universal which floats in the air above the scientists of every time and place."¹⁵² and, on the other hand, she argues that his words suggest that scientific theories are subject to fashion: ...scientific theories pass away as men's fashions did in the seventeenth century; the Louis XIII style of dress disappeared when the last of the old men who had been young during Louis XIII's reign were dead.¹⁵³

Weil quotes a few passages from Planck to support her claim that contemporary scientists are dependent upon the "use value" of their theories because the constantly changing times demand new opinions. I shall quote only some of the more salient parts of the three passages she cites:

...the inventor of an hypothesis has unlimited scope in the choice of whatever means he may deem helpful to his ultimate purpose (H)e takes a personal part in every physical process that happens before him ... for the purpose of pushing through these difficult thought experiments...to the final establishments of conclusions that will be of wide application. Naturally all such conclusions have, at the outset of their statement, nothing to do with the real research measurements. And therefore an hypothesis can never be declared true or false in the light of such measurements. All that can be asked about it is how far it reaches or falls short of serving some practical purpose or other.

An important scientific innovation rarely makes its way by gradually winning over and converting its opponents....What does happen is that its opponents gradually *die* out and that the growing generation is familiarized with the idea from the beginning.¹⁵⁴

Such thoughts, Weil argues, have increased the separation between science and religion so much so that the scientists do not even see the contradictions involved. They do not see that scientific facts cannot be both

¹⁵²Simone Weil, "Quantum", op. cit., p.56.

¹⁵³Simone Weil, "Quantum", op. cit., p.56-57.

¹⁵⁴As quoted by Simone Weil, "Quantum", op. cit., p.56 from Planck's *Initiations à la Physique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1941).

universal and fashionable. Weil suggests two main reasons why such a brilliant mind would be blind to what she thought were glaring contradictions. First, the element of the social has entered the world of science bringing with it all its baggage of prestige. She claims that the "village of scientists" are closed to outsiders and so their theories get passed between them without any thought that other perspectives from the outside might add a dimension to their ideas. However, Weil recognizes that this situation is a part of the specialization that afflicts this whole society. Simone Weil hoped that the West would once again reflect on the roots of science and reconsider why they have made the choices they did; her eyes were always directed towards all the Beauty they close their eyes to.

The second reason why scientists, today, do not see their contradictions is due to their use of complicated algebraic formulas. Weil, as we saw above, already had a problem with the algebra taken up by Descartes because of how it kept only a hidden relation to the geometrical image that gave rise to ratios and proportions. This led to the suppression of the human perspective involved in their mechanistic view of nature. And they did not admit the notion of the mathematical imagination as there was no place for such a notion in algebra. It really is quite peculiar how contemporary science has brought back the human perspective whilst still side-stepping "the third dimension of thought" (Spinoza) — the thought which connects the intellect and intuition. This is, Weil argues, because the algebra of this century has taken on a different role. Algebra has become a language which is now superimposed on what Grant calls "meaningless matter"; since intuition or imagination (for Weil) is no longer used as an intermediary between the scientist and the world, the scientist, Weil points out, translates his or her ideas into algebraic formulae and then presents them — words hardly play a part any more:

In physics algebra was at first simply a process for summarizing the relations, established by reasoning based on experiment, between the ideas of physics; an extremely convenient process for the numerical calculations necessary for their verification and application. But its role has continually increased in importance until finally, whereas algebra was once the auxiliary language and words the essential one, it is now exactly the other way round. There are some physicists who tend to make algebra the sole language, or almost, so that in the end ...there would be nothing except figures derived from experimental measurements, and letters, combined in formulae.¹³⁵

The main reason Simone Weil rejected the language of algebra was because of the way that it separated the mind and body, the world. Physicists, she thought, were all too ready to take their leave from the world of perceptual reality and move into the realm of theory and the limitless world of atoms. But even the obscure language

¹³⁵Simone Weil, "Quantum", op. cit., p.54.

of algebra cannot release them from the conditions of necessity which they, like all of us, continually encounter each day; thus, Weil argues, their closed systems cannot prevent them from realizing one day that the negligible that they desire to reduce to nothing cannot be annihilated.

OUR ATTEMPT TO SUPPRESS THE NEGLIGIBLE

Both classical and contemporary science have shared the same ambition which is to relieve humanity from the yoke of necessity by mastering nature. Weil argues that this led them to try, each in their respective way, to resolve the essential problem of our duality. And both tried to accomplish this by neglecting the "negligible" -- that which causes us to err, the world itself. It is, she claims, necessary to ignore the "negligible" in order to reconstruct a model from which to work. This is the price we have to pay in using mathematics as an intermediary between us and the world:

What is neglected is always as large as the world, exactly as large, because the physicist neglects the whole difference between something that happens in front of his eyes and a perfectly closed, perfectly definite system which he conceives in his mind and represents on paper by symbols and signs; and this difference is the world itself...the world which makes a closed system absolutely impossible. The world is neglected because it has to be; and, since mathematics cannot be applied to phenomena at a lesser price, it is applied at the price of an infinite error.¹⁵⁶

However, not even the 'closed system' of the scientist is free of the negligible because there is in 'mathematics' itself an infinite error implied by the fact that we need objects and images to do it. Weil draws an analogy between how the geometer uses the figure she or he draws on the blackboard to allow her or him to imagine the circle itself or the straight line itself (the geometrical ideas) and how the physicist uses an observation or an experiment to allow her or him to imagine the idea of the object itself. Her suggestion is that the method the Greek geometers' used, without having to use modern technological instruments, but, nevertheless doing experiments, was as good in terms of allowing them to understand the universe. For instance, she points out that:

Plato, who knew that the straight line of geometry is not the one that is drawn, knew also that the stars which describe circular and uniform movement are not the ones we see at night; and Archimedes, who had read Plato, certainly knew without having needed to observe Brownian movement that no fluid in nature is homogeneous or at rest....¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶Simone Weil, "Classical Science", op. cit., p. 31-32.

¹⁵⁷Simone Weil, "Classical Science", op. cit., p. 32.

Both contemporary physicists and Greek physicists used the same method in their "closed systems" because Weil argues there is only one scientific method: the geometric figure on the blackboard is always an imitation of the pure geometrical idea; and likewise, "the experimental device is always an imitation of a purely theoretical system".¹⁵⁸ Both use their methods as a way of constructing an order for themselves and mathematics is used towards this end. However, Weil argues, as pure as the order is that mathematics helps the physicists construct, it could not have been done without the concrete world from which they draw every single image or every single observation. All of those geometrical ideas and theoretical systems have their source in the relation between mind and the world.

Given that all of the physicists' ideas originate in the world and it is to the world that they return with their models and constructs, Weil argues that they must ask themselves certain questions. Physicists are concerned about the relation between their theoretical constructs and the world. This relation is the same as the one between sight and movement, and, Weil argues, it is one of the essential mysteries of our human existence — they above all, she thinks, should contemplate on how their constructs are and will always be involved in trying to imitate the ideas in their minds with the movements of their bodies; yet, the why of this relation remains mysterious:

But when one has understood that the lines drawn by the geometer and the objects of the physicist's observation or experiment are imitations of mathematical ideas, one has still learned very little. One still does not know what that relation is which for want of a better term is described as imitation....What constitutes the difference between these two chalk marks (the one drawn as the straight line and the other as the curve)? The geometer, being interested in the straight lines, can leave that question aside, but the physicist cannot, because he is interested, not in closed systems which he constructs in his mind with the help of symbols and figures, but in the relation between these systems and the things in the world. The relation is impenetrably obscure....This kinship between movement and sight, which is the foundation of perception is a mystery....♣¹⁵⁹

Weil takes, for example, how the straight line involves, even in our minds, the relation between a direction and movement; we cannot think of the straight line without thinking of going from one point to another and whether we do this in our minds or on paper or in the world the same "necessities" are involved. The straight line always has a project about it which connects sight and movements. From the very moment that babies begin to move their own bodies, it is this project that is in their minds; they see something desirable and they discover through trial and error how to move to get it; and what the baby has in mind is the object desired and the project to move from the

¹⁵⁸Simone Weil, "Classical Science", op. cit., p. 33.

¹⁵⁹Simone Weil, "Classical Science", op. cit., p. 34.

place A to the place B. Now, Weil's argument is that the baby and the physicist would not care to move from A to B (the baby) or to construct systems and bring them to the world without that initial stimulant that is perceived and comes from the world itself. The necessities that the physicist tries to imitate thus come from the world itself and not from the mind; however, they seem to come from the mind because physicists, unlike the baby, take the object perceived that stimulated their project and turn away from the world and reflect on how it would be possible to approach the project in the most perfect way possible; thus, with the help of number and geometrical ideas and systems of ideas humans achieve their projects. But, argues Weil, the ideas come first from the stimulant provided by the world and not from the mind:

We are aware each time we think of them that the pure straight line, the pure angle, the pure triangle, are the work of an effort of attention in detaching itself from sensible phenomena and acts; and so it seems to us that these conceptions come from out of our minds; but the necessities and impossibilities which are attached to them and which impose themselves on our minds, whence do they come? For example the impossibility of counting the points in a straight line.... Secondly, the effort of attention necessary to detach one self from the objects and think of a pure point or straight line or angle can only be achieved with the help of objects.... And it is not just any object that can help us to imagine any idea; among these ideas which we form by detaching ourselves from objects our imagination finds links between a certain particular object and certain particular ideas.¹⁰⁰

This mysterious relation between the particular necessities we encounter in the world and the particular ideas they conjure up in our minds, Weil claims, remains and will always remain impenetrable for the human being. Nevertheless, she argues that we achieve a better grasp of this mysterious relation if we admit that the "geometrical ideas" are the "laws of nature" rather than "mere epitomies derived from a large number of successful cases" because the first conception of this relation allows us to account for the necessities which are attached to our constructs whereas the latter does not. The image reminds us of the negligible and that there is a distance between the straight line (as opposed to the angle) I see in the branch of the tree outside and the one in my mind and the figure I draw and it reminds us that the world is and is not the same as the way I imagine and reconstruct it to be:

A branch tossed by the wind bends a little, but it still suggests to me a straight line in relation to an angle.... The purity of mathematical ideas, the necessities and impossibilities which are attached to them, the indispensable images of these ideas which are furnished by objects which do not resemble them, the success of actions performed by confusing, in voluntary error, the objects with the ideas they image — each of these is a distinct and irreducible mystery, and if we find a solution for one of them we do not diminish but, on the contrary, we deepen the impenetrable mystery of the others. For example, if we admit that geometrical relations really are the laws of the universe, we make it more astonishing than ever that actions should be successful which are regulated by a deliberately and infinitely erroneous application of those relations; and if, on the other hand, we admit that they are

¹⁰⁰ Simone Weil, "Classical Science", *op. cit.*, p. 35.

mere epitomies derived from a large number of successful cases, then we fail to account for the necessity which is attached to them and which does not appear in an abstract epitome of them, nor for the purity which is their essence and which makes them foreign to the world: and so on.¹⁶¹

Thus, the physicists can choose to think that there is no necessary relation between the ideas in his mind and the relations found in the world, but they cannot release themselves from being dependent upon this impenetrably mysterious relation to which they owe everything; and they cannot release themselves from their imaginations which is their very imperfect link to the world and permits them to succeed or not in an experiment. Weil argues that by the fact that the human condition which is involved in every experiment of the physicist he or she cannot ignore the negligible:

...the physicist manipulates objects in three-dimensional space and after the manipulation he leaves them exposed to change. Sometimes, when thus left, they continue to evoke the same mathematical ideas in the physicist's imagination as they did while he was manipulating them; and in that case the experiment has succeeded. This seems a strange way of describing a successful experiment; and yet it is impossible to define the relation by which objects are images of mathematical ideas, except through the human imagination. If it were true as has often been claimed, that what the physicist neglects in an experiment is an error which can be reduced as much as is desired, then the deliberate omission of the negligible would amount to taking a limit in the sense of the integral calculus, and the idea of the negligible would have a mathematical significance. But that is not true; it is never true, even in the most favourable cases. For example, it is not true in fact that by taking pains we can get a surface as smooth as we wish....¹⁶²

Thus, just as when the baby sees and desires something outside the window which the baby can only have by taking the image seen and trusting that it does correspond to what it suggests to the baby's mind and then by making the effort to go and get it, thus seeing whether or not it does really correspond to the object desired, the physicist must trust his or her image of the indications that he or she gets of the atom and make the effort to try to see if the image is correct and he or she does this at "the price of the infinite error". No matter how accurate our instruments become, the same relation occurs; when the scientist gets an indication of an atom and of how its particles make up the atom, he or she chooses to trust the image it suggests to his or her mind; and it is by trusting that the imagination does link the mind to the world that gives the scientist the confidence to go away and reconstruct his or her systems; and then, take them back to the world to see as Weil says whether they still present the same image. The relation is one of appearance and reality or necessity; and although the unity between the idea and the world is never totally secure or perfect because it is subject to that unbridgeable gap that makes up our

¹⁶¹ Simone Weil, "Classical Science", op. cit., p. 35-36.

¹⁶² Simone Weil, "Classical Science", op. cit., p. 37.

being, it more often than not goes beyond probability. It is only because the physicist does not perceive with his or her own senses that he or she is willing to think that the appearance is the reality and that therefore the duality does not exist.

Thus, Simone Weil's critique of contemporary and classical science is based on her dualistic conception of the human condition. Scientists, or any other human construction of reality, cannot change the ultimate duality which has been inscribed in the Universe at Creation; our human condition is such that there is a gap between the thoughts we have and the actions that issue from these thoughts and the same gap afflicts our ability to perfectly know the reality of necessity; nevertheless, that is no reason to call necessity appearance. As Christ has shown us, Weil argues, this duality is at once our misery and the indication of the way. This has been considered the highest knowledge attainable by humans for many millenium and it always directs humans towards the acceptance of the reality of this duality which brings much misery and much beauty, joy. Science is the study of the reality and mystery involved in this duality which is manifest to our senses by means of the image scientists use to reconstruct the Order of the world; and as Weil says: "The contemplation of this image of the order of the world constitutes a certain contact with the beauty of the world".¹⁶³ It is only through science, Weil thinks, that we in the West can re-connect ourselves to this ancient knowledge of our ultimate duality; but, only through a science that recognizes this duality in its true sense:

Today one might think that the white races had almost lost all feeling for the beauty of the world, and that they had taken upon them the task of making it disappear from all the continents where they have penetrated with their armies, their trade and their religion....and yet at the present time, in the countries of the white races, the beauty of the world is almost the only way by which we can allow God to penetrate us...

...a sense of beauty, although mutilated, distorted and soiled, remains rooted in the heart of man as a powerful incentive. it is present in all the preoccupations of secular life, if it were made true and pure it would sweep all secular life in a body to the feet of God, it would make the total incarnation of the faith possible.¹⁶⁴

Although humans of the West have succeeded in cutting themselves off from their spiritual roots which connected the Christian vocation to the Greek vocation, and thereby connecting it to the 'identical thought', they have not and cannot succeed in making their human condition disappear. Through their duality, in spite of themselves, they will always remain, albeit unknowingly, rooted in "those millenary traditions ... the traditions of

¹⁶³Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.125.

¹⁶⁴Simone Weil, *Waiting*, op. cit., p.117-118.

India, Persia, Egypt, Greece, and perhaps others as well."¹⁶³ People for centuries, Weil argues, have celebrated the "mystery" of this duality; we, in the West have inherited from the Greeks a way of contemplating this relation through "scientific knowledge". But, by separating the Christian revelation and Greek thought which Weil claims happened in the 13th century, we lost sight of the way.

¹⁶³Simone Weil, "Romanesque", *op. cit.*, p.47.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE COLLECTIVITY AS BARRIER OR *METAXU*

By way of concluding this thesis on the development of Simone Weil's philosophical anthropology we will analyse the final period of her work, especially through *L'Enracinement*, her last work.¹ As I pointed out in my introduction, Simone Weil wrote *L'Enracinement* and many other essays, now collected in *Ecrits de Londres et dernières lettres*,² in London while she was working on an assignment for the Free French.

Her assignment was to examine a number of "projects" that were developed by the Resistance committees in France. These projects were concerned with the reorganization of France after the war. Consequently, Simone Weil was given many concrete problems concerning France's future to think about. She wrote *L'Enracinement* while thinking about these projects. Thus, this concluding chapter will often be referring specifically to France's social, political, and historical situation.

Mary Dietz claims, in *Between the Human and the Divine*³, that Simone Weil's final analysis of the social and political realm in *L'Enracinement* is, in contrast to her historical and metaphysical commentary on the social as the Great Beast, optimistic about the possibility of there ever existing a healthy collectivity.⁴ However, as I pointed out in Chapter Three, Simone Weil has throughout her thought had this optimistic view of the social realm which she fully develops in *L'Enracinement*. Dietz claims that in "Reflections concerning the causes of liberty and social oppression"⁵ and in "Human personality"⁶ that Simone Weil was "conceptually compelled to reject the possibility of a healthy collectivity because the "we" is (still) a dangerous one."⁷ Dietz recognizes that in

¹Simone Weil, *L'enracinement: prélude à une déclaration des devoirs envers l'être humain*(1949; Paris: Gallimard, 1977).

²Simone Weil, *Ecrits de Londres et dernières lettres*(Paris: Gallimard, 1957).

³Mary Dietz, *Between the Human and the Divine: the political thought of Simone Weil* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1988).

⁴Dietz, *Between*, op. cit., p.140.

⁵Dietz uses the English translation Simone Weil, "Reflections concerning the causes of liberty and social oppression," in *Oppression and Liberty*, trans. Arthur Wills and John Petrie, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1973).

⁶Dietz uses the English translation Simone Weil, "Human personality," *Selected Essays 1934-1943*, trans. Richard Rees (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

⁷Dietz, *Between*, op. cit., p.140.

"Reflections concerning the causes of liberty and social oppression," Simone Weil does suggest a way to improve the situation for the individual by organizing society so that individuals can have every possibility to exercise their uniquely human capacity to think in their work. Dietz characterizes Simone Weil's ideal of a free society put forth in "Reflections concerning the causes of liberty and social oppression" as an "antidote to the collectivity." Simone Weil, she claims, "robs politics of almost all of its substance" when she insists that the individual must attempt to escape the "social" and give his/her attention to the "impersonal part of the soul." Dietz argues that what makes *L'Enracinement* so "remarkable" is that Simone Weil no longer expresses "hostility to the collectivity" but rather "she turns her full attention to the *metaxu*, 'those earthly treasures' as the source of human roots... 'roots' themselves are no longer affixed to the heavens, but brought back to the earthly ground, the 'human milieu.'"⁸ Again, in contrasting "Reflections concerning the causes of liberty and social oppression" and *L'Enracinement*, Dietz claims that the main themes of "individual liberty and methodical thinking" of "Reflections concerning the causes of liberty and social oppression" virtually vanish in *L'Enracinement*.

I disagree with Mary Dietz's main claim that Simone Weil changed her view on the collectivity between the time she wrote "Reflections concerning the causes of liberty and social oppression," her metaphysical works, "Human personality," and the time she wrote *L'Enracinement*. I also disagree with Dietz's claim that the collectivity takes on a value it never had for Simone Weil earlier. As was argued in Chapter three of this thesis, Simone Weil always conceived of the possibility of a human community like the one she thought the people of the Langue D'Oc region of the south of France had in the 10th and 11th centuries; also pointed out above as early as 1937, she had this positive conception of the social realm. Furthermore, Weil's critique has always been specifically directed towards the social as a form of idolatry and not towards the social as such. For example, she argues in "A War of Religions" that it is possible for a whole people to have a living religion that would orient them towards mysticism and this could only happen in a social realm. The people of antiquity attempted to make such a religion live in human communities and it seems she thought that they succeeded.⁹ What I will demonstrate in this conclusion is that Simone Weil continues to think that the social realm is an integral part of the human being. That is why she

⁸Dietz, *Between*, op. cit., p.140.

⁹See Simone Weil, "Religions", op. cit., p.214-215.

attempted in "Reflections concerning the causes of liberty and social oppression" to suggest a way of re-organizing society so that each and every individual would be able to participate in what is essentially human: thinking and acting with method. In that essay as shown in Chapter Two of this thesis, Simone Weil analyses how the society can be the most oppressive to the individual or the most liberating. Both of these analyses were claimed by her to be ideals. In other words, the social realm can transmit the worst evils or the highest good to the individual and any combination of evil and good. In that essay, Simone Weil only begins her formulation of a way in which the social realm could nourish rather than oppress individual thought through what she saw to be the unique spiritual treasure of Western civilization: the idea that human labour could be considered as a value which could orient the individual soul towards the Love which Christ preserved for His Father. Rather than rejecting this idea in *L'Enracinement*, as Dietz claims, I will demonstrate that Simone Weil shows how the western social order could make work with a method its spiritual core. Thus, the main themes of "Reflections concerning the causes of liberty and social oppression" do not vanish in *L'Enracinement* as Dietz argues. Work with a method and liberty, as I pointed out in Chapter Two, are essential to human nature. I will show that Simone Weil considers them among the main elements of a healthy social order, and essential to re-rooting the rural people and the workers.

I also disagree with Dietz's presentation of the uniqueness of *L'Enracinement* in her claim that Simone Weil ceases to be "hostile to the collectivity" and that she now roots the human being in the earthly treasures of the collectivity rather than in the heavens. Most of Simone Weil's analyses that characterize the collectivity or the social as the Great Beast have been balanced by suggestions of how to bring about social harmony in the collectivity. In *L'Enracinement* she operates with the same method of analysis: she demonstrates the causes of "uprootedness" as many forms of "idolatry" and then she suggests ways to re-grow roots or to revitalize diseased roots. But what is most striking, as I will demonstrate more thoroughly from the text, is Simone Weil's ability to show us that these roots are earthly, but to be rooted they must relate to the "heavenly." On the one hand, what makes a collectivity a *metaxu* is that it can provide the conditions for the spiritual development of the individuals which form a part of it. Otherwise, there is no point in talking about a collectivity as an intermediary. An intermediary has to lead to something, and according to Simone Weil, all intermediaries lead to God: "Les choses créées ont pour essence d'être

des intermédiaires.... Elles sont des intermédiaires vers Dieu. Les éprouver comme talles."¹⁰ Thus, the direction is towards the spiritual.

On the other hand, what makes a collectivity earthly is that each one belongs to a specific place and time. I think the only way Simone Weil's distinction between the collectivity as the Great Beast and the collectivity as a *metaxu* can be understood is to maintain her distinction between the two sources of morality. When a collectivity draws its morality from the supernatural realm, then it will, according to Simone Weil, root individuals in an environment bearing traditions which are eternal, for "L'Enracinement est autre chose que le social."¹¹ But when a collectivity draws its morality from the social realm, that is when its morality is subservient to an idolatrous form of society as Weil saw the Roman society to be, it is, according to Simone Weil's analysis, the Great Beast in Plato's sense. Societies which are totally subservient to social morality are, in *L'Enracinement*, called "dead collectivities" because they devour souls, they "uproot" individuals from the knowledge of their eternal destiny. It is this distinction between two different kinds of collectivities which allows us to see her analysis of the collectivity as the Great Beast (which as we saw above she also defines as idolatry) in her use of the term "collectivity" in "Human personality" -- an analysis which she continues to use in *L'Enracinement*. Then, in her positive use of the term collectivity in *L'Enracinement*, we could understand her idea of a collectivity which can be imbued with a supernatural morality in the form of a religion which orients the people towards mysticism. It is in relation to this kind of collectivity that she claims:

Qu'est-ce qu'il est sacrilège de détruire? Non pas ce qui est bas, car cela n'a pas importance. Non pas ce qui est haut, car, le voudrait-on, on ne peut pas y toucher. Les *metaxu*. Les *metaxu* sont la région du bien et du mal.

Ne priver aucun être humain de ses *metaxu*, c'est-à-dire de ces biens relatifs et mêlés (foyer, patrie, traditions, culture, etc.) qui réchauffent et nourrissent l'âme et sans lesquels, en dehors de la sainteté, une vie humaine n'est pas possible.¹²

An essential part of the human being is to be rooted in a particular collectivity. Thus, a major aspect of Simone Weil's philosophical anthropology is devoted to considering what a collectivity would be if it were to fulfill its role as a *metaxu* for each and everyone of the human beings forming a part of it. The carnal part and the eternal

¹⁰Simone Weil, *La pesanteur et la grâce*, (1947; Paris: Plon, 1979), p.146-147.

¹¹Weil, *La pesanteur*, op. cit., p.165.

¹²Weil, *La pesanteur*, op. cit., p.147-148.

part -- the impersonal -- of the soul make up the human being and both parts of the soul relate to the collectivity. However, the main value of this relation is to remove "... ce qui est susceptible d'empêcher la croissance et la germination mystérieuse de la partie impersonnelle de l'âme."¹³ Since this is the main value of the relation between the human being and the collectivity, an essential aspect of being rooted is to have received within one's community the spiritual treasures preserved from the past which give one certain expectations for the future. These roots are necessary because the individual "a besoin de recevoir la presque totalité de sa vie morale, intellectuelle, spirituelle, par l'intermédiaire des milieux dont il fait naturellement partie."¹⁴ Simone Weil sought to define all the physical and moral needs that should be satiated if a collectivity were to be an ideal culture bed.

Weil, like Plato, Rousseau, and Kant recognized that it is not enough to have defined what belongs to human nature; a philosopher must also consider how the existing society could be given an ideal model which can speak to the existing leaders and people. This model should relate to the existing society; for example, Rousseau's social contract was meant to relate to an agrarian society and Kant's political theory was set up to relate to the modern state. Likewise, Simone Weil's political theory was written to speak to the leaders of post-war France and to relate to the modern state of post-war France.¹⁵ In spite of the peculiarities which relate to the specific times, all of these theories have some things in common: they all attempt to account for the freedom of the individual, and individuals are considered to be equal. Nevertheless, Rousseau, Kant, and Simone Weil remain closer to the Greeks than the Classical English Liberal political theorists, who followed Hobbes by defining freedom in terms of freedom from government interference. Rousseau, Kant, and Simone Weil, like the Greeks, thought that society should provide the means to freedom, ie. it is only through society that one can attain one's freedom.¹⁶ Society or the government stands in the way of freedom when there is insufficient social order or when a state becomes totalitarian, and oppressive: "... la société est ce qui sépare du mal (de certaines formes du mal) comme par une barrière; une

¹³Simone Weil, "La personne et La sacre," *Ecrits de Londres et dernières lettres* (1957; Paris: Gallimard, 1980), p.21.

¹⁴Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.61.

¹⁵However, Simone Weil was not at all content with the centralised state; for, as we saw above in her historical critique, she argued that those forms of social life that gave everything over to the building of the state were idolatrous societies.

¹⁶See Isaiah Berlin, "Two concepts of liberty," *Four Essays on Liberty* (London, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p.123.

société de criminels ou de vicieux, fût-elle composée de quelques hommes, supprime cette barrière."¹⁷ Society or the government only stands in the way of freedom if it is poorly organized and oppressive. Thus the task for Rousseau, Kant, Hegel and Simone Weil was to organize society and the government so that it could have laws and a social order which avoided oppressing its people. These philosophers were like Plato and Aristotle in so far as they saw the collectivity as a *metaxu* for the individual.

As was pointed out above, to say that a collectivity is a *metaxu* for the individual is to say that there is something beyond the collectivity for which it is a stopping off point. This "something beyond" has been described by Simone Weil in many ways, ie. as a "reality outside of this world," or as "the Good."

As we saw from the examination of Simone Weil's religious metaphysics in Chapter Three of this thesis, there is a Good which transcends of all existence, and yet is the sole foundation of all the good in the universe. Thus, everything which is good in the universe must have a relation to the Good and this accounts for the difference between what is good and what is evil. But this does not mean to say that evil is the opposite of the Good. Simone Weil claims that this cannot be so because Goodness is one and transcendent. It has no opposite. That is why there exists another good which is radically different from the Good because it is the opposite of evil and correlated to evil. Thus, the relative good is derived from the Good through a relationship which is not commutative.

