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ABSTRACT of

J. P. Little, 'The Theme of Mediation in the writings of Simone Weil'.

A study of the theme of mediation necessarily involves a consideration of the two poles between which mediation takes place. This study therefore begins with an investigation of what Simone Weil saw to be man's exile in this world, and his desire for the Good which is God. Since God is unknown and unknowable, this desire cannot be focussed on any particular object, and the soul must experience a void in which there is no compensation for spiritual energy expended. This process is unnatural, however, and painful to man, and he is frequently tempted to focus his desire for the Good on some earthly object; society, by creating the illusion of being greater than the individual, often fulfils this role, and becomes the object of man's idolatry. If man refuses this idolatry and is willing to hold the contradiction posed by his dual nature he will find that all earthly creatures and objects can be mediators between himself and the God whom he desires. In this way exile becomes a fulfilment, and the whole natural realm can speak to man of his supernatural home. All mediation-themes reach their culmination in Christ, whose

suffering is seen as a perpetual cosmic process reconciling the universe with its creator.

The study is therefore presented in three sections: dualism, idolatry (false mediation), and mediation proper. These are fully illustrated by reference to the whole sphere of Simone Weil's meditations, religious, political and philosophical.

Appendices include previously unpublished material, together with relatively inaccessible articles and letters.

THE THEME OF MEDIATION
IN THE WRITINGS OF SIMONE WEIL

by

Janet Patricia Little

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J. P. L.

Southampton

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations of Simone Weil's works have been used in the text:

AD	= <u>Attente de Dieu</u>
C1	= <u>Cahiers I</u>
CA NE	= <u>Cahiers I</u> (new edn 1970)
C2	= <u>Cahiers II</u>
C3	= <u>Cahiers III</u>
CO	= <u>La condition ouvrière</u>
CS	= <u>La Connaissance surnaturelle</u>
E	= <u>L'Enracinement</u>
EH	= <u>Ecrits historiques et politiques</u>
EL	= <u>Ecrits de Londres et dernières lettres</u>
IF	= <u>Intuitions pré-chrétiennes</u>
LR	= <u>Lettre à un religieux</u>
OL	= <u>Oppression et liberté</u>
P	= <u>Poèmes, suivis de 'Venise sauvée'</u>
PG	= <u>La Pesanteur et la grâce</u>
PSO	= <u>Pensées sans ordre concernant l'amour de Dieu</u>
SG	= <u>La Source grecque</u>
SS	= <u>Sur la Science</u>
VS	= <u>Venise sauvée</u>

These abbreviations will be followed immediately by their page reference, e.g. LR 43, PSO 81 etc.

In addition, Simone Pétrement's two volumes on dualism have been abbreviated thus:

DH	= <u>Le Dualisme dans l'histoire de la philosophie...</u>
DP	= <u>Le Dualisme chez Platon...</u>

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INTRODUCTION

Qu'est-ce qu'il est mal de détruire ? Non pas ce qui est bas, car cela n'a pas d'importance. Non pas ce qui est haut, car on ne peut y toucher quand on le voudrait. Les **μεταξύ**. Les **μεταξύ** sont la région du bien et du mal. (C1 80)

In Simone Weil's interpretation of Plato's cave-myth,¹ man in his natural condition is deprived of any direct perception of the Good, since he lives in a world of shadows where only reflections are visible. He is chained in such a way that he cannot move to seek the reality behind the reflections, and is therefore led to believe that the reflections are reality, are rightful objects of his love. But if, by inspiration or by the testimony of those who have managed to leave the cave and have seen the sun outside, he realises that there may be something better than the images he has before him, then he embarks on the painful and difficult journey out of the cave, releasing himself from his chains. Conditions in the cave and the sunlight outside form for Simone Weil two totally opposed realms, the natural and the supernatural, and the ascent from one to the other is not achieved automatically. 'Pour le passage des ténèbres à la contemplation du soleil, il faut des intermédiaires, des μεταξὺ' (SG 106). The nature of these μεταξὺ, these intermediaries, will be the subject of this study, and their precise nature will be analysed in the course of it. For the present it will suffice

¹Republic, VII, 514-516. See SG 98-100.

to say that they represent for Simone Weil the means of man's return to God, the way of his salvation.

It is not mediators as such, however, but rather the theme of mediation which is under discussion. By 'theme' we mean neither the childhood trauma of J.-P. Weber,¹ nor the literary topics and motifs of Eugene Falk,² but rather a pattern of ideas and images centred on and therefore revelatory of a salient feature of the writer's view of existence. This pattern will be found to extend over the whole range of Simone Weil's writing, religious, political and literary, and our concern will be to trace the pattern, both in its broad outlines and in the details which compose it, rather than to examine exhaustively any one aspect of Simone Weil's thought.

If we define mediation as the process of man's return to God, it is immediately obvious that an initial division is implied for this process to be necessary. Mediation is impossible without the assumption of two extreme terms, and it would be no exaggeration to say that these three terms together form the basis of Simone Weil's concept of religion. David Raper has noted that the key to this concept is to be

¹Domaines thématiques (Paris 1963), p. 9.

²Types of Thematic Structure (Chicago 1967), pp. 2-3.

found in 'the recognition of three things--man's bondage to necessity, the reality of absolute good, and the principle of mediation between the two'.¹

The consideration of mediation must therefore be preceded by a consideration of dualism, and of what this can mean in relation to Simone Weil's thought. After a general survey of dualistic thought (I, §1), there will be a study of the two poles of the opposition, God (I, §2) and the realm of necessity (I, §3), with a consideration of the dualism inherent within man (I, §4). It will be noted that the whole concept of mediation depends on the purity with which the two poles are kept apart; a mediator relates one term of the opposition to the other, but compromises the integrity of neither. It must partake in some way of the nature of both extremes, being expressible in the formula $a : b = b : c$. In the religious sense, a mediator is a passage, a means for two-way communication between the natural and the supernatural, but to perform this function it must be absolutely pure, stripped of the desires and hopes which man, in his natural urge to expand himself, projects into every being and object he en-

¹'Simone Weil's Critique of the Old Testament', unpubl. thesis (Hamilton, Ont. 1968), p. 164.

counters. Mediation thus depends on man's retreat from his illusory position at the centre of the universe, on a renunciation of power which is extremely painful (I, §5). Since man in his natural state is unwilling to make this renunciation and to undergo the suffering which it entails, most of his life is spent in idolatry, that is, in projecting into the universe his individual or collective desires for the present and future, or, in the terms of the cave-image, in the belief that the shadows on the wall before him are the absolute Good, to be worshipped as objects of love. Having established the basic dualism of Simone Weil's position, therefore, it will be necessary in the second section to consider what results when these opposites are brought into a 'wrong' relationship, when earthly creatures and phenomena are used not as mediators but as objects which are good in themselves. The ^egeneral definition of Simone Weil's use of the term 'idolatry', and its implications for society, will be considered in II, §1, and from there we shall pass to a more detailed analysis of various manifestations of social idolatry, including those societies, from Rome to Nazi Germany, which Simone Weil considered to be totalitarian (II, §§2; 3), the social implications of Judaism (II, §4) and of the Roman Catholic Church (II, §5).

It is only in the third and final section that mediation proper will be considered, as the 'correct' way to resolve the basic contradiction of man's existence. This mediatory function can be performed by a vision of the beauty of the world (III, §1), a beauty which frequently implies suffering (III, §2), or by individual redemptive figures who have suffered for humanity (III, §3). It can also be performed by perfectly pure objects, by matter which has become transparent so that grace can operate through it (III, §4). Society too can be a mediator, when it is no longer worshipped as a means of collective power and prestige (III, §5). A more theoretical form of mediation is considered in III, §6, where Simone Weil's preoccupation with the spiritual symbolism of Greek geometry is analysed. The final chapter concerns the figure of Christ, who unites in himself all mediation-themes.

This study will thus evolve in apparently dialectical form, with the positing of the thesis (dualism), antithesis (idolatry) and synthesis (mediation). But this is in many ways a false dialectic, and certainly bears little resemblance to its Hegelian variety. Idolatry, rather than being an antithesis of dualism, is a false synthesis of the terms of opposition within that dualism. There is no real antithesis of

dualism, which bears within itself its own dialectic, and to speak of its 'resultion' by mediation is true only in a limited sense. The elements of duality are 'resolved' only in a very special sense, as will be shown. Any dialectic is thus one of form only, and the three parts of this study can be better understood in the terms 'dilemma', 'false solution', 'true solution'.

The scheme of man's salvation involves, clearly, the salvation of the whole man, and no consideration of the theme of mediation could afford to neglect the psychological and social aspects of man, his reactions to the universe in which he finds himself, as well as the individual history which makes him a unique being. And so biographical details concerning Simone Weil's life will be considered wherever necessary, in order to put into human perspective the intellectual and spiritual problems which she faced. For the concept of mediation evolved only gradually within her; chronologically, her dualism preceded her consciousness of mediation, even if the former was never lost. This consciousness was bought at the price of an agonised confrontation with what she saw to be man's dilemma, and was never an easy way of reconciling the apparently irreconcilable. That the dilemma was never

finally resolved is indicated by the fact that even in the last months of her life she was able to write to Maurice

Schumann:

J'éprouve un déchirement qui s'aggrave sans cesse, à la fois dans l'intelligence et au centre du coeur, par l'incapacité où je suis de penser ensemble dans la vérité le malheur des hommes, la perfection de Dieu et le lien des deux.

(EL 213)

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SECTION I

DUALISM

I, §1

ASPECTS OF DUALISM

When considering elements of dualism to be found in Simone Weil's writings, the first problem which presents itself is the very nature of that dualism. For the adjective 'dualist' when applied to philosophical or religious modes of thinking has vast implications, and covers a great range of phenomena. Man from earliest times has been conscious of forces outside himself, of a 'natural' world of which he is a part, and a 'supernatural' world, whose connexion with the natural is experienced to a certain degree as the 'numinous',¹ but is generally incomprehensible and inexplicable in terms of ordinary thought-processes. Then there is the sense, also present early in man's history, that the social order of man merely reflects a higher, macrocosmic order, so that society is constructed after the supposed order of the cosmos.²

In the field of religious speculation there are the great dualistic faiths such as Manicheism, exalting the

¹See Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, trans. J. W. Harvey (London 1923).

²See Marcel Griaule & Germaine Dieterlen, 'The Dogon', African Worlds, ed. Daryll Forde (London 1954), for an example of this. It is of course a feature of Chinese and Indian organisation of space in architecture. See Nelson I. Wu, Chinese and Indian Architecture (London & New York 1963), esp. p. 11.

distance and opposition between God and creation and positing two separate, if unequal, principles. Some critics have seen a definite, though unavowed, link between Simone Weil's thought and the dualism of Gnosticism which was responsible for much of the heresy in the early Church.¹ Philosophical speculation has also produced dualistic concepts, such as the dualism of mind and matter elaborated by Kant, or Descartes' distinction between body and soul. Simone Weil was undoubtedly influenced by Cartesian thought; not only through the obvious fact that it is difficult for any French thinker to escape its influence, but also through Alain, and her choice of Descartes as the subject for her 'thèse de diplôme d'études supérieures'.² Descartes is important too as representative

¹E.g. Charles Moeller, Littérature du XXe siècle et christianisme, t. I: Silence de Dieu (Paris 1954), 2e partie, §2, 'Simone Weil et l'incroyance des croyants'.

Idem, 'Simone Weil devant l'Eglise et l'Ancien Testament', Cahiers sioniens, VI, 2 (1952), 104 ff.

Marcel Moré, 'La Pensée religieuse de Simone Weil', Dieu vivant, 17 (1950), 35-68.

Mention will be made from time to time of Simone Weil's affinities with certain aspects of Gnostic thought, but no attempt will be made to assess exhaustively the extent to which she was 'a Gnostic', since such an assessment would be meaningless, given the unsystematic and undogmatic nature of her thought. Her expressed affinity with the Cathars will be treated in III, §5.

²'Science et perception dans Descartes', SS 9-99.

of a certain dualism within the Christian tradition, the body-and-soul, flesh-and-spirit dualism first emphasised within Christianity by St. Paul, and which has remained a permanent feature of Christian theology to the present day. That a form of dualism is essential to our intellectual existence is readily observable by the fact that thought itself implies a division between subject and object, thinker and thought. Whereas this division is generally unconscious, however, the dualist can be said to be one who is aware of it.¹

One fundamental and comparatively unsophisticated form of duality which may prove relevant to our purpose is the primitive and widespread categorisation of phenomena into two opposite groups. The importance of pairs of objects in primitive and not-so-primitive society has long been remarked upon by anthropologists--for example the veneration or abhorrence of twins, according to the particular traditions of the society concerned. In the same field, Roger Caillois has studied the dualistic

¹Simone Pétrement, Le Dualisme dans l'histoire de la philosophie et des religions (Paris 1946), p. 92. (Referred to hereafter as DH.) The present writer's debt to Simone Pétrement's study of dualism will become obvious in the following pages. Not only is her work of great value in itself, but it is particularly relevant to our purpose, since she was a close friend of Simone Weil's during their student days and later, and, like her, a pupil of Alain.

A well-known example of opposition at the beginnings of Western philosophy, and one used by Simone Weil, is the Pythagorean table of opposites, though here already the list is somewhat sophisticated by its inclusion of abstract notions, odd and even, limit and unlimited etc.¹ An associated form of dualism is to be found in Chinese philosophy, with the pre-Taoist notion of the polarity of the yin and the yang, developed from the basic opposition between light and darkness.

It could be said however that these oppositions are not really a manifestation of dualism but rather an instance of rhythmic alternation; and not of a fundamental difference between the two categories.² Granet puts clearly the basic concept of yin and yang:

A l'idée de couple demeure associée l'idée de communion, et la notion de totalité commande la règle de bipartition. L'opposition du Yin et du Yang n'est pas conçue en principe (et n'a jamais été conçue) comme une opposition absolue comparable à celles de l'Etre et du Non-Etre, du Bien et du Mal. C'est une opposition relative et de nature rythmique, entre deux groupements rivaux et solidaires complémentaires et au

¹See G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, The Presocratic Philosophers (Cambridge 1962), p. 240, and Lloyd, op.cit., p. 94.

²In the case of the Pythagorean opposites, however, Simone Weil seems to take limit and unlimited as expressions of an absolute opposition exterior to the physical world. See III, §6.

même titre que deux corporations sexuelles, alternant comme elles à la besogne et passant tour à tour au premier plan.¹

Simone Pétrement discusses this same concept and concludes that the cyclic nature of these oppositions is in a sense quite foreign to dualism.² And indeed, the essence of dualism is surely a sense of two utterly opposed realms or categories, each completely independent of the other, whereas alternating opposites are in a sense relative, do not really exist one without the other. To begin our discussion of Simone Weil's dualism with a consideration of this type of opposition may thus seem perverse. That it is a form of dualism within reality, an immanent dualism, there can be no doubt, however; Jung uses the term without hesitation to designate the various oppositions which together form the alchemists' Coniunctio, or synthesis of psychic opposites.³ But our real justification must be that it forms the basis of many of Simone Weil's speculations on the nature of this world, in its subjection to time and necessity. This

¹Marcel Granet, La Pensée chinoise (Paris 1950), pp. 144-5.

²DH, p. 58.

³C. G. Jung, 'Mysterium coniunctionis', Collected Works (London 1963), XIV, 38.

immanent duality is the substance of the creaturely element in the dualism man/God which will form the main subject of this section, and can thus be considered conveniently at this point.

*

'L'existence, c'est le lieu des contraires' (C2 285).

This affirmation can readily be deduced even from a cursory view of human existence. Our century has no need of Heraclitus to remind us that 'la guerre est mère de toutes choses; reine de toutes choses'¹--not only are there differences between phenomena, but these phenomena appear to be in perpetual conflict. Although this conflict may be experienced as painful by the individual man, it is capable of resolution on the temporal plane, since it is merely a statement of the relativity of earthly things, of the ~~perpetual~~ ^{cyclic} nature of the seasons, for example. The early Greeks seem to have been acutely conscious of the laws regulating change, and the fact that the 'warring' within phenomena was not merely a disordered jumble. Simone

¹Heraclitus, frag. 53 (1st part): Πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστι, πάντων δὲ βασιλεύς, trans. Simone Weil (SG 153), following Diels' classification.

Weil too has this same feeling for alternating rhythm, for the constant oscillation between extremes which forms the law of nature. She frequently quotes Anaximander's formula on the origin and destiny of phenomena:

Tel est le point de départ de la naissance pour les choses, et le terme de leur destruction, qui se produit conformément à la nécessité; car elles subissent un châtement et une expiation les unes de la part des autres, à cause de leur injustice, selon l'ordre du temps.¹

In this Simone Weil finds a formula applicable to all phenomena, an essential law in scientific investigation:

Formule d'Anaximandre, fondement de toute science. Définir partout un équilibre tel que les ruptures compensées constituent les phénomènes. Aussi dans une âme humaine; quand un mobile va trop loin, il se produit une compensation. Dans la société de même. (Cl 181)

This law is in fact merely a reflection of the universal law of progression in time, which all things are obliged to obey. In a sense the state of becoming which is the condition of existence is a series of breaks in perfect equilibrium:²

'L'ordre est équilibre et immobilité. L'univers soumise au temps est en perpétuel devenir. L'énergie qui le meut est

¹Anaximander, quot. Simplicius, *Phys.*, 24, 13, in Kirk & Raven, pp. 106-7: ἐξ ὧν δὲ ἡ γένεσις ἐστὶ τοῖς οὐδοῖς, καὶ τὴν φθορὰν εἰς ταῦτα γίνεσθαι κατὰ τὸ χρεὼν. δίδοναι γὰρ αὐτὰ δίκην καὶ τίσιν ἀλλήλοις τῆς ἀδικίας κατὰ τὴν τοῦ χρόνου τάξιν, ποιητικωτέροις οὕτως Trans. Simone Weil (IP 117). ὀνόμασιν αὐτὰ λέγων.

²We shall consider Simone Weil's ideas on time in more detail in I, §3. See also II, §1.

principe de rupture d'équilibre! (IP 151). This essentially Greek nostalgia for a world in which change and consequently decay have no part makes Simone Weil suggest that becoming is in itself the source of evil. Referring again to Anaximander, she notes the relationship he has made between injustice and becoming:¹ 'Anaximandre: injustice des choses. Si les choses n'étaient pas injustes, il y aurait équilibre, c'est-à-dire immobilité. Le devenir est le mal' (C3 227). And yet this same movement is both injustice and harmony. She associates Heraclitus' 'l'harmonie est changement de côté'² with the idea on the mechanism of the bow put forward by Lao Tzu,³ for whom the Tao itself proceeded by cyclic motion: 'Turning back is how the way moves'.⁴ The laws of phenomenal change are thus reversion, return (fu),⁵ giving that interaction of opposing movements probably most familiar to the West in the concepts

¹See also I, §2 for Simone Weil's ideas on the origin of evil.

²Frag. 51: Οὐ ξυνιάσιν ὅπως διαφερόμενον ἐνυπὶ δμολογέει: παλίντροπος ἀρμονίη ὅκωσπερ τόξου καὶ λυρῆς, trans. Simone Weil (SG 152).

³Tao te ching, trans. D. C. Lau (Harmondsworth 1963), LXXVII, 184.

⁴Ibid., XL, 88.

⁵Fung Yu-Lan, The Spirit of Chinese Philosophy, trans. R. Hughes (London 1947), pp. 98-9.

of yin and yang already mentioned.¹

Because Simone Weil was conscious of the law of cyclic progression as applied to all phenomena, it is hardly surprising that she should apply the same law to the movement of the intellect. It is thus that she accepts the Platonic dialectic as a means--perhaps the only means--of thought. Contradiction and analogy, which are for her the two essential features of Plato's dialectic, are both means of relating phenomena, and both 'des moyens de sortir du point de vue' (Cl 76).² From Alain too she had learnt that any observation must be followed by its contrary in order to obtain a balanced view of the whole.³

¹But Jean Grenier warns against too close a parallel between Heraclitus' theory of opposites and the concept of yin and yang. The analogy is too general to have any real significance according to him. L'Esprit du Tao (Paris 1957), p. 51.

²The use of contradiction as a kind of mystical moment will be discussed in III, §6.

³Cf. e.g.: 'J'ai appris . . . que l'opposition est le mouvement même de la pensée et le seul moyen de donner du corps aux idées. Cela est sensible dans ces contraires que Platon a dessinés comme par jeu, ainsi le chaud et le froid, le lourd et le léger, le grand et le petit. A force d'y penser j'ai fini par apercevoir que ces contraires étaient inhérents l'un à l'autre, de façon qu'il soit impossible de juger qu'un corps est petit si l'on ne juge en même temps qu'il est grand, ce qui n'est que parcourir toute l'étendue d'un genre et faire courir l'idée. . . . Hegel a trouvé de merveilleuses idées, pleines de matière et de consistance, à force de chercher en chacune son contraire identique à elle.' Alain, Histoire de mes pensées (Paris 1950), p. 35. For a comment on this particular

'Méthode d'investigation: dès qu'on a pensé quelque chose, chercher en quel sens le contraire est vrai' (C1 191). Seen from another angle, if both propositions are true, then neither is. Truth is to be found rather in relationship: 'la vérité se produit au contact de deux propositions dont aucune n'est vraie; leur rapport est vrai' (C2 398). Eckhart too, whom Simone Weil appears to have admired, judging from the relatively few but approving references to him in her published work, used the same method of intellectual progression:

[Chez lui] négation et affirmation forment à elles deux la vérité. L'une n'est pas vraie sans l'autre; et ne peut se concevoir que par rapport à l'autre. Affirmation et négation sont indispensables, n'étant que les deux aspects d'une même vérité.¹

Thus contradiction can be a positive value as well as a negative conflict. It can also serve the related purpose of illustrating the relativity of all human positions, and in particular the relativity of the very notions of good and evil. Whereas these are generally taken to be absolute opposites,

theme, and an assessment of Alain's influence on Simone Weil's thought in general, see Marie-Magdeleine Davy, Introduction au message de Simone Weil (Paris 1954), §2.

¹B. Groethuysen, quot. by Denis de Rougemont, op. cit., p. 132.

Simone Weil insists that what we know as good is in fact another facet of evil: 'Le bien comme contraire du mal lui est équivalent en un sens, comme tous les contraires' (Cl 171). And 'ce qui est directement contraire à un mal n'est (peut-être) jamais de l'ordre du bien supérieur. A peine au-dessus du mal, souvent' (Cl 199).

Needless to say, this does not preclude the possibility of a 'bien supérieur'. A consideration of what this was will bring us to the question of true dualism. For the relativity of what we know as good and evil is a feature of dualistic thinking as is the related concept of the distance between these two and the true good. This latter is, in a sense, unknowable, and the source of sin is the attempt to know it:

. . . chez les grands gnostiques on aperçoit nettement cette idée que nous ne pouvons connaître le bien, et que même c'est la faute essentielle de vouloir le connaître, au moins d'une certaine façon.¹

The emphasis in dualistic thinking is on the absence of the good rather than on the presence of evil. As Simone Pétrement puts it, 'Pour les gnostiques la première question ne semble pas avoir été: d'où vient le mal? mais: d'où vient le bien?'²

¹Simone Pétrement, Le Dualisme chez Platon, les Gnostiques et les Manichéens (Paris 1947), p. 261. (Hereafter referred to as DP.)

²DH, p. 94.

And yet this presence of evil is not a problem which can be ignored, and in a sense a dualist philosophy is one solution of this question. In relation to the concept of deity, the problem of evil is in some ways the most fundamental of all, and it is perhaps appropriate to quote in full here Epicurus' expression of it:

God either wishes to take away evils, and is unable, or He is ~~mm~~able, and is unwilling; or He is neither willing nor able, or He is both willing and able. If He is willing and is unable, He is feeble, which is not in accordance with the character of God; if He is able and unwilling, He is envious, which is equally at variance with God; if He is neither willing nor able, He is both envious and feeble, and therefore not God; if He is both willing and able, which alone is suitable to God, from what source then are evils? or why does He not remove them?¹

To resolve this problem one can have recourse to only two perfectly consistent solutions; firstly one can adopt a monist view of the universe, asserting the ultimate unity of all things with God, and the consequent illusory nature of evil, such as is found in the East, in Hinduism, and in the West, in Spinoza's philosophy.² Evil is then only a distortion caused by our finite, and false, perspective. Some form of dualism

¹Quot. in J. Hick, Evil and the God of Love (London 1966), p. 5, n. 1.

²Ibid., pp. 23-29.

is the other consistent solution, the affirmation of the radically different nature of the ultimate good from the created universe, with a tendency to remove God further and further from any part in the creative act.¹ The Judaeo-Christian solution to the problem, given in the account of creation and original sin in Genesis, while it is of great richness in preserving the omnipotence of God, his goodness, and the freedom of the creature man, nevertheless results in the contradiction expressed by Epicurus. Christian theology thus tends to hover between the two extremes--for instance, Augustine's concept of evil as essentially privatio boni comes very close to monism.² Simone Weil's own solution was nearer to dualism, although it is important to realise that 'solution' here is a very relative term, as she never set out

¹The ultimate link between these two concepts regarding the relationship of God with his creation will be noted in I, §3.

²Simone Pétrement expresses clearly this mingling of monism with dualism when referring to religions positing the transcendence of God. All these are dualist in a sense: 'Elles ne le sont pas jusqu'au bout, parce qu'elles enseignent qu'en remontant jusqu'à l'origine des choses, on atteindrait enfin l'unité: la matière est créée par l'esprit, le diable lui-même est venu de Dieu. Mais si elles sont monistes en ce qui touche l'origine temporelle du monde, elles semblent dualistes en ce qui regarde le monde comme il va.' DH, p. 14.

to 'solve' once and for all any problem. Hers was a way, a method, rather than a system designed to answer all questions.¹ It was a consciousness of the radical difference between two orders, the Good and necessity,² as well as a search for the path between the two. She frequently quotes Plato on this point, insisting that 'on n'a rien compris tant qu'on ne sait pas quelle différence il y a, comme dit Platon, entre l'essence du nécessaire et celle du bien' (IP 155).³ The fundamental contradiction of man's existence is in Simone Weil's view based on this opposition:

La contradiction essentielle de la condition humaine, c'est que l'homme est soumis à la force et désire la justice. Il est soumis à la Nécessité et désire le Bien. Ce n'est pas son corps seul qui est ainsi soumis, mais aussi toutes ses pensées.

(OL 209)

The consciousness of this contradiction is of prime importance in Simone Weil's thought, and can be said in fact

¹It is interesting to note that Simone Pétrement considers dualism to be a characteristic of the philosophers of the 'way' (Plato, and those who took up the Platonic spirit, Descartes, Kant), whereas monism is a feature of the system-builders who followed them (Aristotle, Leibniz, Hegel). DH, p. 37.

²What Simone Weil meant by the term 'necessity' will be discussed in I, §3.

³Republic, V, 493.

to constitute her particular form of dualism.¹ It would thus seem pertinent to consider in turn both terms of the contradiction, beginning in the next chapter with Simone Weil's idea of absolute good, and the association which she makes with the concept of God.

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¹Jacques Dufresne considers that it is her concept of the duality of good and necessity which distinguishes her from modern dualism with its distinction between mind and matter. 'Simone Weil et la tradition dualiste', unpubl. diss., Dijon 1965, p. 48.

I, \$2

THE UNKNOWN GOD

It may seem surprising, even wrong-headed, to begin a discussion of the opposition good-necessity with the transcendent element. A sense of man's lowly condition might seem to require him to confine his attentions to what he knows empirically, to the physical world, or at least to start there. Traditional 'proofs of God' in the Western world have done this in so far as they have called on the idea of God to 'explain' what is known as existing in the world. Thus Aristotle's 'Unmoved Mover' would be unnecessary were there not a realm which could be seen physically to be 'moved'. The Christian ontological proof is in the same category in so far as it starts from the concept of being and posits a Being greater than all other, although the essence of this Being is necessary rather than contingent, and in that sense depends in no way upon creation.

But the essence of a dualistic conception of the world seems to be that God, or the transcendent element of the dualism, is so completely 'other' that it can in no way be deduced from the material world. The two are utterly incommensurate, and any link between the two incomprehensible. In addition, as we noted earlier, the basic question in dualism seems to be

not so much whence comes evil? but whence comes good?¹

Simone Pétrement also emphasises the fact that, historically, a sense of transcendence has preceded that of the conflict of good and evil in the world.² It thus seems appropriate to start with the transcendent element.

Turning to Simone Weil's own writings, we find that the expression of the concept of God comes fairly late. She herself tells how she was brought up by her parents and her brother in complete agnosticism (AD 62), and early adopted the attitude 'qu'étant en ce monde notre affaire était d'adopter la meilleure attitude à l'égard des problèmes de ce monde' (AD 32). She was conscious at this stage of the 'problem of God', and conscious too of its insolubility, but already attached great importance to its correct solution, or rather to the danger of an incorrect solution:

Dès l'adolescence j'ai pensé que le problème de Dieu est un problème dont les données manquent ici-bas et que la seule méthode certaine pour éviter de le résoudre à faux, ce qui me semblait le plus grand mal possible, était de ne pas le poser.

(ibid.)

¹DP, p. 310.

²DH, p. 15.

Even in her last years she considered that no conclusion on the subject could be reached by the means of intellect alone, as when she says in the essay 'Formes de l'amour implicite de Dieu' 'Il ne dépend pas d'une âme de croire à la réalité de Dieu si Dieu ne révèle pas cette réalité' (AD 164). Not only should one not believe in God unless his existence has been revealed, but to deny him in these circumstances is probably nearer the truth: 'Entre deux hommes qui n'ont pas l'expérience de Dieu, celui qui le nie en est peut-être le plus près' (C2 15). Elsewhere she criticises Christianity for requiring belief in God before contact has been established, contrasting this unfavourably with Plato's restriction on the use of the idea of God (IP 91).

However, there is evidence that in her early years of philosophy teaching she was already using the idea of God as a philosophical concept, but it is significant that her observations frequently reveal the distance and intrinsic 'otherness' of God, as in the following comment (taken up later in the Cahiers: C2 146): 'La seule empreinte de Dieu sur nous-mêmes, c'est que nous sentons que nous ne sommes pas Dieu'.¹ It is

¹ Anne Reynaud, Leçons de philosophie de Simone Weil (Roanne 1933-4) (Paris 1959), p. 81.

only in her last years, and in particular from 1940 onwards, that she uses the term 'Dieu' with any frequency, and from then until her death it recurs constantly, often ~~not~~ in the form of a speculation on God, but as a point of reference for other ideas.