It is only the individual human being who can establish the relationship between Good and the relative good of this world. This relationship can only be established when the individual detaches himself or herself from the social world because: "La relation sort violemment du social... La société est la caverne...."¹⁸ Simone Weil is not saying that an individual must live in another realm but rather that to nurture the impersonal part of the soul the individual must develop the faculty of attention by means of the implicit forms of the love of God. Above, the love of thy neighbour and the love of the beauty of the world were discussed.¹⁹ Thus, to be oriented towards the mystical is to nurture one's "uncreated part of the soul" -- the impersonal part of the human being.

¹⁷Weil, *La pesanteur*, op. cit., p.162.

¹⁸Weil, *La pesanteur*, op. cit., p.161.

¹⁹For a more in depth study of these ways see Eric O. Springsted's *Christus Mediator*, op.cit.

A THE IMPERSONAL PART OF THE SOUL IS SACRED

Although this conception of the part of the soul that is an opening to God was implicit throughout her thought concerning the "identical thought" of the tradition and in her essays on Greek thought, she really and expressly makes it her own in "La Personne et le Sacré"²⁰. In this essay, Simone Weil changes what she called "the eternal part of the soul" in her religious metaphysics to "the impersonal part of the soul". As I pointed out above in the third chapter of this thesis, Simone Weil claims that God is a Person because God is Good and cannot be thought of in any other way; and God is impersonal in the way that His Order is inscribed in the world and He comes to us "in secret". Thus, as Simone Weil claims in her metaphysics the eternal part of the soul of each human being is that in us which belongs to God — an opening to God; therefore, according to her mystical thought this part of human beings must be called the "impersonal part of the soul" because anything which is an opening for God in the world must be referred to as impersonal for this is how God resides in the world. Simone Weil insists on distinguishing the carnal part of the soul — that is, the person — from the impersonal part of the soul, which belongs to God because she maintains her dualistic religious metaphysics and philosophical anthropology. This is why she claims that the term "person" or "human personality" cannot express that which is truly sacred in every human being:

Voilà un passant dans la rue qui a de longs bras, des yeux bleus, un esprit où passent des pensées que j'ignore, mais qui peut-être sont médiocres.
Ce n'est ni sa personne ni la personne humaine en lui qui m'est sacrée. C'est lui. Lui tout entier, Les bras, les yeux, les pensées, tout

Si la personne humaine était en lui ce qu'il y a de sacré pour moi, je pourrais facilement lui crever les yeux. Une fois aveugle, il sera une personne humaine exactement autant qu'avant. Je n'aurai pas du tout touché la personne humaine en lui. Je n'aurai détruit que ses yeux.²¹

Simone Weil claims that to put out the eyes of a person is not to take away the personality of that human being: a blind person is every bit as much a person as one who sees. But it does significantly change something and that something is not the person nor the human personality (which is unique to each one), rather it changes that

²⁰Simone Weil, "La personne et le sacré," *Ecrits de Londres et dernières lettres*(1957; Paris: Gallimard, 1980), p.11-44.

²¹Weil, "La personne et le sacré", op. cit., p.11-12.

which is, according to Simone Weil, universally and necessarily the same in every human being:

Il y a depuis la petite enfance jusqu'à la tombe, au fond du coeur de tout être humain, quelque chose qui, malgré toute l'expérience des crimes commis, soufferts et observés, s'attend invinciblement à ce qu'on lui fasse du bien et non du mal. C'est cela avant toute chose qui est sacré en tout être humain.

Le bien est la seule source du sacré. Il n'y a de sacré que le bien et ce que est relatif au bien.²²

There is nothing in the term "person" nor in the term "human personality" to relate this desire that good rather than evil be done to the individual or the "cry against evil or injustice". For, as we saw in the historical analysis above, natural justice is the relation of person to person which recognizes only the realm of the possible or "if there is equal necessity on both sides". This cry that good and not evil be done to one is the cry of the afflicted. It is the echo of the eternal cry which came from Christ on the cross. Thus, it can only be from the impersonal part of the soul which corresponds to God's presence through His Son that one draws one's expectation that good and not evil should be done to one. That is why Simone Weil claims that when harm is done — that is, if one's eyes are mutilated by another human being — what is affected is the "profound unchanging expectation of good"; that is, that which is sacred in the individual. When a human being is harmed in this way, his/her cry is always one of deep humiliation — just like that of Christ's — this cry always asks: "Pourquoi me fait-on du mal?" Simone Weil claims that this is the cry of the severely injured and of the afflicted who cannot express themselves, and we do not hear it. After a while these people become like the slaves of the Greeks — they can cry no more:

Chez ceux qui ont subi trop de coups, comme les esclaves, cette partie du coeur que le mal infligé fait crier de surprise semble morte. Mais elle ne l'est jamais tout à fait. Seulement elle ne peut plus crier. Elle est établie dans un état de gémissement sourd et interrompu.²³

There are two reasons why none of these cries which come from the impersonal part of the soul can be heard: first, often the people who feel the pain of injustice do not have the language to express themselves; second, there are very few human beings who are attentive enough to be able to hear their cries. Therefore, Simone Weil argues that for these people to be able to make proper use of public freedom of expression and for them to be heard, these obstacles must be remedied:

Il faut d'abord que l'éducation publique soit telle qu'elle lui fournisse, le plus possible, des moyens d'expression.

²²Weil, "La personne et le sacré", op. cit., p.13.

²³Weil, "La personne et le sacré", op. cit., p.14.

Il faut ensuite un régime, pour l'expression publique des opinions, qui soit défini moins par la liberté que par une atmosphère de silence et d'attention où ce cri faible et maladroit puisse se faire entendre.²⁴

Injustice is always and everywhere equivalent to the infliction of evil, which is, in turn, equivalent to doing harm to what is sacred in the human being: the desire for the good.

Those people who are deaf to the cry of the extreme suffering of the afflicted are merely a "weaker mode" of those "who inflict the blows which provoke this cry." To remain complacent in the midst of the suffering is to be in an almost equivalent state of mind as those who take pleasure in having the power to make people suffer and use it in this way. Both states of mind are cultivated for their agreeableness — which in each case means that the existence of other human beings ceases to be an obstacle to one's comfort. If one acknowledges their suffering one has to remain uncomfortable and seek justice because: "... c'est aux hommes à veiller à ce qu'il ne soit pas fait de mal aux hommes...."; and "La justice consiste à veiller à ce qu'il ne soit pas fait de mal aux hommes."

Simone Weil seems to adopt the Hegelian perspective, as developed in his *Philosophy of Right*, on person and personality. Hegel argues that human beings are only persons, and have "rights" as persons only in the abstract. This can only be expressed as a command which tells us what not to do, i.e., Kant's categorical imperative. It gives us nothing positive and therefore does not translate into positive action. The reason is that, in order to recognize myself as a person, I need to externalize myself, impress my will on things, to develop my "personality." This involves taking possession of things and of myself and it involves being recognized by others as a property owner.²⁵ Simone Weil seems to hold the same view of personality:

A notre époque, où les écrivains et les savants ont si étrangement usurpé la place des prêtres, le public reconnaît, avec une complaisance qui n'est nullement fondée en raison que les facultés artistiques et scientifiques sont sacrées. C'est généralement considéré comme évident, quoique ce soit bien loin de l'être. Quand on croit devoir donner un motif, on allègue que le jeu de ces facultés est parmi les formes les plus hautes de l'épanouissement de la personne humaine.

Souvent, en effet, il est seulement cela. Dans ce cas, il est facile de se rendre compte de ce que cela vaut et de ce que cela donne.²⁶

²⁴Weil, "La personne et le sacré", op. cit., p.14.

²⁵T.M. Knox, ed. and trans., *Hegel's Philosophy of Right* by G.W.F. Hegel (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), p.38-64.

²⁶Weil, "La personne et le sacré", op. cit., p.16.

Also, Simone Weil agrees with Hegel that rights are what belong to the personality, once the person has come to own property and that this term comes to us from the Romans.

Simone Weil also rejects the Personalist use of the language of rights to refer to that which is inalienable about the human being. Her aim is to bring us closer to the Greeks who never used the language of rights: "Les Grecs n'avaient pas la notion de droit... Ils se contentaient du nom de la justice."²⁷ She argues that the notion of rights was also alien to Christ and the love which led him to the cross: "La Justice, compagne des divinités de l'autre monde, prescrit cet excès d'amour. Aucun droit ne le prescrirait. Le droit n'a pas de lien direct avec l'amour."²⁸

Christ's cry, "Why am I being hurt?" was an impersonal cry against injustice and had nothing to do with the rights of his personality. Simone Weil may have thought that the philosophers of the Personalist movement had lost sight of the Christian inspiration of equating justice and love. This love can only be expressed when a human being "no longer lives in himself but Christ lives in him."

Only the absolute identification of justice and love makes the coexistence possible of compassion and gratitude on the one hand, and on the other, of respect for the dignity of affliction in the afflicted — a respect felt by the sufferer himself and the others. It is Christ's love which must live in us if there is to be justice in a state which always demands that the strong defy their nature; that is why it takes the supernatural virtue of justice:

La vertu surnaturelle de justice consiste, si on est le supérieur dans le rapport inégal des forces, à se conduire exactement comme s'il y avait égalité. Exactement " tous égards, y compris les moindres détails d'accent et d'attitude, car un détail peut suffire à rejeter l'inférieur à l'état de matière qui dans cette occasion est naturellement le sien, comme le moindre choc congele de l'eau restée liquide au-dessous de zéro degré."²⁹

Thus, the terms "personality" and "rights" are inappropriate to form the basis of a state because they have no relation to Justice — these terms relate to material possessions and property and are, at best, secondary concerns of the leaders of the State. Their first concern is to see that human beings are preserved from harm, the kind of harm that transmits real evil into the human being.

²⁷Weil, "La personne et le sacré", op. cit., p.25.

²⁸Weil, "La personne et le sacré", op. cit., p.26.

²⁹Simone Weil, *Attente de Dieu* (Paris: Editions Fayard, 1966), p.129.

Only a human being, through neglect, can damage the impersonal part of the soul of another human being. If a person's wound or privation is due to the blind working of natural forces, whether caused by another human being obeying necessity or by natural causes itself, then the person's sensibility alone is wounded. Thus, Simone Weil, like Rousseau, and Kant argues that only "ill will" can damage the soul of another human being and counts as the criterion of oppression. For the leader/s of the State to avoid oppressing the people, they must, first, have respect for the human being as such, and secondly, must express it indirectly by recognizing the needs of the bodies and souls of human beings as being the basis of their obligations to those human beings: "L'obligation a pour objet les besoins terrestres de l'âme et du corps des êtres humains quels qu'ils soient. A chaque besoin répond une obligation. A chaque obligation correspond un besoin."³⁰

In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant defends a similar obligation, except that he makes obligations decidable by "reason alone" and is dependent upon "good will" or "practical reason" to be recognized. Simone Weil's "obligation" is dependent upon the human being's power to pay attention to the desire for "absolute good." This attention is not a choice of the will, it is rather a refusal to love anything which is not God.

B OBLIGATIONS AND RIGHTS

Now to return to *L'Enracinement* where Simone Weil develops the interdependence of these conceptions and makes them the basis of her ideal state. Simone Weil argues that the term obligation or duty has a relation to Justice and speaks to the impersonal part of the soul. She, like Hegel, argues that obligations precede rights because: "Un droit n'est pas efficace par lui-même, mais seulement par l'obligation à laquelle il correspond"³¹ One's primary obligation is to oneself because of the human possession of an "eternal destiny." Simone Weil adds that there is no corresponding "right" related to this obligation. If one recognizes this obligation, then one is in a position to recognize, by analogy, that other human beings possess the same destiny and for this reason one has an obligation to respect other human beings as oneself. Only when I recognize my obligations to others will their rights be

³⁰Simone Weil, "Etude pour une déclaration des obligations envers l'être humain," *Ecrits de Londres et dernières lettres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), p.78. Hereafter: "...obligations envers l'être humain."

³¹Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.9.

recognized. This is why the language of rights alone is ineffectual. However, one can speak of obligations without referring to rights because: "Un homme, considéré en lui-même, a seulement des devoirs, parmi les quels se trouvent certains devoirs, parmi lesquels se trouvent certains devoirs envers lui-même."³² Rights belong to the objective order. They remain abstract and unrealized unless they are brought into the actual world through the individual recognizing his/her obligation towards the other. So, rights are inseparable from obligations but obligations remain independent of conditions. This dependency of rights on obligations is similar to what Hegel argues in *Philosophy of Right*: "Hence in this identity of the universal will with the particular will, right and duty coalesce, and by being in the ethical order a man has rights in so far as he has duties, and duties in so far as he has rights."³³

Simone Weil, unlike Hegel, does not develop her state dialectically. She does not think of the state as the pinnacle of an evolutionary process and the only organization of human beings in which humans can realize their obligations. Rather, for her, obligations are always and have always been binding on the individual whether they were a part of a tribe, nation or any other collectivity and that is because:

Cette obligation ne repose sur aucune situation de fait, ne sur les jurisprudences, ni sur les coutumes, ni sur la structure sociale, ni sur les rapports de force, ni sur l'héritage du passé, ni sur l'orientation supposée de l'histoire. Car aucune situation de fait ne peut susciter une obligation.³⁴

Simone Weil is careful to point out that: "L'obligation ne lie que les êtres humains." She is willing to judge a social order by how effectively its organization opens the way for the individual to recognize his/her obligations. But she makes no prediction about what kind of collectivity best allows for such a social order. Although for Simone Weil, as for Hegel, Kant, and Rousseau, the collectivity is where the human being must recognize his/her obligation, it is not because the human being has any obligation to the collectivity as such. Rather, "...Il n'y a pas d'obligations pour les collectivités comme telles."

i. A Human Collectivity: Priority is Given to the Human Soul

³²Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.9.

³³Knox, ed., *Philosophy of Right*, op. cit., p.109.

³⁴Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.11.

In *L'Enracinement* introduces her two conceptions of "rootedness" and "uprootedness". We have already encountered her notion of uprootedness implicitly in her critique of history and her notion of rootedness in her thought on the tradition of "identical thought". "Uprootedness" refers to any kind of human force that kills the virtues of humanity thus preventing the human soul from both being oriented and orienting itself towards the truth. "Rootedness" refers to a human environment that provides the soul with an awareness of that "identical thought" issuing from the tradition described above which, in *L'Enracinement*, is called the "spiritual treasures of the past". Simone Weil reacts to the reappearance of the idea of "eternal France" as fervently expressed by Charles Péguy before the First World War.³⁵ She rejects Péguy's tendency to promote the imperialistic France by encouraging her relation to the Romans. As we saw above, Weil hoped that France would see the inconsistency in her admiration for imperialistic states, such as ancient Rome, and her love, as expressed by Péguy, for "the struggle of nations for their independence". Simone Weil completely rejects the idea of anything earthly such as a collectivity having an eternal destiny: "Poser la patrie comme un absolu que le mal ne peut souiller est une absurdité éclatante La nation est un fait, et un fait n'est pas un absolu."³⁶

It is only the human being who has an eternal destiny and thus deserves respect; and the only way to express this respect is "par l'intermédiaire des besoins terrestres de l'homme."³⁷ Thus, the first obligation binding on every human being is not to let another person suffer hunger as long as one can prevent this. Simone Weil argues that this obligation has been recognized by the human conscience since time immemorial; it has always been a Christian value that one should never let another person go hungry. This is the first obligation, as it corresponds to the most basic of human need. But there are other such vital human needs which should equally be fulfilled; some like hunger are physical, and others, which are equally vital, are concerned with the human morale. These are the needs of the soul.

Like Plato, Simone Weil understood how important the health of the human soul is for both the individual

³⁵See also John Hellman, *Simone Weil: an introduction to her thought* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1982), p.37-38, for an analysis of Simone Weil's reaction to the fusion of France and Christianity which arose again during the Second World War.

³⁶Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.168.

³⁷Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.13.

and the collectivity. Furthermore, she could see that it is only within the human collectivity that these needs could be met. Thus, she argued that we must respect the collectivity – not because it is eternal but because it plays a role analogous to food for human beings – it provides sustenance for the human soul.

On doit le respect à un champ de blé, non pas pour lui-même, mais parce que c'est de la nourriture pour les hommes.

D'une manière analogue, on doit du respect à une collectivité, quelle qu'elle soit ... non pas pour elle-même, mais comme nourriture d'un certain nombre d'âmes humaines.³⁸

But sometimes the respect owing to a collectivity demands that one risk one's life. That is why she must give us some reasons for considering the collectivity worthy of one's life. Simone Weil offers us three reasons – all of which we seem to forget but which other peoples have fought for centuries to obtain: "D'abord, chacune est unique, et, si elle est détruite, n'est pas remplacée La nourriture qu'une collectivité fournit à l'âme de ceux qui en sont membres n'a pas d'équivalent dans l'univers entier."³⁹

Simone Weil had to emphasize the uniqueness of each collectivity. She had seen in France during the Second World War how easy it was for many French people to allow themselves to think that they could live under the German values of the Nazi Regime, and how willingly they collaborated with the Germans. These people did not see France as unique at all – at least their actions suggested that they did not. She summarizes how they must have thought: "La France a eu la victoire en 1918 ... maintenant l'Allemagne essaie de l'accomplir; ne la gênons pas."⁴⁰ Imperialistic wars and colonization show an obvious lack of recognition of the uniqueness of another collectivity. This leads to "uprootedness."

The second reason why a collectivity is worthy of one's total commitment in the form of defense, is because of its continuity in time: "Elle contient de la nourriture, non seulement pour les âmes des vivants, mais aussi pour celles d'êtres non encore nés qui viendront au monde au cours des siècles prochains."⁴¹ Simone Weil argues that the collectivity facilitates the nurturing of the kind of attention required to turn away from the personal

³⁸Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.15.

³⁹Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.15.

⁴⁰Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.185. See also John Hellman, Emmanuel Mounier and the New Catholic Left 1930-1950 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), p.158-182, for a description of the part played by Personalism in this way of thinking in France during the war.

⁴¹Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.16.

part of the soul not only because it, if ordered properly, fulfills the needs of the bodies and souls of those who form a part of it, but also because it plays a role analogous to food. The collectivity, because of its continuity through time, contains "spiritual food" for the soul of beings born into it.

This leads us to the third reason why a collectivity can demand a total sacrifice, a reason which also has to do with our continuity in time. A collectivity is rooted in the past:

Elle constitue l'unique organe de conservation pour les trésors spirituels amassés par les morts, l'unique organe de transmission par l'intermédiaire duquel les morts puissent parler aux vivants. Et l'unique chose terrestre qui ait un lien direct avec la destinée éternelle de l'homme, c'est le rayonnement de ceux qui ont su prendre une conscience complète de cette destinée, transmis de génération en génération.⁴²

Thus, these "spiritual treasures" transmit the thought of texts like The New and Old Testament but re-cast it in a way particular to each collectivity which prepares each of its citizens to receive and to make of this thought a living reality. It is the fact that the collectivity can preserve the "time dimension" that makes a collectivity so valuable to the individual and to humanity.

As was presented in Chapter Three of this thesis, Simone Weil argues that if we study history with attention we can find "true greatness" in very small quantities in the past. This true greatness is the expression of love for one's collectivity in history, or it may be the expression of true genius in science, literature or art. However it is expressed, it is only a particular collectivity which can preserve it and that is why Simone Weil argues that in encouraging individuals to love their particular collectivity so that it may preserve true greatness, children must be taught to love what is good from the past of that collectivity:

Il n'y a pas d'autre procédé pour la connaissance du coeur humain que l'étude de l'histoire jointe à l'expérience de la vie, de telle manière qu'elle s'éclaircissent mutuellement. On a l'obligation de fournir cette nourriture aux esprits des adolescents et des hommes. Mais il faut que ce soit une nourriture de vérité....

L'histoire est un tissu de bassesses et de cruautés où quelques gouttes de pureté brillent de loin en loin. S'il en est ainsi, c'est d'abord qu'il y a peu de pureté parmi les hommes; puis que la plus grande partie de ce peu est et demeure cachée. Il faut en chercher si l'on peut des témoignages indirects.⁴³

As I have pointed out above, Simone Weil argued that when the Romans conquered Greece, much of the

⁴²Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.16.

⁴³Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.292-293.

beauty and truth of the Greek culture was lost. The 'true Renaissance' was nothing but a revival of these spiritual treasures. She thought that the Greeks had developed a profound understanding of the eternal destiny of human beings. It is this awareness of the eternal destiny as manifest in the whole civilisation (in their mystery religion, their science, their drama, their art, and so on) which makes a particular culture at once precious and fragile. Furthermore, this understanding of our eternal destiny is the only thing which gives continuity to time as it unites, according to Simone Weil, the "tradition of identical thought". As we saw, Simone Weil's whole critique of Western history, science, philosophy, religion, etc., has been based on how much of this understanding she found manifest in the thought and actions of the people of our past. In *L'Enracinement* her conception of rootedness is based on the idea of preserving the awareness of this eternal destiny which is our only "continuity in time". Anything that seriously threatens this continuity leads to uprootedness.

A healthy collectivity preserves understanding through its institutions and it is ordered so as to make it possible to do this. Simone Weil is careful to point out that the collectivity has no superior status over the individual; quite the contrary, it only has value insofar as it provides material and spiritual food for the individuals who form a part of it. So the only reason the individual should make a total sacrifice to preserve it in times of peril is because it provides this spiritual food for oneself and others -- without the collectivity one cannot receive this food. If the collectivity is diseased, as Simone Weil certainly thought France was at the time (1943), then it devours souls. An attempt must be made, she claims, to cure it -- in this case it may be necessary to have recourse to "surgical methods." She does not elaborate on this but from the term surgical we can assume that she means that the diseased part/s must be cut out of it, removed. She suggests that it is the obligation of those inside, as well as of those outside the collectivity to carry out this surgery.⁴⁴

ii. The Leaders' Duties

In contemporary societies, the state forms the organizing body of the collectivity and the leaders of the State should consent to accept the obligation to respect all human beings by doing everything in their power "de remédier,

⁴⁴Simone Weil elaborates on this point in "The Great Beast", op. cit., see pages 137-140.

dans l'ordre de ses responsabilites et dans la mesure de son pouvoir, a toutes les privations de l'âme et du corps susceptibles de détruire ou de mutiler la vie terrestre d'un être humain quel qu'il soit."⁴⁵ In Simone Weil's social and political theory the needs of the soul function as goals for the leader/s of the state, i.e., these needs may function as political ideals.⁴⁶

The recognition that all individuals have the same needs is for Simone Weil the indirect expression of the recognition of the respect owing to each and every individual because of the presence of a centre – a link with the reality outside this world. This link is the combination of two facts which are an essential part of human nature: "L'exigence de bien absolu habitant au centre du coeur et le pouvoir, quoique virtuel, d'orienter l'attention et l'amour hors du monde et d'en recevoir du bien...."⁴⁷ A leader cannot directly express his/her respect for the human being's link to this other reality because this link is beyond the reach of human faculties. Thus, the leader can only take the means available; that is, he or she can indirectly express the respect inspired by the link; therefore, he or she can do everything in his or her power to fulfill the needs human beings are subjected to because of their "bondage to necessity" – the needs of the body and soul. Simone Weil argues that there is a connection in human nature which links our desire for good and our sensibility so that:

Par elle, lorsque, du fait des actes ou des omissions des autres hommes, la vie d'un homme est détruite ou mutilée par une blessure ou une privation de l'âme ou du corps, ce n'est pas en lui la sensibilité seule qui subit le coup, mais aussi l'aspiration au bien. Il y a alors sacrilège envers ce que l'homme enferme de sacré.⁴⁸

Simone Weil attempts to define exactly what the needs of the soul are so that the state can be organized in such a way that each individual will be physically and morally healthy and be uninhibited in fulfilling his or her obligations towards others. In this sense, she tries to achieve a harmony between the souls of the individuals and the collectivity as a whole just as Plato attempted to do in the *Republic*. However, Simone Weil, as we saw above, was not prepared to exclude any of the human beings that formed a part of the collectivity from the mystical way and thus from being assimilated with God. In fact, the collectivity was to be set up in such a way that each and

⁴⁵Weil, "...obligations envers l'être humain", op. cit., p.78.

⁴⁶Simone Weil recognizes that human needs, especially the particular needs of the soul are permanently open to revision, depending on time and place.

⁴⁷Weil, "...obligations envers l'être humain", op. cit., p.75.

⁴⁸Weil, "...obligations envers l'être humain", op. cit., p.77.

every individual was to be given the spiritual inspiration that would best relate to his/her particular daily activity (work) through biblical parables. This would allow them to become "attentive" to the impersonal part of the soul because of the beauty of the parables that relate to what they know through their bodies. Marx had a similar idea, that is, to set up a working class culture. Many marxists tried to develop this idea, but because they did not recognize what gives continuity to time and the uncreated part of the soul, Simone Weil argues that they were doomed to fail. Plato, in the *Republic*, as I pointed out above, suggests that only some souls are predisposed towards the Good because they are predestined, the elect.⁴⁹ Simone Weil, in contrast to Plato, is very clear about her conviction that each and every soul should be directed towards the Good.

Simone Weil gives a special place to the workers and peasants in her ideal state. She argues that physical labour should be the spiritual core of a well-ordered society. In fact, Simone Weil thinks that the vocation which marks off the Western civilization from the Greeks and those preceeding the Greeks is to create a civilization based on the spiritual nature of work:

Les pensées qui se rapportent au pressentiment de cette vocation, et qui sont éparses chez Rousseau, George Sand, Tolstoï, Proudhon, Marx, dans les encycliques des papes, et ailleurs, sont les seules pensées originales de notre temps, les seules que nous n'ayons pas empruntées aux Grecs.⁵⁰

Throughout this thesis I have argued that work with a method is a major part of human nature for Simone Weil. Her understanding of oppression and liberty was based on whether or not industry and the State organized around the central ideal of allowing each and every human being to fully express his/her nature. In the third chapter of this thesis I pointed out that physical labour took on a special spiritual significance for Simone Weil, due to the fact that labour demanded obedience and self-denial out of necessity. Thus, physical labour is a *metaxu* to God. In *L'Enracinement*, Simone Weil makes this idea of physical labour as *metaxu* one of the central axes around which she organizes her ideal state. The peasants and workers are given a central role in growing roots in France. Science is given a new direction in that its study of the beauty of the world must be made manifest by providing the kind of instruments which allow the workers to labour with method in mind. Finally, religion, through Christ's parables,

⁴⁹Simone Weil does not claim that this is Plato's definitive judgement on the issue of whether other souls would be excluded from this way.

⁵⁰Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.125.

must make the peasants and workers aware of the spiritual nature of work. Simone Weil interprets Christ's words and actions in the New Testament and the exile of Adam and Eve in Genesis to mean that physical labour should be honoured above every other kind of activity. Thus, in Simone Weil's state, roots are at once spiritual and physical. To make work the spiritual core of society, careful planning and also consideration for the human being doing the labour is necessary.

Simone Weil is careful to distinguish fundamental needs of the soul from "fortuitous needs;" particular wants and desires cannot be classified as needs. The difference between a need and a desire is that needs can be satiated, but desire by its very nature cannot be satiated, as explained in Chapter Three.

All of the needs of the body and of the soul are, according to Simone Weil, earthly needs which can be satiated. Although the needs of the soul are the needs of the carnal part of the soul Simone Weil claims that they are sacred. What makes them sacred is the fact that there is a link in human nature "entre l'exigence de bien qui est l'essence même de l'homme et la sensibilité."⁵¹ As pointed out, these needs do change, according to Simone Weil, in relation to time and place. Once they are defined for a particular collectivity they define the obligations which are binding on the leaders of the State to fulfill:

L'obligation fondamentale envers les êtres humains se subdivise en plusieurs obligations concrètes par l'énumération des besoins essentiels de la créature humaine. Chaque besoin est l'objet d'une obligation. Chaque obligation a pour objet un besoin.⁵²

Thus, in Simone Weil's state the leaders have an obligation to make every attempt possible to fulfill the fundamental needs of every individual in that State.

C NEEDS OF THE SOUL

Simone Weil's political ideals, the needs of the soul intended for a democratic state, are similar in some ways to the one Rousseau conceived of in *The Social Contract*. She held the democratic ideals that people should be free to consent to obey the laws, and the goal of all public institutions should be to treat people equally. However, Simone Weil also added a number of traditional political goals. She thinks of the state as an organism

⁵¹Weil, "...obligations envers l'être humain", op. cit., p.77.

⁵²Weil, "...obligations envers l'être humain", op. cit., p.81.

in which each part fits into the whole and plays an essential function in relation to the whole. This idea of the state draws its form from Plato's *Republic* where the City-State was set up so that each of the three parts of the soul carried out its function in each of the corresponding classes of people. Simone Weil also thinks that it is best if different groups of people were to carry out certain necessary functions in the State because in this way ideally everyone would be able to work. However, she does not, like Plato, suggest that the different functions are ruled by different parts of the soul. Rather, in the Christian spirit and like Rousseau, she promotes a system of universal education which would, ideally, open up to everyone the choice to orient his or her soul towards the truth.

Simone Weil set up most of the needs of the soul in pairs of contraries so that each of the pairs would harmonize with its opposite and they would then become complementaries. These contrary needs can be harmonized in the pythagorean sense.

Simone Weil's needs of the soul do accord with her dualistic philosophical anthropology. Some needs more intimately link up with the eternal part of the soul than others; thus, the need which have a more direct link to the impersonal part of the soul have their contrary in the needs that are only indirectly connected to the impersonal. For example, liberty belongs to human beings, according to Simone Weil, because of the impersonal part of our soul; whereas obedience is that part of us which binds us to necessity, whether we agree to it or not. Thus, obedience is more closely linked to our carnal nature. It is only through the recognition of the "reality outside the world" that the leaders of the state can honour their obligations to the human beings under their rule, thus balancing these contrary needs of the soul. Put otherwise, it is only by allowing this other reality to have existence in this world that contrary obligations can be harmonized:

De même que la réalité de ce monde-ci est l'unique fondement des faits, de même l'autre réalité est l'unique fondement du bien.
C'est d'elle uniquement que descend en ce monde tout le bien susceptible d'y exister, toute beauté, toute vérité, toute justice, toute légitimité, tout ordre, toute subordination de la conduite humaine à des obligations.⁵³

In my analysis, I will try to show how each need is rooted in human nature and how it harmonizes with its opposite. The pairs of contraries are: liberty and consented obedience; equality and hierarchy; truth and freedom of expression; punishment and honour; risk and security; personal property and collective property. The remaining

⁵³Weil, "...obligations envers l'être humain", op. cit., p.74.

needs are order and responsibility. The contrary of these two needs cannot be needs of the soul, because human beings have bodies which bind them to a constant struggle with disorder and irascible desire, i.e., irresponsibility.

Order is the first need of the soul because it permits us to assuage "our thirst for the good" by allowing us to fulfil all our obligations towards others. Thus, order is "un tissu de relations sociales tel que nul ne soit contraint de violer des obligations rigoureuses pour exécuter d'autres obligations."⁵⁴ As discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, Simone Weil holds that the human being can only truly act in the world by ordering his/her thoughts through language and then transforming matter in accordance with order. Thus, order is essential to human work and also for allowing our perpetual desire for the good to be satiated. In Chapter Three we followed the expansion of her view in which she asserts that it is by obeying the order of the world, obeying necessity, that human beings express their love for God. Social order is important to the human being because, according to Simone Weil, obeying social order is an imitation of and our way of obeying the order of the world.

Simone Weil recognizes that this perfect human order may not be totally realizable. Nevertheless, it must always be in our thoughts, directing our actions, and in this way letting our actions be "lit by a great hope." We should be trying to reflect the beauty of the order of the world in our social order:

La contemplation des oeuvres d'art authentiques, et bien davantage encore celle de la beauté du monde, et bien davantage encore celle du bien inconnu auquel nous aspirons peut nous soutenir dans l'effort de penser continuellement à l'ordre humain qui doit être notre premier objet.⁵⁵

When one is given, because of the social order, the real chance to fulfill one's obligations; then one has real choice — one has "liberty." Liberty and obedience are the needs of the soul that demonstrate whether or not order exists in a society. As in the tradition of Rousseau and Kant, Simone Weil argues that citizens have liberty when the laws are "assez raisonnables et assez simples pour que quiconque le désire et dispose d'une faculté moyenne d'attention puisse comprendre, d'une part l'utilité à laquelle elles correspondent, d'autre part les nécessités de fait qui les ont imposées."⁵⁶

Thus, unlike the English and American liberal tradition, liberty is not defined as freedom from government

⁵⁴Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.18.

⁵⁵Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.20.

⁵⁶Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.22.

interference but rather as something positive, the freedom to consent to laws which they can understand and see the need for in order to have a stable society. The laws themselves should limit government interference because leaders and public servants must fulfil their obligations too. In this way, people can incorporate these laws into their habits because their minds would not resist. This kind of liberty, claims Simone Weil, has its basis in human nature; thought is as essential to real choice as it is to true action. Thus, although the laws limit our sphere of action, we do not feel coerced because we can understand the need for that limitation. Only those people who are not of good will would feel coerced by such limitations on their actions – these people are like children, in so far as they fail to aspire to the good because of lack of maturity. Simone Weil is here defining the list of obligations which the leaders of the State must take as political ideals.⁵⁷ The other conditions which make liberty possible are that authority should inspire love and respect, and its rules should be sufficiently stable, general, and limited in number.

If the laws in a state were to fulfill all of these conditions, Simone Weil thinks it would then take very little effort for one to choose to be obedient. Obedience, the need of the soul which complements liberty in a well-ordered society, only becomes the contrary of liberty when the laws put in place are such that people cannot understand them or there are too many laws. Obedience should presuppose the liberty to consent or not. Thus, authorities who use force or the hope of gain to motivate their citizens to obey their laws enslave their citizens. Citizens who are forced to obey are deprived of liberty and obedience, for they are not free to choose, nor are they given to understand the laws. They are not free to consent to them as reasonable.

When citizens are asked to obey laws because they stand to gain something, they are not deprived of their liberty; they are free to reject them. They are, however, being deprived of obedience because inner consent is based on reasonableness and cannot be bought. Simone Weil claims that people who have accepted this latter kind of bribery have mistakenly chosen slavery. She suggests that this is what afflicts the present Western nations ruled by

⁵⁷She does not mention her idea of liberty as defined in *Réflexions sur les causes de la liberté et de l'oppression sociale*. However, we will see that when this idea of liberty is applied to rooting the workers in *L'Enracinement* it is the same as defined in *Réflexions sur les causes de la liberté et de l'oppression sociale*. This is because what defines liberty for Simone Weil is the human being's ability to think enough to make "real choices." Thus, for the workers this means being able to work with thought in mind as she argued in *Réflexions sur les causes de la liberté et de l'oppression sociale*. I cannot agree with Dietz's claim that "the idea of individual liberty" has disappeared in *L'Enracinement* (Dietz, *Between*, op. cit., p.150). Simone Weil is not claiming here that it is the collectivity that has this need to be able to make "real choices." Liberty is here defined as an individual need of the soul.

political parties. Each party achieves power through leaders who make great promises of gain for everyone.³⁸ She points out that Rousseau's "general will" was based on reason not passion.³⁹

There is evidence in "Note sur la suppression générale des partis politiques,"⁴⁰ to suggest, I think, that Simone Weil would agree with Plato that encouraging people to respond to their wants and passions is not the way to fulfill their need for obedience. Obedience, she says, would be a good method to use as the basis of a Constitution.⁴¹ Finally, Simone Weil argues that leaders should not be exempt from obeying a higher order than themselves. Everyone should be able to see that the whole order is based on obedience. Thus she suggests that the head of the State should be a "symbol and not a ruler," and be more restricted by "etiquette than any citizen."

The next need of the soul is responsibility: "le sentiment d'être utile et même indispensable."⁴² One class of people Simone Weil is referring to here is the millions of unemployed people of the industrialized countries. Unemployed people do not play any role in society and therefore have the feeling of worthlessness. The manual labourer, on the other hand, she says, is not in a better position. As we saw above, human beings need "obstacles" in order to work the mind and to prompt "real action." Thus, when the factory worker is asked to do the same piecework all day, he or she is not asked to make any decisions or to put any of himself or herself into the enterprise as a whole.

Simone Weil argues that for a worker to be responsible in his/her job: "Il faut enfin qu'il puisse s'approprier par la pensée l'oeuvre tout entière de la collectivité dont il est membre, y compris les domaines où il n'a jamais ni décision à prendre ni avis à donner." And for the human being to be able to come to such an

³⁸See Simone Weil, "Note sur la suppression générale des partis politiques," *Ecrits de Londres et dernières lettres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), p.126-148, where she talks about the problem of depending on the passions of the people.

³⁹This idea that obedience or consent is not something which can be sold reminds us of Marx's claim, in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Marx claims that money transgresses the natural order of things. It does this by allowing false relations. Marx gives the example of the rich man who is ugly but still able to have the company of a beautiful woman. He quotes Shakespeare to make his point that gold is the supreme deity which "transforms the real essential powers of man and nature into what are merely abstract conceits and therefore imperfections." Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844," *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1972), p.105.

⁴⁰Weil, "...la suppression générale....", op. cit., p.130-131.

⁴¹See also "Idées essentielles pour une nouvelle Constitution," *Ecrits de Londres et dernières lettres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), p.93-95 where she argues this.

⁴²Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.25.

understanding, "il faut qu'on la lui fasse connaître, qu'on lui demande d'y porter intérêt, qu'on lui en rende sensible la valeur, l'utilité, et s'il y a lieu la grandeur, et qu'on lui fasse clairement saisir la part qu'il y prend."⁶³ Thus, if all this is lacking for the factory worker, then the unemployed person is completely uprooted. This particular kind of uprootedness causes modern societies to be diseased. As noted earlier in this chapter, Simone Weil asserts that work has "spiritual value." Thus to deprive people of work is to demonstrate complete disrespect for these human beings by depriving them of one of the most essential *metaxu* provided by the social order.

The next pair of contrary needs are hierarchy and equality. Like Plato and Hegel, Simone Weil argues that hierarchy is needed if everyone is to have a function in society for which he/she is responsible. Some have to make the rules and organize things, others have to grow food, and still others will be artists: "La hiérarchie est l'échelle des responsabilités."⁶⁴ And also: "La vraie hiérarchie a pour effet d'amener chacun à s'installer moralement dans la place qu'il occupe."⁶⁵ Thus, those who rule will be the superiors. However, their superiority is only based on their roles as symbols of that which is truly superior. They must be constantly aware of this. True hierarchy would not conflict with equality, according to Simone Weil, because everyone would know that the leaders reflect that higher order, and that all human beings are equal in so far as they have the sacred part of the soul.

Simone Weil was not content simply to say that all human beings are equal nor to have it said in the Constitution; she argues that this equality must also be reflected in the institutions and customs of the collectivity:

Elle (l'égalité) consiste dans la reconnaissance publique, générale, effective, exprimée réellement par les institutions et les mœurs, que la même quantité de respect et d'égards est due à tout être humain, parce que le respect est dû à l'être humain comme tel et n'a pas de degrés.⁶⁶

Since humans are to a great extent determined by the society in which they grow, it is important that this respect be perceptively evident. Simone Weil learned through her experience in the factories that if this respect is not evident, one can fall into a kind of bitter resentment; this causes one to escape into fantasy. Thus, she tries to conceive of a way in which differences in vocations would not imply differences in the degree of respect. The way to do this is to set up a balance between equality and inequality. Simone Weil agrees that the principle of equality

⁶³Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.25.

⁶⁴Weil, "...obligations envers l'être humain", op. cit., p.81.

⁶⁵Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.30.

⁶⁶Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.26.

of opportunity is useful, but she does not think that this principle by itself would bring about the balance. It suggests that the reason one occupies an inferior position is because one cannot do better; this in itself causes bitterness. One then perceives oneself to be inferior.

The way around this is to set up a situation in which the ascending movement towards the top is balanced by a descending movement. To achieve this we need not expect, for example, that the Prime Minister's son become a factory worker, but rather, by imposing greater burdens to accord with the level of social power/status to cohere with one's vocation. Also, greater penalties should be imposed on those higher status people if they do not fulfill their duties. This would make the elite aware of the risk of taking on such power. Simone Weil argues that criminal law should punish those with the greater power more severely. This would help to keep the social hierarchy in line with the true order. If one receives a certain veneration and devotion because one is the symbol of a higher order, then when one's actions fail to reflect this symbolic order one has transgressed one's proper function. Simone Weil thinks that this would have a devastating effect on the social order and should be punished accordingly.

A solution she suggests to balance equality and inequality is to remove differences of a "quantitative character" as much as possible and leave only differences of kind, which, of course, always exist. In order to do this she argues that money and idolatry have to cease to be the sole motives for actions. Ideally, all vocations would be seen to be necessary and of equal importance: "L'égalité est d'autant plus grande que les différentes conditions humaines sont regardées comme étant, non pas plus ou moins l'une que l'autre, mais simplement autres."⁶⁷

Honour and punishment are the next pair of antithetical needs. As was pointed out above, people need to be able to perceive that society recognizes their efforts and devotion. Simone Weil maintains that one of the main symptoms of oppression is that people are deprived of the honour of their "social organisms," such as in the workplace — one should be allowed to share in "le souvenir des trésors de grandeur, d'héroïsme, de probité, de générosité, de génie, dépensés dans l'exercice de la profession."⁶⁸ This should be publicly recognized honour.

Certain professions are constantly praised in the public eye. The heroic efforts of these people go down in history — for example, scientists and musicians fill the papers and television daily. However, as Simone Weil

⁶⁷Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.29.

⁶⁸Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.31.

points out we rarely hear about the heroic efforts of fishermen or of the miners. They, themselves, do not record these events for posterity.

Simone Weil points out that there are sectors of our society which are entirely excluded from social consideration and therefore do not participate in the honours allotted to social institutions. For instance, prostitution is one such institution which admits of no honour and the individuals who participate do not even receive the respect due to a human being as such. Simone Weil argues that a social category of this kind should not exist. Since these people are more often than not forced into this way of life by coercion or need, these people are not criminals. Therefore they should not be treated inhumanely, for "Le crime seul doit placer l'être qui l'a commis hors de la considération sociale, et le châtement doit l'y réintégrer."⁶⁹ In other words, the society should attempt to attend to these people's needs thus erasing this degradation and the social category that goes with it. These people should be given an honourable place in society. The state should try to prevent such categories from existing; that is, there should be no human beings existing within the bounds of the state that are treated, with the state's blessing, as slaves, human beings deprived of all respect.

Simone Weil identifies other groups of people which had, in France at the time (1935-40), a similar degraded status: ex-convicts, police agents, and colonial immigrants. If punishment, which is the complementary need to honour, has its desired effect according to Simone Weil, ex-convicts should not experience the stigma attached to their past crime. The whole goal of penal punishment she argues is to bring the human being, who of his/her own accord committed a crime which places him/her "hors du réseau d'obligations éternelles qui lie chaque être humain à tous les autres," back into society.⁷⁰ The penal code in France, she claimed, was no more than "un procédé de contrainte par la terreur." To create fear in a human being is not a way to appeal to that which is impersonal in the human being. To appeal to this, the penal law and everything connected with it should be the symbol of higher order. Punishment should be regarded "comme une éducation supplémentaire qui oblige à un plus grand degré de dévouement au bien public."⁷¹ For the need for punishment to be satisfied "la dureté des peines

⁶⁹Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.32.

⁷⁰Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.33. Simone Weil also recognizes that there is a need for disciplinary punishment.

⁷¹Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.33.

réponde au caractère des obligations violées et non aux intérêts de la sécurité sociale.⁷²

Simone Weil points out that in France, during her time, a greater penalty was given for "dix menus vols que pour un viol ou pour certains meurtres."⁷³ This makes, she thinks, what is called punishment undeserving of its name. For Simone Weil "La justice consiste à veiller à ce qu'il ne soit pas fait de mal aux hommes." Thus, a system of penal law that judges the taking of someone's material property as a more serious violation of obligation than the inflicting of harm which lacerates the soul through rape or the complete negation of another's liberty and life through murder would be, itself, criminal. Any dignified human being would, in his or her heart, be able to feel the injustice of such laws and judgements.⁷⁴

Simone Weil's claim here seems to be that values are expressed through the severity of punishment assigned to the obligation being violated. She does not want to suggest that punishment is a way of getting revenge by those harmed — her point is simply that the punishment must also accord with people's sense of justice.

Finally, Simone Weil tries to overcome what she identifies as a very difficult political problem: "La question du meilleur procédé pour empêcher qu'il s'établisse en haut une conspiration en vue d'obtenir l'impunité"⁷⁵ The main political problem — discussed in the *Republic* through Thrasymachus and Glaucon — is of how to prevent leaders from abusing their political power to obtain impunity. Her suggestion is that those who have a higher status in the state — those who are higher up in the hierarchy of the state — should receive a greater punishment for their offensive or criminal act, because it shows a greater disrespect for the law by those whose status should imply more respect for it. Also, she thinks it would be a good idea to put in place people whose duty it is to prevent the leaders or the people of higher status from forming a clique, thus exempting themselves from the law.

⁷²Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.33.

⁷³Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.34.

⁷⁴Simone Weil agrees with Hegel's view of punishment as he expresses it in *Philosophy of Right*. Hegel argues there that punishment is the criminal's own right: punishment negates the evil done and reforms the criminal if he or she wants to be reformed. Hegel also rejects the purely deterrent theory of punishment, as does Simone Weil, because it treats a criminal as if he/she were not free. See Knox, ed., *Philosophy of Right* 99-101, where Hegel discusses the details of this. Also, see Hugh A. Reyburn, *The Ethical Theory of Hegel: a study of the Philosophy of Right* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967) for a more in depth study of Hegel's objections to the deterrent theory of punishment.

⁷⁵Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.34.

The next pair of contrary needs of the soul are freedom of opinion and truth.⁷⁶ Simone Weil argues that the leaders should punish the excesses of public opinion when it comes from the press. But like John Stuart Mill, Simone Weil argues that expression is so close to thought that it should not be stifled. Freedom of opinion is necessary to give complete liberty to the intellect. She says that one must be absolutely free to express whatever opinion one has, without exception. Although opinions may be false and, therefore, contradict the truth, we must be permitted to express them because this is the only way to permit real choice. This is one of the ways to prevent totalitarian regimes from getting power.

However, Simone Weil does not think that the intellect is really free in all of its roles. For example, the intellect is enslaved when dealing with technical problems because the objective is pre-defined and there is no room for invention. And the intellect is powerless in the face of throwing light on which path one should follow, so it should not express anything at this point. However, when it is alone and engaged in pure theoretical speculation, then and only then should the intellect possess sovereign liberty. Simone Weil thinks that the ideas or opinions one has during speculation should be permitted to be published. Hegel suggests that opinion is more than just a thought -- it also becomes an act if it incites others to action, and so it can be quite dangerous. The provisions Simone Weil makes for freedom of opinion shows that she also thinks that opinions can be dangerous:

...(Il) serait désirable de constituer, dans la domaine de la publication, une réserve de liberté absolue, mais de manière qu'il soit entendu que les ouvrages qui s'y trouvent publiés n'engagent à aucun degré les auteurs et ne contiennent aucun conseil pour les lecteurs.⁷⁷

The way to prevent readers from taking these opinions as prescriptions for action is by making sure that it is publicly recognized that these thoughts are not intended to influence people's actions.

As the above passage indicates, Simone Weil does think it is necessary to restrict what is being printed in publications destined to influence action:

Au contraire, les publications destinées à influencer sur ce qu'on nomme l'opinion, c'est-à-dire en fait sur la conduite de la vie, constituent des actes et doivent être soumises aux mêmes restrictions que tous les actes. Autrement dit, elles ne doivent porter aucun préjudice illégitime à aucun être humain, et surtout elles ne doivent jamais contenir

⁷⁶Freedom of opinion is defended by most English and American liberal thinkers today, in a tradition which begun with John Stuart Mill. See the classic exposition John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1956)

⁷⁷Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.36.

aucune négation, explicite ou implicite, des obligations éternelles envers l'être humain, une fois que ces obligations ont été solennellement reconnues par la loi.⁷⁸

Simone Weil argues that writers who publish things which obviously show disregard for the moral principles of the state should be punished by discrediting their work. Freedom of opinion, she claims, has to be balanced by "une protection contre la suggestion, la propagande, l'influence par obsession." She points out that such works are methods of restricting other people's freedom by imposing ways of behaving on them. The law should rigorously control such materials. For instance, she suggests that publicity constrains the individual to behave in accordance with the collective way. This is dangerous because one should always be at liberty to choose one's actions in accordance with one's thought.

Finally, Simone Weil argues that repression of journals or radio programs which express ideas that demonstrate "la bassesse du ton et de la pensée, le mauvais goût, la vulgarité, pour une atmosphère morale sournoisement corruptrice"⁷⁹ is necessary in order to maintain moral values. The journalist could start another newspaper, one that would respect the morality of the people: "Une telle répression peut s'exercer sans toucher si peu que ce soit à la liberté d'opinion."⁸⁰

This may not be an acceptable position for liberal thinkers who, following John Stuart Mill, would claim that it is more dangerous to censor than it is to accept the consequences of propaganda. The liberal reasoning holds that there is no way to prove causally the effects of such materials. From Simone Weil's view of human nature this material is dangerous insofar as it occupies the imagination, thus leaving little space for the mind to think independently and freely. Also, Simone Weil thinks that from the practical point of view, suggestive materials or propaganda are like incitations, and some people are bound to behave accordingly. Nevertheless, in so far as human

⁷⁸Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.36-37. Compare this to what Hegel says in the *Philosophy of Right*: "To define freedom of the press as freedom to say and write whatever we please is parallel to the assertion that freedom as such means freedom to do as we please. Talk of this kind is due to wholly uneducated, crude, and superficial ideas." Knox, ed., *Philosophy of Right*, op. cit., p.206. It becomes clear that Weil, unlike Hegel, did not think that the State should control the minds of the people who form a part of it even though she agreed that thoughts easily become actions. However, she considered freedom of opinion important enough to look for other ways to get around this problem of people being influenced by the expression of opinions in magazines, etc.. To give human beings direction is one thing but to control their thoughts is entirely a different matter; such control becomes propaganda and, as we saw above, leads to a totalitarian State.

⁷⁹Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.40.

⁸⁰Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.40.

beings and scientific research are imperfect, the causal relations will never be perfectly established. Thus, it is a matter of judging from a moral perspective what is harmful and what is not harmful.

Simone Weil attempts to maintain a balance: absolute freedom of expression in a designated area and freedom of expression controlled, according to the moral principles of the state, in printed materials and radio (which we can expand to understand other broadcast media) which are mass media.

She argues that it is the individual who is capable of forming an opinion, so that it is no infringement on the individual's need for expression to close down a newspaper or a radio station. In fact, Simone Weil is completely opposed to any group or institution being permitted by law to express an opinion. It is for this reason that she rejects the party system of politics. Parties, she says, stifle the individual's intellect. She claims that party strife kills democracy because at some point one party will decide that democracy is unhealthy and will try to overthrow it. Especially, she argues, if this party decides that democracy prevents it from having absolute rule over the people.

Her solution is not to completely do away with associations of people but rather to separate the associations concerned with interests from those concerned with ideas. Also, both kinds of association should be held in check so that they never become so monstrous as to be out of control. Associations concerned with interests should make justice their prime concern. On the other hand, the association concerned with ideas should never be permitted to excommunicate a member because of an opinion. Such an association should publish and circulate a pamphlet representing its ideas. If the pamphlet showed that there was too great a uniformity of opinion, the association could be considered as tending towards totalitarianism and dissolved. The essential discrimination to be made is between providing a means for freedom of opinion while at the same time not permitting opinions and propaganda to direct the conduct of people's lives.

Freedom of opinion is necessary to leave the intellect free to seek the truth. Truth is the most sacred of all the needs of the soul, because to desire the truth is to love, and is the only path to God. However, the most that the intellect can do in the search for truth is to clear the path so that one can pay attention. The intellect does this by understanding things, making relations until a limit has been reached. At this point the human being must wait: "Le passage au transcendant s'opère quand les facultés humaines — intelligence, volonté, amour humain — se

heurtant à une limite, et que l'être humain demeure sur ce seuil... sans savoir ce qu'il désire et tendu dans l'attente."⁸¹

Thus, if the literature and newspapers one reads are full of falsehoods, then there will be nothing to try to understand in order to help one to reach one's limit. When one is dealing with falsehoods one is working in the realm of pure imagination – the imagination which deludes – and unless one has the means to check and find out for oneself that these are falsehoods, there is no way to escape this realm. That is why Simone Weil claims that when people rely on literature, newspapers and other written materials to acquire knowledge that they cannot acquire themselves in the course of their work, it is criminal for them to be fed falsehoods.

It is commonplace, she claims, to be suspicious of things written in the newspapers. But being suspicious is not enough, because unless we check we have no way of knowing the truth. Thus, she suggests, special judges and courts be set up to punish those who publish falsehoods when they could easily have known better. Of course, the judges would have to be specially selected and trained for such a task. Even so, this may be difficult to regulate.

The next pair of antithetical needs, security and risk are, Simone Weil thinks, psychological needs that have been ignored in the capitalist countries: "La sécurité signifie que l'âme n'est pas sous le poids de la peur ou de la terreur, excepté par l'effet d'un concours de circonstances accidentelles et pour des moments rares et courts."⁸²

Simone Weil points out that the fear of unemployment almost always creates panic and immobilizes people. This especially afflicts those people who have worked in factories and have no special skills on which to rely. What can they do when the house they bought in a factory town becomes worthless because the factory closes down? Such situations weigh heavily on those people directly affected but also on those threatened by it: "La peur ou la terreur, comme états d'âme durables, sont des poisons presque mortels, que la cause en soit la possibilité du chômage, ou la répression policière, ou la présence d'un conquérant étranger ... ou tout autre malheur qui semble surpasser les forces humaines."⁸³

However, security should not stifle people, as it does sometimes when people get into a position with the

⁸¹Weil, *La connaissance surnaturelle*, op. cit., p.305.

⁸²Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.48.

⁸³Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.48.

state bureaucracy: "L'absence de risque suscite une espèce d'ennui qui paralyse autrement que la peur, mais presque autant."⁴⁴ Lack of risk would be equivalent to lack of facing up to obstacles which always confront a human life. This would surely mean the domination of the imagination. Nevertheless, one must judge which risks are in accordance with one's obligations and which are not. For instance, Simone Weil argues that a gambler's risk-taking for the sake of gain is not as fine a stimulant as to a risk taken in order to fulfill one's obligations.

The final antithetical needs of the soul are private and collective property. To strike a balance so that each family has some private property, and yet shares in the collective property of the State is perhaps not so easy a task, especially with the large city phenomenon. But, for Simone Weil, private property is a need of the soul which should not be ignored. In the examination of "Science et perception dans Descartes" in Chapter Two of this thesis, I noted that Simone Weil argues that instruments are like extensions of the body. They are designed to operate in places where it is too painful or impossible for the body to be used. She claims that people should not be deprived or be threatened with being deprived of these extensions of themselves, for in a real way, these things do belong to the people who use and need them. According to Simone Weil, people who depend on certain necessities and certain instruments for their livelihood are also psychologically dependant on these things. This dependancy is not unhealthy, it is simply a part of human nature to use instruments to extend the reach of the body so that the necessities of life can be taken care of. There is no reason, Simone Weil thinks, to deny this physical and psychological need. People need to know that they have shelter from the cold and that the instruments they need to provide for this shelter are there for them. Thus, not only does a family need a house and a small piece of land, but workers, she thinks, should own the tools with which they work, because: "Tout homme est invinciblement porté à s'approprier par la pensée tout ce dont il a fait longtemps et continuellement usage pour le travail, le plaisir ou les nécessités de la vie."⁴⁵

To own one's tools, or for the workers to own their factory, might increase their security as well. Simone Weil's idea of private property is an interesting compromise between Marx's idea of the workers' appropriating all of the property, thus doing away with private property altogether, and the Capitalist idea that those who have the

⁴⁴Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.49.