It is not surprising that in spite of her religious experience which she interpreted in a Christian light, Simone Weil's conception of God should retain elements from the Greek culture of her intellectual formation, and in particular from Plato. It is from Plato, for instance, that she derives her equation of God with the Good. In her commentary on the passage of the Republic where Plato is speaking of the Good which illuminates the mind in the spiritual realm, she identifies the two (SG 95-6), having commented previously (SG 93) on Plato's comparison of the Good and the sun, noting that in many civilisations the sun is an image of God.¹

¹It is permissible however to doubt this identification as an interpretation of what Plato actually meant. Etienne Gilson, commenting on a similar passage where the Form of the Good is shown as the author of all things beautiful and right, the source of reason and truth (Republic, 517), admits that 'assuredly, nothing more closely resembles the definition of the Christian God than this definition of the Good'. (God and Philosophy (Yale 1941), pp. 25-6). But he goes on to assert that since Plato did not actually identify the Idea of the Good and God we should not take the liberty of doing so. (See

Although this identification is initially made in a commentary on Plato, Simone Weil takes it over and uses it in other contexts. It is clear that for her 'the Good' was one of the few things that could be predicated of God with any certainty. The essay on 'Israël et les Gentils' begins with the affirmation: 'La connaissance essentielle concernant Dieu est que Dieu est le Bien. Tout le reste est secondaire' (PSO 47). Elsewhere she notes that 'l'être même de Dieu est d'être bien' (C2 364), and one of her few approving references to St. Augustine is made on the same theme, where she quotes his assertion 'Dieu est un bien qui n'est autre chose que bien' (SG 96) (while claiming Plato as the source of Augustine's inspiration in this instance).

It is significant that the only 'proof' of God's existence which she accepted (apart from the 'preuve par la beauté du

also Sir David Ross, Plato's Theory of Ideas (Oxford 1951), p. 43. Ross bases his separation of the Idea of the Good and God on the fact that by the time the concept of God occupies a central position in Plato's thought (in the Laws), the Ideas have receded into the background.) In addition, Gilson contends that such an identification is unjustified because an idea cannot be thought of as a person, and hence as a God. This charge will be met later in the chapter when the impersonal aspect of God is discussed. For the moment let it suffice to say that provided one is not looking for an anthropomorphic conception of God, there is no reason why Simone Weil's view of the Good as God should not stand.

monde' to be discussed in Section III below) concerned the concept of God as goodness.¹ This was her version of the ontological argument, which she called 'la preuve ontologique expérimentale' (C3 36) or 'la preuve par la perfection'.² She notes it in the 'Théorie des sacrements' as the only valid argument for God's existence:

Pour tout ce qui concerne le bien absolu et le contact avec lui, la preuve par la perfection (parfois faussement nommé preuve ontologique) est non seulement valable, mais la seule valable. Cela résulte immédiatement de la notion même du bien.

(PSO 136)

In other words, it is not so much a question of existence demanding an ultimate existent, as in the traditional onto-

¹It is true that one must be wary when speaking of 'proofs of God' in connexion with Simone Weil. Gilbert Kahn is right when he warns us: 'Pour Simone Weil la question de l'existence de Dieu ne se pose pas vraiment, en dépit de la "preuve ontologique expérimentale". La philosophie religieuse est essentiellement une pneumatologie. Il ne s'agit pas de ce que Dieu est pour nous, mais de ce que nous sommes par rapport à lui, ou si l'on veut, de notre aventure dans l'ordre du bien.' ('A propos de Simone Weil', Empédocle, mars-avril 1950). A discussion of 'proofs of God' is perhaps justified however, when it concerns God as the Good, since it is clear that for Simone Weil this was a matter of deep intellectual and spiritual conviction.

²For a discussion of Simone Weil's use of the ontological argument, see Raper, op. cit., pp. 65 ff.

logical proof, but of the desire for good in man necessitating the absolute Good.¹ Man could have no idea of perfection if that perfection did not in fact exist; conversely, his awareness that he himself is imperfect leads logically to the idea of the perfection which he is not. This idea is already developed in the notes for her philosophy classes:

Nous sentons que nous n'avons pas le droit d'être imparfaits et finis; si c'était pour nous une manière d'être légitime et normale, nous ne nous dirions pas imparfaits; nous sentons que cette imperfection nous est étrangère.²

The relationship between absolute good and the idea which we have of it is expressed for Simone Weil in the conviction, central to her thought, that good alone can produce good. She puts it thus: 'Seule la pensée de la perfection produit du bien--un bien imparfait. Si on propose de l'imparfait, on fait le mal' (CS 313). Her interpretation of the parable of the good tree which produces ^{good} fruit is an illustration of this

¹It thus differs from the ontological argument in that whereas in this latter existence demands an ultimate existent, in the 'preuve par la perfection' it is not good in itself which demands an ultimate good, but the mere desire for it, the consciousness of its absence. In this was it can be said that Simone Weil's 'proof' does not work from the earthly to the spiritual.

²Reynaud, op. cit., p. 81.

idea, which for Simone Weil is a matter of self-evident truth:

. . . le Christ n'a pas dit qu'on reconnaît le fruit à l'arbre . . . mais qu'on reconnaît l'arbre aux fruits. . . l'unique péché sans pardon, le péché contre le Saint-Esprit, consiste à dire que du bien, reconnu comme tel, procède du mal. On peut blasphémer contre le Fils de l'homme; on peut ne pas discerner le bien. Mais quand on l'a discerné quelque part, affirmer qu'il procède du mal est le péché sans rémission, car le bien ne produit que le bien et le mal ne produit que le mal.

(PSO 53)

The rhetoric of this passage may seem overdone, but she clearly meant it quite literally; the ultimate blasphemy was that which made evil the source of good. Hence her condemnation of Augustine who held that pagan 'good works' were in fact evil, because they originated in paganism, i.e. evil (PSO 52).

From the immense importance which Simone Weil attaches to the idea of God being essentially the Good, it may be inferred that in her mind the Good was superior to all other attributes. This is in fact the case. To take one expression of this, in the essay referred to above on 'Israël et les Gentils' she comments on Moses' knowledge of God as Being, and asserts:

Mais Platon . . . a été instruit bien plus avant que Moïse, car il savait que l'Etre n'est pas encore ce qu'il y a de plus haut; le Bien est au-dessus de l'Etre et Dieu est Bien avant même d'être ce qui est.

(PSO 49)

To follow Plato's cave-image, the Good illuminates the objects

of intelligence just as the sun illuminates the objects of this world.¹ Following this train of thought, Simone Weil asserts quite logically that it is in a sense unimportant whether this absolute Good exists or not. All that is required of man is that he should turn from the false good of this earth, and direct his attention towards the true Good.

Mais, me dira-t-on, ce bien existe-t-il ? Qu'im-
porte ? les choses d'ici-bas existent, mais elles ne sont
pas le bien. Que le bien existe ou non il n'est pas
d'autre bien que le bien.

(CS 284)

This idea was also developed by Simone Weil into a kind of wager, similar in form to Pascal's, but vastly superior in content to his. In Simone Weil's version there is nothing to be gained from a wager on God's existence except the knowledge that one has lived in the truth. Extinction of life after death is of no account beside this over-riding concern. It is a question for her of subordinating all things to the obedience of God, with the thought that

Si Dieu est réel, on gagne ainsi tout--quand même
l'instant de la mort apporterait le néant ; si ce mot ne
correspond à rien qu'à des illusions, on n'a rien perdu,
car alors il n'y a absolument aucun bien, et par suite
rien à perdre ; on a même gagné d'être dans la vérité,
car on a laissé des biens illusoire, qui existent, mais

¹Republic, VII, 516.

qui ne sont pas des biens, pour une chose qui (dans cette supposition), n'existe pas, mais qui, si elle existait, serait encore l'unique bien

(CS 109)

In another writer this kind of speculation might be regarded as no more than a verbal exercise; it offends our sense of reality after all to be told that what is of the highest value may not even exist. But it is clear that for Simone Weil the matter was not mere verbiage, and such a speculation is completely consistent with the development of her thought elsewhere. To make it clear that this is no idle jest she continues:

Quand Dieu serait une illusion du point de vue de l'existence, Il est l'unique réalité du point de vue du bien. Cela, j'en ai la certitude, car c'est une définition. 'Dieu est le bien' est aussi certain que 'je suis'.

(ibid.)

If the Good takes precedence in Simone Weil's thought over the idea of Being, it does no less over the idea of Unity. Not that she denied the unity of God: she recognised that this concept was the contribution of Judaism to the idea of the divinity, and accepted it genuinely at its true value (C2 184). She also attributes to Plato the idea that God is the supreme One (IP 130) although this idea, even if it is present in embryo in Plato, is never really developed until

Plotinus and the Neo-platonists.¹ But the concept of God as One is always subordinated to that of God as the Good. God's unity depends by definition on ~~his~~ goodness: 'C'est seulement parce que le Bien est unique qu'il faut reconnaître un seul Dieu' (PSO 48).

This great emphasis put by Simone Weil on the concept of the essential goodness of God is an indication of another, allied feature of her religious thought, that is, her apprehension of God as impersonal.² The concept of an impersonal deity can lead in two opposing and yet complementary directions: either God becomes so transcendent, so utterly remote from the world and human experience that he no longer has any part to play in man's consciousness--some of the African sky gods belong in this category, being at best objects of formal belief but not recipients of worship,³ as does to a certain extent Aristotle's Unmoved Mover; this latter is still conceived as

¹J. M. Rist accepts the identification of the Form of the One with the Form of the Good. Eros and Psyche (Toronto 1964), p. 21.

²Dufresne has also noted this link (op. cit., p. 95).

³Cf. G. Parrinder, West African Religion (London 1949), PP. 30-32.

a person, but only in a philosophical sense, and could never become the centre of religious devotion. Or the idea of an impersonal deity can lead to the concept of an immanent Universal Principle, suffusing all things and source of all life, as for instance in Upanishadic tradition. Simone Weil was conscious of both these directions, conscious that God was at one and the same time beyond the boundaries of the universe and at its very centre (AD 117), but the emphasis was invariably placed by her on the transcendence of God. Certainly there is no place in her thought for any pantheistic doctrine of immanence.

This tendency towards impersonality provides one of the features in Simone Weil's work least likely to meet with sympathy from a reader accustomed to the Judaeo-Christian emphasis on the 'personality' of God. It is not that she completely neglects the personal aspect--she seldom mentions the impersonality of God without at least implying personality at the same time--but she was acutely conscious of the dangers of attributing personality in the human sense to God.¹ It was

¹Simone Weil's criticism of the immediacy of Yahweh in the Judaic tradition will be dealt with in II, §4. See also Raper, op. cit., §3.

equally dangerous in her eyes however to think of God in terms of the impersonality of an inanimate object, simply because human definitions can never encompass the divine (C2 174). But of the two Simone Weil seems more aware of the dangers inherent in the attribution of personality to God, unless it is accompanied by the concept of impersonality:

Dieu n'est pas une personne à la manière dont un homme croit l'être. C'est là sans doute le sens de cette parole profonde des Hindous, qu'il faut concevoir Dieu à la fois comme personnel et comme impersonnel.

(IP 137-8)¹

In her emphasis on the impersonal aspect of God, Simone Weil was undoubtedly more in sympathy with Indian and Chinese thought than with Christianity, although as Otto points out, all gods transcend from time to time the bounds of mere personal representation, and reveal their ancient character as numina (even Yahweh was frequently referred to as the plural 'Elohim', expressing 'the divine').² The impersonal aspect

¹Cf. Otto, op. cit., p. 204: 'In India brahmán is the everlasting Lord and God, the personal Brahmá; while bráhma is the divine Absolute, the supra-personal Bráhma, an 'It' rather than a 'He'. And the two are bound together in indissoluble unity as the two essential poles of the eternal unity of the Numen.'

²Ibid., p. 20. Examples are too numerous to cite, but see R. Young, Analytical Concordance to the Holy Bible (7th edn, London c. 1926), s.v. God, gods, objects of worship, elohim.

is however more pronounced in certain Eastern religions. M. Hiriyanna criticises Western scholars for classing as a defect the 'imperfect anthropomorphism' of Vedic religion (for example, Agni and Parjanya retain their character as 'fire' and 'cloud'), as though anthropomorphism were the ultimate goal in man's evolving consciousness of the deity.¹

Impersonality is a feature of the Gnostic concept of deity too. The Naassenes' idea of God as the Most High, the impersonal, limitless spirit, also named the Good, has several affinities with Simone Weil's concept.² Like Simone Weil, most Gnostic thinkers were overwhelmingly conscious of

¹Outlines of Indian Philosophy (London 1964), p. 32. This criticism would also apply to Gilson, who, as we have already seen, considers that Plato's Idea of the Good could not possibly represent his concept of God, since an idea is less than a person, 'much less a person than a thing' (op. cit., p. 26). When asserting that in Plato's mind the gods are inferior to the Ideas, he does not seem to consider the possibility that 'the gods', that is, mortals as they can and should be, occupied a relatively lowly position in his scheme, whereas the Idea of the Good represents the equivalent of what the Christian tradition knows as 'God'.

²On the Naassenes, see L. G. Rylands, The Beginnings of Gnostic Christianity (London 1940), p. 124. He notes that the Greek word used by the Naassenes is το ἀγαθόν, neuter, and could not therefore be ascribed to a person, and links this with Platonic doctrine.

the distance and remoteness of God, and obsessed by the idea that to bring him into too familiar contact with humanity might detract from his purity and essential otherness. While their concern for the transcendence of God was condemned as heretical by the Church, it cannot be said that their God lost significance by being removed beyond man's comprehension, since few philosophies are more essentially religious than theirs. The impersonal aspect of the deity is of course not completely foreign to Christianity; the third Person of the Trinity is in a sense God conceived impersonally. Simone Weil herself points to St. John of the Cross, and other 'saints d'une très haute spiritualité . . . [qui] ont saisi simultanément et avec une force égale l'aspect personnel et l'aspect impersonnel de Dieu' (LR 36). But, she adds, since in the West God is generally thought of in his personal aspect, those who think of him as impersonal believe themselves to be atheists (LR 37).¹ Simone Pétrement makes the same point, noting the contrast between East and West:

¹The French language has an undoubted advantage over English here, in that the pronoun 'il' can be used to cover both the personal and impersonal aspects. English seems obliged to use 'he' for God, although 'it' is perhaps acceptable for concepts such as 'the deity'.

Peut-on croire au divin sans croire en Dieu? Non sans doute, mais il n'est pas nécessaire que ce soit à un Dieu unique et personnel. Il est permis de se demander si le Dieu personnel des Occidentaux n'est pas quelque peu anthropomorphique, et si le Dieu impersonnel ou supra-personnel des Orientaux n'est pas plus proche du sentiment religieux primordial (qui est aussi le sentiment religieux le plus nécessaire), le sentiment du divin.¹

The expression of transcendence in Simone Weil's thought goes further however than the conception of the impersonal aspect of God. God is not only impersonal, he is essentially 'not-person', to be expressed only in negative terms. The reference made earlier in this chapter to man's knowledge of God (p. 31) is an instance of this; all that we can know of God is essentially negative: 'Nous ne pouvons savoir qu'une chose de Dieu: qu'il est ce que nous ne sommes pas' (C2 146). Simone Pétrement states a similar case when defining the 'knowledge' of God expressed by the Gnostics:

. . . bien que le salut, pour les gnostiques, se trouve dans la connaissance, la connaissance dont il s'agit n'est pas tant celle du divin que celle de l'étrangeté du divin . . .²

This negative expression of God can be found at the heart

¹DH, p. 342.

²Ibid., p. 15.

of the Christian tradition, in St. Thomas Aquinas, who held that 'we do not know what God is, but only what He is not, and the relation of all things to Him'.¹ The anonymous author of The Mirror of Simple Souls affirms the essential unknowable quality of God in the following words: 'There is none other God but He that none may know, which may not be known'.² Simone Weil speaks of a 'foi négative' in which it is necessary to believe that 'rien de ce que nous pouvons saisir n'est Dieu' (C2 122). She insists that nothing real corresponds to one's idea of God when his name is pronounced (C1 200), and in a commentary on a passage of Aeschylus'

Agamemnon,

Zeus, qui qu'il puisse être, si sous ce nom il lui
plaît d'être invoqué,
Sous ce nom je l'appelle,³

notes the significance of this God, who, although invoked by

¹Contra Gentiles, I, 12, xxx. Quot. E. O. James, The Concept of Deity (London 1950), p. 84.

²Quot. Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism (London 12th edn, revised 1930), p. 337.

³v. 160. Trans. Simone Weil (SG 43):
Ζεύς, ὅστις ποτ' ἐστίν, εἰ τόδ' αὐτῷ, φίλον κεκλημένῳ,
τοῦτό νιν προσεννέπω.

the name of Zeus, 'n'a pas de nom' (SG 45).¹ This has a parallel in Taoism, where of the Tao it is said:

I know not its name
So I style it 'the way'.²

Simone Weil does not mention this passage specifically, but elsewhere identifies the Taoist 'way' with the impersonal aspect of God (e.g. LR 28).

She goes further however than the simple negative expression of God. We have already seen (p. 36) that God as the Good precedes in Simone Weil's scheme God as Existent, and it is clear that for her it is not sufficient that God should be unnamable and unattainable; in a certain sense we must be prepared to say that he does not exist at all. This in fact follows on quite logically from the idea that the very concept of God is completely unattainable by Man, since if God is unknowable it is reasonable to express his existence negatively. Such a procedure also serves the purpose for Simone Weil of purifying God of all our man-made

¹The idea of an unknown God who remains the same by whatever name he is invoked is conveyed also in the following passage: 'What is but one, wise people call by different names-- as Agni, Yama and Matarisvan'. Rig-Veda, I, 164, 46. Quot. Hirianna, op. cit., p. 39.

²Tao-te-ching, XXV, 56.

concepts, of affirming the absolute otherness of God. In its form as 'l'athéisme purificateur' (e.g. Cl 199), it is precisely this,^a/purging of the mind's preconceived notions of God. It is a technique to be used in prayer, so that the soul is not hampered by any earthly concepts: 'Un mode de purification: prier Dieu, non seulement en secret par rapport aux hommes, mais en pensant que Dieu n'existe pas' (Cl 213). In a sense however this is a different concept from that of the possible non-existence of the absolute Good, in so far as 'l'athéisme purificateur' is a method of preserving the transcendence of God (implying his existence), while doubt as to the existence of transcendent Good indicates merely that if good exists, then it must be transcendent. There are affinities between the two, but not identity.

Once again, Simone Weil's speculations here seem to bring her closer to certain oriental ways of thinking than to orthodox Christianity. In ~~asserting~~ asserting the reality of what may perhaps not even exist Simone Weil echoes for example the use of 'Nothing' to designate the Tao.¹ D. C. Lau contrasts

¹Tao-te-ching, XL, 89.

this sort of thinking with Western attitudes:

In the Western tradition, up to the beginning of the present century at least, it has generally been assumed that only what exists can be real, so much so that when, at one time, universals were denied existence, an ad hoc subsistence had to be invented to give them reality. With the Taoist, however, whatever has existence cannot be real, for whatever exists also suffers from the limitations of the specific. Hence it is thought far less misleading to say of the Tao that it is like nothing, though, strictly speaking, the Tao can be no more like Nothing than it is like something.¹

It seems that a sort of negativity leading to what can only be termed atheism is indispensable to a comprehension of deity within the terms of man's finite existence. Simone Pétrement points to this as a feature of dualistic thought in particular, and indicates the relationship between this kind of atheism and mysticism:

Dieu est conçu comme l'unité totale, comme la source et le principe de tout. N'est-ce pas pour cette raison que certains dualistes sont athées? Quant aux autres, qui ne le sont pas, quel est leur Dieu? Un Dieu séparé, un Dieu absent, un Dieu faible; n'est-ce pas, en un sens, une négation de Dieu? Le dualisme serait-il donc nécessairement une sorte d'athéisme? Il est cependant certain qu'il y a des rapports avec le mysticisme, ou du moins avec un sentiment religieux profond.²

¹Introduction to the Tao-te-ching, pp. 21-2.

²DH, pp. 90-91.

One might expect that in Simone Weil's view God should take on a more positive aspect in the act of creation. In fact, however, creation for her is yet another example of the distance of God and of his inaccessibility. She retains God as the creator of the universe, unlike certain theories of creation which, wishing to preserve the transcendence of God, have assigned the act of creation to a lesser deity. She realises the contradiction however in making God the originator of the universe: 'Dieu est l'auteur de tout; Dieu n'est l'auteur que du bien; on ne peut se tirer de là' (C2 101). Thus far she follows the Judaeo-Christian tradition (it should be noted however that as far as she was concerned this was Plato's theory too, since she assumes that Plato's creator-demiurge is an aspect of God).¹ Unlike the Yahwistic and Priestly accounts of Genesis, though, she does not appear to have accepted the idea of a creation ex nihilo. She speaks of creation being

¹Cf. DP, p. 48: 'On peut . . . se demander si le D miurge est le Dieu supr me, pour Platon, ou un dieu inf rieur; s'il n'est pas tout au moins inf rieur au monde intelligible et   l'id e du Bien. C'est ainsi que Num nius d'Apam e, par exemple, interpr ta le platonisme; mais il est impossible de savoir si c'est avec raison, car le fait que le D miurge a les yeux fix s sur le mod le  ternel ne prouve pas que, par nature, il soit inf rieur   ce mod le; il a pu descendre pour cr er le monde.'

'la matière mise en ordre par Dieu' (IP 129), of the creator as 'Dieu qui limite', of God '[qui] se soumet à la nécessité' (PSO 35) and of the 'Verbe ordonnateur' (C2 347). The manner in which creation is accomplished is however utterly different from the Genesis version, where creation is a positive act of God and the resulting created order good.¹ In Simone Weil's account,

ce n'est pas seulement la Passion, c'est la Création elle-même qui est renoncement et sacrifice de la part de Dieu. La Passion n'en est que l'achèvement. Déjà comme créateur Dieu se vide de sa divinité. Il prend la forme d'un esclave. Il se soumet à la nécessité. Il s'abaisse.

(PSO 35)

Not only does God in creating the world have to take account of necessity, as in the Timaeus, but God through creation has become less than God. She emphasises this further in a passage from the essay 'Formes de l'amour implicite de Dieu':

¹Simone Weil nevertheless does not reject the Genesis account, merely treating it as one among many, all containing an element of truth: 'L'histoire de la création et du péché originel dans la Genèse est vraie. Mais d'autres histoires de création et de péché originel dans d'autres traditions sont vraies aussi et enferment aussi des vérités incomparablement précieuses' (LR 68).

La création est de la part de Dieu un acte non pas d'expansion de soi, mais de retrait, de renoncement. Dieu et toutes les créatures, cela est moins que Dieu seul.

(AD 106)

This is readily understood if God is considered as a complete self-contemplating entity, who renounces his completeness in order that something else might exist, namely creation. God has limited himself by creating something outside himself. He had no need of creation, or desire for it, since desire implies an object desired, which is impossible if God is everything. But in another sense God is only diminished by creation if one thinks of him as Being. If God is thought of as Good, then creation will be the product of pure, gratuitous love (cf. PSO 123).

Simone Weil probably derives from Plato the idea of creation involving diminution and consequently suffering, since she interprets thus the passage from the Timaeus concerning the world-soul cut in pieces.¹ But there seems to have been an ancient tradition concerning the suffering at the 'birth' of the world,² and Simone Weil was certainly

¹Timaeus, 36. See SG 135.

²For example in the Babylonian tradition the universe is created from the body of Tiamat the Great Mother, slain by her

familiar with its Manichean version, as she mentions

une admirable image qu'on trouve chez les Manichéens, /d'après laquelle/ l'esprit est déchiré, mis en morceaux, dispersé à travers l'espace, à travers la matière étendue. Il est crucifié sur l'étendue . . .

(SS 139)

Likewise James records the Indian tradition that Prajapati, the personification of the creative principle, suffered primal sacrifice at the hands of the gods, as a result of which the phenomenal universe came into being as so many parts of his body.¹

In the light of this idea of creation involving God's sacrifice and withdrawal, it is not difficult to appreciate the significance of a claim such as 'Dieu n'est pas tout-puissant, puisqu'il est créateur' (CS 67). We are reminded of Alain's definition of true religion which must contain the idea of 'un dieu absolument faible et absolument proscrit'.²

sons the gods, led by Marduk. See H. Frankfort and others, Before Philosophy (Harmondsworth 1949), p. 19. Gnostic thought too conceives creation as formed from 'fragments' of God. See M. Bourgeois, 'La Spiritualité du travail selon Simone Weil', unpubl. thesis (Paris 1961), p. 33.

¹Op. cit., p. 53.

²Entretiens au bord de la mer (Paris 1949), p. 220.

From another point of view however, 'Il est tout-puissant en ce sens que son abdication est volontaire' (CS 67). And again, 'le vrai Dieu est le Dieu conçu comme tout-puissant, mais comme ne commandant pas partout où il¹ en a le pouvoir' (AD 105). But since Simone Weil elsewhere insists that 'les limites du vouloir et du pouvoir sont les mêmes en Dieu. Il ne veut que ce qu'Il peut, et s'Il ne peut pas davantage, c'est qu'Il ne veut pas pouvoir davantage' (CS 72),² the idea of God's potential 'toute-puissance' seems to be only an illustration of the withdrawal of God, an expression of the limitations of language (it is impossible to conceive of withdrawal without the complementary notion of abdicated power, withdrawal from something).

It might be supposed that, given the idea of the renunciation and suffering involved in creation, God was under some

¹In MS: Il. We are grateful to M. R. Gaillardot for permission to compare the published texts of Attente de Dieu and Intuitions Pré-chrétiennes with copies corrected by him from Simone Weil's manuscripts. The manuscript version will be indicated as above throughout the present study where there is any discrepancy.

²See Le Livre des deux principes, IV, in R. Nelli, Les Ecritures cathares (Paris 1959), p. 148: 'Si Dieu ne veut pas tous les maux, s'il ne veut ni mentir ni se détruire lui-même, sans nul doute, il ne le peut pas. Car ce que Dieu dans son unité ne veut pas, il ne le peut pas; et ce qu'il ne peut pas, il ne veut pas.'

sort of constraint in the act of creating. Simone Weil is very positive, however, as to the reasons for creation:

'Dieu a créé par amour, pour l'amour. Dieu n'a pas créé autre chose que l'amour même et les moyens de l'amour' (AD 87). She is obviously stating a personal conviction when she says of the Timaeus:

L'idée essentielle du Timée c'est que le fond, la substance de cet univers où nous vivons, est amour. Il ^{est} à/créé par amour et sa beauté est le reflet et le signe irréfutable de cet amour divin, comme la beauté d'une statue parfaite, d'un chant parfait est le reflet de l'amour surnaturel qui emplit l'âme d'un artiste vraiment inspiré.¹

(IP 37)

She returns frequently to the analogy between divine and artistic creation, interpreting thus Plato's theory of the creation of the universe (Timaeus 27-28; see SG 130). The Model represents transcendent inspiration, the equivalent on a higher level of the inspiration necessary to the production of a work of art. This seems at first sight to be a more positive attitude to the act of creation than we have seen previously, but such an idea proves illusory. Artistic creation for Simone Weil is an act not of personal expansion, but

¹The theme of beauty and its relation to Simone Weil's concept of God will be discussed in §II, §1.

of renunciation: 'Dans l'art et la science de 1^{er} ordre, la création est renoncement à soi' (CS 38).

The same result is obtained if we examine the idea of the 'verbe ordonnateur', which represents 'le Bien . . . sous l'aspect de la création' (C2 347). True to her conception of the Good and transcendent, Simone Weil elsewhere designates the 'Verbe' as 'le silence de Dieu' (C2 193). So it is not surprising to find that in Simone Weil's view, although God created through love, and God is, above all, good, the resulting creation should contain an essential element of imperfection. It is important to note that matter, as what is utterly apart from God, is for Simone Weil not essentially evil: it is simply neutral. She associates it with the 'receptacle' of the Timaeus, essentially pure (IP 104). Indeed, 'la Création comme totalité est sans souillure' (CS 164). This idea of the purity of creation thus dissociates her from certain Gnostic ideas of the evil inherent in matter.¹ But evil is nevertheless in her mind associated with the creative act, though not in creation itself; it is rather the distance between God and

¹According to Nelli, the Manicheans considered matter to be essentially evil, while the Cathars thought of it as simply neutral. Op. cit., pp. 16-17.

his creatures (C2 303).¹ This is the impersonal aspect of evil; the personal aspect, that is, the possibility of sin, is implied by the existence of the creatures:

Le seul fait qu'il existe des êtres autres que Dieu implique la possibilité du péché. Ce n'est pas à la liberté que cette possibilité est attachée (car elle n'existe pas pour Dieu), mais à l'existence. L'existence séparée . . . Dieu en créant a créé la possibilité du péché. (C2 78)

It is an inevitable result of the gulf separating God and man: 'Le mal, troisième dimension du divin: Solitude de l'homme. Distance de Dieu. Transcendance' (C2 184). Thus the existence of a world apart from God is the source of sin. Although Simone Weil elsewhere accepts the Genesis account of creation (see p. 50, n.1), she seems to have reservations on the idea of a temporal succession of creation and fall, maintaining that there is rather a causal relation between them:

Toutes les difficultés (insurmontables) concernant l'histoire du péché originel viennent de ce qu'on se représente

¹Simone Weil seems at times to presuppose an emanation theory akin to that of Plotinus, in which creatures have less part in God the further away they are from him. See e.g. the following passage: 'Dieu a créé toute une gamme d'êtres, une échelle infiniment variée. Et la limite inférieure de cette échelle dans la catégorie des créatures faites de pensée, c'est la plus misérable qui soit capable de l'aimer' (C2 290).

cette histoire comme se déroulant dans le temps. Alors qu'elle exprime des rapports de causalité, ou plutôt ce qui dans le surnaturel répond analogiquement aux rapports de causalité.

(C2 258)

Creation and the fall are thus simultaneous, merely two different aspects of God's abdication of power (CS 91).

Such a concept of creation might seem to make God responsible for evil: if God's withdrawal necessarily causes the possibility of sin, the question arises why he thought it good to create at all. Simone Weil draws the logical conclusion, and ascribes to God the 'sin' of creation: 'Le grand crime de Dieu envers nous, c'est de nous avoir créés; c'est que nous existions' (CS 225). Yet elsewhere she insists on the absolute innocence of God. Man was created by God, with a propensity for sin; and yet God is innocent of this sin (C2 258). This seems, logically enough, to be the reason behind her affirmation of the absolute transcendence of God. Since God and evil are utterly incommensurable, no contact between them is possible:

Le mal et l'innocence de Dieu. Il faut placer Dieu à une distance infinie pour le concevoir innocent du mal; réciproquement, le mal indique qu'il faut placer Dieu à une distance infinie.

(C2 173)

In the same way, the impersonality of God is an indication of his innocence, just as his personality is an affirmation

of his responsibility for good: 'Dieu doit être impersonnel pour être innocent du mal, personnel pour être responsable du bien' (CS 59). We are thus left with a contradiction: God's transcendence is a sign of his innocence with respect to evil, but it is this very same transcendence, the distance between God and his creation, which is the source of evil. It is characteristic of Simone Weil that she should hold the contradiction, not attempting to resolve it by, for example, removing from God the creative act, as in an absolutely dualistic scheme of things, or by compromising her essential standpoint, the transcendence of the Good.

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'Le Dieu caché, inconnu, invisible, inconnu, nouveau, étranger, d'un autre pays, l'Autre, le Différent.'¹ Mani's concept of God, in its emphasis on God's ultimate transcendence and unknowableness, is perhaps not so far removed from Simone Weil's. God is certainly 'Notre Père', but he is 'celui'² qui est dans les cieux' (AD 166). As far as Simone Weil is

¹A. von Harnack, Marcion, das Evangelium vom Fremden Gott (Leipzig 1921), I, 89-90. Trans. and quot. Simone Pétrement, DP, p. 164.