⁴⁵Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.50.

money have the property. Like Marx, she recognizes that those who do the actual work should own their own instruments and have the necessities of life which their work would provide for them. But unlike Marx, she does not see the problem to be with the idea of private property. Rather, the problem lies in how the social order is organized. People's physical and psychological needs (not desires), she thinks, can be given first priority.

Collective property, however, has more to do with one's state of mind than of actual ownership. All citizens should feel as though they own public monuments and gardens. Furthermore, the ceremonies arranged by the state should include the poorest with the richest. Simone Weil argues that all the honour which goes to make up a collectivity of any kind should reflect upon all the members of that collectivity. If this were to be the case, then modern factories would need to be organized in a completely different way. Simone Weil argues the present relation between money and property is a false relation and must be transformed: "Il n'y a aucune liaison de nature entre la propriété et l'argent. La liaison établie aujourd'hui est seulement le fait d'un système qui a concentré sur l'argent la force de tous les mobiles possibles. Ce système étant malsain, il faut opérer la dissociation inverse."⁶⁶

Simone Weil's view of gaining property is in keeping with the Marxian-Hegelean tradition that one gains property through labour. Just as the gardener recognizes his/her tools and the garden as his/her own, so too, should the factory worker be able to see the machines and the product of his/her work as his/her own: "Toute espèce de possession qui ne satisfait chez personne le besoin de propriété privée ou collective peut raisonnablement être regardée comme nulle."⁶⁷

Simone Weil's application of the principle of the unity of contraries to the needs of the soul allows for what would otherwise be seen as a disruption to public order. Order is seen here as that which allows for a "just blend" of the spiritual and the profane.

D UPROOTEDNESS

Rousseau brought to political theory his unique expression of human nature as being essentially good and only corruptible by society, and the idea that progress does not necessarily move towards a better state. Similarly,

⁶⁶Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.52.

⁶⁷Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.52.

Simone Weil brought to political theory her unique analysis of how the modern state can re-direct itself by connecting with spiritual roots that have been severed rather than nurtured throughout Western history. Simone Weil attempts to distinguish what she sees to be the healthy roots from the diseased roots in Western thought. The diseased roots, she claims, can be cut out without any loss at all because they have been spreading and contaminating the healthy ones by replacing them in the minds of human beings. Only human beings can carry these roots forward to future generations. That is why she thinks it is very important to make the distinction between those spiritual roots which can nourish future generations from the heritage which can only stifle them.

Simone Weil identifies that which, from our past, suffocates human beings as uprootedness. She draws an analogy between how uprootedness can be a kind of suffocation when we are cut off from our roots, and plants, which depend upon being rooted in the ground, even though the source of their growth comes from the light. Human beings, who are rooted in human collectivities, also derive the energy to maintain those roots and keep them growing from that "reality outside of this world." Thus just as plants have chlorophyll to use the sun's energy, human beings have the impersonal part of soul to receive grace.

The analogy breaks down when one considers that human beings can choose to nurture the roots and carry them on to future generations or to cut the roots, thereby suppressing the knowledge which acknowledges the impersonal part of the soul. Simone Weil's notion of rootedness is universal -- everywhere, every culture that provides a bed of nourishment for the souls that form a part of it does supply those souls with the roots they need and allows for a healthy existence -- one that prepares them for their eternal destiny. Thus, there could be many such environments/cultures. And the fact that each one is securely rooted means that they do not have to close themselves off from each other. This allows them to communicate with one another openly, acknowledging the uniqueness and splendour of each. Simone Weil suggests the exchange between cultures should have the effect of each one confirming its own originality through its encounter with the other. It should be similar to the experience a great painter has when he/she visits the gallery where other great works of art exist. As she says:

Les échanges d'influences entre milieux très différents ne sont pas moins indispensables que L'Enracinement dans l'entourage naturel. Mais un milieu déterminé doit recevoir une influence extérieure non pas comme un apport, mais comme un stimulant qui rende sa vie propre plus intense Quand un peintre de réelle valeur va dans un musée, son originalité en est confirmée. Il doit en être de même pour les diverses populations du globe terrestre et les

différentes milieux sociaux.²⁸

Thus healthy roots are grown and maintained through one's own particular culture and through relations with other rooted peoples.

Before we turn to how nations can grow roots again, according to Simone Weil, we must look at the details of what she perceives to be the main causes of uprootedness. Much of what Simone Weil claims to be the causes of uprootedness in *L'Enracinement* stem from what I have shown to be one of her main criticisms of Western civilization in Chapters Two and Three: that we base the organization of society, our view of history, our view of science, and our conception of Christianity, on a belief in progress. Again, in *L'Enracinement* Simone Weil makes the same point. However, here she subsumes her critique of this unwarranted belief into her conception of "uprootedness" and she applies it to the modern collectivity, the centralized Nation-State, relating her analysis particularly to France. In the following pages, I will analyse Simone Weil's understanding of how the Nation-State of France has become, in her view, uprooted, and what she thinks are the manifestations of this uprootedness. I will then analyse her positive suggestions of what might be done to root the Nation-State so that it can be a *metaxu* for the individuals that form a part of it. Since what afflicts the organism in its general ideology and organization must afflict the parts in their particular ideology and organization, I will also analyse how the problem of uprootedness, according to Simone Weil, afflicts the workers in the cities and the peasants in the country.

As I have illustrated earlier in this final chapter, the workers and the peasants, the physical labourers play a large part in rooting the collectivity spiritually in Simone Weil's ideal State. Thus, I will consider Simone Weil's proposals of how to re-root these physical labourers. Throughout, I will concentrate on how she thinks being uprooted fails to nourish the souls of human beings, thus preventing the individual from attending to the impersonal part of his/her soul and how her proposals to grow roots again do provide the proper environment for the individual to become aware of his/her spirituality. A necessary part of growing roots again in Western civilization, especially in France (as this is the particular Nation-State to which Simone Weil addresses her analysis) is, she argues, for science and religion to re-unite. Finally, I will consider why she thinks this is necessary to the rooting of the

²⁸Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.61-62.

individual in the collectivity.

i Uprootedness of the collectivity

Simone Weil argues that the Nation-State, from its inception, has been the main factor in the uprootedness of the collectivity in the Western countries. She attempts to demonstrate this point through an analysis of the history of the inception of the Nation-State in France. She shows that France had been built by conquering the many other kinds of geographical human collectivites that previously existed, for example, a people could belong to one town, a collection of villages, or a province, or even a particular region. However, France, like many other Nation-States, made sure that all of these smaller collectivities became one thing: "La nation, c'est-à-dire l'Etat; car on ne peut pas trouver d'autre définition au mot nation que l'ensemble des territoires reconnaissant l'autorité d'un même Etat."⁸⁹ Thus, argues Simone Weil, human beings have been coerced into giving to the state their most valuable worldly possession — their continuity in time. This could have been a good thing except that the state fails to play the role of a *metaxu*: "En somme, le bien le plus précieux de l'homme dans l'ordre temporel, c'est-à-dire la continuité dans le temps, par delà les limites de l'existence humaine, dans les deux sens, ce bien a été entièrement remis en dépôt à l'Etat."⁹⁰

According to Simone Weil's analysis, the state did not fulfill its obligation to root its people in their past because it was conceived in its inception to be an absolute power, thus it only idolizes itself. Consequently, the state only preserved those ideas from the past which allowed it to set itself up as this absolute power: "Il (l'Etat) se posait comme un absolu ici-bas, c'est-à-dire comme un objet d'idolâtrie"⁹¹

Simone Weil argues that what actually caused France and the other Nation-States of the West to become uprooted collectivities is at once ideological and historical. She claims that the ideology of progress espoused by the Encyclopedists caused the French to see the French Revolution as a break with the past rather than as a continuation of a tradition. Simone Weil argues that particular historical figures, through their ambition for power,

⁸⁹Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.129.

⁹⁰Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.131.

⁹¹Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.165.

helped to make this interpretation of the French Revolution a reality.

Before I turn to my analysis of Simone Weil's perspective on French history and the ideology of progress which surrounds the Revolution, I think it is necessary to remind the reader of Simone Weil's method of interpreting history. In Chapter Three I pointed out that Simone Weil holds that, as historians are dependant on documents for their interpretation of history, and because the documents preserved are generally the ones favoured by the conquerors, the historian should go to history with the attentive eye which comes from the impersonal part of their soul. This means, according to Simone Weil, that history must be written not only by presenting the facts correctly as much as possible but also by presenting them in their true perspective relative to good and evil. It is this moral perspective that Simone Weil adopts in her interpretation of the history of France.

She searches for signs of "true greatness" amidst what she takes to be the general transmission and praise of false greatness. Simone Weil adopts this perspective because, as I have pointed out, she thinks that it is only from history that individuals growing into the collectivity can receive the knowledge of what there is in one's collectivity which is worth loving and preserving: "Il n'y a pas de patrie sans histoire."⁹² Thus, Simone Weil adopts this moralistic and even mystical perspective on history.

Simone Weil claims that there are two historical events leading to France's uprootedness. The first, actually a series of events, was the fault of the many kings of France. She claims that the French must admit that the forty kings who, over a thousand years made France; often treated the people of the territories owing allegiance quite brutally and as if they were conquered people.⁹³

Simone Weil argues, contrary to chauvinistic opinion, that the kings of France did not peacefully assimilate all those people who had previously only owed allegiance to the king. Some people were brutally conquered. The prime example she uses is the conquest of the lands situated south of the Loire at the beginning of the thirteenth

⁹²Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.292. As Ivo Mallan points out in *L'Enracinement de Simone Weil: essai d'interprétation*(Paris: Librairie Didier, 1961), p.42-53, Simone Weil follows Taine or Renan who, after the defeat of Sedan, felt that the only thing they could do was to try to understand in the history of France what might be contributing causes of the defeat.

⁹³ Arthur Wills in *The Need for Roots*(New York: Octagon Books, 1979), p.106, points out that "the forty kings who in a thousand years made France" is a reference to the motto heading the front page of the royalist organ, *Action Française* before the war.

century:

Ces territoires où existait un niveau élevé de culture, de tolérance, de liberté, de vie spirituelle, étaient animés d'un patriotisme intense pour ce qu'ils nommaient leur "langage"; mot par lequel ils désignaient la patrie. Les Français étaient pour eux des étrangers et des barbares, comme pour nous les Allemands.⁹⁴

Simone Weil was aware that the French were not solely responsible for all of the cruelties that the Albigensians and the people of Toulouse underwent. Nevertheless, Simon de Montfort did lead Pope Innocent III's crusade. Perhaps because he was French, Simone Weil puts the blame on the French: "Pour imprimer immédiatement la terreur, les Français commencèrent par exterminer la ville entière de Beziers, et ils obtinrent l'effet cherché."⁹⁵ Also, she thinks that after the Albigensians underwent defeat after defeat, the Cathars were completely annihilated. The Catholics of Toulouse, she claims, also tried to defend the Cathars but failed, and Toulouse was from then on treated like a conquered country:

Par la suite, le destin de ce pays (Toulouse) eut longtemps encore quelque chose de tragique. Un siècle et demi plus tard, un oncle de Charles VI le traitait en pays conquis, avec tant de cruauté que quarante mille hommes s'enfuirent en Aragon. Il eut encore des frémissements à l'occasion des guerres religieuses, des luttes contre Richelieu, et fut maintes fois ravagé; l'exécution du duc de Montmorency, mis à mort à Toulouse parmi la vive douleur de la population, en marque la soumission définitive.⁹⁶

She cites several other examples: Burgundy in the 14th century, the Bretons, the Franche-comté, and the Corsicans.⁹⁷ Simone Fraisse points out in "Simone Weil et le monde antique" that Simone Weil objected to the many French thinkers who studied in latin and were nurtured by a positive attitude towards the Romans:

...il faut bien dire que les Français qui faisaient du latin ont été nourris par *De viris illustribus*... A la veille de la première guerre mondiale, il y avait eu politiquement un retour en faveur des Romains, en particulier à l'Action Française. Dans son livre *Barbares et Romains*, Maurras répète à longueur de pages qu'il est romain, et c'est un texte auquel il tenait beaucoup. Dans l'entre-deux-guerres, les esprits sont redevenus plus sereins...((cependant)) en 1934, Jérôme Carcopino a écrit *Les étapes de l'impérialisme romain*, ouvrage... favorable aux Romains...⁹⁸

What concerned Simone Weil was that the French had forgotten the analysis of the writers of the 18th century, such as Montesquieu and Mably, who showed how there was a parallel between the way Rome conquered

⁹⁴Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.138.

⁹⁵Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.138.

⁹⁶Simone Weil, "L'agonie d'une civilisation vue à travers un poème épique," *Ecrits historiques et politiques* (1960; Paris, Gallimard, 1979), p.73.

⁹⁷See Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.139-142 for the detailed historical indictments.

⁹⁸Simone Fraisse, "Simone Weil et le monde antique," *Simone Weil: philosophe, historienne et mystique* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1978), p.193-201.

people and the way the French Kings conquered people. What was the worst for Simone Weil was the way in which the French and other modern states followed the Romans in believing that they had a mission to conquer people in order to civilize them. Simone Fraisse endorses Simone Weil's analysis of the parallel between the Romans and the modern states on this point:

... Les Romains ...mais ils étaient tellement persuadés de leur supériorité et du cadeau qu'ils faisaient aux peuples conquis en installant les institutions romaines chez eux, que je crois que son parallèle des conquérants, des impérialistes, des colonisateurs. Cette vaste confrontation est, à mon sens, ce qu'il y a de meilleur dans les vues de Simone Weil sur l'histoire romaine, et nous donne beaucoup à penser.⁹⁹

Simone Weil in *L'Enracinement* is objecting to this same tendency, that is, to put a good "historical" interpretation on essentially bad actions. She points out with these examples of conquered people in France that kingdoms and states which build their country and culture by uprooting other smaller collectivities kill the spiritual roots of their own past. If France valued justice before she had conquered these people, then after she would have lost claim to such a value because of her actions. Military conquest assumes the value which nurtures a totalitarian state: the cause of the strong is more just than that of the weak. France, Simone Weil claims, has built its nation by uprooting people from their spiritual past and forcing them to believe that might is right. But, she claims, these conquered peoples knew this was not true justice. They knew that true justice occurs:

Si on est le supérieur dans le rapport inégal des forces, à se conduire exactement comme s'il y avait égalité. Exactement à tous égards, y compris les moindres détails d'accent et d'attitude, car un détail peut suffire à rejeter l'inférieur à l'état de matière qui dans cette occasion est naturellement le sien....¹⁰⁰

We know that Simone Weil intends this idea of true justice to apply equally between one collectivity and another because, as we saw above, she applies this definition to the actions of the Athenians in 5th century B.C. in the massacre of the people of Melos as described in Thucydides.¹⁰¹

Simone Weil judges the actions of the French, in their military conquests, from the same moral perspective. She argues that they transmitted evil to these people because in brutally uprooting them they did harm to these people's desire for the good. This lack of respect paid to another's collectivity harms the soul of each of the individuals belonging to that collectivity because each one's love for his/her nation is one of the manifestations of

⁹⁹Fraisse, "Simone Weil et le monde antique", op. cit., p.194-195]

¹⁰⁰Simone Weil, *Attente de Dieu*(Paris: Editions Fayard, 1966), p.129.

¹⁰¹Weil, *Attente* , op. cit., p.130.

his/her 'desire for the good'. Furthermore, France has robbed these people of their *metaxu*.

As I pointed out earlier in this chapter, Simone Weil thinks that it is sacrilege to destroy a human being's *metaxu* because human beings cannot live without the relative and mixed blessings of home, country, traditions, culture, etc., which warm and nourish the soul. In judging France's historical actions in this way, Simone Weil applies her conception of morality in order to point out to the French people that there is a serious problem with the way France has conducted its foreign affairs in the past.

The French revolution was the second historical event, according to Simone Weil, to contribute to the uprooting of the French people from their past. She claims that two different conceptions of the term revolution emerged from 1789. The conception Simone Weil favours "consiste à transformer la société de manière que les ouvriers puissent y avoir des racines..." The conception of the revolution that Simone Weil disparages is the one she thinks the Encyclopedists spread and the one which she thinks has caused society to be uprooted: "l'autre consiste à étendre à toute la société la maladie du déracinement qui a été infligée aux ouvriers."¹⁰²

The conquered people, as well as many others, Simone Weil argues, threw themselves into the revolution with the hope that a new system would bring true justice to their country. This hope for true justice, she claims, was the true value which inspired the French Revolution. But the value of true justice did not go down in French history as the value which inspired the Revolution. These values, she thinks, were killed by the Encyclopedists, who were obsessed with the idea of progress. We see here Simone Weil's old criticism of the idea of progress, prevalent in *Réflexions sur les causes de la liberté et de l'oppression sociale* being cited as one of the main causes of uprootedness in the history of France. In *L'Enracinement*, Simone Weil claims that the Encyclopedists were mainly responsible for the transmission of this idea that the French Revolution constituted progress because it constituted a severe break with the past. The Encyclopedists, she claims, are at fault for preventing the liberating value, true justice, which she thinks actually did inspire the revolution of 1789 from being preserved in France.

If the Encyclopedists had seen that the French people desired true justice and that is why they were prepared to die in a Revolution, then they would not have recorded the Revolution as a break with the past. The

¹⁰²Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.67.

desire for justice is, according to Simone Weil's moral theory, the same as the desire for good, which is a desire for the supernatural virtue to descend. These eternal values give continuity to time. This is what she deems is valuable in the history of a particular collectivity. Thus, when the Encyclopedists claimed that the French Revolution was a complete break with the past, they did not understand the people's need for eternal values, true justice, and that it is only in the past that human beings can find these eternal values:

Le passé, quand l'imagination ne s'y complaît pas - au moment où quelque rencontre le fait surgir dans sa pureté - est du temps à couleur d'éternité....

Le présent, nous y sommes attachés. L'avenir, nous le fabriquons dans notre imagination. Seul le passé, quand nous ne l'imagination. Seul le passé, quand nous ne le refabriquons pas, est réalité pure.¹⁰³

In analyzing this event, Simone Weil is indirectly addressing the Communist ideals of a proletarian revolution. She argues in two essays written in London, later published in *Oppression et liberté*, that revolution never gives the power to the "weak," the lower classes, but only strengthens the power of those who have already gained power through hard work.¹⁰⁴ She cites certain historical events to support her argument. One of the main ideals of the proletarian revolution is for the weak, that is, the proletariat, to gain force or power. Her reasoning is that force cannot magically one day be on the side of the weak. This is a contradiction. If the weak are strong and have force on their side, then they cease to be weak.

L'illusion constante de la Révolution consiste à croire que les victimes de la force étant innocentes des violences qui se produisent, si on leur met en main la force, elles la manifesteront justement. Mais sauf les âmes qui sont assez proches de la sainteté, les victimes sont souillées par la force comme les bourreaux. Le mal qui est à la poignée du glaive est transmis à la pointe. Et les victimes, ainsi mises au fait et envahies par le changement, font autant du mal ou plus....¹⁰⁵

Since revolutionary materialism, according to Simone Weil's analysis in "Perspectives: Allons-nous vers la révolution prolétarienne?," operates only within the realm of necessity, as all wars do according to Hegel, the weak have no way to turn their weakness into strength. Thus, according to the logic of the Communists, if the weak become strong it is by becoming a force over others through a revolution, as Simone Weil says:

Le matérialisme révolutionnaire de Marx consiste à poser, d'une part que tout est réglé exclusivement par la force, d'autre part qu'un jour viendra soudain où la force sera du côté des faibles. Non pas que certains qui étaient faibles

¹⁰³Weil, *La pesanteur*, op. cit., p.175.

¹⁰⁴Simone Weil, "Examen critique des idées de révolution et de progrès," and "Y-a-t-il une doctrine marxiste?" *Oppression et liberté*(1955; Paris: Gallimard, 1981), p.178-185, and 221-254, respectively.

¹⁰⁵Weil, *La pesanteur*, op. cit., p.176.

deviendront forts, changement qui s'est toujours produit; mais que la masse entière des faibles, demeurant la masse des faibles, aura la force de son côté.¹⁰⁶

According to Simone Weil, if a peoples' motives for throwing themselves into a revolution is, in their hearts, a desire for true justice, then they must use the language which expresses what is in their hearts. This is the language of justice. However, when the Marxist intellectuals, promoting the revolution, think and speak of the revolution as a desire for power; that is, they use the language of rights, Simone Weil thinks that revolution becomes, instead of a fight against oppression, a mechanism for further uprooting oppressed peoples from their spiritual past.

These two historical events from French history help us to understand how Simone Weil's conception of uprootedness works within one particular historical setting. Simone Weil argues that when a state is built by bringing together uprooted peoples, the ideals of the State remain impure. We saw in the historical analysis done in Chapter three, Part two that Simone Weil found the western conception of the nation-state to be totalitarian in its inception. In French history, we saw that Weil had traced this totalitarian conception of the state back to Richelieu. In *L'Enracinement*, she argues that a state which sets itself up as the absolute value cannot be a *metaxu* for the people. Thus it cannot, according to Weil, fulfill the individual's need for order because only a state which strives to imitate a higher order can be organized in a way so that individuals will not be faced with contradictory obligations.

A state that idolizes itself and enslaves people's minds is what Simone Weil calls the Great Beast. This idea comes from the *Republic* (Book VII). She agrees with Plato that the Great Beast is a collectivity symbolizing a transcendent social idolatry for those who are educated to think that their country should be the absolute.¹⁰⁷ Thus, the power of the Great Beast usurps God's place in the soul; in effect the collective becomes ascendent: "Le collectif est l'objet de toute l'idolâtrie, c'est lui qui nous enchaîne à la terre. L'avarice: l'or est du social. L'ambition: le pouvoir est du social."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶Weil, "...doctrine marxiste?", op. cit., p. 252.

¹⁰⁷See Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.177, where she compares the way the French of 1943 viewed the history of France as the story of France's growth – as if France were like a farm animal. It is here that she quotes Plato on the Great Beast.

¹⁰⁸Weil, *La pesanteur*, op. cit., p.160.

The problem with taking the state as one's absolute value is that one makes the mistake of accepting the relative good which is correlative to evil rather than the absolute good which has no correlative. The only way to see the true role of the State is to break out of the social and, as was pointed out above, only the individual can do that: "Il n'y a que par l'entrée dans le transcendant, le surnaturel, le spirituel authentique que l'homme devient supérieur au social. Jusque-là, en fait et quoiqu'il fasse, le social est transcendant par rapport à l'homme."¹⁰⁹ When the state sets itself up as an absolute value, the individual is not encouraged to place the Good above the state. In this way, the collective mistakenly replaces the good. In other words, it is up to the state to educate its people to value the Good above all. This is how the state plays the role of an intermediary *metaxu*. In France, according to Simone Weil, the State was formed by uprooted people (under the influence of the Encyclopedists) who believed that it was possible to have justice in a society where the ruling value was one of 'might is right' and so they threw themselves into the hands of the State which further uprooted them.

La perte du passé, collective ou individuelle, est la grande tragédie humaine, et nous avons jeté le nôtre comme un enfant déchire une rose. C'est avant tout pour éviter cette perte que les peuples résistent désespérément à la conquête Mais le développement de l'Etat épuise le pays. L'Etat mange la substance morale du pays, en vit, s'en engraisse, jusqu'à ce que la nourriture vienne à s'épuiser, ce qui le réduit à la langueur par la famine. La France en était arrivée là.¹¹⁰

The way that the people of France demonstrated their uprootedness, she claims, was by their attitude towards the state and politics, especially in the period between the two wars. After losing so many lives in a very bitter first world war, people had begun to realize that the state demanded more loyalty and love than it inspired, for: "L'Etat est une chose froide que ne peut pas être aimée ... ainsi on est forcé de l'aimer, parce qu'il n'y a que lui. Tel est le supplice moral de nos contemporains."¹¹¹ Implicitly, Simone Weil thinks that people felt that the state did not offer them true liberty and they showed this by their lack of obedience and their disdain for politics; people cheated the state whenever they got a chance. A strange paradox had developed: a democracy in which people hate public institutions and the value of politics was decried.¹¹²

What Simone Weil saw the French doing in 1943 was using the old nationalist ideals of the great French

¹⁰⁹Weil, *La pesanteur*, op. cit., p.162.

¹¹⁰Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.154.

¹¹¹Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.148.

¹¹²Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.154-156.

Empire to build the spirit of the people to fight for their country. This, she thought was to deny the French people the truth about France's ways in the past. The French Empire, like the Roman Empire, had a false conception of greatness. In a time when the truth was essential to the building of their morale, lying to them was criminal. Simone Weil argues that it was precisely the setting up of an idolatrous state in order to fulfill the desire to build an empire that had gotten France into its predicament of 1940. Nazi Germany was the contemporary embodiment of "triumphant nationalism." Thus, Simone Weil challenged the Free French not to use the ideology of false greatness which was, at that very time, causing the people in France to suffer and which the people had already begun to question in their minds.

Furthermore, she argues that the Free French could not speak about the French State as an absolute value because one's country is something earthly where good and evil are always mingled together. Thus, to talk about eternal France was, she argued, a sort of blasphemy. France was a nation: "La nation est un fait, et un fait n'est pas un absolu."¹¹³

Simone Weil criticized the ideology of the French State because she hoped that it might come to terms with what she saw to be its mistake: that is, separating itself from those universal values which are related to the Absolute Good. She believed that a state, by setting itself up as an absolute value in the eyes of the people, sets itself up to be hated when it fails to be the absolute power it claims to be. When a people's sense of honour is dependant upon false greatness, they quickly recognize the hollowness of this so-called honour when they become the victims of the false greatness of another state.

This phenomenon of self-idolatry was the lie that infected the notion of patriotism in France from the thirteenth century on. Before military conquest was equated with greatness, there were feelings of patriotism which were pure: "... Vercingétorix est vraiment mort pour la Gaule; les tribus espagnoles qui ont résisté à la conquête romaine parfois jusqu'à l'extermination, mouraient pour l'Espagne"¹¹⁴ Simone Weil finds in the Middle Ages many diverse forms of pure expressions of patriotism:

Le patriotisme était diffus, errant, et s'élargissait ou se resserrait selon les affinités et les périls. Il était mélangé

¹¹³Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.168.

¹¹⁴Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.134.

à des loyautés différentes, celles envers des hommes, seigneurs ou rois, celles envers des cités. Le tout formait quelque chose de très confus, mais aussi de très humain. Pour exprimer le sentiment d'obligation que chacun éprouve envers son pays, on disait le plus souvent "le public," "le bien public," mot qui peut à volonté désigner un village, une ville, une province, la France, la chrétienté, le genre humain.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.135.

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E FALSE AND TRUE PATRIOTISM

According to Simone Weil's historical analysis around the early part of the 18th century there was among the peasants a pure flame of patriotism. As pointed out above, it foreshadowed the Revolution, which the peasants believed would bring true justice to France. This pure flame of patriotism was, Simone Weil argues, arrested by the Encyclopedists, when they preserved only the values that went with progress in their writings. As a result, Simone Weil thinks that a less pure form of patriotism grew out of the Revolution. The reason is because patriotism was cut off from the Good by making the absolute state its object. These uprooted people, assisted by the Encyclopedists, severed any ties they had with their past: "Ainsi il y a eu en France ce paradoxe d'un patriotisme fonde, non sur l'amour du passe, mais sur la rupture la plus violente avec le passe du pays."¹¹⁶

The quality of being French she argues, was not so much a natural fact as a choice to be a part of the first sovereign nation. The way Simone Weil saw history unfolding was that this kind of patriotism had no lasting effect because as soon as national sovereignty was recognized as an illusion, it could no longer be the object of patriotism. According to Simone Weil's analysis of the illusions surrounding the idea of a revolution, this was inevitable because force defiles those who use it and either they become oppressors or the oppressors return. Thus, the meaning of patriotism changed and the object of it became the state.