²MS: 'celui' included.

concerned, the ultimate expression of the distance between God and creation is that Christ himself was met only by silence when he cried out to the Father: 'Dieu a laissé Dieu crier vers lui et n'a pas répondu' (C3 322).¹ In a sense God's silence does not matter; our existence can make no difference to God: 'Une fois qu'on a reconnu Dieu comme le bien suprême et réel, éternellement satisfait par soi-même, c'est assez' (CS 85). Simone Weil had learned from Plato that 'God does not deal directly with man' (Symposium 203), but in her emphasis on the transcendence of God, she is in line with an important current of modern theological thought beginning with Kierkegaard, and developing with the work of Barth and Brunner in this century. For them, God is essentially unknowable, and the only contact which can be made is through revelation. He is inaccessible to man through the intellect, and his existence cannot be intellectually proven. Intangible though this deity may seem to be, to the point of having no 'existence' in any sense we can comprehend, it was a matter of profound conviction to Simone Weil that our knowledge of the deity must

¹Cf. Nerval's treatment of this theme in 'Le Christ aux Oliviers' and Vigny's in 'Le Mont des Oliviers'. (For a comparison of these see J. Moulin ed., Les Chimères, Genève 1949, p. 65.)

start from the point of his unknowableness, of his absolute 'otherness'. The kind of 'atheism' which resulted from this was an affirmation of the supremacy of goodness over being, and the negative approach to God an avowal of the essentially finite nature of creation. This 'atheism' can be summed up in Simone Pétrement's words:

En effet ce Dieu séparé, inconnu, détaché de tout, paraît être sans puissance et presque inexistant; c'est le 'Dieu qui n'est pas' de Basilide. Mais en un autre sens, le dualisme est peut-être le seul théisme, car le 'Dieu qui n'est pas' est peut-être le seul Dieu.¹

In the next chapter the opposite pole of the dualism will be considered, the nature of creation and of that necessity to which God subjected himself in the creative act. This will lead to a discussion of Simone Weil's concept of the nature of man, and of the dualism inherent in that nature.

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¹DH, p. 120, n. 1.

I, §3

THE REALM OF NECESSITY

It is proposed to examine in this chapter the concept of necessity in its purely neutral aspect only; its relationship with what Simone Weil calls 'la beauté du monde' will be discussed at length in a later chapter (III, §1). It is necessary here to consider first of all Simone Weil's terminology. As Raper has pointed out, 'nécessité' is generally used by Simone Weil to indicate the sum of conditions to which man, as an earthly creature, is subject, that which in 'Greek' terminology would be referred to as 'nature'.¹ Simone Weil herself uses the word 'nature' surprisingly seldom. But whereas 'nature' tends to mean the whole condition of man, Simone Weil seems to consider that a certain part of man is not subject to necessity. What that part is we shall attempt to illustrate in the next chapter, concerning the nature of man.

As we saw in the last chapter, necessity is that to which God submitted himself by the act of creation. It is therefore utterly other than God. But it would be a mistake to think of it as matter; it is rather the network of relationships

¹Raper, op. cit., p. 59.

which constitute order within matter:

La nécessité qui constitue le mécanisme de la matière n'est pas autre chose qu'un tissu de rapports; et la réalité du monde extérieur n'est pas constituée par autre chose que par la nécessité . . . (SG 167-8)

Simone Weil insists on this association of necessity and reality, returning to the point several times in the Cahiers. (Reality here is opposed to what is imaginary.) Necessity is a 'critérium du réel' (C2 332), and phenomena may be judged by it in order to establish their authenticity:

Tout ce qui est réel est soumis à la nécessité. C'est la nécessité du mécanisme spirituel qui permet de reconnaître les cas de sainteté authentiques des imaginaires. (C2 201-2)

She realises the difficulties in this association, however, since, as we saw in the previous chapter, reality is the definition of the Good, and the Good is completely other than necessity: 'Identité du réel et du bien. Nécessité comme critérium du réel. Distance entre le nécessaire et le bien. Débrouiller cela' (C2 337). In a sense the paradox is legitimate, since it brings us up against the basic contradiction of our existence, that of the gulf between the Good to which man aspires, and the necessity to which he is subject. Contradiction too is a mark of reality:

Les contradictions auxquelles l'esprit se heurte, seules réalités, critérium du réel. Pas de contradiction

dans l'imaginaire. La contradiction est l'épreuve de la nécessité.
(C2 287)

Just as necessity is the criterion of the real, it is only through necessity that the reality of the world can be known. Matter cannot be known as such (E 222); since matter, like everything else on earth, is finite and relative, it is only through the relationships established between various phenomena that we can know anything. By asserting that we know the way in which things behave in relationship one to another, rather than things themselves, Simone Weil is of course in line with modern physics. As we saw earlier, 'pour penser la nécessité d'une manière pure, il faut la détacher de la matière qui la supporte et la concevoir comme un tissu de conditions nouées les unes aux autres' (IP 146). Thus 'la nécessité seule est un objet de connaissance. Rien d'autre n'est saisissable par la pensée. . . . La nécessité est ce avec quoi la pensée a contact' (CS 94). And since necessity is a network of relationships, there must be something to establish those relationships, namely, the human mind. Necessity may thus from one point of view be termed 'pensée en acte' (IP 154).

The idea of the relativity of all things made apparent in necessity impresses upon us clearly that they are finite and

limited. Man's desires are unlimited, but as he learns how little they correspond to reality, he will learn to see necessity governing everything, will learn how all things are dependent on one another and lack finality. The only danger is that since this is a hard fact to face, we may be tempted to cover over the truth 'qu'il n'y a pas de bien ici-bas, que tout ce qui apparaît ici-bas comme bien est fini, limité, s'épuise, et une fois épuisé laisse apparaître à nu la nécessité' (AD 163).¹

Limit is for Simone Weil a reality of the physical world closely associated with that of necessity or relationship. In the following passage she illustrates this association, comparing man's experience of limitation with God's freedom from it:

La limite est la loi du monde manifesté. Dieu seul (ou quelque nom qu'on veuille employer) est sans limites. (Sous un autre aspect, la relation est la loi du monde manifesté, Dieu seul est sans relation.) (SS 275)

M.-J. Rustan has studied in some detail the idea of limit in Simone Weil's work, comparing it to that of Camus, and illustrating how Camus' was essentially a moral concept, an affir-

¹The refusal to face this fact leads to 'idolâtrie' in Simone Weil's terminology, and this concept will be dealt with in Section II of the present study.

mation of man's moral responsibility not to transgress certain limits in his dealings with his neighbour, whereas for Simone Weil the limits were part of the fabric of the physical world.¹ In this Simone Weil affirms the Greek source to this part of her thinking. She seems to have been greatly impressed by the concept of nemesis, the idea that retribution is automatic once certain bounds are overstepped. She describes it as a 'châtiment d'une rigueur géométrique, qui punit automatiquement l'abus de la force' (SG 22), and claims that this idea of limit, of measure, is one which suffused all Greek thinking and which subsequent ages have rejected, to their cost. She associates the concept of limit with that of alternation which was noted earlier (I, §1):

Partout où il y a limite, il y a compensation des actions par les réactions.

. . .

Les limites impliquent des phénomènes de compensation.
(Cl 123)

In itself this is a primitive notion, and one may feel some surprise at Simone Weil's associating herself with the idea of retribution, with all its overtones of elementary

¹M.-J. Rustan, 'La Notion de limite chez Simone Weil et chez Camus', Terre humaine, III (1953), 32-43.

justice and summary vengeance. It is important to realise however that Simone Weil is speaking here of the laws of the physical world, which for her are totally amoral. The application of these laws to the moral world of human relationships will be considered in the next chapter. For the present we may note that these laws of retribution do bring a sort of rudimentary justice into dealings between men. Natural justice is no more than the observance of limits: 'Pour l'homme en tant qu'être naturel, le maintien entre des limites est la justice' (IP 150). This natural justice can occur only when there is 'nécessité égale de part et d'autre' (IP 137), when neither party is subject to the other as a result of inferior force. There is thus recognition by each other that the other party exists as a being in its own right, and an agreement can be reached. On this point, Simone Weil frequently quotes a passage from Thucydides, which she considers illustrates perfectly the way in which relationships between men are governed by necessity:

L'esprit humain étant fait comme il est, ce qui est juste n'est examiné que s'il y a nécessité égale de part et d'autre; au contraire, s'il y a un fort et un faible, le possible est accompli par le premier et accepté par le second.¹

(IP 136)

*

¹The Peloponnesian War, V, lxxxix: ἐπισταμένους πρὸς εἰ-
δότητας ὅτι δίκαια μὲν ἐν τῇ ἀνθρώπειῳ λόγῳ ἀπὸ τῆς ἰσῆς ἀνάγκης

The relationship between force and necessity implied here is used extensively elsewhere by Simone Weil, and should now be considered. In a sense, force too is a network of relationships, a mechanism which, in spite of the illusion to the contrary, is not in reality wielded by any man (C3 132). And yet it is not simply a series of relationships seized by the mind in thought, since it has a reality outside the mind (C3 147). This idea is expressed in a passage in which Simone Weil equates matter and blind force, and contrasts these with necessity:

La matière, la force aveugle ne sont pas l'objet de la science. La pensée ne peut les atteindre; elles fuient devant elle. La pensée du savant n'atteint jamais que les relations qui saisissent matière et force dans un réseau invisible, impalpable et inaltérable d'ordre et d'harmonie.

(E 222)

The distinction here is clear; force is material ('Toutes les forces sont matérielles; l'expression de force spirituelle est essentiellement contradictoire' [OL 130]),¹ whereas

κρίνεται, δυνατόν δὲ οἱ πρὸνχοντες πρᾶσσουσιν καὶ οἱ ἀσθενεῖς
 συγχωροῦσιν.

¹Cf. Alain: 'La puissance est un attribut de la matière, l'esprit tout-puissant n'est plus du tout esprit'. 'Les Pouvoirs', Les Idées et les âges, §6, Les Passions et la sagesse (Bibl. de la Pléiade 1960), p. 217.

necessity is only truly conceived 'au moment où les relations apparaissent comme parfaitement immatérielles' (E 365).

Simone Weil seems here to be going beyond the basic Greek meaning of *ἀνάγκη* as 'force, constraint, necessity',¹ and approaching the Stoic concept of necessity as the order of the world, the logos or divine reason at work in the universe, of which more will be said in a later chapter (III, §1).

Force as a property of matter is the starting-point of a number of images in which Simone Weil relates the physical to the spiritual, among/which the best-known is perhaps gravity. Gravity is the 'force par excellence' (C1 115), the phenomenon against which all other forces can be discerned and calculated (C2 69). (Clearly she is here thinking in terms of Newtonian physical theory.) She enlarges on this in another passage:

Il n'y a ici-bas, dans l'univers sensible, que deux forces; la pesanteur d'une part, et d'autre part toutes les énergies qui nous permettent de contrebalancer la pesanteur, et qui toutes (est-ce bien toutes, absolument?) procèdent du soleil, c'est-à-dire de la même source que la lumière.

(C3 187)

Simone Weil's subsequent analogy between light and grace, and

¹Liddell & Scott, Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. *ἀνάγκη*

gravity and the 'natural' condition of man, is well known. For the present it is only the second part of the analogy which will concern us.

Simone Weil seems to have the same consciousness of man's natural tendency as J. P. Richter, when he says 'l'allure morale de l'homme ressemble à son allure physique, laquelle n'est qu'une chute continue'.¹ Simone Weil's definition of the law which equates force, the strength to accomplish a particular action, with 'low' motives, is a significant example of this kind of moral 'pesanteur' (PG 3). Similarly when criticising the Hebrews' concept of God as being 'natural' and 'carnal' she says 'leur Dieu était lourd' (C2 27). The moral and spiritual significance which she gives to the concept thus differentiates her from Bachelard, whose treatment of 'la pesanteur' is essentially a psychological interpretation of a poetic image.²

But the 'fall' is not necessarily a downward movement; rather is it man's natural inclination to obey physical laws,

¹La Vie de Fixlein, quot. G. Bachelard, La Terre et les rêveries de la volonté (Paris 1948), p. 341.

²Bachelard, op. cit., pp. 341-402.

the central one of which is gravity. An example of 'pesanteur' in the psychological field, though not in the physical, is thus demonstrated in the image comparing the natural tendency in man to expand wherever he is able to, with the expansion of a gas:

Comme du gaz, l'âme tend à occuper la totalité de l'espace qui lui est accordé. Un gaz qui se retracterait et laisserait du vide; ce serait contraire à la loi d'entropie.

(C2 88)

This is immediately linked with the passage from the Peloponnesian War quoted above (p.67): 'Thucydide "chacun exerce tout le pouvoir dont il dispose". Chacun s'étend autant qu'il peut' (ibid.).

The tendency to expand which is a law of man's existence in the realm of necessity leads on naturally to the idea of space, the 'nécessité suprême' (CS 16). Space and time occupy an important part in Simone Weil's conception of necessity, both of them being concerned with man's obligation to travel a certain distance either spatially or temporally before his desire is achieved. Thus the very nature of suffering is defined by a relationship between past and future: 'La souffrance n'est rien hors du rapport entre le passé et l'avenir' (C2 24). Similarly, 'le temps est la croix. La douleur physique est la contrainte du temps sensible à l'âme' (C2 354).

Reciprocally desire can be defined as the will to alter the rhythm of passing time: 'Désir: toujours arrêter ou hâter le cours du temps' (C1 66). There is thus a continual conflict between what man desires and the dictates of necessity, conflict which results in suffering.

As was shown in the previous chapter, suffering is in Simone Weil's view intimately linked with the act of creation. We have already noted her impressions on the Manichean image of the spirit crucified on space (p. 52), and on Plato's account of the creation which involves the cutting in two of the world-soul. In the second book of the Cahiers Simone Weil elaborates this last point, defining the suffering of the world-soul: 'L'âme du monde souffre, quoique parfaitement heureuse. Le temps et l'espace sont sa souffrance' (C2 359). Time for the world-soul is the cross, symbolised by its cruciform disposition at the creation of the world: 'L'âme du monde crucifié entre les étoiles fixes et le soleil. Crucifiée sur la croix du temps. La création est déjà une passion' (C2 359). That man's suffering too is directly related to his existence in time is indicated by the following note: 'Porter sa croix. Porter le temps' (ibid.).

It is not altogether clear whether for Simone Weil creation

existed within space and time, as in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, or whether space and time were merely aspects of creation, and came into being at the same time as the creation of the world. She uses Plato's image of time being created as a moving likeness of eternity (Timaeus, 37) in an interpretation of her own: 'Faire du temps une image mobile de l'éternité, car il ne l'est pas naturellement' (Cl 27). It seems however from the above analysis of the relationship between creation and suffering that time is one of the elements of necessity met by the divine creator in the act of creation.¹ The world-soul is crucified in space and time, implying that these are pre-existent elements of a basically hostile 'natural cause'. Space and time thus become the essential basis of division between God and his creation, and consequently between God and his incarnate Son:

Le Fils séparé du Père par la totalité du temps et de l'espace, du fait qu'il a été fait créature; ce temps qui est la substance de ma vie--et de même pour chacun--ce temps qui est si lourd dans la souffrance, est un segment de cette ligne tendue par la Création, l'Incarnation et la Passion entre le Père et le Fils.
(CS 27)

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¹This is akin to the concept of time in the Indian Sankhya system, where time and space are aspects of prakriti, this

In accordance with our conclusions on Simone Weil's concept of the nature of God reached in §2, we have found little evidence of the presence of God in the created order in our discussion of her ideas on necessity. Since this has been established by inference rather than through demonstration we shall consider now her ideas on Providence, since these indicate in a very positive way the effects on creation of an absent Creator.

Simone Weil was a bitter critic of what she called the Roman concept of Providence, which she describes as 'une intervention personnelle de Dieu dans l'univers pour ajuster certains moyens en vue de fins particulières' (E 236).¹ (The pages in which she elaborates her criticism of this notion provide evidence incidentally of Simone Weil's sense of irony, which has often remained unnoticed by critics.) In both public and private life, according to her, the idea that God intervenes personally in order to alter the necessary sequence of events

latter having many points of resemblance with Greek necessity. See Hirianna, op. cit., p. 270.

¹We shall be dealing in detail with this criticism, including Simone Weil's views on Roman civilisation, in Section II.

is absurd and blasphemous. It is a desire to see the infinite in what is finite and limited, to reduce God to a finite good (E 238). She accepts the pre-quantum notion of causality as a vast network of relationships perceived only superficially by the human mind. We single out one of these relationships as particularly striking, but it is only one of an infinite number:

Les desseins particuliers qu'on attribue à Dieu sont des découpages pratiqués par nous dans la complexité plus qu'infinie des connexions de causalité. Nous les pratiquons en joignant à travers la durée certains événements à certains de leurs effets choisis parmi des milliers d'autres.

(E 239)

The true relationship between God and his creation is however to be found in the identity between the will of God and the existence of the universe; as she says, 'il y a identité entre: Dieu veut cela, et: cela est' (C2 248). In this way, it is possible to read the will of God in every event without exception:

Tous les événements qui composent l'univers dans la totalité du cours des temps, chacun de ces événements, chaque assemblage possible de plusieurs événements ou davantage, entre deux assemblages d'événements ou davantage, entre un événement et un assemblage d'événements-- tout cela, au même degré, a été permis par le vouloir de Dieu. Tout cela, ce sont les intentions particulières de Dieu.

(E 240)

She puts the same case, simply and forcefully, a little further

on: 'La Providence divine n'est pas un trouble, une anomalie dans l'ordre du monde. C'est l'ordre du monde lui-même' (E 241).

This serves to emphasise one of the most important attributes of God, according to Simone Weil: his impartiality. She frequently quotes the Gospel passage on the Father who sends rain on the just and the unjust (Matt. v. 45, e.g. C2 122, EL 43), taking this as an essential precept for man. God refuses to take sides, to interfere with the workings of destiny (C2 122), which is another way of saying that he has willed the blind mechanism of necessity to rule over creation (PSO 93, C2 394).¹ Thus there is nothing in the universe but God and that which obeys God (AD 91), and it is nonsense to speak of God altering the mechanism of causality.²

In the light of the foregoing analysis, it is not difficult to see why Simone Weil refused to perceive behind the actions of,

¹ Simone Pétrement notes Plato's assimilation of necessity into τυχή, 'chance', which is in this context not a lack of causation but blind and mechanical causality. DP, pp. 40-41.

² Alain comments similarly on the idea of a God who does not intervene in human affairs, making the traditional rationalist point of the moral superiority of a man who acts rightly without the fear of divine sanctions. 'Un saint est l'homme qui se passe de Dieu': Propos sur la religion (Paris 1938), p. 255.

for example, Joan of Arc, the inspiration of God. Using Sanskrit terminology, she says that it was prakriti which caused Joan of Arc to act as she did, not ātman (Cl 90).

In the Sankhya system, prakriti is the first cause of everything physical in the universe, both matter and force, and accounts for everything except spirit, which is uncaused.¹

As Sri Aurobindo points out, the conscious will and intelligence are also part of prakriti, since they are subject to the mechanical energy of nature.² Although Simone Weil admits the entry of grace into men's actions, she does not appear to have done so in the case of Joan of Arc, because of the impossibility of making God a partisan in war (Cl 90).

Another passage emphasises the same idea, that the use of force belongs to the realm of prakriti. Commenting on the acceptability of suicide only when constraint is present, she adds: 'De même pour l'usage de la force. C'est contrainte, non grâce, prakriti, non ātman' (Cl 93). Prakriti seems thus in Simone Weil's mind to be identified with necessity, as the

¹Hiriyanna, op. cit., p. 270.

²Sri Aurobindo, Essays on the Gita (New York 1950), p. 66.

source of all human action.¹ She suggests in a commentary on the Bhagavad Gita that 'Prakrit avec ses guṇas fait tout --même le bien--même le mal--le mal et le bien, tout' (Cl 154). By 'le mal et le bien' she presumably means what are usually taken to be such, as her general view is that it is not given to man to do good. In other words, necessity is responsible for the network of relationships governing human action.² It is a mistake to account for success or failure in battle by the intervention of divine Providence.

This view of Providence, where no event is of more significance than any other, seems to have little in common with the traditional Christian interpretation of the concept. On the contrary, it is akin to Stoic ideas, in which the presence of the logos can be discerned in the world simply through the existence of things as they are. There are perhaps too traces of Spinoza in this scheme of things, where God and the world are so intimately connected as to produce an identity between the two. This is an apt illustration of the ultimate link

¹For the association of prakriti and necessity the present writer is indebted to a verbal suggestion of David Raper's.

²Hiriyanna however implies that in the Gita obedience to the dictates of prakriti is not automatic, but is the response of the lower, sensuous self. Op. cit., p. 128.

between an extreme transeendent view of the deity, in which God does not interfere with the processes of nature and can therefore be said to will whatever is, and an extreme monism which identifies God and nature. Simone Weil holds ultimately to the former concept, and it is interesting to compare her account of Providence with that of a writer already mentioned, Rudolf Otto, who emphasises the transcendent element in the concept of deity. Otto insists on the futility of the 'rational' approach to the miraculous, of the desire to see the hand of God in nature, altering for his own ends the causality of the created order, and claims that at a certain point there must be an irrational 'leap' of faith.¹ Although Simone Weil would view with suspicion any over-emphasis of the irrational, their similar attitudes to the question of divine intervention betray the consciousness of a deity who is not to be deduced by any rational process of observation. The logical conclusion to Simone Weil's view of Providence seems to be similar to the naturalist doctrine of the Svetāsvatara Upanishad, according to which the world is not lawless, but is not governed from the exterior. Nature reveals no divine power behind it,

¹Otto, op. cit., p. 3.

nor any transcendent being controlling it.¹ This would be a fairly accurate assessment of Simone Weil's position as regards natural man: the difference lies in that the supernatural is admitted by Simone Weil and plays a part which radically alters man's conception of necessity. This, however, will be entered into more fully in Section III.

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The aspects of creation which have been considered so far in this chapter, force, necessity and Providence, are illustrated admirably in Simone Weil's reading of Homer's Iliad. Apart from scattered and fairly numerous references to the poem in the notebooks, there is a long essay entitled 'L'Iliade ou le poème de la force'² in which she presents the poem as the artistic expression of man's subjection to necessity, and of a correct reaction to this subjection. In a later general note on the Greeks, she traces the inspiration of the Iliad to the guilt felt by the Greeks at the destruction of Troy (SG 77). Far from glorying in this destruction as a

¹Hiriyanna, op. cit., p. 103.

²Published under the pseudonym Emile Novis, Cahiers du Sud, déc. 1940-janv. 1941.

victory for Greece, they saw it as their 'péché originel' (AD 188) whose shadow lies over the whole poem. 'Toute l'Illiade est sous l'ombre du plus grand malheur qui soit parmi les hommes, la destruction d'une cité' (SG 37). As a result of this the Greeks seemed to acquire a spiritual insight which enabled them to contemplate man's suffering without attempting to disguise it. Thus

Il n'y a pas de tableau de la misère humaine plus pur, plus amer et plus poignant que l'Illiade. La contemplation de la misère humaine dans sa vérité implique une spiritualité très haute.

(SG 78)

It is clear that for Simone Weil the picture given by Homer is indeed 'amer' and 'poignant'. The real hero of the Iliad she considers to be force, 'la force qui est maniée par les hommes, la force qui soumet les hommes, la force devant quoi la chair des hommes se rétracte' (SG 11). Force she defines as 'ce qui fait de quiconque lui est soumis une chose' (ibid.). Sometimes it is a question of a man being transformed into an inanimate object through death; sometimes force is subtler in its effects, sometimes it is 'l'autre force, celle qui ne tue pas; c'est-à-dire celle qui ne tue pas encore. Elle va tuer sûrement, ou elle va tuer peut-être, ou bien elle est seulement suspendue sur l'être qu'à tout instant elle peut tuer; de toutes façons, elle change l'homme en pierre' (SG

12-13). This is the force which holds one man in complete subjection to another, which causes the behaviour of the one who wields the force to be modified by the other only as it would be on meeting an inanimate object (SG 15). This subjection is a form of slavery, where the slave ceases to have any being except in relation to his master. Since he exists only at his master's pleasure he can be said not to exist at all as a person. There is identity between throwing a stone to repel a dog and telling a slave to get rid of the animal (AD 104).

One of the most important aspects of force as illustrated in the Iliad is the way in which even those who think they possess it are in fact subject to it. For no one possesses force. The man who wields it cannot imagine that this situation will not continue, but in his very blindness he is subject to force. Sooner or later he will become the victim, reduced to lifeless matter. The greatness of the Iliad in Simone Weil's view is to have brought out this elementary fact:

Les hommes ne sont pas divisés, dans l'Illiade, en vaincus, en esclaves, en suppliants d'un côté, et en vainqueurs, en chefs, de l'autre; il ne s'y trouve pas un seul homme qui ne soit à quelque moment contraint de plier sous la force.

(SG 19)

But the very simplicity of this fact means that men have difficulty in perceiving and understanding it:

Le fort n'est jamais absolument fort, ni le faible absolument faible, mais l'un et l'autre l'ignorent.

(SG 21)

The law of 'pesanteur' applies here as elsewhere, according to which every man exercises all the power he has, or thinks he has. It is not in man's nature to reflect that an abuse of force will automatically cause his own downfall. Simone Weil gives examples from the Iliad of this unconsciousness:

Quand on peut d'un mot faire taire, trembler, obéir un vieillard, réfléchit-on que les malédictions d'un prêtre ont de l'importance aux yeux des devins? S'abstient-on d'enlever la femme aimée d'Achille, quand on sait qu'elle et lui ne pourront qu'obéir? Achille, quand il jouit de voir fuir les misérables Grecs, peut-il penser que cette fuite, qui durera et finira selon sa volonté, va faire perdre la vie à son ami et à lui-même?

(SG 22)

This lack of perspective is translated too in the complete subjection of the warriors to the war in hand. The war has become an end in itself, has grown in men's minds in proportion to the horror of it, so that they might not think that all is in vain. Great sacrifice demands a great cause. But because the warriors do not understand why they are thus sacrificing themselves, they attribute the continuance of the war to the

mysterious influence of the gods (OL 94-5). On the subject of the gods in the Iliad, Simone Weil has her own personal interpretation. With the notable exception of Zeus, she does not take them too seriously:

Les dieux grecs . . . étaient mélangés de bien et de mal; ou plutôt, dans l'Iliade, ils sont tous démons, sauf Zeus. Mais aussi, les Grecs ne prenaient pas leurs dieux au sérieux. Dans l'Iliade, ils fournissent les intermèdes comiques, comme les clowns dans Shakespeare.

(PSO 56)¹

This opinion seems to be echoed by Bowra, although he makes no exception of Zeus:

. . . this complete anthropomorphic system has of course no relation to real religion or to morality. These

¹Compare this instinctive understanding of Homer's system with Alain's appeal for man's self-determination in the following passage: 'Les dieux d'Homère me gâtent l'Iliade. Car ces hommes naïfs et si bien dessinés seraient entièrement beaux à voir, s'ils n'étaient conduits par les dieux invisibles. Leurs passions mêmes sont réglées au conseil des dieux; leurs actions sont perpétuellement déviées. . . . Deux idées dominent ces hommes et ce poème. Une destinée invincible, qui conduit aussi les dieux et qui règle aussi les courages; et, avec cela, une intervention continuelle des dieux, qui contrarient et retardent le destin, sans pourtant arrêter l'événement principal, qui vient comme un nuage orageux. Aussi est déjà dessinée cette théologie accablante pour l'esprit, d'après laquelle l'homme s'agite et Dieu le mène.' Propos sur la religion, p. 20.

gods are a delightful, gay invention of poets.¹

Zeus is different however for Simone Weil, and represents God, as opposed to 'the gods': 'Dans l'Illiade, Zeus est Dieu et les autres dieux sont des démons' (C3 66). But where other critics have seen in Zeus a capricious and irresponsible deity --for example in his defence of Achilles--she sees a manifestation of the 'absent God', who is unable--because unwilling--to alter the mechanism of necessity. She considers this to be the only teaching on the nature of the deity presented by Homer:

Le seul enseignement direct sur la divinité contenu dans l'Illiade est le tableau de Zeus prenant sa balance en or pour y peser les destinées des Grecs et des Troyens, et obligé de laisser la victoire aux Grecs quoique son amour aille aux Troyens à cause de leur piété.

(PSO 56)

A man's good deeds thus in no way influence Zeus' attitude, since he himself is bound by his golden scales, which Simone Weil interprets as necessity (C3 66). Necessity governs all created things, and God cannot intervene through his Providence

¹C. M. Bowra, Tradition and Design in the 'Iliad' (Oxford 1930), p. 222, quot. Dodds, The Greeks and the Irrational (Los Angeles 1951), p. 2.

to alter the chain of cause and effect which binds creation. As in the case of Joan of Arc, one cannot make God a partisan in war. Ares, the god of war, imposes a kind of elementary justice which is itself a reflection of necessity: 'Ares est équitable, et tue ceux qui tuent' (SG 21). This blind necessity, or destiny, is thus the rule, and the only rule, of war. Man has learnt nothing so long as he has not realised fully the void that separates God and necessity, that the hand of God is not to be seen distorting the pattern of the created order. The answer to the question 'why all this suffering?' is that there is no answer. Simone Weil was struck by the way in which T. E. Lawrence posed the question, and gives the reply from her interpretation of the Iliad:

Ils demandaient pourquoi Nous nous demandions tous, attendant [la mort] en tremblant, à qui cela servait, qui cela honorait, de nous faire souffrir de la sorte; quel était le sens évident et secret de tout cela On se torturait le cerveau

•••••
[Réponse (Iliade): pourquoi pas?]

(Cl 26)

If all men are thus subject to mechanical necessity, and suffering is an integral part of human existence, a right attitude to this situation will produce a broad compassion for apparent victims and victors alike. Simone Weil evidently found this in Homer, who saw Greek and Trojan subject to the

same forces:

L'extraordinaire équité qui inspire l'Illiade a peut-être des exemples inconnus de nous, mais n'a pas eu d'imitateurs. C'est à peine si on sent que le poète est Grec et non Troyen.

(SG 38)

This compassion for mankind in general is extended by Simone Weil to include those whom one normally designates as criminal, since in one sense at least crime is simply obedience to the dictates of necessity. She reiterates Christ's plea for the forgiveness of his persecutors, since they are unaware of their crime: 'Les crimes humains qui sont la cause de la plupart des malheurs font partie de la nécessité aveugle, car les criminels ne savent pas ce qu'ils font' (PSO 94). Criminals are thus obedient to necessity in exactly the same way as inert matter is (IP 162). Simone Weil compares what we call criminals to 'des tuiles détachées d'un toit par le vent et tombant au hasard' (AD 91) and adds that 'leur seule faute est le choix initial qui a fait d'eux ces tuiles' (ibid.).¹ If human failure is viewed in these terms as a manifestation of 'la misère humaine', then it is impossible to despise anyone for his crime.

¹By 'choix initial' Simone Weil may be referring to Plato's theory of the drawing of lots by souls before their incarnation. See Republic, XX, 617-20.

(C2 19). Bernard Halda is certainly right in assessing Simone Weil's attitude towards humanity thus: 'Elle voit beaucoup plus de victimes que de coupables'.¹

A right attitude to necessity inevitably produces a sense of compassion towards one's fellow-beings. In the next chapter an attempt will be made to analyse Simone Weil's concept of man, the extent to which he can rise above necessity, and his divided nature which results from this.