Simone Weil does not think that the ideology behind the state can inspire a sense of patriotism based on love of one's country because of its totalitarian tendencies. Thus, the Revolution, inspired by a revolt against the injustice of the kings and a popular desire for liberty, ended up creating the very thing it had hoped to eliminate: an oppressive society.

According to Simone Weil's analysis, the people of 1789 did not choose the correct words to express themselves: they cried out for their "rights" rather than for "justice." This suggested that they did not recognize their obligation towards the collectivity. She argues that the notion of rights is always connected with the idea of force.¹¹⁷ Simone Weil cites the Reign of Terror of 1792-94 as an example of a situation in which verbal expressions such

¹¹⁶Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.142.

¹¹⁷See Simone Weil, "La personne et le sacré," *Ecrits de Londres et dernières lettres*(Paris: Gallimard, 1957), p.26.

as "Give us our rights" are suppressed with force. She argues that a protest against injustice should be expressed as a cry from the depths of the heart, and then it may awaken an impulse of charity on both sides. The use of the word "rights" only serves to increase the alienation between the people and the rulers.

Si l'on dit à quelqu'un qui soit capable d'entendre: "Ce que vous me faites n'est pas juste", on peut frapper et éveiller à la source l'esprit d'attention et d'amour. Il n'en est pas de même de paroles comme: "J'ai le droit de ...", " Vous n'avez pas le droit de ..."; elles enferment une guerre latente et éveillent un esprit de guerre.¹¹⁸

In order to propagate a false patriotism the history of France is taught like a story about its growth, assuming that the military conquests it had achieved were necessarily a "good" thing. Thus, she says, Plato was right to compare the collectivity to an animal in so far as those who are blinded by its prestige: " " appellent justes et belles les choses nécessaires, étant incapables de discerner et d'enseigner quelle distance il y a entre l'essence du nécessaire et celle du bien".¹¹⁹ Simone Weil claims that when history was being taught in the schools, morals ceased to play a part: "Il n'est jamais question des obligations de la France à l'extérieur."¹²⁰

All morality is reduced to the lower planes of private life so that there is no longer any sense of what is good for the collectivity (one's own or another's collectivity). As I pointed out above, Simone Weil thinks that history should be taught and written in relation to good and evil. In other words, historical events that have a relation to good should be, according to Simone Weil, praised whereas those that are cruel and have no relation to justice should be denounced. This way students will know what is good and worthy of love in a country's past and denounce what is not worthy of love.

What Simone Weil sees is that the state gains prestige, not because it stands for certain moral values of justice and goodness, but rather because it stands for the glory it gains through military conquest – false greatness. Thus, the superior prestige of the nation is bound up with the exaltation of war. That is why war is so important to a nation that bases its patriotism on false greatness. In peace time, it is not necessary to foster any patriotic fervour because there is no glory to be gained. Therefore, she points out, people can cheat the state or hate the police without feeling unpatriotic.

¹¹⁸Weil, "La personne et le sacré", op. cit., p.26.

¹¹⁹Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.177.

¹²⁰Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.177.

A collectivity that gives no attention to the general morale of its people and bases its patriotism on glory and national egoism does not have the patriotic fervour, after it loses its glory which eventually always happens, to weather outside threats. The state expects its people to support the injustices it inflicts on other nations while gaining its glory and to decry the injustices that other nations inflict on it while gaining their glory. But according to Simone Weil's moral theory, people should never support injustices nor can they truly love a state which inflicts injustices on others. All of a people's moral sustenance, she claims, is drawn from the Good or that which has a relation to the good. A state or a collectivity which fosters a kind of patriotism based on false greatness and "prestige" has no relation to the Good. That is why the people who belong to this latter kind of state have no moral strength nor any true love for their state. Thus, when their state loses its prestige, these people turn to another state which has prestige even if it is their enemy, because they were taught to believe that prestige is what sustains them. This is what Simone Weil saw happening in France with the collaborations of 1943.

Quand on a pris l'habitude de considérer comme un bien absolu et clair de toute ombre cette croissance au cours de laquelle la France a dévoré et digéré tant de territoires, comment une propagande inspirée exactement de la même pensée, et mettant seulement le nom de l'Europe à la place de celui de la France, ne s'unfiltrera-t-elle pas dans un coin de l'âme?

Les collaborateurs actuels (1943) ont à l'égard de l'Europe nouvelle que forgerait une victoire allemande l'attitude qu'on demande aux Provençaux, aux Bretons, aux Alsaciens, aux Francs-Comtois d'avoir, quant au passé, à l'égard de la conquête de leurs pays par le roi de France. Pourquoi la différence des époques changerait-elle le bien et le mal? On entendait couramment dire entre 1918 et 1919, par les braves gens qui espéraient la paix: "Autrefois il y avait la guerre entre provinces, puis elle se sont unies en forment des nations. De la même manière les nations vont s'unir dans chaque continent, puis dans le monde entier, et ce sera la fin de toute guerre." Les braves gens qui parlaient ainsi connaissaient en gros l'histoire de France, mais ils ne réfléchissaient pas, au moment où ils parlaient, que l'unité nationale s'était accomplie presque exclusivement par les conquêtes les plus brutales....Quoi d'étonnant si une partie au moins de leur âme s'est mise à penser: "Pour le progrès, pour l'accomplissement de l'Histoire, il faut peut-être en passer par là?" Ils ont pu se dire: "La France a eu la victoire en 1918; elle n'a pu accomplir l'unité de l'Europe; maintenant l'Allemagne essaie de l'accomplir; ne la gérons pas."¹²¹

The patriotism which grows out of the idolatry of self is false because it is based on a lie; that is, that one's collectivity is the only collectivity that is unique and has the possibility to be glorious; thus, the need for a new sort of patriotism becomes obvious. This new patriotism must be based on the idea that one's collectivity is unique and a *metaxu*, but the collectivity of others is also unique and a *metaxu* for them. For, each healthy collectivity nourishes

¹²¹Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.184-186.

the souls of those who form a part of it.

Les vrais biens terrestres sont des *metaxus*. On ne peut respecter ceux d'autrui que dans la mesure où l'on regarde ceux qu'on possède seulement comme des métaux... Pour respecter par exemple les patries étrangères, il faut faire de sa propre patrie, non pas une idole, mais un échelon vers Dieu.¹²²

The new sort of patriotism that Simone Weil conceives is one that encourages compassion for one's nation; one that would endure the storms of peril. The way to do this is: "Donner aux Français quelque chose à aimer. Et leur donner d'abord à aimer la France. Concevoir la réalité correspondant au nom de France de telle manière que telle qu'elle est, dans sa vérité, elle puisse être aimée avec toute l'âme."¹²³

In order for one's country to be a *metaxu*, which is the individual's proper relation to the collectivity, one must love one's collectivity with compassion. This pure love gives the impetus needed to overcome the contradiction inherent in patriotism: the country is something earthly which is limited and yet it must ask its people for unlimited loyalty. The main reason for having such compassion is because the needs of the soul of one's compatriots are being met by this collectivity. The recognition that this is so, and the compassion which follows, makes one want to preserve one's country even at the cost of one's life. This shows that one loves one's country as a *metaxu* to God.

La charité peut et doit aimer dans tous les pays tout ce qui est condition du développement spirituel des individus, c'est-à-dire, d'une part, l'ordre social, ...d'autre part, le langage, les cérémonies, les costumes, tout ce qui participe au beau, toute la poésie qui enveloppe la vie d'un pays.¹²⁴

Compassion is desire turned totally towards the infinite Good. But this does not protect those who do have this compassionate love and can contemplate the country's misfortune and give everything to try to remedy it from suffering greatly both in their contemplation and through their efforts to remedy the situation.

However, for the State to give the French people France to love she must cease to be an Empire. She did not think that France should abandon these territories to their own devices, rather it should keep up the contact but only as one free nation does with another free nation, as she says: "Il n'y a échange que si chacun conserve son génie propre, et cela n'est pas possible sans liberté."¹²⁵

As has been previously noted, Simone Weil approaches history from an ethical perspective. She was deeply

¹²²Weil, *La pesanteur*, op. cit., p.148.

¹²³Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.200.

¹²⁴Weil, *La pesanteur*, op. cit., p.164.

¹²⁵Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.208.

concerned about the fact that France had formed its Nation-State by conquering the people south of the Loire Valley. She thought that this certainly weakened these people's love for France. However, Simone Weil recognized that the past cannot be changed. But what she thought could be changed is the recognition on the part of the French that what they did was wrong and they could show a willingness to repair what they could for past wrongs.

Simone Weil did not think that France should or could totally repair the past but she thought what they could do is allow these people to restore some of their spiritual treasures and even encourage them to do so. It is only to repair past wrongs and not to justify future wrong-doings that Simone Weil could agree that: "il n'y a pas incompatibilité entre l'amour de la petite patrie et celui de la grande."¹²⁶ Nevertheless, she thought that even with all of these people's regrets over their loss, the passage of time has brought about many new "organic ties" and that, for this reason, they should recognize that to give France away to Germany, out of bitterness, would not repair past wrongs done to them and it would worsen their situation by destroying the existing organic ties.

The solution is not, according to Simone Weil, to totally forget the past, but to realize that it cannot be changed by continuing to uproot one's present collectivity. Instead, she suggests that the solution might be to put one's heart, as much as possible into that which now exists as one's native land so as to prevent further alienation.

Car de cette manière un homme de Toulouse peut regretter passionnément que sa ville soit jadis devenue française; que tant de merveilleuses églises romanes aient été détruites pour faire place à un médiocre gothique d'importation; que l'Inquisition ait arrêté l'épanouissement spirituel; et il peut plus passionnément encore se promettre de ne jamais accepter que cette même ville devienne allemande.¹²⁷

One thing that could be done, to preserve the past for those people who have lost something precious, is to set up what Simone Weil calls a "nucleus" between people in different nations because they share a common heritage. These nuclei could connect certain bits of French territory with other non-French territories where the people have certain affinities between them and share common ideas. The example Simone Weil gives is that Brittany, Brittany, Wales, Cornwall, and Ireland might feel themselves, in regard to certain things, to be parts of the same environment. Through these nuclei people could form organic bonds of attachments between nations. Were France to allow these bonds of attachment to form between peoples of her nation with peoples of similar ideas from

¹²⁶Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.207.

¹²⁷Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.207.

another nation, France would demonstrate that she is a nation which offers her people the liberty to preserve their own genius.

Simone Weil's idea is that France could show the conquered people that she does regret the brutality of her history and that she would like to help these people capture some of their past. Simone Weil hoped that this would have the effect of easing some of the bitterness conquered people feel and, furthermore, she thought it would allow these peoples to recognize that now they have come to feel some good feelings for France. Once the bitterness is removed, some of the positive feelings they might feel for their present collectivity could surface.

i The duty of a State: to inspire true patriot love

Although Simone Weil claims that it is always the state's primary duty to secure the national territory, she also argues that this is not the state's sole duty towards its people. Her reasoning is that if the state only secures its territory with military force and no more, it would be as though it did nothing at all, because people would be able to forget that their state is a reality they cannot do without. They might begin to entertain the false ideas that they can do without it as the collaborators in France had imagined. With such ideas in the people's minds, the state could not preserve itself in situations when real threat is being imposed on the national territory. Without compassion in the peoples' hearts for their present collectivity the state will not be able to get the kind of support it needs to secure its territory. Simone Weil suggests two ways in which France or any other nation could be presented to its people in times of social stability: "... la patrie lui est présentée comme une chose belle et précieuse, mais d'une part imparfaite, d'autre part très fragile, exposée au malheur, qu'il faut chérir et préserver...."¹²⁸

This way, she thought, the French workers and peasants would be able to closely identify with it – especially since their own pasts have been full of misfortune. They would understand, she thinks, that all that they have must be protected for themselves and future generations. However, this also depends upon the changing of their conditions of existence in a way that confirms to them that France respects the role that they play in making France what it is – their labour is essential to the life of the country. Simone Weil has not forgotten the horrors

¹²⁸Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.224.

she experienced as a factory worker, nor the exhaustion of her days in the fields in the south of France. She understood very well how difficult it would be for a worker, who looked to Russia for relief from oppression, to want to fight for his/her country when the war broke out. The worker's heart would not be with France. She also understood how the peasants, who threw themselves into the Revolution with great hopes, felt abandoned by everyone who focused their attention on the workers' conditions and wages in the factories.

Thus, Simone Weil thought that this would be a good time for the French government to attend to the needs of the soul of the workers and rural people. She argues that this is truly the only way to obtain consented obedience from one's people -- a people who are oppressed will not consent to obey. That is why, Simone Weil argues, France must study how the workers and peasants have been uprooted in the past and take measures to remedy this situation. The people constitute the morale of the country -- if they are oppressed the country can have all the armed forces it can muster together but it will not have the morale of its people behind it. This will cripple the country from within. This was a problem studied by many political thinkers -- Plato, Rousseau, and Kant. Simone Weil suggests how to build the morale of the people from within; these suggestions tend to be socialistic as well as attentive to ways that their work could have a spiritual orientation. She emphasizes that their conditions of existence and needs of the soul should not be improved for the sake of the state itself, rather each and every individual soul among the people remains the most important motive for changing their life conditions.

Simone Weil thinks that physical labourers should form the spiritual core of Western civilization. Thus, she thinks that the workers and peasants should be given a special role in the re-rooting of the nation-state. Simone Weil has argued throughout her life, as I have shown in this thesis, that work and especially work with a method is an essential part of the human condition. She thinks that what distinguishes the Western civilization is that its greatest thinkers, in moments of illumination, have recognized the spiritual value of human labour. Thus, she thought that France should have, after the Second World War, led the Western nation-states by organizing itself so as to give work its true dignity.

My analysis of how Simone Weil thought that the workers had been uprooted and could be rooted again takes France, following her, as the place to examine. I think that with some adaptations, however, her suggestions could be applied to most Western nation-states. Weil's suggestions for reforming the whole *raison d'être* of work

and thereby the conditions of work for manual labourers are intended to give to work its true dignity.

F. ATTENDING TO THE PARTICULARS: IDEAS FOR RE-ROOTING WESTERN CIVILISATION

i. Workers: work with a method

Simone Weil holds the Encyclopedists partially responsible for uprooting the Nation-State in its inception. They helped to uproot the French culture in particular (and the Western culture in general) through the militant revolutionaries, the workers and the peasants. They were responsible, she argues, insofar as they bequeathed to us the ideology of progress and the corresponding conception of the French revolution as a complete break with the past rather than as a struggle for "true justice." The Encyclopedists spread the disease of uprootedness throughout the whole social body in France, she claims, through their special form of education. Since they believed so whole-heartedly in progress they conceived of education as a means of teaching people how it is that the Western civilization became the most highly civilized culture and how the past is nothing but a linear progression towards our present Western culture. Simone Weil cites as an example of this way of thinking: "On croit couramment qu'un petit paysan d'aujourd'hui, élève de l'école primaire, en sait plus que Pythagore, parce qu'il répète docilement que la terre tourne autour du soleil."¹²⁹ This education is based on a particular view of progress which is measured by technical success. This, with its emphasis on technical progress, has cut the Western culture off from its Greek roots, its spiritual roots:

Il en est résulté une culture qui s'est développée dans un milieu très restreint, séparé du monde, dans une atmosphère confinée, une culture considérablement orientée vers la technique et influencée par elle, très teintée de pragmatisme, extrêmement fragmentée par la spécialisation, tout à fait dénuée à la fois de contact avec cet univers-ci et d'ouverture vers l'autre monde.¹³⁰

The young, Simone Weil argues, are taught to have equally narrow goals in learning. Thus, they become obsessed with their marks because their only concern is success. They are unaware of their need for truth, and even though some may still desire truth, Simone Weil does not think the education system inherited from the Encyclopedists could offer them truth. Whereas the youth are obsessed with success due to the ideology of

¹²⁹Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p. 64.

¹³⁰Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.64.

progress, the working class demonstrate their uprootedness through an obsession with their paycheques. Simone Weil considers money another poison of the social body and it especially afflicts the wage-earning class.

L'argent détruit les racines partout où il pénètre, en remplaçant tous les mobiles par le désir de gagner... Il est une condition sociale entièrement et perpétuellement suspendue à l'argent, c'est le salariat, surtout depuis que le salaire aux pièces oblige chaque ouvrier à avoir l'attention toujours fixée sur le compte de sous.¹³¹

According to Simone Weil's analysis, the Encyclopedists' ideology of progress is equally responsible for the fact that these people are not provided with other motives to stimulate their desire to work. Her reasoning is that the militant revolutionaries, marxists, and socialists alike were mainly influenced by this faith in progress; that is, that any break with the past way of doing things, especially with past systems, would be good. Marx, she argues, did not follow the Encyclopedists in their conception of the revolution as a break with the past. Rather, he knew that the revolution needed to be rooted in the past and that is why, she claims: "Marx... a tenu à faire remonter cette tradition aux âges les plus lointains en faisant de la lutte des classes l'unique principe d'explication historique."¹³² Simone Weil follows Marx in encouraging the French to reclaim their past by recognizing that their system of trade-unionism has been inherited from the guild spirit of the Middle Ages. This is the only way to put an end to the proletariat conditions. She argues that the uprooted revolutionaries will never succeed, on purely legal grounds, to improve the workers' conditions because their distress is material and spiritual uprootedness:

On ne détruira pas la condition prolétarienne avec des mesures juridiques, qu'il s'agisse de la nationalisation des industries-clefs, ou de la suppression de la propriété privée, ou de pouvoirs accordés aux syndicats pour la conclusion de conventions collectives, ou des délégués d'usines, ou du contrôle de l'embauche.¹³³

Even Marx, she says, did not seem to realize that his own analysis demanded other solutions than the ones he ended up suggesting which, like the revolutionaries, remained purely legal. *Capital*, she argues, shows that Marx knew better. In order to find a remedy to the proletariat condition, Simone Weil analyses why the workers agreed to the legal proposals of the time. She thinks that although these legal proposals are not the solution to the proletariat condition, they responded to some particular need of the souls of the workers. They demanded control of

¹³¹Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.63.

¹³²Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.71.

¹³³Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.73.

engagement and nationalization because of their need for job security: "... ils sont obsédés par la peur du déracinement total, du chômage."¹³⁴ Earlier in this chapter we learned that for Simone Weil, unemployment is one manifestation of uprootedness. Given her desire to make work the spiritual core of society, we can understand her horror. Also, she claims that if the workers want the abolition of private property, it is because they have been deprived of their need for property for so long that they chose any way offered to them to set it right.

Simone Weil attempts to respond to their "cries of woe" and to find a way to cure them. She suggests that a young person should not be allowed to leave school at twelve or thirteen to enter a factory. This produces such a shock and creates a kind of bitterness which, she claims, can rule out all love of work. Also, she argues, that there must be a change in the system with respect to the concentration of attention on work. Workers need other stimulants besides "fear and extra pay" to keep their attention focused. They should be able to be responsible and show initiative in their work.

Technical research, Simone Weil suggests, could be done with another objective in mind besides the usual double objective of increasing profits and pleasing the consumer. This other objective would be to improve the factory machinery in such a way that it suits the people who work them. Simone Weil argues that technicians should be taught, as part of their instruction in engineering and technical schools, to be thinking of those who do the work when creating their machines. She thinks that technicians could certainly resolve the problem, if posed to them, of designing machinery which would have a more positive effect on the moral well-being of the workers. This is, according to Simone Weil, the main problem with factory life. Her ideal was:

Si la plus grande partie des ouvriers étaient des professionnels hautement qualifiés, ayant à faire preuve assez souvent d'ingéniosité et d'initiative, responsables de leur production et de leur machine, la discipline actuelle du travail n'aurait plus aucune raison d'être.¹³⁵

These professionals could share workshops or work at home. They could all communicate and work together when they need to -- this structure would do away with piece work. People could work at normal speed because they are not aiming for over-production. Finally, work would no longer be a prison-like situation as exists in the factories, as she says:

¹³⁴Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.73.

¹³⁵Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.81-82.

Ce serait autre chose que de savoir qu'on doit répéter indéfiniment le même geste, imposé par un ordre, jusqu'à la seconde précise où un nouveau commandement viendra imposer un nouveau geste pour une durée qu'on ignore. Il y a une certaine relation avec le temps qui convient aux choses inertes, et une autre qui convient aux créatures pensantes. On a tort de les confondre.¹³⁶

Simone Weil maintains that workers should be highly qualified professionals. To this end, workers would work with a method in mind. Thus, it is apparent that methodical thinking remains an essential element of Simone Weil's philosophical anthropology in *L'Enracinement*, contrary to Mary Dietz's claim that methodical thinking is completely absent in *L'Enracinement*.¹³⁷

Rather than continue the trend, begun by the Encyclopedists, to reject anything that has to do with the past, Simone Weil wants to re-introduce a system similar in style to the old guild system of the Middle Ages -- where young people went through a course of apprenticeship, usually learning from their fathers or mothers. This would prevent the young from experiencing that shock of factory life at thirteen or fourteen -- they could gradually learn the work and they could begin after school when they are young, innocent, and curious about their parent's occupations. The principle Simone Weil uses in her ideas of reform is that when people are in distress over their situation -- you do not try to provide them with what they believe they want, rather you look for the best method to rid them of their distress altogether.

Since the capitalists have been so negligent in the area of apprenticeship, she claims that it will have to be up to the state to set that practise in place:

Il faut faire savoir une fois pour toutes à tout le pays et aux intéressés eux-mêmes que les patrons se sont montrés en fait incapables de soutenir les responsabilités que le système capitaliste fait peser sur eux. Ils ont une fonction à remplir, mais non celle-là, parce que l'expérience fait voir que celle-là est trop lourde et trop vaste pour eux. Une fois cela bien entendu, on n'aura plus peur d'eux, et eux de leur côté cesseront de s'opposer aux réformes nécessaires; ils resteront dans les limites modestes de leur fonction naturelle.¹³⁸

Simone Weil also criticizes the trade unions for their negligence in this area of apprenticeship, as well as in defending the extremely oppressed factory workers, such as the youth, women, and immigrant workers. Generally these people were abandoned to their misery: "La somme entière de leur douleur comptait beaucoup moins dans

¹³⁶Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.82-83.

¹³⁷Dietz, *Between*, op. cit., p.150.

¹³⁸Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.85.

la vie syndicale que le problème d'une augmentation de salaire pour des catégories déjà largement payées."¹³⁹ The reason youth, women, and immigrant workers were abandoned to their suffering has, according to Simone Weil, to do with human nature. Human beings are naturally repelled by those in misfortune -- it is a law of sensibility that is, human beings have the propensity to feel contempt and revulsion for those in misfortune. But this does not excuse the trade unions. On the contrary, it demonstrated, according to Simone Weil, how the workers' trade-unions, like the capitalists, have betrayed their calling. The Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne had taken some measures to relieve the misfortunes of the youth workers.

ii. Ideas for rooting a nation or a people

Simone Weil argues that the Western nations have fallen prey to the disease of specialization and she suggests that they have the desire to spread this disease all over the world. In "Perspectives: Allons-nous vers la révolution prolétarienne?" and in *Réflexions sur les causes de la liberté et de l'oppression sociale* she criticized industry for the same problem. There, she argued that the specialization of labour, the division of labour was one of the central causes of oppression. Here again, she claims that the specialization of culture is one of the main causes of its uprootedness. Like all uprootedness we have examined in *L'Enracinement*, cultural uprootedness is also the result of the ideology of progress bequeathed to us by the Encyclopedists. To value the ideology of progress is to value the new and to reject the old -- the traditional. It is this chase after the absolutely new that leads to specialization and deals a death blow to continuity in time, according to Simone Weil's dualistic perspective. The transmission of the continuity in time from one generation to the next that makes a culture a *metaxu*.

One symptom of a culture's uprootedness is, she thinks, when the workers and peasants are completely uncomfortable in the world of ideas. The wisdom that could be obtained in reading Racine's *Phèdre* is not available to those who are led to think that the world of ideas belongs to a special class of people. Simone Weil thinks that if there is truth transmitted by someone of a particular culture, then everyone in that culture could be made so familiar with this truth; in this way, it becomes a lived reality among the people. Culture, she thinks, should be

¹³⁹Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.86.

something unique and shared by everyone who belongs to this particular culture, thus keeping it alive. If the culture is to be a *metaxu* for each and every soul that forms a part of it, then it must attempt to nourish each and every soul, not only the special few. Simone Weil realizes that her ideas on this point are not easy to enact, nevertheless, she thinks that Western cultures need just such a stimulant. Simone Weil proposes that France take the lead in building an industrial population of a new type. The industrial youth, she thought, should have not a purely professional training, but also a general education: "Il faut qu'ils se sentent chez eux dans le monde de la pensée"¹⁴⁰

Simone Weil recognizes that the topic of a working-class culture had been very popular throughout France, Germany, and other European countries ever since the Bolshevik revolution --and no doubt before. However, she, unlike the Marxists, did not perceive the workers' material conditions of existence to be the main obstacle to the people sharing in a culture. Simone Weil points out that if the workers were being offered a little pure truth they would be able to receive it as would any human being disposed to allowing the truth enter his/her soul. She argues that: "La vérité illumine l'âme a proportion de sa pureté et non pas d'aucune espèce de quantité."¹⁴¹

Thus, she argues, it is not material obstacles that prevent them from receiving the purer treasures of the culture, it is rather that the people who should be transmitting these truths to them have not themselves given their attention to these "treasures from the past." Again, this is due to the influence of the Encyclopedists who have discouraged paying attention to the past in any form. That is why they talk, not in terms of translating, but of popularizing culture. As Simone Weil points out:

Non pas prendre les vérités, déjà bien trop pauvres, contenues dans la culture des intellectuels, pour les dégrader, les mutiler, les vider de leur saveur; mais simplement les exprimer, dans leur plénitude au moyen d'un langage qui, selon le mot de Pascal, les rende sensibles au cœur, pour des gens dont la sensibilité se trouve modelée par la condition ouvrière.¹⁴²

Translation or "transposition" of truths, she thought, are necessary because the language in its original use is not always transparent and could easily give the opposite message than the intended one. The point being that sometimes parables can be mis-read. Therefore, the human beings who have reached the level of attention and thus

¹⁴⁰Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.88.

¹⁴¹Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.90.

¹⁴²Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.91.

have received the truth of the text should transpose these truths for those who have not had the time to develop this attention.

This idea of "transposing truths" is borrowed from science. Simone Weil thinks that if there is truth in a text then it should be able to be expressed in many different ways -- the same truth in different manifestations of it. Likewise, when a scientist discovers something through experimentation, the other scientists should also be able to come up with the same results in their experimentations otherwise the original discovery did not present us with a truth about that which was being studied. So just as transposition is a criterion of truth in science, Simone Weil thinks transposition should also be a criterion of truth in the other aspects of a culture, as she says: "Ce qui ne peut pas être transposé n'est pas une vérité ..." ¹⁴³ She argues that learning and practising the art of transposing truths, thereby transmitting culture to the people, could be a "precious stimulant" for culture itself. This might succeed in bringing culture alive among the people rather than it being another form of specialization. The culture of specialists is an uprooted culture, and the signs of this are that relations between disciplines become cut; each discipline is seen to be an end in itself. Simone Weil's favourite example of the kind of culture we have developed is that of the way geometrical necessity is taught to the young, that is, as not having any relation to the world. As she argues:

La plupart ignoreront toujours que presque toutes nos actions, simples ou savamment combinées, sont des applications de notions géométriques, que l'univers ou nous vivons est un tissu de relations géométriques, et que la nécessité géométrique est celle même à laquelle nous sommes soumis en fait, comme créatures enfermées dans l'espace et le temps. On présente la nécessité géométrique de telle manière qu'elle paraît arbitraire. Quoi de plus absurde qu'une nécessité arbitraire? Par définition, une nécessité s'impose. ¹⁴⁴

Simone Weil suggests that the way to teach geometrical necessity to the youth is by introducing it through training schools, such as the "Chantier de jeunesse," associating theoretical study and the workshop. ¹⁴⁵ Children should construct objects which would relate certain geometrical angles and theorems to a project. Other tasks, she suggests would be to give them problems which are known to be geometrically impossible. Once they discover that they cannot complete this task they would be asked to demonstrate its impossibility. This way, Simone Weil thinks,

¹⁴³Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.92.