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¹L'Evolution spirituelle de Simone Weil (Paris 1964), p. 142.

I, §4

HOMO DUPLEX

If man is subject to necessity in Simone Weil's scheme of things, he has nevertheless a consciousness of God, albeit a stranger God, which indicates that his subjection is not complete, that there is a part of him capable in some way of apprehending the true Good which is not of this world. It is to this duality within man that our attention must now be turned.

Evelyn Underhill has noted the language of exile which comes naturally to the soul which apprehends God in the terms of transcendent reality.¹ If God is not to be found in any way on earth, and the soul knows God to be its true home, then its earthly residence will be experienced in terms of loss and of exile. The 'strangers and pilgrims' of the Epistle to the Hebrews (XI. 13) who sought a better, heavenly country, are only one example of a recurrent phenomenon. Even Camus' 'homme absurde' retains a nostalgia for what is not subject to the passing of time, although he prefers to reject it for the here and now.² Simone Weil seems to have derived inspiration

¹Op. cit., p. 98.

²'L'Homme absurde', Le Mythe de Sisyphe in Essais (Bibl. de la Pléiade 1965), p. 149.

for her consciousness of man's exile from the Greeks, about whom she says: 'Ce qu'ils ont eu intensément, c'est le sentiment de l'exil, le sentiment que l'âme est exilée dans le monde' (SS 241).

Simone Weil seems to relate this sense of exile to the idea of original sin, as expressed in her commentary on Plato's myth of the divided man. She refers to Aristophanes' speech in the Symposium, where the original man is said to have been cut in two by Zeus as a result of his wrong-doing.¹ In her commentary on the passage, she relates this division to the basic tragedy of human existence:

Notre vocation est l'unité. Notre malheur est d'être en état de dualité, malheur dû à une souillure originelle d'orgueil et d'injustice. La division des sexes n'est qu'une image sensible de cet état de dualité qui est notre tare essentielle, et l'union charnelle est une apparence trompeuse de remède. Cette dualité qui est notre malheur, c'est la coupure par laquelle celui

¹Symposium, 191. It is interesting that Simone Weil makes no comment on the rather doubtful motives for Zeus' act. Mortals are not destroyed altogether in spite of their wickedness, because the gods would be 'thus depriving themselves for ever of the honours and sacrifice due from humanity'. The plan for the division of man is agreed on because, as Zeus says, 'in this way they will be weaker, and at the same time more profitable to us by being more numerous'. Even allowing for the fact that the speech is attributed to Aristophanes, the underlying morality is far inferior to that of the Genesis account of the fall and punishment of man.

qui aime est autre que ce qui est aimé, celui qui connaît est autre que ce qui est connu, la matière de l'action autre que celui qui agit, c'est la séparation du sujet et de l'objet.

(IP 45-46)

Man is thus isolated from the other half which would complete him, isolated from the object of his desire, isolated as thinking subject from the object of his thought. This is another facet of the contradiction which has already been noted, between the good that man desires and the necessity to which he must submit. Simone Weil shares with Plato the idea that man is not what he ought to be, that the soul is somehow uncomfortable in its mortal dress.¹ Pascal had a similar sense of the 'disproportion de l'homme',² and of the contradictions which form his existence:

Nous souhaitons la vérité, et ne trouvons en nous qu'incertitude. Nous cherchons le bonheur, et ne trouvons que misère et mort. Nous sommes incapables de ne pas souhaiter la vérité et le bonheur, et sommes incapables ni de certitude ni de bonheur.³

This expression of contradiction in man is akin to Baudelaire's experience of duality which he describes as the existence

¹Phaedo, 79, 84.

²Pensées, ed. Lafuma, 3e éd. (Paris 1960), No. 390.

³Ibid., No. 125.

within man of 'deux postulations simultanées, l'une vers Dieu, l'autre vers Satan',¹ although for Baudelaire it is rather a sense of being pulled in opposing directions. Within the Christian tradition it is St. Paul who gives earliest expression to the contradiction, with his despairing cry of 'the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do'.²

In a sense it is possible to deduce this duality within man from the fundamental opposition between a transcendent deity and finite man subject to necessity. Evelyn Underhill holds that the consciousness of the opposition between Absolute and Contingent, Being and Becoming etc. involves the existence of the natural self and the transcendent self within man.³ Simone Pétrement goes further, and claims that the one dualism is inevitably deduced from the other, and precedes the other in historical development. A dualism of principles, 'à l'intérieur du monde', is merely an extension of a more fundamental

¹'Mon cœur mis à nu', XIX, Journaux intimes, in Oeuvres (Bibl. de la Pléiade 1954), p. 1211.

²Romans, VII. 19.

³Op. cit., p. ix.

dualism, that of transcendence.¹ Thus we arrive at the idea of a horizontalism dualism² (illustrated in such concepts as the conflict between body and soul, spirit and matter etc.) which can be deduced from, and is complementary to, a vertical dualism of an absolute, transcendent deity and the created order. The relationship between the two is readily demonstrated by the observation that one term of the horizontal dualism (for example, soul) is always akin to the transcendental element of the vertical dualism. It would seem appropriate therefore to examine the horizontal dualism inherent in Simone Weil's conception of the human being.

Simone Weil drew the inspiration for much of this dualism from the Platonic tradition, but since this tradition has come through strongly into Christianity, many of her assertions have a familiar Christian ring. The division between body and spirit appears very early in Christian teaching with St. Paul's emphasis on those righteous men 'who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit' (Romans, VIII. 1). There are many

¹DH, pp. 15 & 105-6.

²The term 'horizontal' should be taken to mean here 'existing within human experience', since in a sense even this dualism is vertical, having a spiritual element which can be represented as 'superimposed' on the material element.

examples of this division in Paul's letters¹ and in the Gospel of John,² both writers who have been considered to have dualist if not directly Gnostic tendencies. The tradition continued in developed form with the growth of monasticism, emphasising the life of the spirit at the expense of the carnal life.

Simone Weil uses this dualistic tradition often implicitly, and the opposition âme-corps appears repeatedly. The word âme in her terminology appears to mean both the intellectual and spiritual life, as is evidenced for example by the following passage from the 'Théorie des sacrements', in which she is writing of the identity between the sacramental host and God:

La seconde condition est que la croyance en une certaine identité entre le morceau de pain et Dieu ait pénétré l'être tout entier au point d'imprégner non pas l'intelligence, qui ne peut avoir là aucune part, mais tout le reste de l'âme, l'imagination, la sensibilité, presque la chair elle-même. (PSO 139; italics added)

This soul is frequently considered by Simone Weil under the aspect of the privation which it suffers in one way or another through incarnation. (This could be seen as a parallel to God's experience of privation at the creation of the world.) Thus

¹E.g. Romans VII. 25; VIII. 5-8; Galatians V. 16-25.

²E.g. III. 6.

she speaks of 'la privation de chaleur physique ou de nourriture matérielle soufferte par l'âme céleste attachée à un corps mortel . . .' (C2 338). The soul is made subject to necessity, and suffering is caused by the fact that necessity is not its natural element; the soul ought to be free from physical constraint, and is in fact in bondage. Simone Weil quotes the Orphic σῶμα σῆμα, 'the body is a tomb', as an expression of this 'death' of the soul (C2 184). She uses this idea again coupled with the idea of prison in another note, in which she affirms: 'Le corps est une prison' (C2 189). But instead of the traditional Christian interpretation of the 'things of the flesh' seducing man away from God, she offers an original explanation of the power of this 'prison': 'La chair n'est pas ce qui nous éloigne de Dieu, elle est le voile que nous mettons devant nous pour faire écran entre Dieu et nous' (C3 317). This appears to be similar to Pascal's concept of 'divertissement', though for him man seeks entertainment in order to forget the reality of his condition.

Simone Weil seems to have been attracted by Plato's theories of the origin of the soul.¹ Since on this matter

¹See Phaedrus, 245-8.

she is usually commenting either directly or indirectly on Plato, there arises the question as to how far these ideas were merely a commentary, merely intellectual speculation, and how far they were her own. While there is clearly no question for her of the literal truth concerning the Platonic myths (any more than there was for Plato for that matter), it is difficult to believe that she attached no importance to them, given her conviction of the tremendous spiritual significance of Plato's writings. Thus when she writes

Ainsi tout être humain, sans aucune exception, y compris le plus dégradé des esclaves, a une âme qui vient du monde situé au-dessus des cieux, c'est-à-dire de Dieu, et qui est appelée à y retourner

(SG 116)

we are aware that she believes what she says to be the mythical representation of a spiritual truth. This impression is heightened by the fact that she draws from it a general observation on the nature of man, and one which has direct relevance to the actual world: 'Il n'y a entre les êtres humains que des différences de degré qui sont accidentelles et variables. Par essence ils sont identiques et par suite égaux' (ibid.). In the same way Simone Weil uses Plato's theory of reminiscence, in which the soul on learning something in its earthly life is in reality only remembering truths from its past, incorporeal

existence.¹ In a commentary on ^a ~~this~~ passage from Aeschylus' Agamemnon,² she associates the 'mémoire douloureuse' with Plato's theory of reminiscence, and with St. John of the Cross' 'dark night of the soul' (SG 45). The link which she sees appears to be that of the pain and discomfort endured by the soul at this moment, when links with earthly reality have been disturbed if not finally broken, and the confused image of something beyond this reality has been glimpsed by the soul, but not yet attained.

Although this division between soul and body occurs frequently in Simone Weil's writings, the associated distinction between different parts of the soul is used at least as often. This twofold division is probably inspired by Plato, for whom man was compounded of an immortal soul associated with a mortal body, to which the lesser deities added the mortal parts of the soul.³ So in Simone Weil we have different ways of dividing the soul, usually corresponding to one or other of the Platonic myths. She speaks for example of 'la partie naturelle et . . .

¹Phaedrus, 249. The whole Socratic method of education depends of course on this theory of reminiscence.

²V. 160-183.

³Timaeus, 69.

la partie surnaturelle de l'âme' (IP 155) and of 'la partie spirituelle de l'âme' which must use the prison of the body 'pour enfermer, emmurer la partie charnelle' (CS 189). This clearly derives from Plato's division already mentioned of the whole man into immortal soul, mortal soul, and body, as does the note 'L'âme doit avoir été divisée en deux avant qu'une partie puisse utiliser le corps contre l'autre' (ibid.), which seems to be a combination of that myth with the myth of the primal division of man already referred to. Sometimes she speaks of one part of the soul only, but in such terms as imply a complementary part, as where she mentions 'la partie humaine de l'âme [qui est] soumise à la nécessité' (C2 192); 'la partie inférieure de l'âme' (C3 112), 'la partie divine de l'âme' (C3 316) and 'la partie médiocre de l'âme' (PSO 140). In this last case she refers to the opposite half as 'la part de la vérité dans l'âme', and suggests that the division takes place (in the particular case she is discussing) when the soul comes into contact with a true sacrament. 'La partie médiocre' then tries to escape, because it cannot bear contact with absolute purity, while the superior part desires this contact.

Another use of this division of the soul is in her interpretation of the Upanishadic image of the two birds, one of

which eats the fruit while the other watches.¹ It is not absolutely clear as to whether Simone Weil regards the two birds as two different souls, or as the two parts of the soul, but the principal idea for our purpose is clear enough, that of the 'partie éternelle de l'âme' in its abstinence 'digesting' and thus destroying the 'partie mortelle de l'âme':

Ici-bas, regarder et manger sont deux. Il faut choisir l'un ou l'autre. On appelle l'un et l'autre aimer. Seuls ont quelque espoir de salut ceux à qui il arrive quelquefois de rester quelque temps à regarder au lieu de manger.

'L'un mange les fruits, l'autre les regarde.'

La partie éternelle de l'âme se nourrit de faim. Quand on ne mange pas, l'organisme digère sa propre chair et la transforme en énergie. L'âme aussi. L'âme qui ne mange pas se digère elle-même. La partie éternelle digère la partie mortelle de l'âme et la transforme.

(CS 252)²

This 'partie éternelle de l'âme' is presumably what Simone Weil refers to occasionally as 'la partie increée de l'âme' (CS 49, 85). For this definition Moeller accuses her of

¹Chandogya Upanishad, VIII, 1.

²Cf. the interpretation of this passage given by Aurobindo: 'One of the birds is the eternally silent, unbound Self or Purusha by whom all this is extended and he regards the cosmos he has extended, but is aloof from it; the other is the Purusha involved in Prakriti' (op. cit., p. 71). We shall return to this passage in the next chapter.

Gnostic tendencies,¹ but there is surely no need to turn to heretical doctrines within the Christian tradition for a possible source. In the second of these two references, it is clear that she has adopted the idea from Eckhart, and puts it forward merely as a suggestion that one part of the soul is uncreated. But Plato too in the creation-myth of the Timaeus indicates the same thing,² and it would seem reasonable that Simone Weil should adopt this myth, as she did others, for what spiritual value it had. In the first passage referred to, she is using the idea of the uncreated part of the soul to form the essential link between man subject to necessity and God:

La création est abandon. En créant ce qui est autre que lui, Dieu l'a nécessairement abandonné. Il ne conserve sous sa garde que ce qui dans la Création est Lui--la partie incréée de toute créature. (CS 49)

This implies that Simone Weil made a definite distinction between a part of man which simply obeys the laws of necessity, and a part which in some way remains outside necessity. She states this clearly in the preceding note, which indicates the

¹Moeller, Littérature du XXe siècle . . . , p. 243.

²Timaeus, 41. See p. 98.



direct relationship between 'la partie créée' and 'la partie éternelle et surnaturelle'.

Dieu abandonne notre être tout entier, chair, sang, sensibilité, intelligence, amour, à la nécessité impitoyable de la matière et à la cruauté du démon, sauf la partie éternelle et surnaturelle de l'âme.

(CS 49)

That this part of the soul plays no part in the conscious life of man is implied in a passage from the essay 'L'Amour de Dieu et le malheur':

Porter la croix, c'est porter la connaissance qu'on est entièrement soumis à la nécessité aveugle, dans toutes les parties de l'être, sauf un point si secret de l'âme que la conscience ne l'atteint pas.

(PSO 110)

This can perhaps be related to Simone Weil's view of what is sacred in a human being. In her eyes, it is not his person or his personality, but something essentially impersonal: his desire for good, in spite of all the evidence that good is not to be found in the world (EL 13). There is here the same division between necessity and the Good as is implied in the previous passage, and the same association of these with parts of the human soul. This desire for good is the part of the soul which struggles to return to the Good which it glimpsed in its pre-incarnate state, if one follows Plato's Phaedrus myth.¹

¹Phaedrus, 248. Trans. and commented on, SG 114-6.

From the same myth Simone Weil also uses the image of the division of the celestial soul into two horses and a coachman.¹ As in her interpretation of the Upanishadic image of the two birds, where the 'partie éternelle de l'âme' by abstinence gradually destroys the 'partie mortelle de l'âme',² so here the 'mauvais cheval' has to be trained and brought under control.³ The 'mauvais cheval' for Simone Weil represents the physical and appetitive part of the soul, which must not be allowed to disturb the perfect equilibrium of the soul's approach to the Good.⁴

Another use of the idea of the divisions of the soul should be mentioned here, and that is the interpretation of Plato's Republic as a myth of the soul. As for Alain, so for Simone Weil the different citizens simply represented different parts of the soul, the philosophers representing 'la partie

¹254. Trans. and commented on, SG 122-4.

²See above, p. 100.

³See I, §5 for a further consideration of this 'training'.

⁴It is significant, however, that Simone Weil assigns a positive role to the 'mauvais cheval', that of causing the soul's approach to the Good through beauty. This will be discussed in III, §1.

surnaturelle de l'âme' (SG 105). Thus the whole Republic would seem to be an extension of the discussion of the various component parts of man contained in Book IV. Simone Weil backs up this assertion with Plato's own words from the end of the work (IX, 592): 'C'est dans le ciel peut-être qu'il y a un modèle de cette cité pour quiconque veut le voir, et, le voyant, fonder la cité de son propre moi' (SG 105).

*

The idea that the soul is divided, that only a part of it has any relationship with the truth, while the rest is subject to the blind forces of necessity, implies that much of man's life is spent in darkness. The workings of necessity, completely amoral and divorced from the Good which is man's true home, form the conditions under which he must live, and do not permit the hand of God to be seen directly at work in the universe. Thus the feeling man has of being a stranger in the world is reflected in a certain unreality concerning the things of this world. As we have seen, such is the interpretation given by Simone Weil to Plato's myth of the cave. For her this myth represents the ultimate description of man's condition; as she says, 'on ne peut pas pousser plus loin le tableau de la misère humaine' (SG 100). In contrast

to those who criticise Plato's excessive faith in man's intellect, Simone Weil deduces from this myth that we do not in our natural state know anything at all:

Nous naissons et vivons dans le mensonge. Il ne nous est donné que des mensonges. Même nous-mêmes; nous croyons nous voir nous-mêmes, et nous ne voyons que l'ombre de nous-mêmes. Connais-toi toi-même: précepte impraticable dans la caverne. (SG 101)

Furthermore, the man still in chains who has never left the cave is not even capable of the 'sentiment de l'exil' already referred to (p. 90) which is a necessary condition of his spiritual pilgrimage:

Nous naissons et vivons dans l'inconscience. Nous ne connaissons pas notre misère. Nous ne savons pas que nous sommes châtiés, que nous sommes dans le mensonge, que nous sommes passifs, ni, bien entendu, que nous sommes inconscients. (ibid.)

Simone Weil's interpretation of this part of Plato's myth is illustrative of one of the most fundamental features of her social and political thought. If we can never be certain that we are 'in the truth', if we do not even know that we do not know, then the idea of creating a utopia on earth is not merely foolish, it is positively dangerous, since although occasionally and by chance our ideas may correspond to the truth, most of the time our desires and

actions will simply conform to the working of necessity.¹

In the 'monde des mélanges' good and evil produce one another incessantly, and a vision of a future paradise on earth not only is no guarantee of a viable society in the present, but is likely to prove deceptive even as a long-term goal.²

'L'homme a pour condition naturelle les ténèbres' (EH 84), and he must beware of acting as if he were in broad daylight.

Thus in spite of her active career fighting for the rights of the French worker, indicating a positive reaction in the face of social injustice, Simone Weil's concept of what political action could achieve was essentially self-limited and to a certain degree pessimistic. Her admiration for Machiavelli, which seems to have been considerable, was based on this pessimism, since she saw in him the continuation of Plato's theories on the essential evil of society.³

¹Marx too considered that man is not always conscious of the misery of his condition, but deduced from this that it is the task of the social reformer to awaken his fellow-men.

²For a comparable rejection of millenarian ideals see Camus, 'L'Homme révolté', Essais (Bibl. de la Pléiade 1965), pp. 413-705.

³Plato's theories, in particular his image of society as the Great Beast, will be discussed fully in Section II.

She thus expresses Machiavelli's ideas on the reform of society in essentially negative terms: 'La réforme ou la transformation de la société ne peut pas avoir d'autre objet raisonnable que de la rendre la moins mauvaise possible' (SG 90).

Such a programme for social action seems to follow logically from the affirmation of the gulf between what is good and what is possible. Since necessity is the raw material of society, sociology must be the scientific examination of necessity. Simone Pétrement expresses the same concept, related to Gnostic thought:

[Le dualisme gnostique] aboutit à la distinction lucide de deux ordres; celui du bien et celui de la nécessité; à une politique où le bien ne serait pas confondu avec la force, mais où il serait tenu compte et de la force et du bien; à une science de la nécessité, à une morale de la fidélité.¹

There is no apocalyptic vision, no desire for the rule of justice on earth, simply an interpretation of society as a 'mal irréductible qu'on peut seulement tenter de limiter' (SG 91). In order to perform this task, a real analysis of society is necessary, and the mechanism of social relationships determined (C1 207, 215, 236). It was the great merit

¹DP, p. 298.

of Machiavelli, in Simone Weil's view, to have begun this analysis.

This concept, while limited in its aim and scope, is nevertheless more positive than Pascal's reaction to the same problem. He too saw clearly that no paradise on earth was possible, but concluded from this that the wisest thing was to desire no change in the social order, that laws should be obeyed not because they were just in absolute terms, but because disobedience causes anarchy. His famous phrase 'la justice est ce qui est établi'¹ is a terse illustration of this.

This deliberate limitation of ambition in the social field has its counterpart in Simone Weil's thought in international politics. She saw clearly that conflicts between nations are frequently based on meaningless notions, on the

¹Pensées, no. 198. Montaigne provides a source for Pascal's view in the following passage: 'Nos meurs sont extrêmement corrompues, et panchant d'une merveilleuse inclination vers l'empirement; de nos loix et usances, il y en a plusieurs barbares et monstrueuses; Toutesfois, pour la difficulté de nous mettre en meilleur estat et le danger de ce crollement, si je pouvoy planter une cheville à nostre rouë et l'arrester en ce point, je le ferois de bon coeur'. Essais, II, xvii, 441.

conception in absolute terms of what only has meaning in the relative political sphere. On the power of abstract words she writes the following:

. . . 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.

(EH 259)

It was for these reasons that in the years leading up to the Second World War she adopted a pacifist attitude, and frequented pacifist circles. An article in L'Effort speaks of a none-too-successful pacifist demonstration at St.-Etienne in which she took part;¹ in another journal there appears a declaration signed by Simone Weil among others approving Chamberlain's policy of appeasement, and urging the French to act likewise.² In an article which appeared in Syndicats she elaborates the workers' point of view in a manner which seems eminently rational and yet perhaps ultimately short-

¹'Où étaient-ils tous ces pacifistes?' 28 oct. 1933.

²'Pour une négociation immédiate', Feuilles libres de la quinzaine (Lyon), no. 54, 25 mars 1938.

sighted. She does not seem at this point to have grasped the truth about the German regime--she was not alone in this--and considers the whole matter to be a question of national pride and prestige, and consequently unreal. She speaks of the great personal humiliations which the workers had suffered in the years before the reforms in factory conditions of 1936, and of the way in which they had kept quiet in spite of it all:

On n'a pas versé le sang de ceux par qui on avait subi parfois des humiliations qui atteignaient chacun au fond de l'âme, qui brisaient presque physiquement. En revanche on accepterait de mourir à cause d'une soi-disant humiliation nationale qui ne touche aucun de nous en particulier.¹

The only honour to be defended, she concludes, is that of the oppressed, wherever they are to be found, and this must be done through social struggle rather than by armed conflict.

In a later article in the same paper, she develops this theme, pointing out that in the case of war in Europe, all the advantages recently gained by the workers would immediately be lost.² The emancipation of the workers is incom-

¹'Prestige national et honneur ouvrier', Syndicats, no. 26, 8 avr. 1937.

²'Les dangers de guerre et les conquêtes ouvrières', Syndicats, no. 28, 22 avr. 1937.

patible with the sort of reinforced state power necessary to the waging of a war:

En ce sens, si l'on admet, avec Marx et Lénine, que la révolution, de nos jours, consiste avant tout à briser immédiatement et définitivement l'appareil d'Etat, la guerre, même faite par des révolutionnaires pour défendre la révolution qu'ils ont faite, constitue un facteur contre-révolutionnaire.

(EH 241)

It is important to note however that during this period when she held pacifist ideas, she had enlisted as a volunteer in the Spanish civil war, joining Durruti's anarcho-syndicalist column. It is not completely clear whether or not she had any intention of actually fighting; Gabriel Marcel declares that she never took up arms,¹ and Halda suggests that although she was armed she had no intention of ever resorting to force.² A fellow-volunteer, Louis Mercier, indicates that this was not so, that she had come to Spain determined to do whatever was required of her, and certainly it is unlikely that she would have gone as far as asking for a gun, as Cabaud relates, unless she had intended to use it.³ She was determined at

¹'Simone Weil', The Month, July 1949, pp. 9-18.

²Halda, op.cit., pp. 27-8.

³'Contribution à la connaissance de Simone Weil', Le

any rate to play an active part in the war, as she notes in her letter to Bernanos:

En juillet 1936, j'étais à Paris. Je n'aime pas la guerre; mais ce qui m'a toujours fait le plus horreur dans la guerre, c'est la situation de ceux qui se trouvent à l'arrière. Quand j'ai compris que, malgré mes efforts, je ne pouvais m'empêcher de participer moralement à cette guerre, c'est-à-dire de souhaiter tous les jours, toutes les heures, la victoire des uns, la défaite des autres, je me suis dit que Paris était pour moi l'arrière, et j'ai pris le train pour Barcelone dans l'intention de m'engager.

(EH 221)

It was clearly this need to 'participer moralement' which finally caused her to leave her pacifist position with regard to Hitler's Germany. It is obvious that she regretted her previous attitude and found it subsequently short-sighted, as is illustrated in her attempt to explain though not excuse it:

Mon erreur criminelle d'avant 1939 sur les milieux pacifistes et leur action venait de l'incapacité causée depuis tant d'années par l'écrasement de la douleur physique. Etant hors d'état de suivre leur action de près, de les fréquenter, de causer avec eux, je n'ai pas discerné leur inclination à la trahison.

(CS 317)

She puts her failure down to 'le péché de paresse, la tentation d'inertie' (ibid.) which made her involuntarily want a peaceful

Dauphiné libéré, 16 nov. 1949, and Jacques Cabaud, Simone Weil: A Fellowship in Love (London 1964), p. 138. Cabaud supports this account by indicating a post-card sent by Simone Weil to her friend Claudius Vidal.

solution to the crisis, without actually examining her own motives in strict objectivity. This attitude seems to bear little relation to the reasoned pacifism of the articles described earlier, but the divergence can perhaps be explained in her own terms, in that she simply accepted pacifist arguments at the time because her state of fatigue did not allow her to go into the matter more deeply. Whatever the explanation, and although she was still attracted by the idea of non-resistance, she became convinced of the necessity for non-resistance to be effective, and frequently quotes the example of Gandhi on the subject. The effect against the hostile power must be as great when one uses non-violence as when one actively resists, and for this great spiritual power is needed. Non-violence is thus a goal, rather than an immediate way of action (C1 153).

In this matter of the acceptance of the need to fight, Simone Weil clearly drew considerable inspiration from the Bhagavad Gita, which she read for the first time in the spring of 1940 (AD 39). In her interpretation, Arjuna's fault in refusing to fight at the beginning of the poem lies in his desire to find good incarnate in action (C2 268), his very human desire to feel he is fighting for a just cause. His enlightenment comes through the progressive revelation by

Krishna that in the realm of necessity there are no absolute rights and wrongs; to some extent one must accept being a channel for the workings of necessity. The aim is thus 'laisser agir en soi la nécessité' (C2 180), 'accepter d'être soumis à la nécessité et de n'agir qu'en la maniant' (C1 66). This kind of obedience is in essence passive, an 'activité passive' (AD 149), a resolution to restrain oneself to immediate acts which cannot be avoided, rather than attempting to see any long-term 'good' in a particular course of action. It is a kind of spiritual immobility:

L'accomplissement pur et simple des actes prescrits, ni plus ni moins, c'est-à-dire l'obéissance, est à l'âme ce que l'immobilité est au corps. C'est là le sens de la Gîta.
(CS 306)

The individual self is no account in this kind of obedience, and to Western minds, accustomed to the expansion of the self, this concept may seem strange. It is akin however to the obedience exacted in the monastic life within the Christian Church, except that in monasticism obedience is directed, in an immediate sense at least, towards one's superiors, whereas for Simone Weil it was a question of inner compulsion, a conformity to the will of God as she understood it.¹ This kind

¹ Moré (art. cit., pp. 43-57) has criticised this reliance

of compulsion she defined as 'action non-agissante' (C1 153), described thus: 'Faire seulement ce qu'on ne peut pas ne pas faire' (ibid.). Thus Arjuna is led to fight, not through any positive desire for victory, but because he realises that in the realm of necessity it is the basic minimum:

Il voudrait ne pas combattre et se perd dans son émotion de pitié. Mais s'il se demande clairement: 'est-ce que je peux ne pas combattre?' il ne peut pas, à ce moment, dans cette situation, répondre oui.

(ibid.)

The concept of 'action non-agissante' is noted, naturally enough, in Simone Weil's discussion of the philosophy of the Tao. The doctrine which ^{proposes}~~propos~~ that the wise man should 'n'agir que sans effort'¹ is the most developed form of this kind of negativity in action, and Simone Weil seems to have been particularly struck by this aspect of Taoist philosophy, contrasting for instance the Tao '[qui] agit sans effort' with the Newtonian vision of a universe ruled by forces (C2 110). Likewise the following comment: 'Reculer devant l'objet qu'on

on an 'impulsion intérieure' as a sign of pride, and a lack of doubt of her own capacities. It seems strange however to equate this complete withdrawal of the individual will with what is normally understood by pride.

¹Tao te ching, XXIII, trans. Grenier, op. cit., p. 123.

poursuit. Seul ce qui est indirect est efficace. On ne fait rien si l'on n'a d'abord reculé' (PG 136) has echoes of Lao Tzu's 'turning back is how the way moves' (XL). She also makes a comparison between Christ's affirmation 'Je suis la Voie' and the 'action non-agissante' of the Tao which in her eyes is an equivalent form (C2 221). There is indeed the same notion in both of a non-active vehicle which allows itself to be used by the active principle, although Christ's definition of himself as the Way involves the idea of a person which is lacking in the Chinese (see III, §4).

An extension of this concept of 'action non-agissante' is linked with Simone Weil's well-known idea of 'attention'. It is not our concern to make an exhaustive study of this fundamental concept, but simply to indicate its association with 'le non-agir'.¹ The basis of the idea is in any case familiar; it is an availability to truth, a desire for it, as opposed to the more 'positive' notion of searching. It is opposed to the activity of the individual will, to all muscular effort, as Simone Weil demonstrates in the essay 'Réflexions sur le bon

¹This concept has been studied by D. W. Harwell in 'Attentive Fruition. Simone Weil's vocation of attention. "Ils porteront des fruits dans l'attente."' Unpubl. thesis, Strasbourg 1959.

usage des études scolaires . . .' (AD 71-80). Instead of the muscular contractions which pass for intellectual effort (AD 75), Simone Weil sees a completely different form of activity which she defines thus:

L'attention consiste à suspendre sa pensée, à la laisser disponible, vide et pénétrable à l'objet . . . La pensée doit être vide, en attente, ne rien chercher, mais être prête à recevoir dans sa vérité nue l'objet qui va y pénétrer.