¹⁴⁴Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.93.

¹⁴⁵These were schools set up by the Vichy government during the Second World War to give young people "practical experience in a trade." Generally, they were modelled on the ideas of the Personalist movement on education.

they would encounter necessity.

Simone Weil argues that only the "first class" works of literature should be taught to the workers, since literature is the study of the human condition. Only those works that really relate human misery in a way that pierces the heart could capture their attention. For example, she argues that a worker "qui a l'angoisse du chômage enfoncée jusque dans la moelle des os comprendrait l'état de Philoctète quand on lui enlève son arc, et le désespoir avec lequel il regarde ses mains impuissantes."¹⁴⁶

These reforms are meant to replace the working class's lack of culture with a very real working-class culture and should have the effect of totally erasing their slavery. Most of all, Simone Weil hopes that such reforms would free their minds for the highest forms of thought. According to Simone Weil's philosophical anthropology, the workers have been enslaved because they have been deprived of their human capacity to think. This prevented them from having the choice to give attention to those spiritual treasures from the past which transmit a knowledge of the eternal destiny of human beings. For the collectivity to be a *metaxu* for the workers, they must not be deprived of this choice. Thus the state must, in order to fulfill its obligations to these people, make every attempt to provide them with this choice by making the appropriate reforms. Liberty of mind is one of the vital needs of the human being and the workers, she thinks, have been deprived of this. The reforms should allow the workers to be thinking people in their work; then, their minds would not be oppressed and they could if they chose spend a couple of hours reading or studying at the end of the day. Simone Weil insists that any worker reforms not dealing with their spiritual impoverishment show a misunderstanding of their primary needs.

Finally, Simone Weil suggests a number of other concrete reforms. For example, large factories could be abolished; instead, a number of small workshops could be dispersed throughout the country, all connected to one central assembly shop. The workers could all go and visit the central shop occasionally. Workers, she thinks, should acquire technical knowledge about the products being developed. She thought it would be a good idea to have a workers' university near the central assembly shop -- this university should be associated with the managers of the industry, but it should not be their property.

¹⁴⁶Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.95.

The machines in the workshops should be the property of the workers either individually or collectively. This would take care of part of their need for private property. But, she argues, each worker should also have his own house and a piece of land. All of this could be accomplished through the administration of the state.¹⁴⁷

Simone Weil's suggestions were intended to be real and possible for the state of France to enact. If her views seem Utopian and impractical, it is perhaps because we continue to live within a capitalist or Marxist ideology. It is possible, though, to consider Simone Weil's suggestions as political ideals which would bring about a novel kind of state: one retaining something of the present system and replacing other of its more brutal ways with better systems and goals to root us in our past.

Simone Weil's social reforms centre around the idea of providing the physical labourers with a sense of dignity in their work. These people, she thinks, should know that their work has as much spiritual value as intellectual labour. Thus, she finds the capitalist's and socialist's use of money as a motive for work degrading and uprooting. Money, and all the material possessions it can buy, offers no spiritual awareness nor dignity to the individual in his/her work. Dignity comes from being responsible and knowing that one's work is an important and essential contribution to the collectivity. In work one learns how to willingly accept the way of things and obey the order of the world. This knowledge gives work its spiritual value. Above all, this idea of making work a spiritual bridge informs Simone Weil's view of a social order:

En tout cas, un tel mode de vie sociale ne serait ni capitaliste ni socialiste....
Il aurait pour orientation, non pas, selon la formule qui tend aujourd'hui à devenir à la mode, l'intérêt du consommateur - cet intérêt ne peut être que grossièrement matériel - mais la dignité de l'homme dans le travail, ce qui est une valeur spirituelle.¹⁴⁸

iii. Rural People : the Relation to Necessity through the Beauty of Nature is at the heart of rooting a Nation

It has now become difficult to imagine the countryside as an artist such as Van Gogh saw it. In a relatively short time, the uprootedness of the countryside has become almost total in the Western nations. Transmigration from rural to urban areas has depopulated the rural regions. Simone Weil noticed how dissatisfied the peasants have become with life on the farm and that their ambitions were to move to the towns and cities - to become factory

¹⁴⁷Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.98-103.

¹⁴⁸Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.103.

workers.

Simone Weil analysed the cause of uprootedness in the countryside. She noted that more attention had been given to the problems of factory workers in industrial society and to artisans in pre-industrial society than to the peasants. Thus, she claimed, the peasants suffer from a "lack of honour," reducing them to an inferior status in the face of the workers. This produces an exodus: peasants leave the country to go to the towns to become workers. The workers subscribe to the notion that they are superior to rural people and take every opportunity to let them know it. The leftist intellectuals have encouraged the situation by focusing most of their efforts in helping the workers. Consequently, the rural population has remained, for the most part, supporters of the right, politically.

Most of the intellectuals Simone Weil is referring to have been raised with the belief that an agriculturally based society belongs to the old feudal system. This is especially true of the Marxists, who in the 1930's, were working towards industrializing all societies so that they could liberate all the workers at once. They were propelled by their faith in progress -- technology would liberate us all from labour. They inherited this optimism from the Encyclopedists in whose footsteps they followed -- from the scientific revolution to liberation through technology. Simone Weil constantly reminds us of what is lost along the way. Our humanity is thrown away for the sake of a future filled only with our imaginings.

The peasants' problem of feeling ignored is not based on their imaginings; rather, it is based on real events. She traces the process of devaluation and uprooting of rural life to as early as the fourteenth century when "les paysans énumèrent, avec un accent déchirant, les cruautés que leur font subir toutes les classes de la société, y compris les artisans."¹⁴⁹ The number of events have only increased since then. Another example Simone Weil talks about, one that continues to afflict the Western countries, especially France, is how people are continually deserting the land. She predicts that the trend, if continued, will result in the death of society.

Simone Weil remarks that the state appears to be helpless in the face of the peasants' uprootedness. During the economic crisis in France, which had begun in 1931, the government seemed able to do anything but stand by and watch as the rural people flooded into the cities to work. To Simone Weil, this was a clear indication that the

¹⁴⁹Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.105.

workers' problems were intimately connected to the peasants' problems. If the displaced rural people are always there to replace the striking workers, then the unions and all the workers' efforts would be rendered useless. Thus, Simone Weil argues that whatever effort is made to help relieve the workers' oppression and improve their morale, an equal effort must be made for the rural people.

The first need to consider in trying to help the farmers feel rooted is their need for property. She argues that if it were recognized that "the need of property" is sacred and not simply one of "legal title," then it would be recognized that the land worked by the peasants should obviously not be owned by the people of the town. If it is necessary to have large agricultural enterprises then, like the workers, the rural people could form co-operatives. It is quite conceivable that they could organize themselves to produce what is needed.

Other needs of the soul that go wanting among rural people are their needs for security and risk. Simone Weil suggests that those ready to retire be given old age pensions. This would give them some security. On the other hand, for the young rural boys and girls too much security can be stifling. Simone Weil has noticed that, at first, when they begin working on the farm they consider it enjoyable, "the work is pure poetry" for them. But later, when they are older, work ceases to be a poetic experience and boredom sets in. Programs must be put in place to prevent boredom from taking hold. Simone Weil suggests that the young peasants be encouraged to travel, free of charge, in the countryside of other parts of France or in other countries. This would assuage their thirst for adventure and they would then be expected to return home and begin family life.

Also, she suggests setting up a form of education suitable to a rural way of life. Science, she thinks, could be taught in a poetic way to rural people, especially as it relates to their work.

Pour les paysans, tout devrait avoir pour centre le merveilleux circuit par lequel l'énergie solaire, descendue dans les plantes, fixée par la chlorophylle, concentrée dans les graines et les fruits, entre dans l'homme qui mange ou boit, passe dans ses muscles et se dépense pour l'aménagement de la terre.¹⁵⁰

For science to be taught like this to the rural people Simone Weil thinks we would have to begin to see it as the Greeks saw science, that is, as the study of the beauty of the world. Only then could science be taught in such a way as to emphasize not only the mechanical aspect of nature but also its beauty.

¹⁵⁰Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.114-115.

Simone Weil argues that rural people need to have their own "culture of the mind." To develop this, rural schoolteachers have to have a special kind of education — one appropriate to teaching rural children. One way could be for them to be trained to teach the "folklore" of France, and then by way of contrast and comparison, the folklore of different countries around the world. Most of all, she thinks that school teachers could be taught to appreciate the experience of rural life — its hardships and its beauty — so that they can teach the children to absorb the poetic side of rural life and love this.

Finally, she raises a very controversial issue: the importance and value of religious education in France. For Simone Weil, a religious education, obtained through the churches and in the schools, has the value of fulfilling the need for truth. She argues that the parables about the countryside that Christ used to privilege work on the land should be used to nourish the souls of the peasants. This could not be accomplished routinely through the village priest because many of Christ's parables are not included in the liturgy. Thus, she argued that religion must also be taught in the schools.

She argues that the secularization of education does not give children a neutral education. Schoolteachers can be as fanatic about their ideas of what is neutral, as religious zealots are concerning their beliefs. It must be recalled that in Simone Weil's view, the state and the social order must have as its primary obligation that of acting as a *metaxu* for each and every individual in the state. With this primary obligation in view, we can appreciate her claim that secular education harms children because it covers up the spiritual treasures of the past — which as we saw above issue from Christianity and the tradition of "identical thought". Simone Weil's solution to the problem is to bring religion back into the schools — not only through Christianity, but also through other religions: "La seule attitude à la fois légitime et pratiquement possible que puisse avoir, en France, l'enseignement public à l'égard du Christianisme consiste à le regarder comme un trésor de la pensée humaine parmi tant d'autres."¹⁵¹

She thinks it is absurd that graduates would leave university without having read the Bible, especially since they would have read poetry, literature, and philosophy "impregnated with Christianity." To address this problem:

Il n'y aurait qu'à dire aux futurs instituteurs et aux futurs professeurs: la religion a eu de tout temps et en tout pays, sauf tout récemment en quelques endroits de l'Europe, un rôle dominant dans le développement de la culture, de

¹⁵¹Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.120.

la pensée, de la civilisation humaine. Une instruction dans laquelle il n'est jamais question de religion est une absurdité. D'autre part, de même qu'en histoire on parle beaucoup de la France aux petits Français, il est naturel qu'étant en Europe, si l'on parle de religion, il s'agisse avant tout du christianisme.¹⁵²

People, she thinks, should be permitted to know their spiritual past and receive these treasures as much as they are open to them. On the one hand, we should, she says, not hide the fact that dogma has played a very significant role in our countries' past, and we should learn that very eminent people have believed in it. On the other hand, we should not hide the fact that the very same dogma has been badly used to inflict the worst cruelties on people. Simone Weil thinks that children or young adults might then come to understand that religion can be very beautiful and true, but in the hands of certain people it can be used as a front for idolatry and the like. At least, she argues, the people should be given the chance to have some contact with the beauty of Christianity. This can only happen if they are introduced to the religious texts. Teachers, she thinks, could comment on the Bible "in the spirit of the text." The idea is that the text may inspire students simply with its beauty. Dogma, Simone Weil claims, is a part of our heritage and it should be taught as such. Yet, she insists that teachers should not be permitted to make any negative or affirmative judgement on it. Rather, children should be left to find the truth in it, or not, as they can. This way, Simone Weil hopes that the people would be attracted to it on their own accord:

Le contact avec la beauté chrétienne, présentée simplement comme une beauté à savourer, imprégnerait insensiblement de spiritualité la masse du pays, si toutefois le pays en est capable, bien plus efficacement qu'aucun enseignement dogmatique des croyances religieuses.¹⁵³

For the rural people, the text that would best nourish their souls is the New Testament. Particularly apt, Simone Weil thinks, are those passages from Christ's description of rural life, such as the Gospel of St. Mark, Chapter 4, where Christ uses the analogy of the Word of God being like a seed that is sown in the soil. If the soil is good the seed will take root, and with the help of the sun it will grow. Simone Weil takes this analogy to express how the mechanism of growth reflects the supernatural mechanism; a peasant might come to understand and see that daily labour has this rigorous necessity about it which is the reflection of how God sows the seeds in the hearts of people. This, she thinks, should give them another perspective on the nurturing process. Also, all the efforts they make to prepare the soil properly brings about a fatigue which makes them even more appreciative of the beauty

¹⁵²Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.120.

¹⁵³Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.122.

of the successful crop. In this way they are prone to understanding, much better than human beings who labour less and experience much less fatigue, the supernatural mechanism and the glory which is God's when the word, sown in the human heart, takes root and flourishes. It is the knowledge that their work is analogous to God's work which gives work its "true dignity." That is why Simone Weil thinks that: "La tâche de l'école populaire est de donner au travail davantage de dignité en y infusant de la pensée, et non pas de faire du travailleur une chose à compartiments qui tantôt travaille et tantôt pense."¹⁵⁴

Simone Weil thinks that work should begin to seem less like prison and more like hard work done with the thought of the wonder of the natural mechanism of which one forms a part and of how this reflects the supernatural mechanism. She presents another analogy which helps to make this point clear:

Une jeune femme heureuse, enceinte pour la première fois, qui coud une layette, pense à coudre comme il faut. Mais elle n'oublie pas un instant l'enfant qu'elle porte en elle. Au même moment, quelque part dans un atelier de prison, une condamnée coud en pensant aussi à coudre comme il faut, car elle craint d'être punie. On pourrait imaginer que les deux femmes font au même instant le même ouvrage, et ont l'attention occupée par la même difficulté technique. Il n'y en a pas moins un abîme de différence entre l'un et l'autre travail.¹⁵⁵

As I pointed out above, Simone Weil argues that it is the vocation of our age to create a civilization which is based on the spiritual nature of work. This means that just as the young pregnant woman was attending to her sewing and all the while thinking of the child she is carrying, so too, should the peasant or worker have present in his/her mind the double beauty of the natural world and the world beyond. For us to make this our vocation requires that the schools, the churches, trade unions, literary and scientific circles, and political circles would all have to cooperate.

Thus the problem Simone Weil has struggled with throughout her life is how to unite thought, in the various disciplines, so as to converge on the spirituality of work. As she conceived of it, each sector of culture has its role in the creation of a social order in which the spiritual nature of work is at the centre. Thus far we have seen how the Nation-State could be conceived to make it possible for people to live together as one people with each individual having a specific role. The workers, we saw, would be set up by the State with the proper working conditions, supplied by the engineers, technicians, and education, and the proper spiritual education supplied by the teachers

¹⁵⁴Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.123-124.

¹⁵⁵Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.124.

of science and religion. The rural people would have property, special equipment also supplied by engineers and technicians, and a spiritual education in science and religion. Now Simone Weil's problem is: what must be done for this to become a reality? This is a problem Plato had to face in the *Republic* and that is why he introduced the Philosopher-King who was the only one who could know the Form of the Good. Simone Weil faces this problem by directing all thought and action in a Nation-State towards what she saw as our vocation of creating "une civilisation fondée sur la spiritualité du travail."

G. ROOTING THE STATE

Throughout her analysis Simone Weil points to the different ways that particular sectors of society can become rooted again. However, this depends, for the most part, on how well the State can organize the society.

All the ways of rooting the peasants, the workers, and the people generally in the Nation-State depend on two conditions. Firstly, politics must be seen to be like an art, for political action demands the concentration comparable to that of an artist and its object, justice, is every bit as important as the object of art, beauty. Secondly, political leaders must find a method which is appropriate for breathing inspiration into a people. Plato, she points out, realized that there was a need for such a method -- he alludes to it in his *Politics*.

For a political leader to be like an artist, he/she must be able to think on multiple planes at once because this is the law of artistic creation. Thus the leader must be able to think about all the different groups of human beings that must be harmonized to form the nation and be a moral example for all of these people, because his/her goal is to create a just state. In order to do that he/she must first be very attentive to the impersonal part of the soul in himself/herself, and then to awaken that part of the soul in his/her citizens. To do the latter, a leader must find the method of inspiring a people with a desire for good.

Simone Weil argues that to find such a method may seem like an impossible task. But, she thinks, if it is possible for St. John of the Cross to write a treatise on the method to achieve a perfect state of mystical contemplation, then it should be possible to find a way to awaken the desire for good in a people. Simone Weil does not agree with the writers of the 16th century who claim that although matter can be methodically controlled, "...

les choses de l'âme sont ou bien arbitraires, ou bien livrées à une magie, à l'efficacité immédiate des intentions et des mots.¹⁵⁶ Rather, she claims:

A vrai dire, depuis une antiquité indéterminée, bien antérieure au christianisme, jusqu'à la deuxième moitié de la Renaissance, il a toujours été universellement reconnu qu'il y a une méthode dans les choses spirituelles et dans tout ce qui a rapport au bien de l'âme.¹⁵⁷

It is for this reason that she thinks it would be very probable that a method to breathe an inspiration into a people could be found.

Simone Weil claims we must conceive of a definite notion of public action as a mode of education for the country. This notion of public action is to "(i)ndiquer ce qui est avantageux, ce qui est obligatoire, ce qui est bien"¹⁵⁸ and that is the main goal of politics as a means of education. Simone Weil points out that public activity has previously used five different methods of education: fear and hope, brought about by threats and promises; suggestion; expression; example; and the modalities of action themselves, and those of organizations created for purposes of action.¹⁵⁹ The first is a very bad means, often used by totalitarian regimes. The second is not good, but a very powerful one -- propaganda. It is powerful because it uses repetition and it aims to conquer the force inherent in the group. Simone Weil prefers to use the final three methods, because they offer a possibility to appeal to the best in people not to try to manipulate them using force or mind control.

Expression requires a leader to be very sensitive so as to know what thoughts are hidden in the people's hearts. The leader must understand that it is a characteristic of human nature that all kinds of thoughts lay unformulated and unexpressed in the mind. Simone Weil seems to be assuming that some of these thoughts constitute the yearning for good in the hearts of people. Thus, if a political leader were to publicly express these thoughts, then they would have a stronger hold over the minds of people. Some might even bring about an inner transformation to the soul. The reason thoughts, publicly expressed, can infuse comfort, energy, and, as it were, a "spiritual food" into people is because it is a need of the soul of each and every individual to hear these truths. When the people are nourished by the truth, they are also motivated to pay attention to, and follow the direction

¹⁵⁶Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.238.

¹⁵⁷Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.238.

¹⁵⁸Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.240.

¹⁵⁹Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.190.

of, their leader. It is only then that a politician's incitations can prompt collective action without stifling the individual mind. Indeed, such action awakens the individual and stimulates growth as his/her need for truth has been satisfied.

Simone Weil realizes though that a people do not only need to be motivated towards the good, but that they also need to be motivated towards the useful. When trying to motivate the people towards the useful, leaders must use the kind of words which appeal to the carnal part of the soul, whereas when trying to motivate people towards the good, they must use words which cohere with the Christian postulate expressed in the words of Christ in the Gospel according to Matthew:

"Est-ce qu'on récolte dans les épines des grappes mûres, ou dans les chardons des figues? Ainsi tout arbre bon fait de beaux fruits; l'arbre pourri fait des fruits mauvais. Un arbre bon ne peut pas porter de mauvais fruits, ni un arbre pourri porter de beaux fruits."¹⁶⁰

Only words which are good in the spiritual sense can appeal to the eternal part of the soul. In times of peril it is words of the latter kind which may awaken those rare individuals who obey a direct and individual order from God. The important thing is to choose words that have the appropriate effects and to examine all the possible effects the different incitations might produce in different circumstances. Simone Weil claims that the pacifists of France who came out of the First World War did not sufficiently examine the consequences of their incitations for peace. This was, she claims, a grave error on their part. ♣¹⁶¹

However, as was pointed out above, the only way a leader could be depended upon to put aside his/her obsession with power and respond to his/her obligation to the people and the state is if the leader recognizes his/her "symbolic function" as the "sacred ruler" of the state. Then the leader could be the example *par excellence* of moral action, thus indicating to the people that the state is the symbol of the higher value of justice. This would predispose the people to recognize their obligation to obey the State. Their consent would be free because they would be inspired by truth and justice which they had received through the public expressions and public actions of their leader.

¹⁶⁰Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.253-254.

¹⁶¹ See *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.256, where Simone Weil outlines her rigorous method for overcoming this problem.

The hierarchical state was the only way Simone Weil could conceive of to bring truth and justice into the state and to motivate everyone towards the good. This seems impractical to political theorists such as Conor Cruise O'Brien and Phillipe Dujardin.¹⁶² O'Brien criticizes Simone Weil's stand against political party life. As has been discussed, Simone Weil agrees with Rousseau that party strife automatically destroys the Republic. Thus, she proposes in "Note sur la suppression générale des parties politiques" that the party system be completely abolished. O'Brien points out that a state (he says a France) built on Weilian lines "would have no political parties, no trade unions, no freedom of association... It would be organized on hierarchical lines, although we are not told just what these lines would be."¹⁶³ O'Brien claims that politics in fact does proceed by associations of people, and that Simone Weil had a deep rooted aversion to such associations. He then quotes a passage from *The Need for Roots* in which he claims Simone Weil expresses herself as a rigorous enemy of the "we." O'Brien argues that to be an enemy of the "we" is to be antihuman. He cites Aristotle's idea that man is a political animal and he concludes from this that to be antipolitical is to be antihuman.¹⁶⁴

The first criticism made by O'Brien of Weil's stand against political life is based on the idea that she is against freedom of association. It is not entirely correct to say that Simone Weil is against freedom of association, as such. What Simone Weil says in the cited section on freedom of opinion, is that freedom of association is not a need of the soul, but an expedient employed in the practical affairs of life.

She points out that there are two kinds of associations: those concerned with interests, and those concerned with ideas. The first kind of association, she says, is a good thing because people must be allowed to group themselves together to protect their interests. It is the second kind of association that Weil saw as dangerous. She considers that these kinds of associations suppress freedom of opinion. Freedom of opinion is a need of the intellect, which resides only in the individual. There is no such thing as a collective exercise of the intellect. When a group has opinions, it tends to impose them on its members. Then the individuals find that they cannot express opinions

¹⁶²See Conor Cruise O'Brien, "Patriotism and the Need for Roots: The Antipolitics of Simone Weil," in G.A. White, ed., *Simone Weil: Interpretations of a Life* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1981), p.95-110; Phillipe Dujardin, *Simone Weil: idéologie et politique* (Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 1975). Mary G. Dietz outlines and responds to Dujardin criticisms in *Between The Human and the Divine* 181-187.

¹⁶³O'Brien, "...antipolitics....", op. cit., p.96.

¹⁶⁴O'Brien, "...antipolitics....", op. cit., p.96.

opposed to the collective opinion, unless they wish to leave it. Thus Weil is an enemy of only those associations concerned with ideas.

It is true that she is an enemy of a certain kind of "we," but, as Mary Dietz points out, Simone Weil is not an enemy of all kinds of collectivities, rather: "By exposing patriotism's bloody relatives, and demystifying the idolatry of the State, she would create a healthy "we" — a coherent and moral patriotism — as an alternative to a sick and deracinated one."¹⁶⁵

In fact, one of the main focuses of *L'Enracinement* is how to create a state that would allow the individual to be a member of a collectivity without being oppressed by it. Being rooted means above all else to Simone Weil, that "... on doit du respect à une collectivité, quelle qu'elle soit — patrie, famille, ou tout autre —, non pas pur elle-même, mais comme nourriture d'un certain nombre d'âmes humaines."¹⁶⁶

This does not suggest that Simone Weil is an enemy of the "we" as such, but only of those "we" states which devour souls — totalitarian states, like the Nazi one or others. Simone Weil is not anti-political she is merely anti-totalitarian, against the kind of state which idolizes itself rather than attending to the nourishing of the souls that form a part of it. That is why she compares the modern form of State, modelled as it is after the Roman State, to the Great Beast, following Plato's use of the notion in the *Republic* (VII 492a-494a). Simone Weil recognizes, as did Alain before her, that political party leaders have a tendency to be like the sophists as described in the *Republic* (493a-494a).

One of the most difficult questions to address is not O'Brien's query about how to organize a society along hierarchical lines, because we can look to Rousseau and to Simone Weil's suggestions as outlined below, but rather how such a state would protect us against totalitarianism. What is the mechanism which would guard us against totalitarian rulers pretending to be symbols but really being dictators? I do not think that Simone Weil has a better answer to this problem than did Plato or Rousseau. But, she, like Rousseau, does attempt to allow the people to choose, as in a true democratic state. She proposes that the magistracy choose, from among the highest magistrates, a President of the Republic. As Plato and Rousseau always emphasize, it would be no good putting people in public

¹⁶⁵Dietz, *Between*, op. cit., p.180.

¹⁶⁶Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.15.

positions which are meant to be the highest expression of justice if these individuals were not just. That is why a proper education is so essential to the highest officials of a state, as she says:

Les juges doivent avoir une formation spirituelle, intellectuelle, historique, sociale, bien plus que juridique (le domaine proprement juridique ne doit être conserve que relativement aux choses sans importance); ils doivent être beaucoup, beaucoup plus nombreux; et ils doivent toujours juger en équité. La législation ne leur sert que de guide. Les jugements precedents aussi.
Mais il y aurait une Cour spéciale pour le jugement des juges, avec châtiments très sévères.¹⁶⁷

The President would be named for life. Then he or she would name a Prime Minister, who would be put in place for a 5-year term -- but for the first three months he or she would be on probation. The President could bring the Prime Minister or any member of the Legislative Chamber in front of the Supreme Court of Justice for transgressing his/her obligations.

The people would elect the Legislative Chamber every five years. Their duties would be:

1. connaître les besoins, les aspirations, les pensées sourdes du peuple;
2. les traduire en idées claires sous forme de lois;
3. surveiller comment le gouvernement effectif du pays et la magistrature s'inspirent de l'esprit de la législation, et en instruire régulièrement la peuple.¹⁶⁸

Those who are not renewed after their 5-year term is up would have to go in front of a tribunal that would examine why they were not re-elected. The hearings would be publicized.

Finally, every 20 years, the people would be asked in a referendum whether they find (given human imperfection) public life satisfying. To guard against arbitrariness, she suggests that: "Le referendum est procédé d'une longue periode de réflexion et de discussion, ou toute propagande est interdite sous peine des châtiments les plus graves."¹⁶⁹ If the people's answer to the referendum is that the public life is not satisfactory then "...le Président de la République tombe automatiquement, et se trouve automatiquement soumis jusqu'à la mort à une

¹⁶⁷Simone Weil, "Idées essentielles pour une nouvelle Constitution," *Ecrits de Londres et dernières lettres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), p.95.

¹⁶⁸Weil, "...pour une nouvelle constitution", op. cit., p.94.

¹⁶⁹Weil, "...pour une nouvelle constitution", op. cit., p.97.

dégradation sociale dont on fixerait les modalités."¹⁷⁰

Such measures taken to prevent totalitarianism from settling into a state may or may not be effective, but in any case we could not accuse Simone Weil of paying no attention to the problem of guarding her political State against that tendency. One thing is certain though, she gives an important role to the people as is the spirit of a true democracy.

Thus, the role of the leaders as examples is reinforced by the way the state and the political process is organized; leaders are severely punished so that the people can see that the transgression of their obligations is a very grave matter. This is intended to guard against the kind of cynicism that often sets in among the people of democratic states. However, no matter how sincerely political leaders treat politics as an art, as long as they are not backed by the institutions of science and religion it would all be for naught.