(AD 77)

The mind has thus only to be a receptacle for the truth which passes through it. But although this is an essentially negative activity, it is far from being useless; it is in fact the only effective method. Simone Weil relates a series of techniques from Taoist philosophy, by which the hunter is taught never to miss his prey, however small, provided a certain degree of attention is achieved.¹ Thus 'une certaine qualité d'attention est liée aux mouvements efficaces, sans effort ni

¹The text, taken from the Lieh Tzu, was found among Simone Weil's papers and included in the Cahiers: 'Technique de l'attention. Pour abattre les cigales en plein vol, il suffit de ne voir dans l'univers entier que la cigale visée; on ne peut la manquer. Pour devenir archer, rester deux ans couché sous un métier à tisser et ne pas cligner les yeux quand passe la navette. Faire grimper trois ans un pou le long d'un fil de soie, face à la lumière. Quand il paraîtra plus grand qu'une roue, qu'une montagne, quand il cachera le soleil, quand on verra son cœur, on peut tirer: on le touchera en plein cœur' (C2 45-6).

désir' (C2 45). The idea that the action should be 'sans désir' seems to be contradicted in another note: 'L'attention est liée au désir. Non pas à la volonté, mais au désir' (PG 136). But by 'sans désir' she seems to mean 'désir' non attaché à un objet', as is evidenced by another note on the same page. It is akin to St. John of the Cross' 'adventencia amorosa',¹ a loving disposition towards God, unattached to any earthly object or any specific benefit. This non-activity can thus produce practical results in the spiritual sphere, although these are not specifically aimed at:

L'attention tournée avec amour vers Dieu (ou, à un degré moindre, vers toute chose authentiquement belle) rend certaines choses impossibles. Telle est l'action non-agissante de la prière dans l'âme. (PG 137)

But this open disposition of the soul is by no means natural. The soul, as a part of nature, abhors a vacuum, and is by no means willing to abandon the pursuit of specific objects. As Simone Weil notes in the following passage: 'Mauvaise manière de chercher. Attention attachée à un problème. Encore un phénomène d'horreur du vide. On ne veut pas avoir perdu son effort' (PG 135). It is however, as we have

¹St. John of the Cross, quot. Halda, op. cit., p. 113.

seen, a fundamental feature of Simone Weil's dualism that the soul's desire cannot be satisfied with earthly things: the void between desire and its object, between the necessary and the Good, must be preserved if the integrity of earthly and spiritual realms is to be maintained. In the last chapter of this section it is proposed to examine the idea of 'le vide' in Simone Weil's terminology, as a necessary preliminary to the concept of mediation.

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I, \$5

THE VOID

The concept of the void, as used by Simone Weil, is the psychological reflection of the metaphysical dualism which has been the subject of this section so far. It is the maintenance intact of the gulf which separates the Good from the necessary, a conscious acceptance of the fact that nothing on earth can satisfy the desire for good. Even this desire for good is a 'vouloir à vide', since the Good cannot be represented in any way to man's intelligence:

En tout vouloir, quel qu'il soit, par-delà l'objet particulier, vouloir à vide, vouloir le vide. Car c'est un vide pour nous que ce bien que nous ne pouvons ni nous représenter ni définir.

(C3 120)

In extreme situations however it is impossible for man to produce this non-directed desire; in extreme pain, for example, the only good conceivable by the soul is the alleviation of that pain. At that moment

l'univers tout entier est occupé à pousser le cri de l'âme: 'J'ai faim!' 'J'ai mal!' 'Il faut que cela cesse!' Il n'y a plus d'autre bien au monde que la satisfaction immédiate du besoin.

(CS 193)

It is then that the 'partie éternelle de l'âme' must reply, as Talleyrand did to the beggar who said to him 'Il faut que je vive', 'Je n'en vois pas la nécessité' (ibid.). It is, in other words, the total and unconditional rejection of the satisfaction of that need, the consent to the permanent

absence of good, and acknowledgement that the Good is not to be found on earth. Simone Weil returns frequently to Christ's despairing appeal on the Cross: 'My God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Matt. XXVII. 46). This 'why?', Simone Weil says, does not express the search for a cause, but for an aim (IP 168). To what end all this suffering? The answer is that there is no answer, since 'tout cet univers est vide de finalité' (*ibid.*). The soul has simply to learn this through repetition of the question, until

il lui arrive un jour d'entendre,¹ non pas une réponse à la question qu'elle crie, car il n'y en a pas, mais le silence même comme quelque chose d'infiniment plus plein de signification qu'aucune réponse, comme la parole même de Dieu. (*ibid.*)

If the desire is 'à vide', it must be expected that the reply be equally intangible.

Simone Weil has been criticised by Catholic writers for what they take to be her despairing solution to the problem of human suffering, and her reduction of the role of God as Father caring for his children. Certainly her complete rejection of consolation in any form demands a lucidity and

¹MS: no comma.

a courage which could not be expected of everybody. But since consolation is a false representation of man's actual condition, suffering must not be comprehensible: 'Expliquer la souffrance, c'est la consoler; il ne faut donc pas qu'elle soit expliquée' (C2 135).

This silence encountered by the desiring soul is frequently expressed in terms of mechanics. It is in fact for Simone Weil a mechanistic notion, obeying the same laws as the physical world, and akin to her theory of 'pesanteur'. The suffering experienced by the soul when faced with the void is simply the tension caused by the lack of correspondence between desire and fulfilment.¹ Simone Weil defines it thus:

¹Berlioz uses similar mechanical imagery when analysing the feeling of 'isolement' and 'absence' which precedes the experience of 'spleen'. He describes the experiment in which, by the creation of a vacuum, water, in the presence of sulphuric acid, is made to boil and evaporate, leaving behind a block of ice through the water's loss of heat, and compares it to his own experience: 'Le vide se fait autour de ma poitrine palpitante, et il semble alors que mon coeur, sous l'aspiration d'une force irrésistible, s'évapore et tend à se dissoudre par expansion. Puis, la peau de tout mon corps devient douloureuse et brûlante; je rougis de la tête aux pieds. Je suis tenté de crier, d'appeler à mon aide mes amis, les indifférents mêmes, pour me consoler, pour me garder, me défendre, m'empêcher d'être détruit, pour retenir ma vie qui s'en va aux quatre points cardinaux.

Cet état n'est pas le spleen, mais il l'amène plus tard:

'Vide, quand rien d'extérieur ne correspond à une tension intérieure' (C2 9--Simone Weil's italics). In a sense the experience of the void breaks the laws of nature, since in nature this vacuum is not tolerated. Thus 'Thucydides' definition of psychological law, already quoted, whereby man always exercises all the power he has, becomes the basis for a new experience: 'Ne pas exercer tout le pouvoir dont on dispose, c'est supporter le vide' (C2 34). 'S'arrêter, se retenir, c'est créer du vide en soi' (C2 28). This is obviously a painful process, since, as in the physical world, exterior forces are ready to rush in and fill the vacuum: 'En se vidant, on s'expose à toute la pression de l'univers environnant' (C2 135). Immediately the soul feels these pressures, it is seized by the feeling of impossibility, the purely physical reaction that such a state of affairs cannot be. Thus in the experience of extreme suffering, the soul rebels against the non-accomplishment of its desire, namely the alleviation of that suffering: '"Souffrir ainsi, c'est

c'est l'ébullition, l'évaporation du coeur, des sens, du cerveau, du fluide nerveux. Le spleen, c'est la congélation de tout cela, c'est le bloc de glace.' Mémoires (Paris 1969), I, xl.

impossible." Ce sentiment d'impossibilité, c'est le sentiment du vide' (C2 18).

This experience of the void which is felt to be impossible is in every sense of the word an unnatural experience. It is not natural to face silence when we would have an answer, to accept that desire is not met by a compensatory fulfilment. In an age when the suppression of a desire is considered a crime against human nature, it is not surprising that Simone Weil's ideas on the subject should be considered as strange and 'unnatural'. For her the whole concept of natural fulfilment and the infinite expansion of the individual is contained in 'l'horrible phrase de Blake: "Il vaut mieux étouffer un enfant dans son berceau que de conserver en soi un désir non satisfait"' (EL 16). This over-riding need to find compensation for every desire is thus for her not the liberating of the individual which Blake and the apostles of 'self-expression' thought it to be, but a retaining of man within the limits of those natural laws which find their ultimate expression for Simone Weil in the law of gravity. Man's natural tendency is towards a psychological balance which consists in the alternate spending and receiving of energy, and conforms thus to the laws of necessity governing all

natural phenomena (see I, §3). Thus when a man is wronged, his natural reaction is to repay in kind the one who has wronged him. The idea of forgiveness is unnatural, and in a sense impossible, as Simone Weil notes in the following passage:

Pardonner. (Valéry) On ne peut pas. Quand quelqu'un nous a fait du mal, il se crée en nous des réactions. Oubli volontaire. Le désir de la vengeance est un désir d'équilibre. Accepter le déséquilibre.

(C1 213)

In another passage, she compares the desire for vengeance to the desire for satisfaction experienced by a miser: 'Si on me fait du mal, j'attends quelque chose de celui qui m'a fait du mal, comme l'avare attend quelque chose de son trésor. ("Satisfaction".)' (C2 62). The same mechanism operates when I am the one who inflicts the wrong:

En revanche, faire du mal à autrui, c'est en recevoir quelque chose; quoi? Qu'est-ce qu'on a gagné (et qu'il faudra repayer) quand on a fait du mal? On s'est accru--On s'est étendu--On a comblé le vide en soi, en en créant chez autrui.

(ibid.)

In this way sin against one's fellows is simply a waste of energy, energy which should have been directed elsewhere, since the quantity possessed by any individual is limited. Thus to the question 'en quel sens le péché nous rend-il débiteurs?' (Texte du Pater)' she replies: 'Nous avons laissé

de l'énergie se perdre (se dégrader). Nous sommes des intendants infidèles. Il faut refaire le vide en nous' (C2 55). An equivalent form to 'remettez-nous nos dettes' is then 'rendez-nous l'énergie gaspillée' (C2 62).

Man's desire for psychological compensation is illustrated again for Simone Weil in her interpretation of Arjuna's spiritual discipline in the Bhagavad Gita. Here, however, her reading is fairly orthodox: Arjuna must learn to act without any thought of reward, that is, without receiving the fruits of that action, without compensation for the energy spent. 'Agir pour l'acte, non pour son fruit' (C1 142) is the ideal. It is not a question of renunciation of the act itself--hence possibly the relative accessibility of the poem to the Western mind--but renunciation of its normal compensations. Refusing to act does not in any case produce the desired effect: 'Renoncer à l'action ne produit pas un vide. Renoncer, non à l'action, mais à son fruit; là, il y a vide' (C1 227). This is the necessary result of refusing to look for good in the action itself, since a sense of purpose, of accomplishing what is good and right, is a necessary stimulant to action and compensation for energy expended. It is thus an affirmation of the fundamental distinction between the necessary and the

good.

It is perhaps interesting to mention here another discipline which for Simone Weil was illustrative of the same point. This was the Zen Buddhist technique of the *kō-an*, in which the student is made to exhaust the possibilities of the discursive intellect through the contemplation of an insoluble problem. Simone Weil calls primitive Zen 'une recherche à vide si intense qu'elle se substitue à tous les attachements' (C2 382). It is a 'recherche à vide' in the sense that the result of Zen is not its aim. As Alan Watts has put it,

whereas it might be supposed that the practice of Zen is a means to the end of awakening, this is not so. For the practice of Zen is not the true practice so long as it has an end in view, and when it has no end in view, it is awakening--the aimless, self-sufficient life of the 'eternal now'. To practise with an end in view is to have one eye on the practice and the other on the end, which is lack of concentration, lack of sincerity.¹

Simone Weil follows traditional comparisons in associating the discipline imposed by the search for the answer to the *kō-an* to the process of illumination practised by Western mystics. The search brings about a 'nuit obscure' which is followed by

¹The Way of Zen (Harmondsworth 1957), p. 174.

illumination (C2 383), the search itself being a painful discipline during which ' . . . nous orientons notre attention vers le négatif et le vide' (C3 202). The process is made more painful by the fact that the soul is already detached from earthly things, but has not yet entered into contact with the good that it desires (C2 113).

The acceptance of the void involves a kind of death, or at least the possibility of death. This idea universally found among mystical writers is given a new interpretation by Simone Weil, since maintaining the void means rejecting any false (and therefore comforting) notion which might come to fill it. With remarkable lucidity, she expresses it thus: 'Etre résolu à mourir, accepter le vide, même chose; cela seul permet que, dans certaines situations, le mensonge ne soit pas une nécessité vitale' (C1 224).¹ A development of this idea is seen in the following passage, where the entertaining of false notions is shown to be a technique for filling the vacuum, and thus preventing God from entering the soul:

La mort même, subie pour une cause mauvaise, n'est pas vraiment la mort pour la partie charnelle de l'âme. Ce qui est mort pour la partie charnelle de l'âme, c'est

¹This note is in capitals in the text.

de voir Dieu face à face.

C'est pourquoi nous fuyons le vide intérieur, parce que Dieu pourrait s'y glisser.

(C3 316)

The distinction made here between physical and spiritual death is an important one, since it implies that the two are not synonymous, and that physical death is possible without the death of the 'partie charnelle de l'âme' (and the converse, that spiritual death does not necessarily imply death of the body). This idea is related to an important concept in Simone Weil's thought, that of 'décréation', which should now be considered. The term, although not current in the French language, is not a true neologism, as it was first used by Péguy (in a diametrically opposed sense, it is true).¹ Miklos Vetö, who has made a lengthy study of its use by Simone Weil, defines it as 'the process of man's return to God',² and points out that while the term is negative in appearance, it is ultimately creative, since it involves the suppression of that dis-

¹'Note conjointe sur M. Descartes et la philosophie cartésienne', Oeuvres en prose 1909-14 (Bibl. de la Pléiade 1957), pp. 1385, 1405 etc. Noted in Vetö, op.cit., p. 26. There appears to be some discrepancy over pagination: we have only been able to find reference to 'décréation' on pp. 1329, 1330, 1350 of this edition.

²Vetö, op. cit., p. 26.

tance between God and man caused by creation. It is the negative aspect which will concern us here, however, the disappearance of the autonomous creature who says 'I' and who (because this 'I' sets him up in opposition to God's will) cannot fully love God (C2 289). This appears to be a destructive concept, but Simone Weil sees it as a mere reflection of reality. The creature, by decreating himself, is simply acknowledging his lack of true being, and by consenting to the death of his ego, is indicating his desire that he might have life 'more abundantly': 'Dieu m'a créée comme du non-être qui a l'air d'exister, afin qu'en renonçant par amour à cette existence apparente, la plénitude de l'être m'anéantisse' (CS 42).¹ Being and existence are thus at opposite poles, when 'existence' is taken in the sense of the autonomous existence of the creature.

Such an idea follows naturally from Simone Weil's concept of creation, where God and his creatures together are less than God alone. Decreation becomes an answer to creation, a redressing of the balance upset at the creation of the uni-

¹Cf. Eckhart: 'The word Sum can be spoken by no creature but by God only: for it becomes the creature to testify of itself Non Sum.' Quot. Underhill, op. cit., p. 5.

verse, as Simone Weil indicates in the following note:

Dé-cr ation en tant qu'ach vement transcendant de la cr ation; an antissement en Dieu qui donne   la cr ature an antie la pl nitude de l' tre, dont elle est priv e tant qu'elle existe.

(C3 91)

There is at least a suggestion here of Anaximander's cosmic $\alpha\mu\epsilon\iota\pi\omicron\nu$ (the indefinite), of which the existing creatures are detached fragments, and to which they return at the end of their cycle. The deliberate ambiguity of death-in-life, being-and-existence, can be compared too to Heraclitus' 'immortal mortals, mortal immortals, living their death and dying their life',¹ on which Robin comments: 'L'individualit  de la vie est une mort, et l'immortalit  consiste   se replacer, d s cette vie si on le peut, dans le courant universel'.² Decreation is thus the making whole again of a divided universe, through the abandonment of individuality.

As was noted above however this 'death' of individuality does not necessarily imply physical death. It is important to emphasise this point, as many critics have taken this aspect

¹Fr. 62: $\alpha\sigma\acute{\iota}\nu\alpha\tau\omicron\iota$ $\theta\upsilon\eta\tau\omicron\iota$, $\theta\upsilon\eta\tau\omicron\iota$ $\alpha\sigma\acute{\iota}\nu\alpha\tau\omicron\iota$, $\zeta\omega\acute{\nu}\tau\epsilon\varsigma$ $\tau\omicron\nu\epsilon\kappa\epsilon\iota\omega\nu$ $\theta\acute{\alpha}\nu\alpha\tau\omicron\nu$, $\tau\omicron\nu\delta\epsilon$ $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\epsilon\iota\omega\nu$ $\beta\iota\omicron\nu$ $\tau\epsilon\theta\upsilon\epsilon\omega\tau\epsilon\varsigma$.
See Kirk & Raven, p. 210.

²L. Robin, La Pens e grecque (Paris 1948), p. 93.

of Simone Weil's thought to be excessively self-destructive, whereas in fact self-destruction is non-productive in the process of decreation. She describes suicide as an 'ersatz de dé@création' (C2 187), clearly because suicide is in a sense the most final assertion of the individual's desire to control his destiny. The will to self-destruction is illusory, since the more I wish to destroy myself, the more that self claims attention and assumes importance. It is a question of consent, rather than of will: 'La créature ne s'est pas créée, et il ne lui est pas donné de se détruire. Elle peut seulement consentir à la destruction d'elle-même qu'opère Dieu' (C2 396). In the same way one man cannot assist in the decreation of another. If he has the power to destroy the individuality of another man, and wields it, he is making that man's own decreation impossible, since decreation must be consented to, must be an act of love (AD 136; cf. C2 242, 296).

The question of Simone Weil's own death raises itself naturally here, and one may well argue that in her case decreation did in fact involve physical death. C.J. Snyder sees a close relationship between the two, linking them by the con-

cept of imbalance referred to on the death certificate:¹

The concept of decreation . . . is based precisely on failure to redress the balance of the mind. That Simone Weil should have preferred to end her life as she did, rather than reason herself into a more normal attitude to it reflects in practical terms the theory behind her written work.

Her death was thus the supreme example of refusal of the laws of gravity, and acceptance of the void. It could also be argued however that death was due to being deprived of the means of decreation, that decreation involved a positive share in the sufferings of her countrymen which Simone Weil felt was denied her. Death could thus be seen as an alternative to decreation. The suffering which in fact she experienced was in her eyes useless, since she felt cut off from the affliction of France.²

¹The deceased did kill and slay herself by refusing to eat whilst the balance of her mind was disturbed.' Quot. Cabaud, Simone Weil, p. 348. See C. J. Snyder, 'Simone Weil: A Study of her Thought, with special reference to the concept of decreation', unpubl. thesis, University of Wales 1969, p. 197.

²This interpretation is borne out by the fact that Simone Weil refused while in hospital to eat more than her fellow-countrymen in occupied France. This practical gesture of solidarity would have theoretical backing if seen as an attempt to retain contact with the sphere in which she felt her own decreation should lie. Sir Richard Rees has suggested several possible additional motives in Simone Weil: A Sketch for a Portrait (Oxford 1966), pp. 67-9, 84.

Whether decreation involved physical death or not, it is clear that by definition it implies a high degree of suffering for 'la partie charnelle de l'âme'. What is experienced by the soul only has reality in so far as it is experienced physically in the body, and psychologically in the desiring, 'carnal' part of the soul. On this physical level, the void can be experienced only as privation:

Soif, faim, chasteté--privations charnelles de toutes sortes--dans la recherche de Dieu. Formes sensibles du vide. Le corps n'a pas d'autre manière d'accepter le vide.

(Cl 214)

In this, she is only following the tradition of asceticism common to the religious life of both East and West. St. John of the Cross speaks of the discipline the soul must undergo before being unified with God, and describes how

[the soul] must completely and voluntarily void itself of all that can enter into it, whether from above or from below . . . For who shall prevent God from doing that which he will in the soul that is resigned, annihilated and detached?¹

It is not merely desire for earthly things, but desire itself

¹The Ascent of Mount Carmel, II, §4: '[el alma] ha de vaciarse de todo lo que puede caer en ella perfectamente y voluntariamente, ahora sea de arriba, ahora de abajo . . . ; porque a Dios ¿quién le quitará que él no haga lo que quisiere en el alma resignada, aniquilada y desnuda?'

which must be eradicated. Simone Weil seems to go no further than St. John of the Cross when he speaks of the soul that is 'annihilated', and yet her asceticism has often been met with criticism and incomprehension.¹ As we hope to show in the final section of this study, she always considered the discipline which she imposed upon herself to be a means to an end, and not an end in itself: 'Le parfait imitateur de Dieu d'abord se désincarne, puis s'incarne' (SG 106). The mortification of the natural part of the soul was for her simply an acknowledgement of the void which exists between the two orders, the natural and the supernatural, an acceptance of the fact that our desires cannot be satisfied by earthly objects. She illustrates this again by reference to Plato's cave-image, which she interprets thus:

L'irréalité des choses que Platon peint si fortement dans la métaphore de la caverne n'a pas rapport aux choses comme telles; les choses comme telles ont la plénitude de la réalité puisqu'elles existent. Il s'agit des choses comme objet² d'amour. (IP 74)

¹See Moeller, Littérature du XXe siècle . . ., p. 244. He speaks of 'l'espèce de joie que Simone Weil éprouve dans . . . l'anéantissement recherché pour lui-même', and ascribes it to 'de la sexualité refoulée'. But see below, p. 140.

²MS: objets.

In other words, it is a question of denying absolute allegiance to earthly things in favour of the true Good which is not of this world, and is unknowable. If Simone Weil expresses herself as a Platonist rather than as an orthodox Christian, her intellectual background is largely responsible.

She is as aware as anyone of the dangers of asceticism as a sort of spiritual gymnastics, which is of course one of the reasons why she puts so little emphasis on the development of the will and of muscular effort in spiritual progress. Her definition of true ~~xxx~~ as opposed to false asceticism keeps apart the realm of the Good and that of the necessary, while giving a just estimate of man's condition:

Il y a des efforts qui ont l'effet contraire du but recherché (exemple: dévotes aigries, faux ascétisme, certains dévouements, etc.). D'autres sont toujours utiles, même s'ils n'aboutissent pas.

Comment distinguer ?

Peut-être: les uns sont accompagnés de la négation (mensongère) de la misère intérieure. Les autres de l'attention continuellement concentrée sur la distance entre ce qu'on est et ce qu'on aime.

(PG 136)

She is aware too as all the great mystics have been, that the foundation of mystical energy is the same as that of sexual energy, but sees

une différence essentielle entre le mystique qui tourne violemment vers Dieu la faculté d'amour et de

désir dont l'énergie sexuelle constitue le fondement physiologique, et la fausse imitation de mystique, qui, laissant à cette faculté son orientation naturelle, et lui donnant un objet imaginaire, imprime à cet objet, comme étiquette, le nom de Dieu.

(C3 92)

In the mystical life, where the soul is so disciplined as to make union with God its primary concern, no energy is wasted on earthly objects:¹ 'Tout attachement à un objet est émission d'énergie Le détachement, c'est l'émission de la totalité de l'énergie vers Dieu' (C3 92). Thus chastity is the acknowledgement that one's love should be directed outside the created world, towards God. This leads Simone Weil to speculate on the spiritual significance of courtly love in twelfth-century France; she considers that its roots go back to the practice of homosexuality in Greece, although the role of the woman was obviously different, due to the comparative ease of relationship between the sexes in ancient Greece. She affirms: 'Ce qu'ils honoraient ainsi, ce n'était pas autre chose que l'amour impossible' (EH 79-80). Denis de Rougemont takes this basic concept of 'amour impossible', which he considers to be Cathar, and applies it to the Roman de Tristan; Tristan's 'original sin' is to have given way to physical passion, and the whole poem is the account of the

redeeming of the two lovers by a long penitence.¹ He refers,

¹Op. cit., p. 112. It is not impossible that some of the common ground illustrated here between Denis de Rougemont and Simone Weil was the result of discussion of that subject when both were members of the group which formed around the Nouveaux cahiers in 1936. Since de Rougemont's study first appeared in 1939, and he recalls in his 'Avertissement' (dated 1938) that he had planned the work out in detail two years previously, it is not unreasonable to suppose that he had discussed it with members of the group. In this case, Simone Weil's interest in the Cathars may well date from this time. De Rougemont himself in a private letter to the present writer admits the possibility of such an influence, though cannot affirm it with any certainty:

'Je n'ai pas été sans me demander moi-même quel rôle mon livre avait bien pu jouer dans l'évolution de Simone Weil vers le catharisme, telle que je l'ai découverte après la guerre en lisant ses lettres et les essais parus dans les Cahiers du Sud. Honnêtement, je ne sais rien de certain.

J'ai rencontré Simone Weil à maintes reprises dans le cercle des "Nouveaux Cahiers", je l'ai souvent entendue lors des débats organisés par la revue - de 1936 ou 7 à 1939 -, mais il me semble que nos relations se sont bornées à celles d'un rédacteur en chef et d'une collaboratrice (elle nous avait donné plusieurs longs articles). Je la revois très bien, dans cette salle, au premier étage d'un café près de la Place St Sulpice, où avaient lieu nos débats: presque affalée sur la table devant elle, la tête entre les avant-bras [sic], à cause de ses perpétuels maux de tête. Mais je n'ai pas souvenir d'avoir discuté avec elle d'autres sujets que politiques. L'Amour et l'Occident n'a jamais fait l'objet de débats aux "Nouveaux Cahiers", mais bien sûr les animateurs de la revue l'avaient lu - et plusieurs m'en ont écrit - lors de sa parution en janvier 1939. J'imagine que je l'avais envoyé à Simone Weil aussi. Et en tout cas, elle a dû lire quelques uns [sic] des nombreux articles que le livre a suscités en 1939 et 1940. . . .

C'est chez Gustave Thibon que Simone Weil s'est réfugiée dans le Midi en 1940. Or Thibon écrivait alors un texte extrêmement élogieux sur mon livre Il est donc à peu près certain que Thibon et Simone Weil ont parlé de mes thèses à ce moment-là.' Letter dated Genève, le 14 avril 1970.

as does Simone Weil, to various Hindu chastity-techniques, in which the object was the retaining within the body of sexual energy, transformed thus into spiritual energy.¹ Simone Weil speaks of an 'image hindoue . . . du nerf nouveau que produit la chasteté véritable, le détachement, qui fait monter l'énergie sexuelle jusqu'au sommet de la tête' (C3 92-3). She also mentions the ancient belief, repeated by Aristotle, that in a child the sperm, symbol of spiritual energy, circulates in the body, so that he is 'disponible; il est orienté, et il n'est pas orienté vers quelque chose. Orienté à vide' (C3 89). The aim of the adult was thus to detach himself so that the sperm once more circulated.

Simone Weil thus belongs on this point to a well-defined mystical tradition which has flourished both within and without Christianity, and she certainly would never claim any originality in her use of sexual imagery and language. To those who accuse her and other mystics of 'refoulement' because of this imagery, she replies:

Reprocher à des mystiques d'aimer Dieu avec la faculté d'amour sexuel, c'est comme si on reprochait à un peintre

¹Op. cit., pp. 98-99.

contin

de faire des tableaux avec des couleurs qui sont composées de substances matérielles. Nous n'avons pas autre chose avec quoi aimer. On pourrait d'ailleurs aussi bien faire le même reproche à un homme qui aime une femme.

(C3 91)

Denis de Rougemont sees the idea that mysticism is simply a sexual deviation as the fundamental error of materialism, pointing out that firstly, the language of passion found in the mystics is not primarily the language of physical love 'mais il est au contraire la rhétorique d'une ascèse étroite-ment liée à l'hérésie méridionale du douzième siècle'; secondly, among the great mystics, the language of passion is used with such freedom, 'que l'on ne voit plus ce que pourrait signifier, dans leurs cas, le soupçon habituel de "refoulement"'.¹

The direction of sexual energy towards God is thus the means by which the mystical consciousness attempts to approach the only object worthy of its love. But since for Simone Weil God is essentially unknowable, it is a question of 'aimer à vide' (C3 121). In so far as our love requires a tangible object, we may love the persons and things surrounding us, but only 'en tant qu'indignes d'amour' (ibid.). The void

¹Op. cit., p. 136.

must be maintained within, even where the world claims our attachment.

This maintenance of the void is supremely difficult, and yet it is essential in order to conceive of the idea of intermediaries, objects which do not hinder the ascent of desire towards the Good, but which act as a channel for it (C2 35). The tendency of desire is, however, to omit these intermediaries, and to aim for the absolute, forgetting that the absolute has no place on earth. The result of this tendency will be the subject of our next section, where some of the 'croyances combleuses de vides' (C2 12) will be discussed.

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SECTION II

IDOLATRY

II, §1

ASPECTS OF IDOLATRY

Having attempted in the previous section to give some idea of the nature and extent of Simone Weil's dualism, we shall try in this section to illustrate her ideas on what could be called illegitimate mediation, the false resolution of contradiction. It is our contention that the false harmony thus created is the equivalent of Simone Weil's definition of idolatry. The originality of this definition seems to lie in the fact that Simone Weil took what is essentially a religious notion (and one characteristic of the Judaeo-Christian tradition) and extended it to cover practically every aspect of human society, secular as well as sacred. Conversely it can be said that it was not so much a matter of extending this religious notion to secular society, but of Simone Weil's essentially religious vision of society. The emancipation of the concept of idolatry from its narrow theological interpretation thus follows automatically.

As a result of this, whereas in section I we were dealing mostly with religious philosophy, this section will range over several aspects of Simone Weil's critique of society. For example, in the chapter dealing with Simone Weil's relationship with Catholicism, we will be discussing the Church as a social institution rather than as the elaborator and conserver

of Christian doctrine. Thus, although the subjects of the various chapters range from imperial Rome to Karl Marx, and from Judaism to Hitler, we shall not attempt to give a full account of each of these phenomena, but shall be guided by our theme, to which, in the interests of coherence, the over-all picture will be subordinated. We shall therefore be following Simone Weil's bias rather than attempting to set the record straight on behalf of those who have objected to her handling of, for example, Judaism or the Catholic Church, but every effort has been made to indicate opposing arguments within the restrictions of the theme of idolatry. We are conscious that this method leads inevitably to a certain imbalance, but have tried to redress this to some extent in section III, where for instance the positive role of Catholicism, as Simone Weil saw it, is discussed.

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The notion of idolatry is one which has evolved considerably over the centuries, and the modern Christian interpretation is a kind of synthesis of ideas which have their origins in early Jewish tradition. We are assured, for instance, that 'dans l'Ecriture, εἰδωλον, idolum, simulacrum traduisent

trente noms hébreux différents'.¹ Classical definitions, such as that given by St. Thomas, 'to give divine honour to whom that honour is not due',² or Origen's distinction between εἰκών (a true representation of something which exists) and εἰδωλον (a false representation of something which does not exist)³ beg the question as far as a definition is concerned, as they still leave open the more relevant question of how one is to judge of the truth or existence of the God concerned. Simone Weil would certainly have concurred in them as definitions, since her concept of God implied of necessity both truth and, to a more limited extent, existence, but this does not mean she accepted the traditional^{ti} Judaeo-Christian notion. As we shall see in the chapter on Judaism (II, §4), monotheism was no protection against idolatry; in fact, it seems almost irrelevant: 'Connaître la divinité seulement comme puissance et non comme bien, c'est l'idolâtrie, et peu importe alors qu'on ait un Dieu ou plusieurs' (PSO 48). In any case, she believes that true monotheism, that is, the

¹A. Vacant, E. Mangenot, Dictionnaire de théologie catholique, VII (Paris 1922), s.v. Idolâtrie, idole.

²Sum. theol., IIa, IIae, q. xciv, a. 1. '. . . ad superstitionem pertinet exhibere cultum divinum cui non debetur', quot. Vacant & Mangenot, loc. cit.

³Vacant & Mangenot, loc. cit.

belief in a Supreme Being, has always been widespread: 'Ce que nous nommons idolâtrie est dans une large mesure une fiction du fanatisme juif. Tous les peuples de tous les temps ont toujours été monothéistes' (LR 13).

This would explain her unconcern when confronted with polytheism in its various manifestations. Homer's representation of the Olympic pantheon in the Iliad she takes as a comic interlude (PSO 56). Plato's knowledge of the Good as One was to her of far more significance. In the same way, various references to fetishism (E 220) and idolatry in the sense of image-worship (PSO 72) compare these favourably with what are in her view far more serious manifestations of idolatry. In so far as her opinion on the essential monothesis of all peoples is simply an affirmation of belief in a single Supreme Being, Simone Weil is in agreement with most modern anthropological studies¹ (although there are always exceptions to this general rule: Buddhism, for example, is not founded on a belief in God as such).² But this is not

¹See J. Daniélou, 'Hellénisme, Judaïsme, Christianisme', Réponses aux questions de Simone Weil (Paris 1964), p. 22.

²See C. Humphreys, Buddhism (Harmondsworth 1951), p. 79.

necessarily monotheism as in the Judaic tradition; belief in a Supreme Being does not automatically imply worship of this Being. Parrinder illustrates this ambiguity in his study of West African religion to which we have already referred (I, §2), indicating that the concept of the High God in these tribes is very different from our modern European one; whole areas of human life are completely untouched by this supreme being, and he often lacks any moral force, moral sanctions being imposed by lesser deities. As he says,

while to us belief in God is the 'highest' article of religion, and practised as such, it is not in the forefront of practised West African religion. Whatever lip-service may be paid to the creator, in practice, worship and morals, he may not even be first among equals.¹

But this remoteness of the West African High God would be unlikely to trouble Simone Weil in her views on monotheism, given her own concept of God's essential otherness (see I, §2). The same applies to her reading of Plato's deity, which we have already discussed (ibid.).

But although this might seem to indicate that Simone Weil's attitude towards idolatry tended towards the excessively

¹Op. cit., pp. 31-2.

tolerant, the contrary is true. One thing was perfectly plain to her: man had a need of envisaging beyond himself an absolute good, and thus had a choice only between worship of the true God and idolatry. There could be no half measures:

Nul être humain n'échappe à la nécessité de concevoir hors de soi un bien vers lequel se tourne la pensée dans un mouvement de désir, de supplication et d'espoir. Par conséquent, il y a le choix seulement entre l'adoration du vrai Dieu et l'idolâtrie.

(CS 276)

It is not even necessary to identify this good with God, but only to avoid giving the name of God to anything else: for this reason it is better to deny the existence of God than to worship a false one:

Il ne dépend pas d'une âme de croire à la réalité de Dieu si Dieu ne révèle pas cette réalité. Ou elle met le nom de Dieu comme étiquette sur autre chose, et c'est l'idolâtrie;¹ ou la croyance à Dieu reste abstraite et verbale.

(AD 164)

Simone Weil seems to have realised the impossibility of absolute agnosticism, however, as is indicated in the passage from La Connaissance surnaturelle quoted above. She even concedes, with a compassionate insight, the necessity of idols to man's existence in the world (CS 112), but adds 'il faut les idoles

¹MS: de l'idolâtrie.

les moins mauvaises possible' (CS 113). Idols in the form of concrete images are in fact a guarantee against more serious, because more convincing idols, since 'on ne peut pas se mettre devant un morceau de bois sculpté et lui dire: "Tu as fait le ciel et la terre"' (CS 171).

Another, and more startling, 'use' of images is indicated in a passage from La Connaissance surnaturelle, where Simone Weil is speaking of the necessity to strip the soul of all that is 'au-dessus de la vie végétative' (CS 260) in order to leave this 'partie végétative' directly exposed to the light of grace. This union of 'la matière inerte', type of perfect obedience with 'l'esprit divin', is an image of perfection, and in the same way the union of a divine spirit with an inanimate object in an image or idol reflects this perfection.

But although these examples provide interesting vindication of the use of tangible objects in worship, Simone Weil never stresses this type of idolatry, and as we have said before, in her own terminology, idolatry means something very much broader and more difficult to grasp. In general philosophical terms, she defines idols thus: 'des biens relatifs pensés comme biens hors de toute relation' (Cl 226) or alternatively, they are earthly objects considered to embody absolute

good (E 137).¹ In other words, referring back to the notions of opposites and of the transcendence of the Good which we discussed earlier (I, §§1, 2), idolatry is the illusion that the good which is the opposite of evil is the absolute Good, the denial of transcendence. Looked at in another way, it is the denial of limits (I, §3), the claim that the infinite can exist on earth. The limit, seen as 'quelque chose qui est toujours dépassé, mais impose une oscillation compensatrice' (C2 32) is the point to which everything always returns, and which prevents the pendulum from continuing indefinitely in one direction. It is akin to the definition of the Tao as given by Granet:

Le Tao est un Total constitué par deux aspects qui sont, eux aussi, totaux, car ils se substituent entièrement l'un à l'autre. Le Tao n'est point leur somme, mais le régulateur (je ne dis pas: la loi) de leur alternance.²

¹In the essay 'Réflexions sur les causes de la liberté et de l'oppression', Simone Weil defines the 'folie fondamentale qui rend compte de tout ce qu'il y a d'insensé et de sanglant tout au long de l'histoire' as the 'renversement du rapport entre le moyen et la fin' (OL 95). Although at this stage she does not call it 'idolâtrie', this concept is clearly very close to her later elaboration of idolatry. Alain indeed makes the connexion explicit: '. . . l'idolâtrie consiste proprement à adorer le moyen et l'outil' (Propos sur la religion, Paris 1938, p. 15).

²La Pensée chinoise (Paris 1934), p. 325.

It is also obviously connected with the law of Anaximander already quoted (I, §1), concerning the tendency of things to compensate each other for their injustice, according to the regulative factor in the universe.

To understand the implications of Simone Weil's definition, however, it will be necessary to look~~in~~ into its practical applications. One of its most fundamental manifestations is that exhibited by the role of force ~~in~~ in the world. The essence of force, as we have seen (I, §3), is that it recognises no limits to its empire; its effect is to reduce the person subjected to it to a mere thing, and to blind the one wielding it to the fact that he is not omnipotent, that he too is subject to force. The essay on Homer's Iliad (SG 11-42) provides, as has been shown, Simone Weil's most poignant expression of the concept of force. It illustrates too that most extreme example of the use of force, slavery. Through its denial of limits, it is a false resolution of opposites, the opposites in this case being the rival claims to existence of two separate human beings. The opposites are also relative good and evil, the standards by which morality is assessed; a master with absolute power over his slave does not question the morality of his conduct towards him:

A qui peut tout, tout est permis. Qui sert un Tout-Puissant peut tout en lui. La force délivre du couple de contraires bien-mal. Elle délivre qui l'exerce, et même aussi qui la subit. On ne fait pas tort à un esclave. Un maître a toute licence. (C3 140)

The opposites are resolved here through simple extermination of one of them. This conclusion is more pessimistic and at the same time more realistic than Camus' analysis of the master-slave relationship in L'Homme révolté.¹ For Camus there comes a point at which the slave says no, a point beyond which submission cannot be tolerated: Simone Weil, with her factory experience which she likened to the state of slavery (AD 36), knew that in the situation where revolt is possible, complete servitude has not yet been reached. Slavery, a form of 'le malheur', deprives a human being of the consciousness of his personality, makes an inanimate object of him, no longer able or even willing to better his condition in any way (AD 86).

Is there an illogicality here? If a man can spend a lifetime in the state of slavery, so far deprived of his humanity that he is incapable of desiring a better life, then how does the notion of limits operate? There seems to be no

¹in Essais (Bibl. de la Pléiade, Paris 1965), p. 423.

chance of the slave redressing the balance in this life, and Simone Weil does not seem to have believed in, or wanted to believe in, a compensatory after-life. The answer seems to be that the master who believes he has absolute power over his slave is simply living in an illusion; even if he retains this power throughout his life, or the life of the slave, he is none the less subjected to the force of necessity and ultimate death. His power is in reality limited by his own limits as a finite human being. Idolatry is after all a belief in what is false, a belief in the absolute nature of the phenomena of this world, and Simone Weil's discussion of it is centred on the contradiction between apparent limitlessness and real restriction.

The denial of limits in the individual, leading to the illusory expansion of the ego to fill all available space is mirrored in the tendency of the collectivity to expand indefinitely. Worship of the collectivity seems to have formed for Simone Weil a much more real form of idolatry than worship of the individual. If the 'je' was dangerous, the 'nous' was infinitely more so, because of the power it exercised over the individual. The 'je' was the product of the flesh, the 'nous' was the product of the devil (AD 22-3; cf. p. 174 below). It

is thus that Simone Weil discerned in the theories of Marx a more potent version of the illusion concerning power which she read in the master-slave relationship. Marx, according to Simone Weil, believed that the oppressed proletariat would through revolution seize the power at present in the hands of their capitalist masters. But this in practice was mere day-dreaming: 'Couple de contraires domination-oppression. Réve impossible de mettre la domination aux mains des opprimés' (C3 285). And why impossible? Simone Weil elaborates:¹

La force, en changeant de mains, demeure toujours une relation de plus fort à plus faible, une relation de domination. Elle peut changer de mains indéfiniment sans que jamais un terme de la relation soit éliminé. Au moment d'une transformation politique, ceux qui s'apprêtent à prendre le pouvoir possèdent déjà une force, c'est-à-dire une domination sur de plus faibles. S'ils n'en possèdent aucune, le pouvoir ne tombera pas entre leurs mains, à moins qu'il ne puisse intervenir un facteur efficace autre que la force; ce que Marx n'admettait pas.

(OL 208)

It is a question again of the false harmony of opposites:

Les anarchistes sincères, entrevoyant à travers un brouillard le principe de l'union des contraires, ont cru qu'en donnant la domination aux opprimés ont détruit le mal.

(C3 284)

The mere reversal of historical roles cannot however destroy

¹This passage and Simone Weil's criticism of Marxism are commented on in Dufresne, op. cit., pp. 152-5.

evil because it denies the transcendent element:

La mauvaise union des contraires, mauvaise parce que mensongère, est celle qui se fait sur le plan où sont les contraires. L'union authentique est sur le plan au-dessus.

(C3 284)

In this particular case 'ce qui est au-dessus de la domination est le point d'unité, c'est-à-dire la limitation de la puissance' (C3 285).

Marx evidently felt the need for the transcendent element, and by denying its existence while making use of it, albeit illegitimately, he involved himself in a fundamental contradiction:

Le matérialisme révolutionnaire de Marx consiste en somme à poser, d'une part que la force seule règle exclusivement les rapports sociaux, d'autre part qu'un jour les faibles, tout en demeurant les faibles, seraient quand même les plus forts. Il croyait au miracle sans croire au surnaturel. D'un point de vue purement rationaliste, si l'en croit au miracle, il vaut mieux croire aussi à Dieu.

(OL 208)

Marxist transformation of Hegel's original idea of the progress of Spirit through the world into an ambiguous materialism above which Spirit still hovers is criticised in like terms by Raymond Aron:

Ceux que n'éclaire pas la grâce ont toujours eu peine à admettre la compatibilité entre le caractère intelligible de la totalité historique et le matérialisme. On comprenait la coïncidence finale de l'idéal et du réel, aussi longtemps que l'histoire elle-même passait

pour le Progrès de l'Esprit. Le matérialisme métaphysique, aussi bien que le matérialisme historique, rend étrange, sinon contradictoire, cette combinaison de nécessité et de progrès. Pourquoi cette ascension dans un monde livré aux forces naturelles ? Pourquoi l'histoire dont la structure est commandée par les rapports de production, devrait-elle aboutir à une société sans classes ? Pourquoi la matière et l'économie nous apportent-elles la certitude que l'utopie s'accomplira ?¹

For Marx of course the reply was obvious: the historic mission of the proletariat was to bring about salvation through suffering. This was automatic and an article of faith; the laws of the dialectic could not be questioned. In addition, the 'negation of the negation', the self-abolition of the proletariat which suffered as a negation of its own true self, would necessarily produce something positive; but whereas Simone Weil, with Aron, could accept the idea of the tendency of Spirit to self-improvement and eventual perfection, there was nothing to suggest that matter contained within itself a similar tendency:

Marx a prétendu "remettre sur ses pieds" la dialectique hégélienne qu'il accusait d'être "sens dessus dessous";

¹L'Opium des intellectuels (Paris 1968), p. 157. Aron has clearly adapted for the title of this work Simone Weil's definition of Marxism as 'un opium du peuple', since the passage where she refers to it thus, and Marx's original categorisation of religion as 'l'opium du peuple', are used as epigraphs to it.

il a substitué la matière à l'esprit comme moteur de l'histoire; mais 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 aspiration au mieux. (OL 65)

Other writers have of course pointed out this contradiction. R. C. Tucker for instance has indicated the meaninglessness on purely rational grounds of expecting good to come out of evil:

Capital becomes, therefore, the agency of capital's own destruction, and Hegel's notion of moral evil as the prime beneficent force on history lives on in Marxist thought. He sees in the dehumanization process itself the means of man's ultimate humanization. He entrusts to the force of greed that he recognises as absolutely evil the decisive responsibility for ensuring the triumph at the end of that which is constructive and good.¹

As we have already seen, this for Simone Weil is a false resolution of opposites, false because made on the same plane as the opposites themselves. Harmony is sought in the changing, the transient:

Il me semble qu'il y a peu d'idées plus complètement fausses. Chercher l'harmonie dans le devenir, dans ce qui est le contraire de l'éternel. Mauvaise union des contraires.

(C3 306)

But although the philosophers of the nineteenth century exploited

¹Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx (Cambridge 1961), p. 223.

this notion, they by no means created it; in Simone Weil's eyes such an illusion goes back to the origins of Christianity and the idea of 'la pédagogie divine' (C3 305) with its corresponding notion of spiritual progress. It is the Christian 'notion d'histoire comme continuité dirigée' (C3 306) to which she objects, and which inspired Marx and Hegel. She puts it graphically thus: 'La grande erreur des marxistes et de tout de XIXe siècle a été de croire qu'en marchant tout droit devant soi, on monte dans les airs' (C3 55).

This protest against the whole nineteenth century concept of history is a very significant one, and needs to be set out in some detail, as it relates to a number of concepts fundamental to Simone Weil's thinking. As a criticism of the ~~mf~~ idea of God controlling history, it finds expression in her anti-Jewish sentiments (See II, §4). God does not intervene in human events and change the laws governing the relationships between particles of matter according to a preordained, divine plan. This of course is only another expression of her conviction of the remoteness of God, his essential transcendence (See I, §2). It is also a protest against the idea that what passes for right in this world of the relative bears any real relationship to the Good. Popper makes the same protest:

The theory that God reveals Himself and His judgment in history is indistinguishable from the theory that worldly success is the ultimate judge and justification of our actions; it comes to the same thing as the doctrine that history will judge, that is to say, that future might is right.¹

History is written by the conquerors for both Simone Weil and Popper, and can never be more than the record of earthly conflict. In this respect, it is as idolatrous to suppose that God reveals himself in history as to reject the idea of God and substitute a teleological philosophy of secular history. Hegel's theory that God becomes God through self-actualisation in history lays the foundation stone for the historicism of Merleau-Ponty--and incidentally of all existential thinking--when he says:

Une philosophie de l'histoire suppose que l'histoire humaine n'est pas une simple somme de faits juxtaposés--décisions et aventures individuelles, idées, intérêts, institutions--mais qu'elle est, dans l'instant et dans la succession, une totalité en mouvement vers un état privilégié qui donne le sens de l'ensemble.²

Hegel is also partially responsible for the moral relativism of our time, for the idea that any event or custom must be

¹K. R. Popper, The Open Society and its Enemies, II: The High Tide of Prophecy (4th edn, London 1962), p. 271.

²M. Merleau-Ponty, Humanisme et terreur: Essai sur le problème communiste (Paris 1947), pp. 165-6, quot. Aron, op. cit., p. 204.

judged in the light of the society of the time, and that no moral absolutes are possible. Simone Weil, with her perception of the moral and spiritual value of certain ancient civilisations--the humanity of the Greeks, the mysticism of certain Chinese and Hindu texts (see PSO 58-9)--realised that the source of these different manifestations was the same in every case and that the moment in history at which they appeared was irrelevant:

Autant les fluctuations de la morale selon les temps et les pays sont évidentes, autant aussi il est évident que la morale qui procède directement de la mystique est une, identique, inaltérable. . . . Cette morale est inaltérable parce qu'elle est un reflet du bien absolu qui est situé hors de ce monde. (OL 211)

She was thus no easy prey either to moral relativism or to the idea of humanity's natural tendency to self-improvement. She would have appreciated Benda's comment on 'tout un groupe de critiques littéraires, lesquels, devant un ouvrage et de leur propre aveu, cherchent bien moins s'il est beau que s'il est expressif des "volontés actuelles", de "l'âme contemporaine"'.¹ He quotes with obvious distaste the remark made by Barrès:

¹J. Benda, La Trahison des clercs (Paris 1927), p. 124.

Voilà que les professeurs en sont encore . . . à discuter sur la justice, la vérité, quand tout homme qui se respecte sait qu'il faut s'en tenir à examiner si tel rapport est juste entre deux hommes déterminés, à une époque déterminée, dans des conditions spécifiées.¹

Simone Weil's protest against the worship of history is manifested in yet another way: her concept of time. In contrast to those philosophies which find comfort in the idea of a final purpose, and which are prepared to accept ~~the concept~~ personal destruction so long as the individual spirit lives on in some greater collectivity, or to those who look to personal immortality in one form or another, Simone Weil is acutely conscious of the limitations of human existence, and the impotence of man faced with the future. The idea that the future in some way belongs already to the present is a sin: 'Le cri de l'orgueil c'est "l'avenir est à moi", sous quelque forme que ce soit. L'humilité est la connaissance de la vérité contraire' (CS 47). In fact, 'tous les péchés sont des essais pour fuir le temps' (ibid.). God cannot in any way reveal himself in past history or in future progress, which is why a mediator is necessary: 'Un médiateur est néces-

¹Ibid., p. 118, n. 1.

saire parce qu'il n'y a aucun rapport possible entre Dieu et le temps' (C2 162). Time is experienced as something essentially painful; the desire for immortality is strong in man, and renunciation is immensely difficult. Renunciation is, precisely, submission to time, the acceptance of mortality (C2 122). The pain thus experienced is a purification:

Accepter le temps, descendre dans le temps. Quoi de plus douloureux pour la pensée? Il le faut.

 Fais entrer le temps dans mon âme comme une croix, comme des clous.
 La mort des êtres chers est une purification, si on ne croit pas à leur immortalité.
 (C2 201)

While transience and the tragedy of death can be a sign of submission to time, however, so can apparent endlessness. The disgust and exhaustion experienced in long physical toil can convey the burden of time just as effectively (C2 246). Both are means for overcoming time and entering into eternity:

Durée. Quand la douleur et l'épuisement arrivent au point de faire naître dans l'âme le sentiment de la perpétuité, en contemplant cette perpétuité avec acceptation et amour, on est arraché jusqu'à l'éternité.
 Croix.
 (C2 217)

The cross of Christ, symbol of suffering and of the meeting-point of eternity with time, is usually seen by Simone Weil as a perpetual cosmic event rather than as a single occur-

rence in history (see III, §7). Christ is 'l'être déchiré le long du temps' (C2 162), an archetypal figure whose sacrifice is continuous and eternal, an example of Eliade's 'éternel retour'.¹ The attraction of this static concept for Simone Weil is obvious, the eternity of being contrasting with the frailty and mortality of becoming. That Eliade attaches the myth of 'l'éternel retour' to the Greeks, who thus sought to 'satisfaire leur soif métaphysique de l'"ontique" et du statique',² only renders it more plausible since Simone Weil had learned early from Plato the value of absolute being as opposed to the world of change. This concept is essentially different from the Jewish idea of time taken over by Christianity, where the historical process is seen as all-important, and revelatory of the divine will (see I, §4). But for Simone Weil history could never reveal the purposes of God except in so far as the interplay of the forces governing the world were a sign of God's absence and therefore of his goodness (see I, §2). The idea of God's revelation in history was as foreign to her as Marx's march of history towards Communism and his mission

¹M. Eliade, Le Mythe de l'éternel retour (Paris 1949).

²Ibid., p. 133.

of the proletariat in the creation of a just society.

*

We must now turn back to Marx, and to what Simone Weil considered to be another, and perhaps the most important, aspect of his idolatry. He was not only a worship^{per} of history, convinced ~~that~~ antagonisms could be resolved in the future: his idol was primarily society, the future society:

Marx était un idolâtre. Son idolâtrie avait pour objet la société future; mais, comme tout idolâtre a besoin d'un objet présent, il la reportait sur la fraction de la société qu'il croyait sur le point d'opérer la transformation attendue, c'est-à-dire le prolétariat.

(OL 210)

But in order to ensure that the prophecy was fulfilled, Marx was obliged to conceive of the actions of the proletariat not in relation to any absolute good, but in relation to the final end which for Marx had taken its place. The era of justice and righteousness which was the goal of society was also to be its judge. In the light of this, anything which could bring about the promised end was right:

Il regardait comme juste et bon, non pas ce qui apparaît tel à un des esprits faussés par le mensonge social, mais exclusivement ce qui pouvait hâter l'apparition d'une société sans mensonge; en revanche, dans ce domaine, tout ce qui est efficace, sans aucune exception, est parfaitement juste et bon, non pas en soi, mais relativement au but final.

(OL 252)

This is the 'morale de groupe' which forbids the exercise of judgement upon itself, which, because it is literally 'beyond good and evil', is by definition right. Simone Weil defines it as the phenomenon of 'mise à part', by which she means that the normal associations and relationships made between things are lacking in this instance. It is particularly common in anything concerning the collectivity:

Notamment toutes les fois qu'intervient le social, les sentiments collectifs, guerre, haines nationales, de classes, patriotisme d'un parti, d'une Eglise etc. Tout ce qui est couvert du prestige de la chose sociale est mis dans un autre lieu que le reste et soustrait à certains rapports.

(C2 311)

Simone Weil recognised this as a psychological phenomenon common to all peoples at all times, but nevertheless links it with Marx's worship of society, of which this is an instance. She does not seem, however, to make much of a more conspicuous example, that is, Hegel. Her references to Hegel are limited to a few in connexion with Marx (e.g. C3 306, OL 47 & 65), and the approving observation of his idea of 'le corps rendu comme fluide par l'habitude' (OL 121) applied to the submission of the body to the machine which it serves. But of his theories of the State and of his identification of the interests of the collectivity with right, there seems to be no mention. Hegel's

definition of the State as 'the self-certain absolute mind which acknowledges no abstract rules of good and bad, shameful and mean, craft and deception'¹ is surely a supreme example of the tendency to 'mettre à part', to put things beyond the opposites of good and evil.² The declaration that 'the State is the Divine Idea as it exists on earth. . . . We must therefore worship the State as the manifestation of the Divine on earth . . .'³ and that 'the State is the march of God through the world'⁴ surely means nothing if it is not an exhortation to social idolatry. It leads straight on to the idolatry

¹Hegel, System der Sittlichkeit, trans. Sterrett, § 258, quot. E. Cassirer, The Myth of the State (Yale 1946), p. 264.

²Her comments on that other exponent of the principle 'beyond good and evil', Nietzsche, are limited to a letter to André Weil, in which she admits that the philosopher inspires in her 'une répulsion invincible et presque physique'. This seems to be based on his 'orgueil sans mesure' and on his incomprehension of the Greeks, particularly their concept of proportion and sense of the tragic in man's life. On Dionysos too, 'il s'est complètement trompé La démesure, l'ivresses cosmique, et Wagner n'ont rien à voir là-dedans' (SS 231-2, and variants pp. 240-1 & 247-8).

³Hegel, 'Theories of the State' (from Hegel, Selections ed. J. Loewenberg, 1929), quot. Popper, op. cit., p. 31.

⁴Ibid.

present in the concept of the modern totalitarian State, where the religious character of the State removes it not only from all criticism, but from all possibility of being wrong. As Aron, writing this time about the Communist party, puts it:

certaines/ L'histoire du parti est l'histoire sacrée, qui aboutira à la rédemption de l'humanité. Comment le parti pourrait-il participer des faiblesses inhérentes aux œuvres profanes? Tout homme, même bolchevik, peut se tromper. Le parti, d'une/façon, ne peut ni ne doit se tromper, puisqu'il dit et accomplit la vérité de l'Histoire.¹

The notion that the party by definition can do no wrong must inevitably be attributed in essence to Hegel. And this is surely one of the most revealing manifestations of what we have termed idolatry. For to Simone Weil idolatry was always of a social nature, was always concerned in one way or another with the pressures of society upon the individuals which compose it: 'L'objet du véritable crime d'idolâtrie est toujours quelque chose d'analogue à l'Etat' (E 103). Simone Weil's definition of idolatry here has much in common with George Orwell's definition of nationalism:

¹Aron, op. cit., p. 160. Sartre makes use of the idea that the party is an end in itself, rather than merely a means to power, in the conflict established between Hugo and Hoederer in Les Mains sales. See e.g. 5e tableau, sc. 3.

By 'nationalism' . . . I mean the habit of identifying oneself with a single nation or other unit, placing it beyond good and evil and recognising no other duty than that of advancing its interests.¹

Before him, Benda had strongly criticised the prevalence of the same phenomenon:

L'Etat, la Patrie, la Classe sont aujourd'hui franchement Dieu; on peut même dire que pour beaucoup (et plusieurs s'en font gloire) ils sont seuls Dieu. L'humanité, par sa pratique actuelle des passions politiques, exprime qu'elle devient plus réaliste, plus exclusivement réaliste et plus religieusement qu'elle n'a jamais été.²

But long before either of them, Plato had depicted what Simone Weil considered to be the archetype of the object of social idolatry: the Great Beast of the Republic (VI, 493). Plato's image of the collective as an animal whom its masters (i.e. the leaders) attempt to pacify by studying its moods and habits is expanded by Simone Weil into a symbol of universal import; it is perhaps legitimate to ask whether she does not, in fact, make too much of it by interpreting the animal as society in general. It is surely valid to see in Plato's image merely his aversion for the form of democracy

¹'Notes on Nationalism', Collected Essays, Journalism And Letters, III, (London 1968), p. 362.

²Op. cit., p. 52.

which was being practised in Athens at the time, and which was responsible for Socrates' death. The animal is then merely the masses, the unruly mob with its collective instincts and fickle sympathies. The whole art of government is to study the ~~the~~ psychology of the mob in order to be able to keep it under the control of the leaders.¹

Be that as it may, Simone Weil clearly attaches great importance to this image, and refers to it constantly throughout her writings. In the commentary on this section of the Republic, she notes two main points (SG 91): firstly that the opinions of the 'gros animal' are not necessarily contrary to truth. But they are essentially 'opinions',² that is,

¹This interpretation tallies with Demosthenes' use of the same image, though this is not necessarily significant. Addressing the people of Athens, he analyses their troubles and says of their leaders: 'They have mewed you up in the city and entice with these baits, that they may keep you tame and subservient to the whip.' οἱ δ' ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ πόλει καθάρξαντες ὑμᾶς ἐπάγουσιν ἐπὶ ταῦτα καὶ τιθασέουσιν χειροῖσιν αὐτοῖς ποιοῦντες.

(3rd Olynthiac, 31)

Shakespeare uses the same image in Coriolanus, ~~Act~~ 4. 1.

²Simone Weil's concept of 'opinion' is an interpretation of Plato's epistemology. See Republic, VI, 509-11 and VII, 514-8. It is presumably influenced by that of Alain, who warns against 'la puissance des illusions, surtout collectives' (Propos sur la religion, p. 71)..

judgements which have been formed as a result of social pressures, and thus, while they may sometimes concur with the truth, they are quite unrelated to it. Simone Weil gives the following example: 'Si on a envie de voler et qu'on se retienne, il y a une grosse différence entre se retenir par obéissance au gros animal ou par obéissance à Dieu' (SG 91).

The second point concerns the difficulty of distinguishing the motive for an action, of knowing ~~whether~~ whether it is inspired by God or the 'gros animal', since we are so utterly ~~xxx~~ under the influence of the latter. 'En fait tout ce qui contribue à notre éducation consiste exclusivement en choses qui à une époque ou à une autre ont été approuvées par le gros animal' (SG 91; Simone Weil's *italics*). She gives as an example

L'histoire; les hommes dont le nom est parvenu jusqu'à nous ont été rendus célèbres par le gros animal. Ceux qu'il ne rend pas célèbres restent inconnus et de leurs contemporains et de la postérité, (ibid.)

an illustration of the worship of history discussed earlier in this chapter.¹

¹It is interesting to compare this with Popper's passionate denunciation of what is normally taught as history, and which, in his view, is 'nothing but the history of international crime and mass murder', leaving aside 'the life of the forgotten, of the unknown individual man; his sorrows and joys, his suff-

Given this insistence on the social nature of idolatry, it is interesting to note that Simone Weil's references to the Devil are almost invariably linked with social temptations. She frequently cites the temptation of Christ by the Devil, where the kingdoms of the world are offered to him, as the supreme temptation (SG 90, IP 76, PSO 55, etc.; Matt. iv. 8-10) and in the commentary on the passage of the Republic discussed above as in an essay on Marxism (OL 236) this episode is associated with the 'gros animal'. Power is the gift of the Devil (CS 282) because it creates the illusion of omnipotence, the illusion that limits do not obtain, and so the Devil is, in another sense, infinity (C3 287).¹ His power is such that the social temptation is much more difficult to

ering and death . . . all the history which exists, our history of the Great and the Powerful, is at best a shallow comedy; it is the opera buffa played by the powers behind reality It is what one of our worst instincts, the idolatrous worship of power, of success, has led us to believe to be real' (op. cit., pp. 270, 272). This comparison is the more fascinating in the light of Popper's attack on Plato as the father of modern totalitarianism, in the first volume of this work. In spite of this, it is clear that he and Simone Weil had much in common.

¹This is an interpretation of Simone Weil's note 'si le seul Dieu, c'est le diable' (C3 287), coupled with the idea that 'on échappe à la limite en montant à l'unité ou en descendant dans l'illimité' (C3 140).

overcome than the temptations of the flesh. It is in this sense that Simone Weil interprets Plato and St. Paul:

Platon sentait surtout très vivement que la matière sociale est un obstacle infiniment plus difficile à franchir que la chair proprement dite entre l'âme et le bien. C'est aussi la pensée chrétienne. Saint Paul dit qu'il n'y a pas à lutter contre la chair, mais contre le diable

(OL 236)¹

It is the devil who exploits the collective instinct:

La chair pousse à dire moi et le diable pousse à dire nous; ou bien à dire, comme les dictateurs, je avec une signification collective. Et, conformément à sa mission propre, le diable fabrique une fausse imitation du divin, de l'ersatz de divin.

(AD 22-3)

This false divinity in which the devil clothes the collectivity gives the illusion that society is somehow transcendent to the individual, that it is an absolute on earth:

Il n'y a sur terre qu'une seule chose qu'il est en fait possible de prendre pour fin, parce que cela a une espèce de transcendance à l'égard de la personne humaine, c'est le collectif.

(C3 205)

Characteristically, she finds reality in an inversion of this:

'Chacun est dans la société l'infiniment petit qui représente l'ordre transcendant au social est infiniment plus grand' (C3 84). Once again true strength, strength which is not of this

¹Presumably a reference to Ephesians vi. 11-12.

world, is to be found in the apparently weak and insignificant. It will make no conquest on earth, but it is the only path to a knowledge of the Good.