H. GROWING ROOTS: THE REUNION OF SCIENCE AND RELIGION

Throughout Simone Weil's thought we receive hints, in the form of criticisms, of the need to imbue science with the spirit of truth and religion with the true conception of God, and to re-unite the two, with science taking its proper place in the hierarchy of thought following religion. We have earlier considered the conflict between science and religion, now we arrive at Simone Weil's idea of a resolution.

Truth, Simone Weil says, is a need of the soul and it is mysteriously united with the Good: "La vérité et la beauté habitent ce domaine des choses impersonnelles C'est lui qui est Sacré."¹⁷¹ But the only way to dwell in truth is to love -- because to love is to practise a form of attention and this is the only way to reach that realm where the truth resides.

L'amour réel est pur et par lui-même esprit de vérité. C'est le Saint-Esprit. Le mot grec qu'on traduit par esprit signifie littéralement souffle igné, souffle mélangé à du feu, et il désignait, dans l'Antiquité, la notion que la science désigne aujourd'hui par le mot d'énergie. Ce que nous traduisons "esprit de vérité" signifie l'énergie de la vérité, la vérité comme force agissante. L'amour pur est cette force agissante, l'amour qui ne veut à aucun prix, en aucun

¹⁷⁰Weil, "...pour une nouvelle constitution", op. cit., p.97.

¹⁷¹Weil, "La personne et le sacré", op. cit., p.17.

cas, ni du mensonge ni de l'erreur.¹⁷²

For the scientist to love like this he/she must love the stuff of his (her), p.investigations, which is the universe. And what can be loved in the universe is its beauty: "La vraie définition de la science, c'est qu'elle est l'étude de la beauté du monde."¹⁷³

As we have seen from Simone Weil's religious metaphysics, beauty consists of the thought of a net of relations: "...des relations qui saisissent matière et force dans un réseau invisible, impalpable et inaltérable d'ordre et d'harmonie."¹⁷⁴

This net of relations is God's orders left for us to contemplate: "C'est que l'objet de la pensée humaine est, lui aussi, de la pensée. Le savant a pour fin l'union de son propre esprit avec la sagesse mystérieuse éternellement inscrite dans l'univers."¹⁷⁵ Thus, according to Simone Weil's conception of the universe, of religious metaphysics, and of science, there is no opposition "...entre l'esprit de la science et celui de la religion..." because: "L'investigation scientifique n'est qu'une forme de la contemplation religieuse."¹⁷⁶

This idea that the object of human thought is itself thought suggests that Simone Weil is a monist, not a dualist. But Simone Weil always insists that God is outside of the universe, that: "Dieu fait exister cet univers en consentant à ne pas y commander, bien qu'il en ait le pouvoir...."¹⁷⁷ What allows Simone Weil to reconcile science and religion, as she finally makes explicit in *L'Enracinement*, is the fact that she remains a dualist throughout. She defines the scientists task in much the same way as she defines the task of any human being who truly desires that pure good descend. It is Simone Weil's conception of God as an impersonal Providence in this world which transforms the way we view the universe and God's relation to it as well as our own.

As I have pointed out earlier in this concluding chapter, Simone Weil's state must be heirarchical. As we saw above, this means that the leaders of the state must be symbols of a higher order. But, as Simone Weil saw it, present-day science, with all of its prestige, undermines this idea of there being such a higher order. As this

¹⁷²Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.319-320.

¹⁷³Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.329.

¹⁷⁴Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.329.

¹⁷⁵Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.329.

¹⁷⁶Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.329.

¹⁷⁷Weil, *Attente*, op. cit., p.146.

thesis points out, Simone Weil thinks that science has gone astray in its theory of the universe. Furthermore, as analyzed in Chapter Two, she thinks that science has taught us that there is no moral authority outside of human reason. Thus, each individual should conduct himself/herself in accordance with his/her own reason. This would be fine except that Simone Weil thinks that it is very difficult for the individual to attain this independent reasoning capacity. As pointed out in Chapter Two of this thesis, the social realm, through "language," transmits to the individual a whole culture of ideas and ways of conducting himself/herself before he/she attains the capacity to think. In *L'Enracinement* Simone Weil claims, I suggest, that these cultural roots have the added advantage of transmitting spiritual treasures to the individual. However, if these spiritual treasures are rooted in religion, as they are for Simone Weil, and religion has lost its claim to authority on these matters, as she thinks it has, then this thought will not be transmitted, certainly not in the way that Simone Weil thinks it should be. Consequently, the leaders of the state could not act as moral examples of this higher order. Thus, it is the schism between science and religion which must be overcome for the state to provide for the Order conducive to allowing human beings to fulfill their obligations and to the nurturing of the souls of those who form a part of it.

In Chapter Two of this thesis, I pointed out that Simone Weil thought that had science followed Descartes' moral teaching, the schism with religion might not have occurred. However, she claimed that Descartes had himself gone astray in the sense that he had not discovered a way of preventing the order, conceived by the mind, from being imposed on the world. Thus, one of the ideas she found in Descartes' thought which was to root modern science in Greek science had not been, Simone Weil thought, successful.

In *L'Enracinement*, Simone Weil claims that Descartes' project was bound to go astray because to succeed Descartes would have had to confront the Church's conception of God. As we saw above, Simone Weil argued that the early Christians had carried on the Greek view of God which issues from the tradition of identical thought, but that the Romans, when they took over Christianity, transformed it and the connection to the tradition of identical thought was lost. The connection was the relation between the Order of the World and Christ's Incarnation being the completion of the Order by inscribing the Image as the Beauty of the World which leads by desire to God's Love. The Roman's lost sight of the Image by seeing our ability to meet necessity on her own terms as an indication of our role as being one of Mastery; that is, as being the image of the All-Powerful God and thus sharing God's

Power over All. Weil's argument is that this is not the point of the Image, rather the way of Christ is quite the contrary; it is an abdication of imaginary power which reveals the Beauty of the Image and the Reality of the Love at the basis of Creation; the abdication of our imaginary power over nature matches God's abdication of His Power to allow us to be free. So, God is All-Powerful but He, in his Love, desires our consent and so He expressed this Love by creating a distance between Himself and His Creation at Creation; yet, as we saw this distance is bridged by Love – the impossible Love.

Simone Weil argues that this shift in thinking between Greek science and Modern science is the result of this transformation that had taken place in religion. But, she says, this does not have to continue because:

Il ne s'agit pas de l'avènement du christianisme. Le christianisme originel, tel qu'il se trouve encore présent pour nous dans le Nouveau Testament, et surtout dans les Evangiles, était, comme la religion antique des Mystères, parfaitement apte à être l'inspiration centrale d'une science parfaitement rigoureuse.¹⁷⁸

Her analysis of Christianity under the Romans and Early Christianity found in the New Testament has uncovered two different conceptions of Divine Providence. In the Gospels of the New Testament she found a conception of an impersonal Providence, and she quotes two passages from the Gospels in support of her claim. The first:

"Devenez les fils de votre Père, celui des cieux; car il fait lever le soleil sur les méchants et les bons, et fait tomber la pluie sur les justes et les injustes ... Soyez donc parfaits comme votre Père céleste est parfait."¹⁷⁹

She understands this passage to be saying that what is being offered as a model of perfection is "...l'impartialité aveugle de la matière inerte, c'est régularité impitoyable de l'ordre du monde, absolument indifférente à la qualité des hommes"¹⁸⁰ For the scientist, she argues, this would mean that he/she could contemplate the order of the world, that is, the order God has inscribed in the world (without further intervention). Thus, claims Simone Weil, this passage also suggests that in the same way as the sun shines down on all, and yet it depends entirely upon the conditions it meets as to whether anything grows by its light, is purely rigorous, also, the way God's grace falls down on all of us and depends entirely on the conditions grace meets within the soul of a human being as to whether it will be able to plant its seed of Love and grow is as rigorous as a mechanism:

¹⁷⁸Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.330.

¹⁷⁹Weil; *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.330, quoted from Matthew 5, 45.

¹⁸⁰Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.330-331.

La grâce tombe de chez Dieu dans tous les êtres; ce qu'elle y devient dépend de ce qu'ils sont; là où elle pénètre réellement les fruits qu'elle porte sont l'effet d'un processus analogue à un mécanisme, et qui, comme un mécanisme, a lieu dans la durée.¹⁸¹

The second passage is one Simone Weil often quotes from the Gospels, and she thinks that it, even more clearly, expresses "la non-intervention de Dieu dans l'opération de la grâce":

"Le royaume de Dieu, c'est comme si un homme jette du grain dans la terre, puis dort et veille la nuit et le jour, et le grain germe et pousse sans qu'il sache comment. Automatiquement la terre porte le fruit; d'abord la tige, puis l'épi, puis la plénitude du grain dans l'épi."¹⁸²

Simone Weil's main point is that God does not make any choices as to who will receive grace, in the same way as the sun does not choose which seed will germinate and be a tree which will bear good fruit. If it is a good seed and the earth provides the conditions needed and the sun shines on it, the seed will germinate and grow. The same applies to the human being in relation to grace. If a human being has a real desire for pure good and the collectivity he/she is born into provides the proper conditions of existence, then this desire for good will grow and God's Good will descend and the germination of grace will take place.

With the proper conception of God, that is, of a God who does not intervene in the Order of the universe, Simone Weil thinks that science would not conflict with religion. Both would hold the same view of the Universe as being equal to the Order God inscribed here. The state could then set up the human order so that the individual human beings, scientists included, could be nurtured to love God's Order. It is only in and through the State that human beings can learn about the order of the Universe and about our human destiny. Thus Simone Weil thinks that St. John of the Cross, and of course Plato, had the right approach in searching for a method to attain the pure state of mystical contemplation. In fact, she argues, their works are nothing but "...une étude rigoureusement scientifique des mécanismes surnaturels."¹⁸³ This is because there are certain conditions to be fulfilled in order to achieve such a state, and Simone Weil was certain that: "Quand les conditions sont remplies, Dieu ne refuse

¹⁸¹Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.331.

¹⁸²Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.331, quoted from Mark p.4, p.26.

¹⁸³Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.333.

jamais."¹⁸⁴

The Gospels, claims Simone Weil, suggest the way a human soul could attain a pure state of mystical contemplation. For example in the passage quoted from Luke 14:11, "Quiconque s'élève soi-même sera abaissé, quiconque s'abaisse soi-même sera élevé"; the human soul is divided between two sides of a balance. In one of the scales is the carnal part of the soul and in the other scale is the divine part. Thus, when one's attention is focused on the divine part of the soul, that is, the humbler one, the scale eventually tips and one receives grace. However, the more one gives over to the carnal part of the soul, the scale tips the wrong way. Simone Weil argues that the Saints have verified that there is a supernatural physics of the human soul. However, in the case of the Saints, "la vérification est constituée par la marche vers la perfection...."¹⁸⁵

Simone Weil locates what she deems to be the main source of Western uprootedness — our misconception of God and God's relation to the Universe — in the historical twist of events. She claims that when the Roman Empire made Christianity its official religion "On fit de Dieu une doublure de l'Empereur."¹⁸⁶ The Romans, she argues, condoned this conception of God because they saw themselves as Masters. Simone Weil argues that the consequences of this were manifold: the Romans infected everything with slavery:

Ils ont déshonoré les suppliants en les forçant à mentir. Ils ont déshonoré la gratitude en la regardant comme un esclavage atténué; dans leur conception, en recevant un bienfait, on aliénait en échange une partie de sa liberté. Si le bienfait était important, les mœurs courantes contraignaient à dire au bienfaiteur qu'on était son esclave.¹⁸⁷

Thus, as we saw in the above historical analysis, she claims they persecuted the Pythagoreans, exterminated the Druids of Gaul, annihilated the Egyptian religious cults, "noyé dans le sang et déshonoré par d'ingénieuses calomnies l'adoration de Dionysos..", and finally, persecuted the early Christians.¹⁸⁸ But, argues Simone Weil, the Romans needed a front, "l'écorce extérieure d'une tradition religieuse authentique" so they adopted the "worn out" Christians. Simone Weil claims that the Roman conception of slavery is not to be confused with Christ's conception of slavery as used in The New Testament. Christ, she says, uses the term slave to refer to people "qui ont voulu

¹⁸⁴Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.332.

¹⁸⁵Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.334.

¹⁸⁶Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.341.

¹⁸⁷Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.342.

¹⁸⁸Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.347.

de tout leur cœur se donner à Dieu comme esclaves."¹⁸⁹ These people are free and consent to be God's slaves in Christ's conception of slavery. But in the Roman conception, which she argues is the more common conception, slaves are property -- they are not free to consent to work, rather they are forced to be slaves. Simone Weil thinks that they attributed to God the same master-slave relation that has been set up between human and human.

The Roman conception of Providence is one of "une intervention personnelle de Dieu dans l'univers pour ajuster certains moyens en vue de fins particulières."¹⁹⁰ This view anthropomorphizes God because it claims that this intervention is subjected to the same kind of causality as that of the intervention human beings make in acting in the world. As she says:

Dieu viole l'ordre du monde pour y faire surgir, non ce qu'il veut produire, mais des causes qui amèneront ce qu'il veut produire à titre d'effet....
ces suppositions correspondent exactement à la situation de l'homme devant la matière.¹⁹¹

She claims that the Roman Master conception of God has ruled over almost the whole of Christianity -- the only exception being the Mystics. She points out that with the Roman conception we end up with quite absurd analyses of history, such things as what she encountered in a Catholic review on the anniversary of the discovery of America: "Elle disait que Dieu avait envoyé Christophe Colomb en Amérique afin qu'il y eût quelques siècles plus tard un pays capable de vaincre Hitler."¹⁹²

(It also leads to even more absurd interpretations of how God intervenes to affect individuals in their private lives. For example, Simone Weil points out that individuals are known to think that God has intervened to save him/her from lightning. But she argues if this were true in one individual case it would have to be considered true for all the individuals in the world who were not hit by lightning. This, she points out, reduces the whole idea of intervention to absurdity.)

An essential problem Simone Weil finds with the Roman conception of God is that it is incompatible with what she thinks is the true scientific conception of the universe, -- a net of relations which are necessary. Simone Weil argues that the reason science and religion had to go their own ways was because religion held the wrong

¹⁸⁹Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.348.

¹⁹⁰Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.351.

¹⁹¹Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.352.

¹⁹²Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.354.

conception of God. Divine Providence, she argues, cannot be a disturbing influence to the order of the world because it is the regulating principle of the Universe. She thinks that many religious texts from the past have carried forth this truth; she cites some of the beautiful and pure parts of the Old Testament: in Greece among the Pythagoreans and all the sages, in China with Lao-tse, in the Hindu scriptures, and in the Egyptian Book of the Dead.¹⁹³

This deviation, (from the tradition of religious thought) bequeathed to us by the Romans, Simone Weil thinks, led science astray. Because science, she claims, no longer recognizes that it is a symbolic mirror of supernatural truths. Simone Weil argues that the only way for the Western civilization to re-integrate into the tradition is "de méditer le vieux récit de la Genèse, en le situant dans le milieu qui est le sien, celui de la pensée antique."¹⁹⁴ What Genesis tells us is that we, as human beings, have placed ourselves "hors de l'obéissance." Thus, we must consent to the punishment which is ours, labour and death: "Par conséquent le travail et la mort, si l'homme les subit en consentant à les subir, constituent un transport dans le bien suprême de l'obéissance à Dieu."¹⁹⁵

Simone Weil organizes her ideal State around the idea that the soul's needs must be considered prior to and yet at the same time as material needs — in a sense, the two can be harmonized and this is what Weil attempts to do in making the notion of physical labour the spiritual core of her State. The way that the physical labourer through work with a method in mind encounters necessity is for her a constant death or otherwise said renunciation of self; thus, a consent to God's Order. However, this is not to be confused with a conception of work as a means of mastering nature, but rather as a means by which the individual can encounter necessity which is very different. The focus in the latter case is on the "encounter with necessity" thus understanding is one of the conditions of it. Not only does this notion of "physical labour as the spiritual core of the State" accord with her dualistic conception of human nature, but she also intends for it to accord with the teachings of Genesis. She claims that the Old Testament

¹⁹³See *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.285-289, where she quotes from many of these sources, which express the impersonal conception of God and the view that the universe is governed by necessity.

¹⁹⁴Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.377.

¹⁹⁵Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.377. To consent to death does not entail wanting to die or acting in such a way as to bring death to oneself, i.e., suicide as Weil did not condone such practises; rather, it condones an acceptance of death as a condition of necessity and that humans can prepare their souls; thus, the desire to stay alive is related to the desire to be ready.

brings forward the truth that physical labour is the most honorable activity of human beings.¹⁹⁶ But she insists that we have misunderstood Genesis. The conventional interpretation is that physical labour is Divine punishment (which she agrees with) and that those who labour most are the least honored. It is this latter part that she contests.

Simone Weil asserts that to labour is to consent to God's chosen punishment and to restore God's Order which was inscribed in the universe at Creation by means of the Second Person as the Ordering Principle. God's order can also be restored by consenting to death. In *L'Enracinement*, Simone Weil argues that one cannot readily consent to death before the time Providence has chosen. That is why, she thinks, we have been given a way to consent to death in life through physical labour.

Physical labour is conceived as a daily death, as it does violence to human nature in two ways. First, in submitting our body and soul to matter, we exhaust our supplementary energy. Second, we experience something of the extremity in the way in which labouring hours or days drag. Simone Weil argues that if we can continue to consent to suffer this violence daily, then we have come as close as possible in life to obeying God:

Immédiatement après le consentement à la mort, le consentement à la loi qui rend le travail indispensable à la conservation de la vie est l'acte le plus parfait d'obéissance qu'il soit donné à l'homme d'accomplir. Dès lors les autres activités humaines, commandement des hommes, élaboration de plans techniques, art, science, philosophie, et ainsi de suite, sont toutes inférieures au travail physique en signification spirituelle.¹⁹⁷

Endnotes: Chapter Four

1 Simone Weil defends the view that there are and have been such things as "miracles". She argues against the view that "miracles" can be defined as "a fact contrary to the laws of nature." David Hume makes this claim in his refutation of miracles in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1977), p.89.

This definition of miracles assumes that we know the "laws of nature," but she argues: "Nous ne connaissons pas les lois de la nature. Nous ne pouvons faire à leur sujet que des suppositions." (*L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.355). It is equally absurd, she claims, to attribute miracles to the will of God because, as she has taken pains to demonstrate, God does not intervene in the affairs of the world. Concerning God's will, she claims: Nous savons seulement, d'une manière générale, que tout ce qui se produit, sans aucune exception, est conforme à la volonté de Dieu en tant que Créateur; et que tout ce qui enferme au moins une parcelle de bien pur procède de l'inspiration surnaturelle de Dieu en tant que bien absolue. (*L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.335)

¹⁹⁶See Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.372-374. Weil cites many accounts from ancient texts that implicitly or explicitly consider physical labour in this way.

¹⁹⁷Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.379-380.

Hume, however, does not rely on "necessity," instead he relies on the testimony of common sense, which strictly speaking, cannot comprehend most of science, let alone miracles.

Simone Weil argues that we should not make miracles our reason for accepting the words of a Saint. Rather it is the "saintliness" of one who performs the miracle that should compel us to trust what a saint says. The miracle, she argues, is only a physical phenomenon; one which accompanies "un abandon total de l'âme au bien ou au mal." Simone Weil uses an analogy to emphasize this point. The mechanism it obeys, she says, is analogous to the mechanism which produces tears when one is feeling sorrow. A mechanism, she argues, is not supernatural, that is why it is the saintliness which must be judged, not the miracles. Also, because there are diabolical miracles, and one who performs diabolical miracles is not a saint. This person has abandoned himself/herself to evil, whereas the saint has abandoned his/her soul to the good.

Miracles, she argues, have no "apologetical value" for Christianity because they are not a supernatural fact (they are very common in India and were very common in Greece in its decline). Christ, she thinks, should be judged not by the miracles he performed by His holiness: ... la pureté de sa vie, la parfaite beauté de ses paroles, et le fait qu'il exerçait ses pouvoirs seulement pour des actes de compassion. Il résultait de là seulement qu'il était un saint. (*L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.338)

It was also on the basis of Christ's saintliness that people were certain that when He said; "He is the Son of God," it was true. The purpose of the miracles was only to draw people's attention. Thus, Simone Weil argues Christ did not do miracles for the purpose of making believers out of non-believers. Moreover, she says faith has no relation to credulity because faith is certainty and belief is a lack of certainty. In order to have faith one has to move out of the realm of opinion (*pistis*) toward that of certainty. Simone Weil defines faith in the following way:

La foi dans la Providence consiste à être certain que l'univers dans sa totalité est conforme à la volonté de Dieu non seulement au premier sens, mais aussi au second; c'est-à-dire que dans cet univers le bien l'emporte sur le mal. Il ne peut s'agir là que de l'univers dans sa totalité, car dans les choses particulières nous ne pouvons malheureusement pas douter qu'il y ait du mal. Ainsi l'objet de cette certitude est une disposition éternelle et universelle constituant le fondement de l'ordre invariable du monde. La Providence divine m'apparaît jamais autrement, sauf erreur, ni dans les textes sacrés de la Chine, de l'Inde et de la Grèce, ni dans les Evangiles. (*L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.341)

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have argued that Simone Weil's philosophical anthropology remains consistently dualistic throughout her work. However her idea of the exact way in which human nature is dualistic does change from her earlier thought to her later thought. The continuity of her thought can be seen in the coherence of her dualistic philosophical anthropology with her dualistic religious metaphysics. This dualism is first shown in her theory of knowledge; she establishes it in relation to Descartes' epistemology and mind-body dualism. Weil particularly emphasizes the link between Cartesian science and Greek science from whence it originated and departed. In my analysis of Weil's early thought, I have argued that Weil's concern about the direction of science stemmed from her realization that our conception of human nature is determined by how science perceives the relation between humans and nature. Critiques of Classical science and its mechanistic tendencies were not uncommon in Weil's intellectual environment. What was uncommon was Weil's dualism; phenomenologists and existentialists were very involved with the project of re-establishing the role of the human subject in science thus following thinkers like Husserl and Hume. What sets Weil's analysis apart is her insistence that we cannot simply emphasize the human subject and thus ignore necessity; Weil neither adopted the positivistic tendencies nor the subjectivist theories prevalent in her time. I have argued that she perceived that the human imagination in perception plays a very significant role in establishing the essential link not only for every individual's relation to the world, but also for the scientists' relation to the world. Furthermore, in Weil's analysis, this link allows the scientist to encounter necessity; this link also allows the worker who works with method in mind to encounter necessity. I claimed that it was possible for Weil to maintain this dualistic conception of human nature whilst avoiding the problem of trying to get out of the self to act in the world because in her theory of perception itself there is this link between sight and movement; it takes a special effort of mind to control the body from reacting to the initial response to the messages received from the imagination. So, the link to the world is a problem for the subjectivists because they fail to see that all of our ideas originate in our imagination which is for Weil, as it was for Descartes, intimately linked to the body. We see with our eyes and feel with our bodies; yet we no sooner see and feel and our body reacts and Weil argues that this is by way of the imagination.

My thesis is that Weil saw the true problem to be one of moving in the world in a way that allowed the human being to be equal to necessity; she saw that the human mind working in cooperation with what was perceived could acquire all that was needed to meet necessity on equal terms. Thus, I have argued that Weil claims that humans get from necessity all the mathematical relations through the imagination that the mind needs to devise a method of action with which it can then return to the world and act in accordance with necessity. I do not agree with Professor Springsted that Weil held that "thoughts which come from the understanding" give us a capital N-necessity and the world as force presents us with a small n-necessity. I realise that the necessity that confronts us as force appears to be other than that which we can conceive of; but I think that it is not for Weil other than that which we can conceive of as it is simply that which is not in our control because we have not conceived of it at all or properly; but, even when we meet necessity on its own terms we are not in total control of necessity; it is always beyond our total control. Thus, as Weil argues those of us who are deceived by our "imaginary power," are shocked, when we meet necessity as force. We, then, realize that we have not really understood the extent of her dominion. My argument is that, for Weil, the fact that there is a necessary gap between us and the world does not prevent us from knowing necessity as it exists in the world apart from us. The imagination is an imperfect link and thus allows for error but it does not prevent us from being certain about the laws of nature once we establish them beyond a reasonable doubt. Already stated in Weil's early thought is this idea that we can know the laws of nature -- God guarantees us that -- but we are not God so we must remember the limits; when we encounter force, we encounter necessity as the limits. Thus, Weil's emphasis on the necessary relation between mind and body (or necessity) and the ability for the mind to remove itself from the world and sort out the ideas brought to it through the imagination(which includes language and mathematical relations) from the world is her early conception of the relation between epistemology and philosophical anthropology. Weil's argument which she arrived at through an analysis of Descartes, Kant, and the Greeks is that if the world is opposed to us as an obstacle, then it is first opposed to us as an obstacle through our own bodies; that is, the imagination which like the obstacle is the source of our clear ideas and the source of confused ideas. The intellect must discern which is which.

I have argued that although Weil not fully develop her dualistic philosophical anthropology in relation to her religious metaphysics in her early thought, however, later the seeds of it were already there and germinating.

Also, I have argued that when she began her political and social activity in the concrete world of work and work with a method, she was already equipped with her dualistic conception of human nature; she criticized the marxists and Marx himself from this basis. Weil was not drawn into scientific socialism like those around her in the Unions and the Communist circles because she held another conception of human nature which made her question rather than assume the one-sided perspective she found therein. She perceived, although she was not aware of Marx's thought at first, that there was something missing in the way that the unions and Communists were directing the workers. She was concerned that the promised cultural life in which each worker would not only be a labourer but a thinker as well might never arrive; Soviet Russia looked to her more of the same kind of oppression as occurred around her. Thus, I have argued, Weil took it upon herself to analyse Lenin's conception of the Communist goals, its epistemology and implied conception of human nature; she wanted to see if there was in their thought itself an oppressive element. My view is that Weil's critique of Marx and the marxists is firmly grounded in her dualistic conception of human nature; she was able to see that this thought was steeped in the humanist conception of progress which she had already perceived was based on a science that took as its main goal to master nature. Weil had begun her political and social activity with the view that the socialistic goal was to reform society in such a way that Capitalism would no longer oppress the workers. But, she learned that the source of the problem was more complex than merely uniting the workers in a battle against the Capitalists. Furthermore, she realized that her conception of liberty for the workers was only partially in agreement with that of the marxists. Weil always had her ideal of the worker as one who should be given the opportunity to achieve an understanding of necessity in the process of work in the back of her mind. However, she, like the marxists whole-heartedly wanted the workers to have better conditions of existence; yet, she was not convinced that the power struggle method would achieve even that goal for them. Her analysis of the factory and the Taylor system, adopted by Soviet Russia itself, convinced her that the problem had also to do with the mechanistic system itself; it was being used to extract the most out of each and every human body.

The problem was that the domination of nature had become the domination of human nature; therefore, Marx was right, what we face is a problem of power relations between humans. But, Weil's dualistic conception of human nature prevented her from accepting Marx' solution to the problem of this ancient power struggle. Work

is not the result of the relations between classes because the encounter with necessity is essential to human beings as it continually maintains our conscious awareness of our duality; thus, it should not be a goal of society to try to rid ourselves of work. For Weil, the best way for humans to deal with necessity is to attempt to meet her on equal terms by understanding and obeying her laws; thus, she argues that that part of the human being that thinks and is made for liberty can be taken to be the prime goal of the society and industry.

Weil claimed that even if the workers were to have control of the state, there would always be that element of human nature that desires domination to contend with -- Marx had not conceived of a way to balance what is intrinsic to human beings; that is, some are strong and others weak. It could not be assumed that if the workers were to take power, they would not become the new oppressors. When the force is in the hands of the other side, there is no guarantee that they will be just. Weil thought that Marx had realized that what needed to be changed was the system of production, but he had not conceived of how to change it in a way that would be best for the individual soul. Weil argues that it had to be changed to accord with the essential needs of an individual, especially, the need to work with method in mind and the other needs of the soul. But, there was still the problem of the tendency of the strong to oppress the weak to cope with. Weil dealt with this problem in her later thought.