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Given Simone Weil's views on social idolatry, and the power of collective values over the individual, it is not surprising that she should take exception to Durkheim and his sociological school. There are only a few references to Durkheim in Simone Weil's writings, but they have rather more significance than this would suggest, both to a study of Simone Weil and the general intellectual atmosphere of the time.

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Firstly she considers that Durkheim/theories do in fact contain an element of truth, in that they expose the difficulty of distinguishing between true religion and idolatry:

Si stupide que soit la théorie de Durkheim confondant le religieux avec le social, elle enferme pourtant une vérité; à savoir que le sentiment social ressemble à s'y méprendre au sentiment religieux. Il y ressemble comme un diamant faux à un diamant vrai, de manière à faire méprendre effectivement ceux qui ne possèdent pas le discernement surnaturel. (AD 15)¹

¹It is important to note that in this passage Simone Weil is not objecting to the use of religious terminology in the evaluation of society; in her equation of society with the Devil, and in her use of the idea of mediation through society (III, §5), she does the same thing. 'Le religieux' in this passage must be taken to mean God, the transcendent good which

The feeling that the individual is only a part of a greater whole, and yet is unable to encompass with his intelligence the society to which he belongs creates an illusion of similarity between the social and the supernatural; Simone Weil is thus ready to excuse Durkheim his error, at least to a certain extent (Cl 207).

But his theory of the God whom men worship being an extension of the primitive tribe's projection of itself is in many ways based on the flimsiest of evidence. Why should we accept, for instance, his assertion that society is the highest reality in the intellectual and moral order that we can know by observation?¹ Is it really correct to say that the division of time into units--days, months, years etc.--is a social phenomenon?² Surely the social phenomena involved, and the celebrating of festivals and such like, are simply man's

is utterly other than society. Nor is any harmony possible between God and the Devil, since they are not on the same plane (the opposites are resolved 'en montant à l'unité (God) ou en descendant dans l'illimité (the Devil)' (C3 140)).

¹Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse (2e éd'n revue Paris 1925), p. 23.

²Ibid., p. 15.

adaptation to what he finds around him? The phases of the moon and the succession of the seasons can hardly be attributed to man as a social being.

In addition, in discussing the influence of society upon its members, he seems to make no distinction between the sort of momentary mass hysteria which can lead a group of people to do something which they would not normally do,¹ and the traditions and culture of a society which exercise a constant influence upon all who form part of it.² This is the very distinction which Simone Weil makes between the evil influence of society, that which leads to idolatry, and that which in a society leads to the concept of 'enracinement' (see III, §5). Imogen Seger, in a review of Durkheim's position, says that if he had known of the concept of 'culture' as later developed by American anthropologists, he would have used it in many instances where he used the word 'société', and thus have saved himself many misunderstandings.³ He seems

¹Op. cit., pp. 300-1.

²Ibid., pp. 303-4.

³Durkheim and his Critics on the Sociology of Religion (Columbia Univ., 1957), p. 34.

only too ready, nevertheless, to equate the collective element in crowd phenomena and that in the 'collective unconscious', to borrow Jung's term. Simone Weil's idea of the apparent weakness and real strength of the individual in the face of ^osociety is taken up by Essertier in a comparison between 'l'âme de la foule' and 'la conscience collective':

L'âme de la foule, si on l'étudie sans parti-pris, révèle précisément des caractères opposés à ceux qu'on attribue à la conscience collective: il y a moins dans le tout que dans les parties et il n'y a pas autre chose. Par rapport aux individus qui la compose, une foule est toujours une diminution, une soustraction; elle représente une complexité psychologique moindre et même minima; son originalité n'est qu'apparente ou, tout au plus, superficielle.¹

But to the individual this is by no means obvious, and for Simone Weil it is only too easy for the individual to feel that the apparently transcendent reality forming the social element is in fact transcendent. 'Le sentiment social de Durkheim, s'il n'est pas le sentiment religieux, en est bien réellement un ersatz' (C2 130). False transcendence, embodied in the collective, is thus identified with the Devil; as indicated in a cryptic note: 'Le Diable est le collectif.

¹Psychologie et sociologie, essai de bibliographie critique (Paris 1927), pp. 17-18. Quot. Seger, op. cit., p. 23.

(C'est la divinité de Durkheim)' (CS 272). Aron has the same difficulty in believing in the truly transcendent nature of Durkheim's divinity. As he says,

Il me paraît proprement inconcevable de définir l'essence de la religion par l'adoration que l'individu voue au groupe car, au moins à mes yeux, l'adoration de l'ordre social est précisément de l'impiété. Poser que les sentiments religieux ont pour objet la société transfigurée, ce n'est pas sauver, c'est dégrader l'expérience humaine dont la sociologie veut rendre compte.¹

The idea of social idolatry at which we thus arrive is something akin to Popper's definition of totalitarianism as 'the closed society'--society contemplating its navel. While it would be rash to assert that Durkheim's theories had any influence on the modern development of the totalitarian State, it is perhaps justifiable to call him a product of his age. Imogen Seger comments on the putting into practice of some of his theories, and the transformation they underwent in the process:

Durkheim's thesis that a religion to fulfil all its essential functions, does not need other gods than society, is being tried out experimentally on a grand scale in our time. Not, however, in the scientific manner Durkheim envisaged. The new authorities which replace the old transcendent authority are by no means

¹Les Etapes de la pensée sociologique (Paris 1967), p. 361.

the 'real society' which encompasses 'ideal society' and which Durkheim wanted to find and to define by scientific investigation. They are on the contrary a mythically clouded biological concept, 'people' or 'race', or the eschatological image of the perfect classless society to be achieved via the Communist state.

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 Durkheim did not contribute to the apotheosis of the socialist society which began in Russia some five years after the publication of Les Formes élémentaires, but the two events are related products of a leading trend of the age.¹

A survey of the development of totalitarianism as Simone Weil saw it, and a study of the theoreticāl notion of social idolatry put into practice will therefore be both pertinent and illuminating.

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¹Op. cit., pp. 53-4 & 72.

II, §2

TOTALITARIANISM I:
ROME & 'LE ROI SOLEIL'

The totalitarian State as we know it in the twentieth century is generally considered to be a modern phenomenon, differing from previous autocratic regimes in several important respects. This is not to say that it does not have roots in the past; writers differ considerably in their search for the origins of totalitarianism, but most are prepared to make comparisons with either ancient autocracies or more modern theories of the State. It is ironic indeed, when we think of Simone Weil's great love for Plato, that he should have been considered by Popper to have outlined the first totalitarian State in his Republic;¹ ironic again that Rousseau, whom Simone Weil thought to be one of the greatest exponents of the principle of individual liberty, should be held responsible for the ideas that hardened into totalitarianism over a century later. We shall be considering Simone Weil's interpretation of Rousseau in the next chapter; but for the moment perhaps it would be as well to attempt some sort of definition of totalitarianism, so as to have a focal point from which to examine Simone Weil's

¹K. R. Popper, The Open Society and its Enemies (London 1952). Simone Weil would of course have scorned such an interpretation since, following Alain, she did not consider the Republic to be a political treatise but a dialogue on the composition and development of the human soul (see SG 105).

development of the concept.

A useful starting-point can be found in the definition given by Friedrich and Brzezinski, who present a clear idea of what they mean by the term in stating six features common to all totalitarian States:

The 'syndrome', or pattern of interrelated traits, of the totalitarian dictatorship consists of an ideology, a single party typically led by one man, a terrorist police, a communications monopoly, a weapons monopoly, and a centrally directed economy.¹

They go on to say, however, that these always form an organic system where totalitarianism is concerned, and warn of taking one individual trait, applying it to a system or regime, and concluding it is totalitarian. Since it is a fact that no ancient autocracy ever contained all these features--for example, the Roman emperors had no need of a party or an ideology to support them²--they conclude that totalitarianism is a modern phenomenon.

Simone Weil has, inevitably, a less academic approach,

¹Carl J. Friedrich & Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy (Cambridge, Mass. 1956), p. 9.

²This claim rather leaves aside the whole question of the relationship between religion and the State in Rome.

and her analysis is on several points at variance with this definition. For her the concept is closely linked with that of the 'gros animal', the Great Beast representing the sum of collective values and the annihilation of the individual, and as such is capable of appearing at all times and in any age. Its principal concern is existence, and since the existence of anything else is intolerable, existence means unlimited expansion:

Le gros animal a pour fin l'existence. 'Je suis celui qui suis'. Il le dit aussi. Il lui suffit d'exister, mais il ne peut ni concevoir ni admettre qu'autre chose existe. Il est toujours totalitaire.

(C3 312)

Totalitarianism means total surrender or death. Hannah Arendt considers imperialism to be an example of this kind of unlimited expansion.¹ Expansion is a built-in law of capitalism, and when this reached national boundaries it was inevitable that the businessman should turn politician and direct his gaze outwards towards territories giving scope for further expansion.² Totalitarianism is essentially dynamic, con-

¹The Origins of Totalitarianism (Cleveland, Ohio 1958), p. 126.

²Ibid.

cerned with self-preservation at the expense of all opposition.

But while it is constantly outward-looking in its desire to exterminate opposition, the totalitarian State is also essentially narcissistic; for Simone Weil it was merely an extreme form of social idolatry. The State becomes an absolute, absorbing all spiritual values at the same time as it saps the vital energy of the individuals subjected to it. The first manifestation in history of the spirit of social idolatry was to be found in the Hebrew people; we have dealt with this in a separate chapter (II, §4). Then came the Romans, particularly the Romans at the founding of the Empire; it is these whom we must now consider, bearing in mind Friedrich and Brzezinski's definition of totalitarianism, and the fact that they do not consider the Romans to have formed a totalitarian State. Later we shall turn to what Simone Weil held to be other manifestations of the totalitarian spirit: the development of the modern State under Richelieu and Louis XIV, the imperial designs of Napoleon and later imperialism, and finally modern totalitarianism in the guise of Fascism and Communism, which Simone Weil had observed at first hand.

Simone Weil's distaste for ancient Rome and all it represented, and her almost complete rejection of the fruits of Roman civilisation, are well known. The whole idea of a Roman 'civilisation' appears to her as a giant hoax. Rome has succeeded in convincing the Western world of its enormous debt to her simply by exterminating all cultural activity flourishing before her arrival. The Romans' physical and spiritual rootlessness has resulted in the uprooting of the Mediterranean world:

Les Romains étaient une poignée de fugitifs qui se sont agglomérés artificiellement en une cité; et ils ont privé les populations méditerranéennes de leur vie propre, de leur patrie, de leur tradition, de leur passé, à un tel degré que la postérité les a pris, sur leur propre parole, pour les fondateurs de la civilisation sur ces territoires.

(E 48)

It is significant that 'déracinement' is, in Simone Weil's analysis, the greatest ill of modern Europe, significant too the scorn which she pours on the Romans' 'déracinement'. It is of course not the fact of their being 'déracinés' which excites her anger, but their audacity in claiming to impose a civilisation on conquered peoples. There is no civilisation where there is rootlessness. She implies as much in the following comment on the Romans' lack of spirituality: 'Peut-être un seul peuple antique absolument sans mystique: Rome.

Par quel mystère ? Cité artificielle faite de fugitifs . . . ' (C2 240-1). In her assignment of a spiritual vocation to each people of antiquity, the Romans are excluded (SG 77). Genuine spirituality was unknown in Rome, at least before the influence of Christianity laid a thin veneer of civilisation over its barbarity: 'Les Romains furent complètement sourds et aveugles à tout ce qui est spirituel, jusqu'au jour où ils furent plus ou moins humanisés par le baptême chrétien' (AD 183). Elsewhere however she denies the very possibility of Rome's baptism: 'Entre l'esprit de Rome et celui du Christ il n'y a jamais eu fusion' (E 125).

These are hard words indeed, and paradoxical when we consider the importance of the Roman tradition in the development of Christianity. Some points are easier to understand than others, however. When Simone Weil accuses the Romans of frequent cruelty and treachery in their methods of conquest, we know what she is talking about, since the historical records are there.¹ The account of the siege of Numantia, for example,

¹Dufresne emphasises the historical acceptability of the material she used: 'Ses propos les plus sévères sur les Romains s'appuient sur des textes dont l'authenticité est certaine et sur des faits historiques qui semblent incontestables.' Op. cit., p. 213.

gives ample proof of cold-blooded resistance to any humanitarian considerations, any display^a of courage or loyalty by the Numantines and their allies, and the most blatant treachery and lack of honour. A complete account of the siege can be found in Appian,¹ and Simone Weil uses his record for her own comments in her article on the origins of Hitlerism (EH 32-3). What appalled her particularly about the cruelty of the Romans was that it was a matter of calculated policy, adopted because it brought results:

Nul n'a jamais égalé les Romains dans l'habile usage de la cruauté. Quand la cruauté est l'effet d'un caprice, d'une sensibilité malade, d'une colère, d'une haine, elle a souvent des conséquences fatales à qui y cède; la cruauté froide, calculée et qui constitue une méthode, la cruauté qu'aucune instabilité d'humeur, aucune considération de prudence, de respect ou de pitié ne peut tempérer, à laquelle on ne peut espérer échapper ni par le courage, la dignité et l'énergie, ni par la soumission, les supplications et les larmes, une telle cruauté est un instrument incomparable de domination.

(EH 28)

Thus it was that the Numantines' repeated offers for battle were met by a continuation of the siege; the capitulation of the Carthaginians met not by clemency but by the destruction^u of their city.

¹Historia romana, VI, §xv.

It is sometimes argued that, when once the initial conquest had been made, the Romans exerted no direct pressure on the newly conquered peoples to 'Romanise'.¹ This may be true in a sense, but it is certain that moral blackmail was imposed by the system of rewards by titles and honours for increased identity with Roman ideals. In the same way, French colonial policy was not to punish directly the colonised peoples for not accepting a French way of life, but to make the rewards to the successful 'évolué' so great that no man of ambition would be able to withstand them. A similar system has existed in Russia in the post-Stalin era with regard to the Christian Church: profession of Christianity is punished only indirectly, by making membership of the party and consequent social advancement incompatible with it.

Even worse than the actual cruelty, every atrocity perpetrated by the Romans was accompanied by protestations of clemency: 'Ils ne commettaient jamais de cruautés, ils n'accordaient jamais de faveur, sans vanter dans les deux cas leur générosité

¹See e.g. Camille Jullian, Histoire de la Gaule, (Paris 1929), VI, 53: 'Rome a proposé en exemple ses institutions et ses mœurs, elle ne les a pas imposées.'

et leur clémence' (E 123) thus making the recipient indebted to them for brutality as for concessions. Simone Weil admits that Athens too dealt harshly at times with her subject peoples. At least this was never thought of as something to be proud of, but merely the necessary course of politics:

Sans doute Athènes eut des velléités d'impérialisme qui firent d'ailleurs sa perte; et il s'en faut de beaucoup que la perfidie et la cruauté ait été absente de sa politique. Mais personne . . . ne regardait de telles pratiques comme étant, du point de vue de la morale, louables ou indifférentes . . .

(EH 52)

But what of Roman influence on the cities and peoples once they were conquered? Here we are on much less firm ground, because to a certain extent we are inside the Roman tradition and have little evidence of what went before in order to assess the degree of civilisation destroyed or brought by Rome. And all evidence, as Simone Weil says, is essentially presented from the Roman point of view: 'Sur les Romains, on ne possède absolument rien d'autre que les écrits des Romains eux-mêmes et de leurs esclaves grecs' (E 192). Why should we bother to question their testimony? There is no incentive to do so, she adds, since 'ce ne sont pas les Carthaginois qui disposent des prix de l'Académie ni des chaires en Sorbonne' (ibid.). An exaggeration perhaps, particularly as she com-

pletely ignores Josephus' account of the Romans, but she makes her point. It is a pity however that she does not seem to have known of some of the questionings of the value of Roman civilisation which were going on at the time. She often gives the impression that she is fighting a lone battle against prejudice, and needing to use exaggeration and over-emphasis to make her point. Victor Chapot, for example, is far from unaware of the drawbacks of the Roman influence. In commenting on the effects of Roman occupation on Gaul; he says it produced

a society that was merely polished and refined, very much preoccupied with its own comfort but very little influenced by any lofty ideal. Its religion was scepticism allied to ritualistic formulae and conventional practices. Its sentiments were not, as a rule, wicked or hateful, but rather mean and commonplace.¹

His analysis of the price paid for the comforts of civilisation by the subject peoples would surely have been welcomed by Simone Weil:

Wherever this culture struck root it was dearly paid for. By imposing her own ideas and usages, and the style of decoration in which her own life was lived, Rome finally destroyed the people's souls and nipped in the bud original

¹The Roman World, trans. E. A. Parker (London 1928), p. 322.

civilisations which would have developed. The world never needed a uniform mould, a cosmopolitan human type, produced at the cost of intelligence, which could only yield commonplace results--as is proved conclusively by the example of Rome.¹

Simone Weil did however know of the criticism of Jullian, who, writing at the same time, is sceptical as to the permanent value of the Roman occupation in the civilisation of Europe.² While it is difficult to establish what might have developed in the territories occupied by Rome, other regions which never formed part of the Empire have not exactly remained in utter darkness:

Les beautés de l'Illiade et les leçons de Socrate, le droit écrit, la vie municipale, le travail industriel, la morale chrétienne sont arrivés à la moitié de l'Europe sans qu'elle ait été annexée par César ou par Charlemagne, et je ne m'aperçois pas qu'elle ait dénaturé les leçons du Midi en ne les recevant pas de maîtres armés.³

Simone Weil clearly appreciated such criticism. Her objections to the idea that Gaul was a cultural desert before the arrival of the Romans are set out in L'Enracinement (189-90); in default of much concrete evidence of pre-Roman Gallic civil-

¹Chapot, op. cit., p. 424.

²Simone Weil mentions Jullian in E 191.

³Jullian, op. cit., p. 522.

isation she calls the Druids to witness the level of culture of the times. Since we know through Julius Caesar's account that the studies of the Druids lasted twenty years, she concludes that there must have been a wealth of material in the form of religious and metaphysical poems for them to study during so long a period.¹ The Druids are often mentioned by Simone Weil as an example of the Romans' lack of toleration; they were necessarily eliminated as a spiritual danger to the central authority:

Les Romains ne pouvaient rien tolérer qui fut riche en contenu spirituel. L'amour de Dieu est un feu dan-

¹J.J. Tierney is more sceptical concerning the 'studies' of the Druids, although he is of course speaking of a rather earlier time: 'We know that the Celts at this period, say 80 BC, were still practising divination by human sacrifice, and preserving the skulls of slain enemies by nailing them as trophies to the porches of their houses. Is it possible that they were at the same time living on the rarefied levels of Greek philosophy? . . . The alleged studies of the Druids are simply a programme of Stoic philosophy including some of their specific doctrines such as that of the periodic destruction of the universe by fire or water . . .'. 'The Celtic Ethnography of Posidonius' (Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy 1960), p. 223, quot. Anne Ross, Pagan Celtic Britain (London & New York 1967), p. 56. Simone Weil of course considered the material of their studies to be native products of literature and philosophy.

gereux dont le contact pouvait être funeste à leur misérable divinisation de l'esclavage. Aussi ont-ils impitoyablement détruit la vie spirituelle sous toutes ses formes. . . . Ils ont exterminé tous les Druides de Gaule, anéanti les cultes égyptiens . . . (E 232-3)

It is important to note however that although Simone Weil supposes the spiritual contribution of the Druids to Celtic life to have been considerable, she is not categorical on this point, and is very little tainted by the romantic elaborations of the Druids' role still prevalent at the time. She conceded that human sacrifice may well have been practised among the Druids, but compares ritual or punitive sacrifice with the Roman practice of gladiator fighting for the amusement of the rabble (E 190). She recognises too the political nature of the extermination of the Druids: they were wiped out, she says, 'pour crime de patriotisme' (ibid.). It is clear from Roman commentators and modern scholarship that the Druids were in fact a political power, the centre of Celtic resistance to the Romans, and as such a menace to the Roman Imperial power.¹

¹See e.g. Anne Ross, op. cit., pp. 52 ff. Also Jullian, op. cit., p. 4: '. . . aucune des mesures prises contre ces prêtres ne menaçait leurs dieux et leurs dogmes. Il s'agissait pour l'Etat de mettre fin à une société religieuse qui avait fait corps avec la patrie et la liberté gauloises . . .'

Thus Roman religious 'tolerance' was essentially political in nature, since it allowed to exist only those institutions which were innocuous to the central authority: 'On a dit que les Romains étaient tolérants. Ils toléraient en effet toutes les pratiques religieuses vides de contenu spirituel' (E 232). For example, 'les Romains pouvaient facilement tolérer le culte de Mithra, orientalisme truqué pour snobs et femmes oisives' (ibid.). This is perhaps a harsh if amusing judgement on a cult which after all challenged Christianity for a short period of time, but it is perfectly true to say that it was compatible with imperial worship.

The fact was of course, and Simone Weil saw this very well, that with the increasing centralisation of the Roman Empire, and the intensification of the State cult, all forms of religion became subordinate to the worship of the Emperor. There is a curious ambiguity in the Roman imperial worship. On the one hand it was purely political, a way of cementing loyalty to a central authority, and appealing to an authority higher than human to render it valid. On the other hand the Roman Empire, as Simone Weil points out, appropriated all religious and spiritual values to itself in the figure of the Emperor. The mere practice of deification is by no means confined to the Romans,

and the idea certainly did not originate in Rome, although Frazer attempted to prove that it was native to Italy.¹

Bailey considers it to be simply a degradation in the concept of anthropomorphism, and a political rather than a religious measure:

The picture it gave was not of a figure of supreme moral or spiritual worth, but that of a wielder of supreme power in the State: it was a political not a personal apotheosis.²

The fact that Simone Weil did not object particularly to the deification of the Egyptian rulers, for example, indicates that it was not the actual idea of deification which she could not accept, but rather the totalitarian concepts which in Rome went with it. The Roman Empire was totalitarian because it demanded a complete allegiance and a sacrifice of spiritual freedom which a temporal authority has no right to demand (Cf also AD 50). In its total demands, as

¹The Golden Bough (abridged edn, London 1949), Chap. 13. W. Warde Fowler claims that the only obvious trace of divine kingship is to be found in the taboos of the Flamen Dialis. See Roman Ideas of Deity in the last century before the Christian era (London 1914), p. 96.

²C. Bailey, Phases in the Religion of Ancient Rome (London 1932), p. 141.

we shall see later, Simone Weil likens it to Nazism: 'L'Empire romain était un régime totalitaire et grossièrement matérialiste, fondé sur l'adoration exclusive de l'Etat, comme le nazisme' (LR 84). It was not simply an adoration of God through the medium of the State, but rather a question of setting the State up as God and trying thereby to abolish all true spirituality: 'Rome a voulu supprimer toute pensée de Dieu et ne permettre aux hommes d'adorer que la puissance de l'Etat' (CS 171). This was social idolatry, the reduction of God to a social unit:

L'Empire romain était . . . idolâtre. L'idole était l'Etat. On adorait l'empereur. Toutes les formes de vie religieuse devant être subordonnées à celles-là, aucune d'elles ne pouvait s'élever au-dessus de l'idolâtrie.

(AD 184)

These sentiments are echoed by Bailey:

The crystallisation of the worship of Rome and her destiny in the persons of the Imperial household was almost an abandonment of true religion, not so much because the individual emperors were unworthy of respect and veneration . . . but because in so narrow and official a conception all wider and more spiritual thoughts of religion as a right relation to unseen powers were inevitably lost.¹

Rome, for Simone Weil, was Plato's Great Beast: 'Rome,

¹Op. cit., p. 142.

c'est le gros animal matérialiste, n'adorant que soi' (C3 106). It is inevitable that she should also identify it, in Kabbalistic tradition, with the Beast of the Apocalypse, although she sometimes identifies it rather with the woman sitting on the Beast. Thus in one passage she says, when speaking of the relationship between the Christian Church and the Roman Empire: 'La Bête de l'Apocalypse est presque sûrement l'Empire' (LR 84), whereas in a later text she affirms:

Bien que Rome ne soit pas, comme on le dit parfois, représentée par la Bête, il ne semble pas douteux que c'est elle qui est représentée par la femme pleine des noms du blasphème, ivre du sang des saints, mère des fornications et abominations de la terre, assise sur sept collines.

(SG 170)

Simone Weil is undoubtedly referring here to the Beast of Revelations 17. 3-18, and it would seem from the mention of the seven mountains upon which the woman is sitting (v. 9) and the 'great city' (v. 18) that she is right in this latter interpretation.¹

¹J. Hastings makes the following observations on both the Apocalyptic Beasts and the woman sitting on the seven hills. Commenting on Rev. 13 and 19. 11-21 he says: 'The two beasts are not identical with the Roman Empire and Emperor worship, but are the representatives of these in the spirit-world; they are not an abstract symbol of Rome but a concrete (personal) embodiment of Rome. They are demonic beings, pictures of the evil spirit-power. . . . But though distinct from Rome the

This Great Beast, 'n'adorant que soi', is a symbol of idolatry, and thus a refusal of mediation. The collective always takes over where individual and authentic spirituality is suppressed, since the desire for worship can never finally be erased from man's consciousness. But instead of the relationship of the individual with his God, we have the circular relationship between a collectivity and itself. As Simone Weil says, 'un Romain pensait toujours "nous"' (C2 243). To those who say that all peoples of the ancient world recognised only collective values, she replies:¹ 'En réalité, cette erreur

beasts are not apart from it. We mistake the Jewish idea of the angelic counterpart if we give it independent significance. The beast's power is Rome's power, and Rome's fall is the fall of the beast. Yet the two are not one, and it is possible that the writer used the figure of Ch. 17 to express his belief that Rome was to fall at the hand of its own evil genius, by the fruits of its own sin. It was the woman sitting on the beast, against whom the beast itself would at last turn in hatred.' (A Dictionary of the Bible (Edinburgh 1902), IV, s.v. Revelation, Book of, V: Teachings of the Book: (3) The Fall of Satan.)

¹Simone Weil is not of course the only one to have considered the adoption of collective values the cause of degradation to the Romans. Jullian (op. cit., p. 546) expresses the same sentiments when speaking of the effect of Romanisation on Gaul: 'Réunissez les hommes en une foule, faites-les sentir, penser, parler ensemble, dans un grand spectacle, ou dans une réunion publique; il est bien rare que de ces impressions ou de ces efforts collectifs il sorte une idée originale, un sentiment supérieur. La mise en commun des facultés humaines aboutit trop souvent à ce qu'elles soient abaissées.'

n'a été commise que par les Romains, qui étaient athées, et par les Hébreux; et par ceux-ci, seulement jusqu'à l'exil à Babylone' (E 169).

Worship of the collectivity engendered a certain servility in relationship between men, or between the worshipper and the Emperor, which Simone Weil was not slow to point out. Obviously if the object of cult is at the head of a political system, and that system is the source of well-being or otherwise to the citizens encompassed by it, a certain obsequiousness becomes a natural and necessary part of life. Here it is perhaps relevant to compare the mindless obedience to the ruler which all totalitarian States produce. The ruler does not need to be consistent in his demands; indeed, it is better if he is not, so as to keep his subjects in a constant state of turmoil and suspense.¹

Simone Weil expressed this relationship as that of a slave to his master: even on a social level the Romans had no conception of the 'vertu religieuse d'obéissance' (E 231), and the Emperor possessed his subjects in the same way as a master did his slaves. Since Roman society was based on slavery, a

¹Camus' Caligula illustrates this admirably.

slave-master would find it quite natural to be, in his turn, enslaved by the Emperor (E 232-3). Slavery had touched and degraded all sectors of public and private life, a fact which Simone Weil stresses:

Chez [les Romains] l'esclavage avait pénétré et dégradé toutes les relations humaines. Ils ont avili les plus belles choses. 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. Ils ont déshonoré l'amour; être amoureux, pour eux, c'était ou bien acquérir la personne aimée comme propriété, ou bien, si on ne le pouvait pas, se soumettre servilement à elle pour en obtenir des plaisirs charnels, dût-on accepter le partage avec dix autres. Ils ont déshonoré la patrie en concevant le patriotisme comme la volonté de réduire en esclavage tous les hommes qui ne sont pas des compatriotes. Mais il serait plus court d'énumérer ce qu'ils n'ont pas déshonoré. On ne trouverait probablement rien. (E 230)

Perhaps the most poignant comment that can be made on Simone Weil's feelings on Roman slavery is her confession to Joë Bousquet, that after her year's factory experience, 'je me suis toujours sentie une esclave, au sens que ce mot avait chez les Romains' (PSO 81).

If all social relationships were tainted with slavery, was anything good at all to be found in Roman history? Very little, in Simone Weil's opinion. She gives as the sole

'exemple de bien parfaitement pur' the account of the slave-owner, whose slaves, during the proscriptions under the Triumvirate, tried to shield him from arrest and were tortured as a result. The master, seeing his slaves being tortured from his hiding-place, came out and gave himself up in order to save them, and was immediately killed (E 196). In addition to this anonymous slave-owner, she would except Marcus Aurelius and the rule of the Antonines from her general condemnation, but these exceptions would not go much further. Roman Stoicism she found a grotesque parody of its Greek counterpart. It was no more than a flexing of the muscles of the will, a sort of endurance test: 'L'esprit de compétition sportive permet de tout endurer sans aucune vertu véritable. Le stoïcisme romain avait dégénéré^é en cet esprit' (CS 179).¹

Simone Weil does not say much on the early phases of Rome's history, and the form which its religion took before the imperial cult was established. Since she never undertook to give a systematic history of Rome, she cannot be expected to do so, but her approach to the Romans is fairly typical of her approach to all phenomena. She homes on a particular

¹See further III, §1 below.

feature in delight or disgust, analyses it deeply, but makes no attempt to put it in historical perspective or to make any allowances for time, place or personality. Yet had she delved more deeply into the early history of Rome, it is unlikely that she would have found much to impress her. The primitive animism which constituted Rome's religion in the pre-Imperial age was laudable in so far as it gave prominence to the virtues of obedience, hierarchy and family life, but was in the end dull, and lacking in spiritual elevation. From earliest times Roman religion was plagued by an excessive attention to ceremony and ritual, and possessed neither the plastic grace of the Greek pantheon, since anthropomorphism was a later import into Italy, nor the Greek capacity for metaphysical speculation which existed side by side with their polytheism. And after all, this is not the period for which Rome became famous. Rightly or wrongly she must stand on the evidence of her Empire, since this was the age of her glory. Simone Weil could reconcile neither the motives behind this empire-building, nor the means by which it was pursued, nor the results which it obtained, with a desire for truth and a concern for spiritual values. Given what she demanded of a civilisation, it was inevitable that she should

reject Rome and all it stood for as an example of the degradation caused by social idolatry.

*

The Roman Empire, and the fruits of it which we have examined above, laid the foundations, in Simone Weil's view, of the modern totalitarian State. The spirit of Rome, passing through the Catholic Church, next appeared in France under Louis XIV and Richelieu. 'Le Roi Soleil' in his admiration for the reign of Augustus followed closely the Roman model, and any lack of success was due to incompetence rather than to lack of ruthlessness. Simone Weil associates him with Napoleon in the following passage:

Napoléon et Louis XIV ont visiblement été obsédé par le souvenir d'Auguste, et tous les procédés de Rome ont paru bons à imiter. Si leurs efforts n'ont pas été couronnés par un succès durable, un certain défaut d'habileté en est cause, mais non pas certes un excès de scrupule.