Weil's critical analysis of the marxist conception of the Communist ideal state and how it has nothing in place to prevent those in power even if they are the workers from becoming the new oppressors is drawn from her conception of human nature and from her historical analysis of the French Revolution; the bourgeoisie, who were to be the new liberators, became instead the new oppressors. Weil saw that her view of human nature had a spiritual side to it that was held in contempt by the marxists. Religion was the opium of the people. But, Weil began to see that the conception of progress that fed and motivated marxism was the new religion of the people and it was not a "true religion". This analysis and the upcoming political events that Weil engaged in with the Communists and Socialists led to her claim that the social element and pressure involved in group or party politics prevented any reasonable dialogue between individuals. Dissent should always be considered a healthy and welcome stimulant to any group and none of this was permitted in the pre-war politics that Weil faced with her insightful analysis of how the Communists' and Socialists' support of Stalinist Russia did nothing to resist Hitler's National-Socialism. After a long struggle with Marxism which was quite a social force in her time, partially because it had made common

cause with the leftist Hegelians (it adopted the Hegelian view of the historical process and reconstructed it), Weil rejected the overall thrust of the idea that there would be liberty at the end of long power struggle with the Bourgeoisie and Capitalists. She rejected the historical process thought completely and began her own analysis of the upcoming war based on her view of human nature.

Weil already had, in her early analysis of human nature, already an understanding of what gave human beings the ability to gain power over nature and human nature. However, her further analysis in *Oppression and Liberty* confirmed her view that necessity as force is always present to remind us that the power of an individual is always limited. So, although Weil realized that power and prestige are illusions and equally a part of necessity, she thought that human beings were made for something other than social oppression and the kind of liberty that humanism promised. That is why, I argued, she began her search for a way to balance the strong and the weak through a search for a way to inspire a people with the virtues of humanity which transcend necessity. As I have argued, this led Weil towards Christian Mysticism and in search of its source in that long lost tradition of "identical thought".

I have argued that Weil was directed, in her search, by the desire to root Christianity in a past it had separated itself from. Her conviction was that this past held the true Christian roots. Weil's method of approaching the past was similar to the one used by Jean Guitton who was contemporaneous with her. There was this true desire among them to understand how the Western civilisation had lost a relation to the virtues of humanity that could only come from a knowledge of the supernatural which is the true Christian message; secular society did not permit this knowledge to live among human beings because it directed them towards desiring worldly goods (utility) alone and this orientation is contrary to how the soul must be directed in order to nourish the spirit. I have argued that Weil's claim was that the soul should be oriented towards the truth and worldly goods are received in recompense. The point being that she saw that we assume the opposite; that is, that worldly goods are the precondition of this orientation but Weil is claiming that it cannot be.

I draw out of Weil's conception of the past her analyses of the "identical thought" that she found in the ancient traditions of many civilisations. I have presented a few of her analyses of the ancient civilisations mainly to get the general conceptions which she found to have been living realities in those civilisations. I have shown that

Weil saw in ancient Indian thought -- Hinduism -- a true mystical thought which had as its true revelation the idea of a "mystical union with God by means of the perfection of the soul". We saw that Weil found that the conception of equilibrium was prevalent in this thought and led them to conceive of a method of detachment that was another manifestation of the one practised later by the Greeks. Their ancient texts also showed a knowledge of the Trinity and of the virtue of Justice. Thus, Weil realised that the knowledge of these conceptions of equilibrium, Justice, and the Trinity had been passed on to Egypt and Greece and the West from the Far East and that each civilisation gave expression to a different manifestation of this same "identical thought". Egypt's revelation was the way Justice and Charity were one through a "Love of thy Neighbour"; this gave rise to a positive conception of Justice -- the human virtue that showed an understanding and a respect for God's Order. The Egyptians thought that the act of giving bread with attention to the afflicted was a way of transmitting God's Love and thus transforming the soul of the afflicted.

The Greeks had inherited the Egyptian conception of Justice and Charity and had had their own revelation; that is, of the distance between God and the Universe which led them to discover another method of directing the soul towards the truth; this was the method of the contemplation of necessity or God's Order through science which connected the Order and Beauty of the World. I argued that Simone Weil claimed that Pythagoras had had a revelation through his discovery of the geometric mean, that is, the incommensurable; his discovery of the incommensurable led him to see that the science of geometry is the science of physics. Pythagoras saw his discovery of the "geometrical image" of the mean between the segment of the two lines which make up the diagonal of the square to have issued from "divine Love". This discovery was only possible by seeing the "image" of the point of unity between the segments which were equivalent in their unity to two whole numbers. In other words, there was no way to mediate between two whole numbers mathematically until Pythagoras had (re)discovered the incommensurable; and it is evident if one compares the geometrical image of the incommensurable with the mathematical expression of it that it is possible to see the perfect image whereas it is not possible to give a perfect expression of this image. Thus, what Pythagoras saw contradicted all the mathematical relations possible between numbers. Not only did this confirm for him that there was mediation between one thing and another thing in the world so that unity was at the source of diversity and unity; and, the Order of the World was seen to be essentially

dualistic, but also by reflecting on this image Pythagoras became aware of how the Beauty of the World was connected to the Order of the World and that it was the Beauty that oriented the soul towards the truth by way of desire.

The way that the image contradicted all possible mathematical expression suggested to Pythagoras that that which mediates and is the source of number transcends necessity — thus, it must come from God who Himself is outside of the Universe at the same time as God is the Mediator Himself. But, if God is Mediator and known through the Image, then, the Image of God must have descended in order to leave His Image imprinted in the Universe as Beauty; Weil's claim is that Pythagoras' revelation was that there had been a Mediator that appeared on earth as the Image of God and that this Mediator inscribed in the Order of the World the Image of God as the Beauty of the World. According to Weil's analysis, the other implication of Pythagoras' revelation was that the role of science was to construct the geometrical images and reflect on them because that was equivalent to desiring to see the Image of the Mediator Himself; science provided the means of expressing the Greeks' desire to bridge the distance between humans and God. The way that the image of the geometrical mean contradicted mathematical logic and yet was visible to the eye made the early Greeks privilege the geometrical image over all algebraic formulations. For them, "God is ever Geometer" as Plato had claimed. Thus, all other images, such as in art, literary and plastic, which attempted to express the ultimate contradiction of our duality as could be seen in the geometrical image, took on a special significance in the Greek civilisation. Weil argued that that the Greeks were dedicated in their search in the world for ratios and proportions (that could only be known by means of the geometrical mean) and in their construction of all kinds of images that imitated these ratios and proportions. Their desire to build the perfect bridge to God eventually led to a conception, inspired by pure desire, of the perfect bridge and this led God to send His Image through His only Son, Christ. Weil saw in Plato's conception of the "perfectly just man" as portrayed in the *Republic* (but seen in combination with other of his dialogues) the perfect image of how God's Son who, for Weil, is God Himself could appear on earth. For, just as the geometrical image contradicted all mathematical logic but nonetheless could be seen, so too must the Image of God contradict all the force of necessity which for the human being is the power and prestige of society. Thus, Plato's image of the "perfectly just man " as a man stripped bare of all prestige and power and made to suffer this ultimate degradation as well as physical torture was the only way

that the Image of God could appear on earth -- this total renunciation of the force of necessity, that is of His Power, was the Image of the Act of God's Abdication of Self at Creation. The perfectly just man -- the human God -- had to appear to us as though he were a common criminal and this image of the perfectly just man was the ultimate contradiction equal to that perceived by Pythagoras. And as Weil had argued, for humans to know Justice itself which is the Model of God's Act at Creation, this Model must appear to them in the only reality they can know: in human flesh on earth. This meant that humans must see in the the image an imitation of reality itself; but, to do this, the appearance of the image is necessary. The claim is not that each and every human being must see the Son of God in the flesh, but rather that Christ left His Image inscribed in the Beauty of the World which we can perceive and which our desire for love compels us to imitate. Thus, we have the Image of the equilibrium or the unity of unity and diversity which is inscribed in necessity; and humans can perceive this unity and direct their whole lives accordingly because each image of reality has, although the same as it is an image of reality, a different manifestation depending on the aspect of life it must relate to. For example, the image of the balance relates to measuring things in the world; whereas, the image of equilibrium relates more generally to how we can see and understand the universe; and, the image of Justice relates to how we can direct our actions in the world. These images are essentially manifestations of the Image of Mediation Himself.

I have argued that Weil's conception of the Trinity based as it was on Pythagoras' revelation (and other fragments that showed the relation of the geometric mean to the identical thought of the tradition) of the unity of contraries did not exclude the possibility of there having been other Incarnations previous to that of Christ. For example, we saw that she suggested that the Egyptians had witnessed an Incarnation of the Son of God and that Melchisedich was also an Incarnation. She thought that those civilisations which she saw to have had Revelations, such as China (in Tao - "I am the way") and Persia, and India (Buddha) as well as others thought that they had witnessed an Incarnation of the Image of God. I think that because of the ambiguous claims she makes on this issue (sometimes she says that these Images are the Son of God and sometimes she says that they are images which demonstrate a profound desire for the Image to be a living reality) that she may have thought that it was possible for there to have been other Incarnations. My tentative conclusion is that she thought that the Second Person of the Trinity was inscribed in the Order of the Universe at Creation and that to imprint the Beauty in the images of the

Universe the Second Person had to be Incarnated and that this may have happened at other times before Christ; but that, whether there was an Incarnation before or not, for sure, Weil thought Christ was the Incarnation. Weil thought that it was because of the profound desire expressed by certain individuals for a human environment in which the whole was imbued with the Wisdom of the mystical path and its relation to the Order and Beauty of the World and who felt the depths of the spiritual poverty of human beings without this knowledge -- she expressly claimed this about Plato -- that God would feel compelled to send His Image, His Son. Simone Weil argued that there is a grave imbalance between the spiritual and the profane. This imbalance manifests itself in the world and appears to us -- as the images are our signs -- in the form of an excess of force. Weil argues that an excess of force remains an imbalance whether it be the hands of the guardians of the spiritual or in the hands of those who guard the profane.

Christ was the Incarnation and He left the Image of Himself inscribed in the Beauty of the World for us to contemplate; Christ's life and death were for Weil many expressions of the duality which defines existence -- to be born of Love and to always desire this Love and yet to be miserably separated from this Love. The Passion expressed the ultimate in duality because Christ went the furthest distance from God's Love in His affliction and yet He continued to Love God -- the ultimate contradiction and the unity of the contraries by means of God's Love. Christ's Passion was for Weil the Model of the Eternal Cry of affliction and the proof that at the basis of all, especially affliction, is God's Love. Christ's affliction tells us that the poor and afflicted are privileged because they are already the way of Christ -- they know the ultimate distance from God's Love and the ultimate misery of that distance. The echo of Christ's cry can be heard if one can hear it in all of those afflicted human beings that are, like Christ was, the outcasts of society. Weil's greatest horror was that they did not know it and so they could not complete the way of the Cross. Thus, the Christian Mystic, St. John of the Cross, according to Weil, had rightly understood that the most certain way to God's Love was by means of the Cross (Weil thought that all is possible for God). Thus, Weil saw no problem with the idea of Christ being accepted by all as the Son of God as Christ's Word cohered with the knowledge which issued from the tradition of "identical thought".

Weil's study of the mystical tradition of "identical thought" confirmed her dualistic conception of human nature. She does, however, make one considerable change from her early philosophical anthropology as a result

of her understanding of the degree to which necessity in its manifestation as force rules human existence. Weil realizes that the part of the soul that is an opening to God's Love -- the uncreated part of the soul -- is for want of a better term a small part of the soul. This is a significant change because she sees clearly that the intellect can use its capacity to formulate a method of action for the purpose of the domination of nature and human nature rather than to accord with virtue. She more clearly expresses the view that the intellect must be directed towards the truth for it to have the effect of orienting the whole soul towards a union with God's Love. In other words, the intellect can be enslaved to the desire for power rather than carrying out its intended role of arbiter which means that its function is to discern the truth and submit to it. When the intellect does the latter it nurtures the "uncreated part of the soul" thus making more space for God's Love to enter.

I have argued that Weil's critique of Western Civilisation was based on her view of the tradition of 'identical thought' and her conception of the Christian Revelation that issued from this thought. Weil took her conceptions of Justice and Charity, which are the virtues of humanity, and her idea that the ideal human community should be imbued with a just balance between the spiritual and the profane from this 'identical' thought. I have shown that she judges the history of the West as far back as the Athenians of the 4th century B.C. from the point of view of the virtues of humanity and of the idea of this balanced human community. In the broad sense, we saw that Weil perceived a general fluctuation between a disequilibrium caused by an excess of the profane (or secular culture ruled by necessity) and a disequilibrium ruled by an excess of the spiritual (because of its excess it is equally ruled by necessity). We are today living an excess of the profane. However, there was a period in the 10th and 11th centuries which Weil claimed as the true Renaissance; it is this period that she took as her point of comparison with the later Renaissance of the 17th century, called the 'false Renaissance.' The reason she called this second Renaissance false was because the return to the Greeks was incomplete both with regards to its conception of science and its connection to Christianity. I have shown that Weil established her understanding of Western civilisation through an analysis of Western history and Modern science as it compares to Greek science.

In my analysis of Weil's view of Western history, I have introduced the conception of Justice and Charity that issues from the tradition of identical thought and the notion of idolatry as a basis for an understanding of her analysis of the Athenians, the Romans, the French, and the Germans. She took these latter peoples as examples to

illustrate her arguments. Weil distinguished those imperialistic powers who had maintained a link to the "identical thought" and at least showed that they knew that their actions were not just from those who did not even maintain this link in their thought; these latter we saw thoroughly believed that they were by right the Masters of the World — they believed that any means that the strong chose to maintain their dominate position was right and even just. Those who believed themselves to be the Masters of the World generally held themselves to be the superior race and they set up their collectivity as that which is to be idolized; for Weil, this is the origin of the state idolatry which she thinks afflicts the Western Nation/States. The distinct characteristic of state idolatry is that its tendency towards centralisation draws all of the life out of its people; it does this because it is in its inception totalitarian. Weil claimed that the Western states took many of their methods of propaganda and indoctrination from the Romans; state idolatry, especially when it uses the full extent of its force in dominating other nations, has the side-effect of preventing the virtues of humanity from living among the people. That is why, Weil claimed, that the Christianity that the Romans took to be their own was soiled by being adopted by them; state idolatry is contrary to Christianity as the soul cannot be directed towards idolizing an earthly treasure and directed towards the truth at the same time. Weil consistently argued that the soul should be directed towards the truth and receive the earthly treasures in recompense. The Christianity we inherited from the Romans had been uprooted from its connection to the Greek vocation and from the tradition of identical thought.

Weil argued that the Roman style of the centralised state entered the West by way of France through the Latin writers of the Roman tradition. Hitler was simply carrying on the Roman style of imperialism; however, in her opinion he made the crucial error of setting up a totalitarian state before he conquered the English. Weil argued that the combination of the return to the Roman style of imperialism and the reaction to the "totalitarian spirituality" of the Gothic Middle Ages was the main reason why the people of the "false Renaissance" of the 16th and 17th centuries returned to Greece behind Christianity thinking that they could leave Christianity behind. However, they were ignorant of the fact that the Christian vocation and the Greek vocation were one and the same. This led to the schism between science and religion and all that was left was humanism. Weil pointed out that humanism wanted to have all the virtues of humanity that issued from the identical thought but none of the "light" which sustains such virtues. Thus, humanism cut the links with Christianity, but it did not take up the mystery religion of Greece either;

and so, consequently, humanist scientists cut the links with early Greek science and the idea of doing science as a way of directing the soul towards the truth. What Weil argued was that the humanists were not wrong to return to Greece in search of the truth, but instead of reconnecting Christianity with the identical thought by means of the Greek discovery of how the Beauty of the World could be contemplated through science, they cut themselves off from both traditions and from the identical thought too. This was how science ended up with a degraded conception of the truth; and Classical science separated scientific truth from Pythagoras' revelation that the image of the geometric mean was made possible by divine love.

The schism of science and religion was in Weil's view fuelled by "the religion of progress" and the "historical process". Although she did not explicitly reject "modern historical theodicy", she did explicitly reject the idea of progress and the idea of the historical process; thus, I have argued that Weil would not have accepted Hegel's system because it demands, as Grant pointed out, directing science towards the mastery of nature rather than towards the truth.

I have argued that Weil's later critique of science did not change from her early critique ; however, she did have a clearer conception in her later thought of what the schism of science and religion and Classical science and Greek science implied concerning the whole scientific endeavour. She came to understand how this came about historically and what this meant in the detailed conceptions science was working with and the philosophical and theological implications involved. Weil's early critique of Classical science showed that by separating itself from Greek science, science lost the relation between human perception and the geometrical image which at once connected science to the Order of the World and the Beauty of the World. As we saw Pythagoras was only able to discover the incommensurable by seeing the geometrical image of the mediation between unity and diversity. After Pythagoras' discovery, the Greeks took the science of geometry as the study of the Order of the World but once they constructed the image which took considerable effort as it would for any scientist today, they contemplated the image to connect themselves with the Beauty of the World. As we saw, it was Beauty that the Son of God left as His imprint on the world for us to contemplate ; thus, contemplating the image was like contemplating the way of Christ.

The significant point about the geometric image which especially relates to Classical and Contemporary

science is that it could be seen that there was a unity between the things in the world; that is, all things could be one and two or unity and diversity which means that for the Greeks the continuous and the discontinuous went together. It is the unity or the one which mediates as it was in the image of the geometric mean. As we recall, the point of balance could be perfectly portrayed and seen but not perfectly written mathematically -- there is that infinite error in the square root of two. What Weil showed was that Classical science and Contemporary science, by losing sight of the geometrical image (that is, by no longer including it as part of the scientific method, especially in Contemporary science but it had already begun in the 19th century and less so but with Descartes too) had lost sight of the Order of the World in its dualistic form which is mediated by unity, the image of "divine Love". Weil had shown that the only way to understand how it is possible to have numbers that express the relation between two whole numbers such as ratios or mean proportionals is by means of the image -- in other words, the only way to understand the perfect correspondence between 1:2 and all the ratios formed thereby is to see the geometrical image of that relation. Thus, Classical science could apply ratios to the world and use the balance to measure things and in doing so the geometrical image and the dualistic conception of necessity was hidden in the depths of their practise. However, by suppressing the image, they soon lost sight of the duality in necessity. Weil argued that the Classical scientists followed the Greek scientists of the sixth century A.D. in taking the continuous as their object; and, that the Classical scientists were bound to run into the discontinuous just as the Greek scientists of the sixth century A.D. did.

Thus, Weil was not at all perturbed by the discovery of the discontinuous because she had always thought that the two terms were needed for scientists to understand necessity. But, she was concerned about the fact that Contemporary science did not preserve the two terms together. Instead, they think that, in the world, we have two kinds of necessity which do not relate to each other at all. This was incomprehensible to Weil and she could not conceive how this could have happened. Her argument was that if the scientists had traced their steps a bit, they would have discovered what had happened because embedded in their algebraic formulas is a connection to the geometric mean. This was so, at least, until algebra was thought to have no real connection to Classical science and the algebra used by them. Weil pointed out that up until Joule's time there was this connection, although hidden, to Greek science because all energy was measurable as if it were mechanical energy.

This connection to the geometrical image and mean proportional was cut by twentieth century science when algebra became a language of convenience which had no connection to the world except in so far as scientists used it to hypothesize and to impose their ideas on nature. What is important is how this came about. Weil argued that what happened was two-fold. First, Planck in his experiment, in which the "constant h" was discovered and formulated, did not pay attention to what the experiment had told him. Weil's point is that entropy cannot be measured in terms of whole numbers as it must be measured in relation to mechanical energy. She claimed that Planck, in introducing probability into his calculation, had to introduce the use of whole numbers because, as we saw, a calculation of probability was similar to the kinds of calculations one does when one plays a game of dice.

Weil's argument is that it is a contradiction to measure entropy on one scale as though it were related to mechanical energy which concerns only continuous movement and then to measure the same phenomenon on another scale as though it could relate to atomic energy which concerns only discontinuous movement. In other words, Weil is claiming that scientists cannot measure atomic energy by means of entropy even using the notion of probability in their calculation as it does not apply to the kind of energy which we get by movement alone. To do this, she argues is to defy the principle of non-contradiction.

Weil's argument is that Contemporary science is not only willing with Classical science to give up the relation which God has guaranteed us between sight and movement as a necessary relation (that is, the relation between mind, imagination, and action which accords with the Order of the World and appreciates the Beauty of the World through the image), but also willing to give up the role of the intellect which is "to discern" the truth and to submit to it. But, as we saw Classical science only maintained a degraded concept of truth and Contemporary science did not maintain the concept of the truth so that there is no truth for the intellect to submit to -- so it has been given over to the passions and utility.

Western civilisation has, according to Weil's analysis, much to change if we take seriously the Christian Revelation and its roots in an identical thought which has been known to and expressed by many ancient civilisations and peoples. These civilisations had (and still have in their ancient texts) a knowledge of the way or path to assimilation with God which means that in their thought one can find the knowledge of the relation between the Order and the Beauty of the World. The link for us is the relation between the Greek vocation and the Christian

vocation which had its origin in the relation between science as the study of necessity -- that which is a dominion unto itself and yet could be seen to be a perfect Order that could be known only by means of seeing the unity between its parts through the Beauty of the image which relates to our sense of sight and leads us to desire to know the reality which the image imitates -- and "divine love". Weil makes no predictions, her analysis simply suggests that there are choices to be made and that it is possible to choose a re-orientation of the civilisation towards its roots rather than continuing to remain uprooted. Weil presents these roots to us with the implicit question: Can a plant be cut from its roots and go on living? Yes, if it grows new roots, but it will need the same roots and conditions for it to be healthy. In every aspect of her thought, she raises the same question and her analysis leads to the same conclusion that we have cut ourselves off from our roots in the past(our continuity in time) or that they have become diseased and yet she sees that it is not impossible to become rooted again; thus, towards this optimistic goal, Weil wrote her last philosophical treatise on the subject of how we in the West could begin to grow roots again and thereby re-connect to that ancient wisdom.

The roots that Weil argues can re-orient our civilisation begin with the basics which human beings must have in order to attain an equilibrium between the spiritual and the profane. These basics must attend to our dualistic nature. This which means that just as the scientist must privilege the unity seen in the image while allowing the contraries to co-exist (and the unity is only possible this way), society in attending to the basics must privilege obligation which is the social equivalent to the unity seen by the scientist and unites the material needs and the needs of the soul in Weil's State. In this way, the Order of the State can be set up to provide food for the needs of the soul and of the body simultaneously. Weil's conception of obligation is rooted in the ideas of Justice and Charity, and the Love which are their condition, that issue from the tradition that we considered above.

Weil claims that the way society can attain a link to Justice is by teaching each individual that there is a relation between the needs of the soul and body and an obligation to the self which has at the very heart of all of its desires a longing for love; and that this love can only live in each one if society does not form a barrier to the formation of the soul; thus, each one must fulfill his or her obligations for there to be this social harmony between the human beings who are the parts and the leaders who have the role of the citizen (therefore, have to attend to the same obligations as any citizen) as well as overseeing and directing the whole so that it unites the parts in an

Order that everyone can see, understand, and feel as their own. Weil claims that in the language of the laws that this unity is expressed for everyone to understand; but as we know, for her, laws are only as good as they are real and that is why the "majesty of the laws" is only possible when every citizen can feel that this law is what he or she knows to be in accordance with a higher Order. In other words, these laws must have a relation to Justice and as with the "perfectly just man" and Justice, they must have their living models in the leaders of the State. This does not mean to say that they can be Christ, but just that they must be the examples to the people in obeying the laws and fulfilling their obligations. In this way, the people could see the reality of the laws and would be inspired to obey.

Weil's idea is that the love of one's country and one's collectivity depends upon people being able to see in their own past a relation to that identical thought as well as a sense of how uniquely it has been and is expressed by their collectivity. In this way, the people can have a sense of a continuity in time that is both temporal and eternal. For this a religious education is necessary and the people must be given a complete understanding of their past in all aspects of culture and in history and its relation to their present. In doing the latter, Weil thought that it was most important that "false greatness" be distinguished from "true greatness". It would be seen that since their country is a human environment both the good and bad, weakness and strength, etc. will coexist in it by necessity; but, it would be clear to the people what is to be praised and wherein lies the difference between necessity and the Good. Weil's claim is that we do not need to distort the facts of history to discern and teach the difference between true and false greatness; we simply have to praise the virtues of humanity and prefer these to the abuse of force. The past can then be a "truth-giving food" for the people and inspire them to desire to make it truly great. Also, Weil thinks that the attention given to the truth of their country will inspire their love, so that, when it is necessary they will not hesitate to protect it against any threatening force.

It is not surprising that Weil's final work would express her last attempt to ameliorate the conditions of existence for the workers and the peasants – those who encounter necessity with their bodies. As we saw, Weil did not follow the trend in her time of thinking that humans could or should relieve themselves of that "ancient curse": physical labour. As I have argued, Weil thought that specialization (in the way that it led to a lack of understanding) and the rationalization of labour were unhealthy aspects of Western civilisation and she sought to remedy this

situation; her idea was that if factories were organized with the idea of the individual's needs of the soul in mind, then it would be possible to make each job a challenge for the mind of the worker thus allowing him or her to work with method in mind. Weil's conception of this probably draws from the idea of the guilds of the Middle Ages. I think the point of Weil's reforms of the whole production process is intended to make physical labour the "spiritual core of society" in the sense that this kind of work best expresses our duality; thus, everything possible must be given towards providing them with the spiritual awareness which relates to their activity and the scientific understanding of their trade — this includes both the workers and the rural people. In fact, the rural people have a special relation to the beauty of necessity in her natural state. Thus, I think her ideal was for them to have an encounter with necessity which could only be fully realised through work with a method. However, Weil knew that the hardships of the daily effort of the physical labourer could in any case be a constant reminder of the distance between the human being and God. That is why Weil saw these people's work to be the closest to the way of Christ; it is this knowledge of how their relation to necessity is related to the way towards assimilation with God that they must come to see and know.

One of Weil's greatest insights was in being able to see how science could play that mediating role of directing the souls of individuals both in their study and in their work towards the truth. Science can help the individual labourer to understand their relation to necessity so that he or she can come to love this relation that brings together the mind and the body. For this, both the scientists and the workers must have a knowledge of the human condition; that is, that humans are in their essence a part of nature and not a part of nature but that it is only by means of their love of the Beauty of God's Creation that they can love God. Thus, science can only have this mediating role in society if scientists recognize that they take all of their knowledge from the only source of that unity which defines the mind's capacity — divine love; and, that out of Love, God has so arranged His Creation so that scientists (humans generally) could know the Order of the World by seeing in the image the relation which is the manifestation of God's Beauty in the World.

Weil's thought inspires serious reflection on the true value of our civilisation. She questions the very basis of the drive which compels us to continue cutting our roots with the past; that is, the drive to release us from the yoke of necessity — from physical work. Weil leaves us with the idea that we may have missed the meaning of

Christ's Passion and its relation to Genesis; thus, she suggests we reflect on this possibility. Much of what permits the nurturing of the eternal part of the soul is bequeathed to us or sustained by the particular collectivity – and broadly, the civilization – to which we belong. Thus, Weil claims, Western civilization must re-root itself, because "Cet arbre porte les fruits qu'il mérite."¹⁹ Finally, she presents us with the optimistic perspective that she had for our civilisation which is that science be that which directs our attention to the truth concerning the Order of the World and the Beauty of the World thus giving to our civilisation its "true greatness" and yet at the same time connecting it to its roots in that identical thought of those "millenary traditions".

¹⁹Weil, *L'Enracinement*, op. cit., p.371.

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