(EH 54-5)

As in the Roman Imperial State, we have an absolute ruler responsible to no one and a subject people dependent for their existence on his every whim and fancy. The formula 'L'Etat, c'est moi', even if apocryphal, expresses perfectly the fusion of State and ruler, expressed by Louis himself thus: 'Quand on a l'Etat en vue, on travaille pour soi. Le bien de

l'un fait la gloire de l'autre'.¹ This complete identification of ruler and State, while implying a considerable sense of duty in the King, meant that any disagreement with the King was tantamount to treason, and criticism of person or policy out of the question.² Unquestioning obedience was exacted from his subjects, an obedience which Simone Weil characterises as 'une soumission qui ne mérite pas le beau nom d'obéissance' (EH 82), just as the Romans had developed a sense of servility rather than of obedience. One has only to read any account of life at the court of Louis XIV to know that this is true.³ The adulation and complete submission of almost every member of the court to the King during a period of no less than fifty-five years appears absurd and distasteful to the modern mind--although the twentieth century is not above fixing its adoration on the strangest objects at times. An instance of the abasement of spirit brought about

¹Mémoires quot. S. Skalweit, 'Political Thought' in The New Cambridge Modern History, V, The Ascendancy of France 1648-88, ed. F. L. Carsten (Cambridge 1961), p. 98.

²See F. L. Carsten, 'Introduction: The Age of Louis XIV' in ibid., pp. 9-10.

³See e.g. J. Lough, 'France under Louis XIV' in ibid., p. 240.

in all whom this regal pantomime touched is provided by a comment of Mademoiselle, the King's niece: 'Il est comme Dieu, il faut attendre sa volonté et tout espérer de sa justice et de sa bonté, sans impatience, même, afin d'avoir plus de mérite'.¹

As with the deification of the Roman emperors, however, it is not the resulting adoration which Simone Weil attacks, but rather the fact that the object of this adoration should be identified with the State, the confusion of absolutes with a temporal, collective power. She makes a comparison between the Spanish concept of monarchy, and the French:

La soumission totale à un roi n'a pas abaissé les Espagnols au XVI^e siècle et au début du XVII^e comme elle a abaissé les Français sous Louis XIV, parce que ce qu'ils adoraient, c'était leur propre serment et la vertu de loyauté; ils pouvaient (conformément à l'étiquette) baiser les pieds du roi ou de n'importe quel supérieur sans rien perdre de leur fierté. Au lieu que sous la personne de Louis XIV c'est le pouvoir d'Etat qu'on adorait; il en résulte un abaissement effrayant.

(EH 110)

Here she differs from critics such as Boulenger who considers that the rule of Louis XIV resembles the Spanish monarchy or oriental despotism, precisely because of its authoritarian

¹Quot. J. Boulenger, Le Grand Siècle (Paris 1948), p. 211.

nature. Boulenger holds that the resulting evil of this kind of rule was the complete divorce of the monarchy from the people by implying that the stuff of monarchy was of a totally different nature from that of ordinary people.¹

Simone Weil pays scant attention to the native ability which, combined with a special conjunction of circumstances, allowed the man to impose himself on his subjects as divinity itself, thus breaking with the past history of the French monarchy. His personal grace and attraction must have been considerable. Even Saint-Simon acknowledged his supremacy in the art of kingship, of embodying regality, although his views were more usually coloured by Louis's suppression of the power of the nobility. But then Simone Weil was never impressed by talent alone, and she could never have accorded genius to a man whose personal glory, however much identified with that of France, was of such importance to himself.

She recognises however that many developments had to take place before the modern totalitarian State could be formed;² under Louis XIV it was but in embryo. Although

¹Op. cit., p. 186.

²Although she attributes to Louis XIV's reign the name of totalitarian in e.g. EH 14.

the power of the State, centralised as never before, increased enormously during his reign, it never reached the high degree of development necessary for totalitarianism (EH 304). The unpredictability necessary to such a regime in its dealings with its own people as well as abroad, was also lacking. Since the leaders in a totalitarian State are, in their own eyes, merely executing the laws of history, and these are to be 'interpreted', there are no reliable criteria by which human beings can order their lives with a view to remaining 'within the law'. Since the law is fluid and constantly changing, arbitrariness is an essential part of totalitarian rule, and terror ensues, from which no man is safe.¹ Simone Weil recognises that this unpredictability was not cultivated as a means of government at least with regard to foreign countries, potential allies and enemies, under Louis XIV (EH 38). It is true however that the technique was there in embryo, particularly as regards the King's immediate entourage. The devotion of the Court to their monarch was built on the assumption that the King's will was absolute and not to be questioned, and did not necessarily obey the laws governing the behaviour

¹Arendt, op. cit., pp. 464 ff.

of ordinary people. Nevertheless the King's will and not any supposed laws of history was the relevant factor.

Certain other features of totalitarianism Simone Weil considers however to have been present under Louis XIV. In spite of the lack of modern techniques, propaganda played an important part in the building up of the royal image:¹ 'Liselotte, la seconde Madame, n'écrivait-elle pas qu'on ne pouvait publier aucun livre sans y insérer les louanges du roi?' (EH 15). (This in itself can hardly have had any considerable effect on the general public, most of whom could neither read nor write. In fact, the impact of Louis XIV's reign on the peasantry seems to have been felt mainly through taxation and other measures necessary to promote the interests of the Court. The King's personal influence was felt less than any previous monarch's, particularly after the removal of the Court to Versailles.)

The other feature of Louis XIV's rule which Simone Weil considered totalitarian was his foreign policy, which she compared to Hitler's (EH 15). In her eyes it was built on an

¹Propaganda with regard to foreign seems to have been neglected by Louis XIV, unlike Richelieu, who used it extensively. See G. Zeller, 'French Diplomacy and Foreign Policy in their European setting', New Cambridge Mod. Hist., V, 208.

insatiable pride, a great capacity to humiliate, and a complete disregard for conventional notions of honour governing international relations. She cites as examples the taking of Strasburg in contempt of a previous treaty, the devastation of the Palatinate, and the unprovoked attack on Holland which almost destroyed a flourishing civilisation (EH 15). It is certain that in his foreign policy Louis XIV's main concern was for the glory of France and consequently for his own glory, and that this came before any consideration for the people of France or for the quality of the civilisation he was attacking.¹ The lack of honour governing the King's foreign policy is underlined by C. G. Picavet, in his consideration of the principles which directed it. He writes, 'reconnaissons . . . qu'il avait manifesté de bonne heure de grandes dispositions pour l'art de tourner les traités'.² The King was surrounded by historiographers and jurists who spent their time manipulating their monarch's designs so as to make them appear legitimate. As Louis himself stated, 'il n'est point de

¹See Zeller, art. cit., p. 207.

²La Diplomatie française au temps de Louis XIV (Paris 1930), p. 170.

clause si nette qui ne souffre quelque interprétation'.¹

In agreement with most modern critics, however, Simone Weil considered the State as it developed under Louis XIV to have been the creation of Richelieu (EH 14).² She discusses the minister's power over the King in a letter to a friend (EH 113-6) in which she attributes it, at least in part, to a judicious playing on the idea of the King's assassination. Once his position was assured, Richelieu used all his considerable powers and energies to build up his concept of the State as object of devotion and of supreme importance, beyond even that of the King.³

Sauf erreur, la notion d'Etat comme objet de fidélité est apparue, pour la première fois en France et en Europe, avec Richelieu. Avant lui on pouvait parler, sur un ton d'attachement religieux, du bien public, du

¹Mémoires, quot. Picavet, op. cit., p. 169. Zeller (art. cit., p. 208) holds however that Louis 'made ceaseless efforts to keep his engagements, though with debatable success'.

²See e.g. J. B. Wolf, 'The Emergence of the Great Powers 1685-1715', The Rise of Modern Europe, ed. W. L. Langer (New York 1951), p. 98.

³The development of a loyalty to the State surpassing that accorded to the monarch himself is noted with reference to the Colberts in Wolf, op. cit., p. 98.

pays, du roi, du seigneur. Lui, le premier, adopta le principe que quiconque exerce une fonction publique doit sa fidélité toute entière, dans l'exercice de cette fonction, non pas au public, non pas au roi, mais à l'Etat et à rien d'autre.

(E 102)

Richelieu had the clarity of mind to realise that 'le salut des âmes s'opère dans l'autre monde, au lieu que le salut de l'Etat ne s'opère que dans celui-ci' (E 103). Instead of drawing what Simone Weil considers to be the Christian conclusion, and realising that to the State, being limited, only a limited loyalty was due, Richelieu came to the opposite conclusion, making the State into an absolute, demanding absolute allegiance (ibid.). This led him, in Simone Weil's eyes, to the crime of idolatry:

Ce cardinal, en posant comme un absolu une chose dont toute la réalité réside ici-bas, commettait le crime d'idolâtrie. . . . L'objet du véritable crime d'idolâtrie est toujours quelque chose d'analogue à l'Etat.

(ibid.)

The Devil's temptation of temporal power, refused by Christ, was accepted by Richelieu. The State is not a natural object of adoration; but as we saw earlier (p.185) the Great Beast is total in its demands, and since by the law of expansion which it obeys it eventually destroys all else, it takes to itself the human need of an object of worship:

L'Etat est une chose froide, qui ne peut pas être aimée; mais il tue et abolit tout ce qui pourrait l'être; ainsi on est forcé de l'aimer, parce qu'il n'y a que lui.

(E 102)

In terms of the historical reality of France, this is demonstrably true. Richelieu began the work of centralisation, killing in France 'tout ce qui n'était pas Paris' (EH 82), which has continued up to the present day. That the centralised power was in the hands of the King meant only that the King had taken over the function of the State, and the initiative for this measure, in spite of the great glamour of Louis XIV's reign, came from Richelieu rather than from the King. As Boulenger writes,

après Richelieu, le pouvoir se trouva mieux concentré que jamais il ne l'avait été entre les mains du Roi; et par les intendants, agents soumis du gouvernement, l'administration centrale s'ingéra partout. La monarchie dite absolue, telle qu'elle fonctionna en France au XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles, date bien moins de Louis XIV que de Richelieu.¹

As the absolute power of the King and the centralisation of his kingdom were first conceived under Richelieu, so did the new servility of the King's subjects first see the

¹Op. cit., p. 112.

light under Louis XIV's minister. The base flattery to which an author had to have recourse in order to be accepted horrified Simone Weil. She gives as an example Corneille's dedication to Richelieu of his tragedy Horace, written 'en termes dont la bassesse est un pendant à l'orgueil presque délirant qui inspire la tragédie' (E125). She gives however no credit to Corneille for his realisation that such a dedication was merely an irksome convention of the times. As he says, 'Notre siècle a inventé une espèce de prologue . . . qui ne touche point au sujet et n'est qu'une louange adroite du prince'.¹ She points instead to Théophile de Viau, who suffered, she implies, while Corneille prospered, because of the former's refusal to abase himself by flattery (E 104). While it is certain that Théophile was persecuted as much for his Protestant background and alleged free-thinking as for anything else, it remains probably true to say that his spirit was more independent of the times than was that of Corneille; certainly he was not an admirer of Ancient Rome in the way Corneille was. For Corneille, imbued with the spirit of Rome,

¹Quot. M. Pellisson, Les Comédies-Ballets de Molière (Paris 1914), p. 4.

a sovereign's subjects belonged to him in the way that a master possessed his slaves; his actions could in no way be modified by his subjects' wishes, and their treatment depended entirely on his beneficence. This is exemplified in the line from Cinna, where Maxime is speaking to Auguste:

Rome est à vous, Seigneur, l'empire est votre bien.
(II. i)

Because of the servility which this attitude implied, Simone Weil considered Corneille, in accordance with the general atmosphere of his time, to have reduced the concept of patriotism to one of idolatry. This debased idea of patriotism, inherited from the Romans, has persisted to the present day, which explains why the notion of patriotism is taught through the medium of such authors as Corneille (E 125). It is the idolatry by a people of itself, and has nothing to do with the 'compassion pour la patrie' (E 147) which Simone Weil held to be true patriotism: 'Jeanne d'Arc disait qu'elle avait pitié du royaume de France' (ibid.). Such a concept has nothing to do with pride of achievement or glorious exploits.¹ A characteristic rejection of superficial success

¹We shall examine more fully Simone Weil's concept of true patriotism in a later chapter (III, §5).

and the values of a merit-conscious (and by her definition, idolatrous) world can be seen in the following lines where she describes the object of true patriotism as

une chose à aimer non pour sa gloire, son prestige, son éclat, ses conquêtes, son expansion future, mais en elle-même, dans sa nudité et sa réalité, comme une mère dont le fils est entré premier à Polytechnique aime en lui autre chose.

(EL 54)

We are a long way here from the aims and achievements of 'le grand siècle', where the individual was sacrificed to the collectivity, and the collectivity deified as an absolute end in itself. The achievements of this pursuit of absolutism and the glories of the age are perhaps simply too obvious to be acceptable to Simone Weil, for whom all conventional success was a lie. Her opinions are of course vindicated on consideration of the misery of the majority of Louis XIV's subjects, and the fact that at the end of his reign his projects devoted purely to prestige had ruined the country. Boulenger's assessment of the achievements of Richelieu provides a fair comment on the sacrifice made by the French people on the altars of glory:

Il n'a pas cherché . . . à rendre la justice plus juste ou les agents de finances moins voleurs, bref à améliorer la condition sociale des habitants du royaume; il s'est seulement proposé de rendre les fonctionnaires plus soumis et les institutions plus souples, de remplir

de plus d'argent les coffres du gouvernement, et en somme de faire de la France un meilleur instrument de force et de puissance extérieures entre les mains du monarque. . . . Ce qui paraissait à un Richelieu le but même de la politique, c'était la gloire de la collectivité, de la France, autrement dit: la gloire du Roi.¹

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¹Boulenger, op. cit., p. 113. Henri Hauser, in La Pensée et l'action économiques du cardinal de Richelieu (Paris 1944), gives a picture of Richelieu which interprets his ambitions and talents in a very different light. He implies that, although for economic reasons Richelieu wanted peace above all, and a policy directed towards the sea with all its opportunities for trade, he was obliged to turn towards the interior of France and to sustain a perpetual series of wars in continental Europe. Richelieu was thus able to achieve very little of what he had set out to do. (p. 193)

II, § 3

TOTALITARIANISM II:
ROUSSEAU TO HITLER

As we noted at the beginning of the previous chapter, the theories of Rousseau have been considered by some critics to be at the origins of the modern totalitarian State. In the light of Simone Weil's admiration for Rousseau, we should therefore at least state these criticisms, and attempt to assess the validity of her own interpretation of the writer. There is a certain difficulty of lack of direct reference: although Simone Weil was obviously very attracted by Rousseau's philosophy, there is only one passage in her published works in which she expounds her ideas in anything like a full form (in the essay entitled 'Note sur la suppression générale des partis politiques', EL 126 ff). Elsewhere references are merely fragmentary.

She begins by stating that 'quelques chapitres mis à part, peu de livres sont beaux, forts, lucides et clairs comme Le Contrat Social' (EL 127-8). But since she adds: 'On dit que peu de livres ont eu autant d'influence. Mais en fait tout s'est passé et se passe encore comme s'il n'avait jamais été lu' (EL 128), we can assume that the treatise is at least susceptible to different interpretations, if not to downright misunderstandings.

The essay begins with a statement of the two 'évidences'

which form the starting-point to Rousseau's thought:

L'une, que la raison discerne et choisit la justice et l'utilité innocente, et que tout crime a pour mobile la passion. L'autre, que la raison est identique chez tous les hommes, au lieu que les passions, le plus souvent, diffèrent.

(EL 128)

From this Simone Weil concludes that if a group of individuals reflects, each one separately, on a given problem, the points on which they agree will be in conformity with reason, while their disagreements will arise from their passions. The general will of a people--as opposed to a majority will, which is only the sum of individual passions--will thus in the majority of cases be just and reasonable through the neutralisation of the interest of the individual as such. She notes that this is not necessarily so, and that the will of a group, if it is unjust, is no better in Rousseau's eyes than the unjust will of an individual. But the idea that individuals converge reasonably and diverge passionately implies this conclusion.

There are a number of obvious objections which can be made to this argument. Firstly, the Cartesian divorce of reason from passion is by no means an observable fact of human nature. All men are motivated by a mixture of the two so in-

tricate that it is in practice impossible to identify anything as 'reason' or 'passion'. Secondly, were one able to identify 'reason' as a motive of human behaviour, there is no guarantee that this would in fact bring them together. What unites men more than anything else is self-interest; they herd together because they have something to defend, because there is safety and power in numbers. The man who wants justice at the expense of self-interest is not only rare but invariably a voice crying in the wilderness. The fact that men come together to defend what is theirs can hardly be put forward as a proof of man's rationality, since many animals have devised a better group-security system than ours. Simone Weil, with her acute suspicion of the collectivity, sees the danger inherent in seeking justice in the group, when she warns against 'la passion collective':

Il est tout à fait évident que le raisonnement de Rousseau tombe dès qu'il y a passion collective. Rousseau le savait bien. La passion collective est une impulsion de crime et de mensonge infiniment plus puissante qu'aucune passion individuelle. Les impulsions mauvaises, en ce cas, loin de se neutraliser, se portent mutuellement à la millièème puissance. La pression est presque irrésistible, sinon pour les saints authentiques.

(EL 129)

She admits, moreover, that since the absence of collective passion is a condition for democracy, democracy has never

been known in France (EL 131). She then goes on to analyse ways in which collective passion could be eradicated from public life, and--since such is the subject of the essay under consideration--concludes that the suppression of political parties is of the first importance, since

il est impossible d'examiner les problèmes effroyablement complexes de la vie publique en étant attentif à la fois d'une part à discerner la vérité, la justice, le bien public, d'autre part à conserver l'attitude qui convient à un membre de tel groupement. (EL 139)¹

This is a characteristic attitude, and we recognise here the authentic tone of her continuous warning against the evil influence of the collective. Is there then a conflict between this position and the one noted at the beginning of the essay, where individuals converge in truth and diverge in opinion? Not necessarily, since in the former attitude a distinction is

¹It is interesting to note that one of the articles of faith of twentieth-century Fascists is also the abolition of parties, though for a totally different reason. Whereas Simone Weil considers that they engender collective passion and blind devotion, the Fascists wished to abolish the splitting up of different groups within the State. See Sir Oswald Mosley's proposals for the British Fascists in F. L. Carsten, The Rise of Fascism (London 1967), and Mussolini's articles (actually written by Giovanni Gentile) on Fascism in the Enciclopedia Italiana (1932), quot. H. S. Cariel ed., Sources in Twentieth Century Political Thought (London 1964).

drawn between the individual thinking independently and the same individual subjecting his reasoning to the party-line, whereas in the latter the individual reaches his conclusion independently and then shares what he has found with other like-minded individuals.

It is difficult to see, however, how collective passion in social organisation can be avoided. For not only political parties but any group of individuals who come together for a purpose and with clearly defined views in common is potentially totalitarian. And if one supposes a priori that the general will embodies truth and justice, anyone who deviates from the general will is a traitor and an enemy to the public good. Even Rousseau admitted that the general will did not mean the will of all. As Talmon remarks, the general will is no more than an expression of man's higher, better self;¹ therefore even if he is constrained to obey the general will he cannot complain of coercion since he is merely obeying, albeit unknowingly, his own true self. In Rousseau's own words:

Afin donc que le pacte social ne soit pas un vain formulaire, il renferme tacitement cet engagement, qui

¹J. L. Talmon, The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy (London 1955), pp. 40ff.

seul peut donner de la force aux autres, que quiconque refusera d'obéir à la volonté générale y sera contraint par tout le corps: ce qui ne signifie autre chose sinon qu'on le forcera d'être libre.¹

Liberty here means civil liberty as opposed to the natural liberty of the state of anarchy.² The over-zealous desire of the eighteenth-century thinkers that all men should be happy and free is in itself an invitation to totalitarianism:

The very idea of a self-contained system from which all evil and unhappiness have been exorcised is totalitarian. The assumption that such a scheme of things is feasible and indeed inevitable is an invitation to a régime to proclaim that it embodies this perfection, to exact from its citizens recognition and submission and to brand opposition as vice or perversion.³

Simone Weil recognised the difficulties of putting into operation such a system as Rousseau's, as we have seen. In her view, France had only seen one brief moment of democracy as Rousseau conceived of it, namely in the early days of the Revolution, when the leaders could truly be said to embody the

¹Rousseau, Le Contrat social, I, 470.

²Ibid., I, 500 ff.

³Talmon, op. cit., p. 35. Camus voices similar doubts as to the message of the Contrat social: 'Le Contrat social s'achève . . . dans la description d'une religion civile et fait de Rousseau un précurseur des sociétés contemporaines, qui excluent non seulement l'opposition, mais encore la neutralité'. (L'Homme révolté in Essais, Bibl. de la Pléiade, 1965, p. 525.)

will of the people (EL 130-1). But although she recognised the difficulties, she does not seem to have been aware of the perversions such a philosophy might undergo. It is not necessary to state that Rousseau never intended violence to become the method of imposing the general will; but it is difficult to see how the ambiguities and sheer impracticalities inherent in his ideas could have resulted in less than misunderstandings. Simone Weil's apparent explanation, that collective passion degrades even the finest theories, is at least as accurate and pertinent as any other.

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We now turn to another manifestation of totalitarianism, that which is found in imperialism. The heyday of imperialist expansion is now over, in the Western world at any rate, but its results are still very much with us, and the new nations which have sprung into life in Africa and Asia as a result of having European nationalism thrust upon them--their very boundaries bear witness to this--may well be the foundation of the next turbulent cycle in world history. Simone Weil, in an article written in 1937¹ foretold with a strange accuracy and on

¹'Le Sang coule en Tunisie', EH 336-8.

a note of triumph the effects of a world war on the colonised peoples:

Quand je songe à une guerre éventuelle, il se mêle, je l'avoue, à l'effroie 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.

(EH 338)¹

Imperialism is, on the face of it, an excellent example of the expansionist impulses of the Great Beast. The insight of Cecil Rhodes, who was struck with horror at the thought that there were geographical limitations to his otherwise boundless aspirations, illustrates this only too well. We have already noted Hannah Arendt's equation of imperialism with capitalist expansionist policies:

Imperialism was born when the ruling class in capitalist production came up against national limitations to its economic expansion. The bourgeoisie turned to politics out of economic necessity; for if it did not want to give up the capitalist system whose inherent law is constant economic growth, it had to impose this law upon its home governments and to proclaim expansion to be an ultimate political goal of foreign policy.²

¹Cf. Lewis Nkosi, 'Black Power or Souls of Black Writers' in South African Writing Today (Harmondsworth 1967), p. 196.

²Op. cit., p. 216. See above, p. 185.

But there is another side to the coin, a facet of imperialism other than mere economic gain, however important. True, the capitalist system helped to justify expansion and exploitation, since the profit-motive was thus considered respectable and indeed necessary in dealings with foreign countries, particularly with those who had the misfortune to possess a culture other than the recognised European model, and who were thus 'barbarians'. But, particularly in the case of France, prestige played a very important part in the history of colonial development. Growth was all-important, and even if this was not financially profitable it was an irrefutable good. As Simone Weil puts it: 'Le passé n'est que l'histoire de la croissance de la France, et il est admis que cette croissance est toujours un bien à tous égards' (E 121). We have already seen (II, §2) how large a part considerations of prestige played in the policies of Richelieu and Louis XIV. Henri Brunschwig, in his work on French imperialism, quotes an illuminating extract of a letter written by Richelieu to the French ambassador in London on the subject of Guiana:

Vous sentez parfaitement qu'il serait impossible de céder aux demandes du Portugal, moins à cause de l'intérêt réel qu'il y a pour nous à conserver un territoire qui ne peut offrir d'avantages véritables que dans un avenir

éloigné, que parce que la dignité du roi et de l'Etat serait blessé par une concession qui ne serait justifiée par aucun droit quelconque de la part du Portugal. Cette considération est de la plus grande force, car, dans notre situation actuelle, tout acte de condescendance serait pris pour de la faiblesse.¹

The role of the colonies here was obviously not so much to bring in revenue as to augment the glory of France abroad and to act as calculable assets in the great competition for world supremacy which France was engaged in with the other colonial powers.

Simone Weil comments on the way in which certain of these territories had been acquired in much the same terms as she uses when condemning the Roman or Hitlerian use of treachery and bad faith in their foreign relations. The essays on Morocco, one entitled 'Le Maroc, ou de la prescription en matière de vol' (EH 331-35), and the other 'Un peu d'histoire à propos du Maroc'² are cases in point. In them she states the facts of Morocco's seizure by France and, with heavy sarcasm, denounces the breaking of treaties (in this case the Act of Algeciras) and the selling of the Egyptian people which

¹Mythes et réalités de l'impérialisme colonial français 1871-1914 (Paris 1960), p. 13.

²Syndicats, no. 17, 4 fév. 1937, p. 3. See Appendix A.

was necessary to its acquisition, and points out that the provocation to Germany of this act was not a negligible factor in the outbreak of the First World War.

Treachery and the breaking of promises were also current in France's later dealings with her colonies. In another article for Syndicats she compares the plight of the Roman slaves who revolted rather than continue to fight their masters' battles for no improvement in their condition with that of the colonial peoples who provided cannon-fodder for the First World War:

L'état s'est conduit de la même manière envers les peuples coloniaux. En 1914, il s'agissait de les jeter dans la fournaise, d'en faire de la chair à canon; on leur a promis alors de belles réformes pour après la victoire. La guerre finie, on n'a rien changé au régime colonial. Preuve que d'opprimé à oppresseur il ne faut jamais changer des réalités contre des promesses.¹

Elsewhere she discusses the welfare of the peoples subjected to colonial rule. She comments bitterly in her essay 'Le Sang coule en Tunisie' on the double-standard applied by normally well-meaning people to nations removed from their understanding by geographical distance and narrow sympathies,

¹'La grève des plébéiens romains', Syndicats, no. 23, 18 mars 1937, p. 4.

giving the familiar arguments:

. . . Ces gens-là--jaunes, noirs, 'bicots'--sont habitués à souffrir. . . . Depuis le temps qu'ils crèvent de faim et qu'ils sont soumis à un arbitraire total, ça ne leur fait plus rien. . . . Au fond, ils ont un caractère plus servile. Ils sont faits pour la servitude. Sans quoi ils résisteraient. (EH 336)

Distance is a very important factor; the further away an injustice is, the less it touches the everyday routine, and consequently the less unjust it seems. Thus political leaders are able to ignore even the worst oppression when it is not taking place on their soil. The international workers' movement is a mockery when the majority of the workers have no idea of the conditions under which the proletariat in less favoured parts of the world has to work:

Quand les métallos de Billancourt sont en difficulté, Léon Blum reçoit une délégation; il se dérange pour aller à l'Exposition parler aux gars du bâtiment; quand il lui semble que les fonctionnaires grognent, il leur adresse un beau discours par radio tout exprès pour eux. Mais les millions de prolétaires des colonies, nous tous, nous les avons oubliés.

(ibid.)

Even supposing the working conditions of the colonised proletariat were as good as those of their fellow Europeans, however, even supposing ill-treatment were negligible, colonialism would still be morally wrong. Not only is it wrong absolutely in itself, but it is especially wrong for France:

Toute autre nation avait à la rigueur le droit de se tailler un Empire, mais non pas la France. . . . Quand on assume, comme ~~mm~~ a fait la France en 1789, la fonction de penser pour l'univers, de définir pour lui la justice, on ne devient pas propriétaire de chair humaine.

(E 146)¹

But given that France now has her Empire, what is to be done? Simone Weil dismisses the possibility of educating the public of the colonial power to the sufferings endured by her subjects, and likewise the notion of a successful uprising, given the difficulties of reconstructing a society afterwards. It is to her credit that even in 1938 she was maintaining that the best way of freeing the colonised peoples was by progressive emancipation, by making them partners and collaborators in their own interest--and that of the colonising power--instead of preserving the master-slave relationship which had existed up until then (EH 353, 5). It is interesting that she regards with suspicion the idea of simply granting citizenship to the colonised population, which would create an aura of 'equality' while completing the process of destruction

¹Durkheim made a similar point concerning the Dreyfus affair when he wrote that since all nations had learned the rights of the individual from France, the violation of these rights by France was moral suicide. Essays on Sociology and Philosophy ed. Kurt H. Wolff (Cleveland 1960), p. 36.

wrought on their native culture and institutions:

Je ne pense pas, comme beaucoup des hommes de bonne volonté qui s'intéressaient aux populations colonisées, que l'idéal fût pour elle de devenir des provinces françaises peuplées de Français moyens. La considération des droits des individus, si importante qu'elle soit, ne me paraît pas plus importante que la conservation de trésors collectifs constitués par les traditions, les mœurs et l'esprit des populations soumises à la conquête coloniale. . . . Même au temps où les Français étaient des citoyens, avoir un empire fait de 110 millions de citoyens français au lieu de 40 millions de citoyens et 70 millions de sujets, ne m'aurait pas paru une solution souhaitable.¹

The era of domination is over. France must put an end to the expansion which should never have taken place, come back within her frontiers, forget the impulse to glamour and glory which had been a part of her thinking for so long. But it is characteristic that Simone Weil does not waste time on the evils that have been. Instead she turns compassionately to the victims and begins to work out a scheme for them by which they may preserve what is left of their past and throw

¹ Lettre (inéédite) à Dermenghem. See Appendix B. With reference to the French North-African colonies, we should mention the articles which Camus wrote for Alger républicain under the heading 'Misère de la Kabylie', which were published in 1939. In them he describes vividly the sufferings of the Kabyles, with the object of removing some of the ignorance concerning the colonies then prevailing in France. (Essais, Bibl. de la Fléiade, 1965, pp. 905-938.)

down new roots for the future.

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Simone Weil was as uncompromising in her rejection of the fully-fledged totalitarian State of our own day as she was in all previous manifestations of totalitarianism. She knew at first hand and watched with consternation the development of Nazi Germany, visited Italy in 1937 and 1938, and had followed closely the development of communism both in France and elsewhere. It seems even that she had been suspected of Nazi sympathies during the few months she spent in the United States, a suspicion which she repudiates with scorn in a letter to Jean Wahl:

Ce qui a pu donner lieu à ces bruits, c'est que je n'aime pas beaucoup entendre des gens parfaitement confortables ici traiter de lâches et de trâîtres ceux qui en France se débrouillent comme ils peuvent dans une situation terrible.¹

One can readily imagine her defending collaborators from attack by people who could afford to be objective several thousand miles away from the conflict.

Like many people in the years leading up to the Second

¹Deucalion, no. 4, oct. 1952. See Appendix C.

World War, Simone Weil considered Fascism and Communism to be basically alike, whatever their superficial differences; together with complete disorder, they are 'les expressions à peine distinctes, équivalentes, d'un mal unique' (E 157). In her essay 'Ne recommençons pas la guerre de Troie' (EH 256-72) she analyses the main structure of both systems and pronounces them almost identical:

De part et d'autre, c'est la même mainmise de l'Etat sur presque toutes les formes de vie individuelle et sociale; la même militarisation forcée; la même unanimité artificielle, obtenue par la contrainte, au profit d'un parti unique qui se confond avec l'Etat et se définit par cette confusion; le même régime de servage imposé par l'Etat aux masses laborieuses à la place du salariat classique.

(EH 261)

Friedrich and Brzezinski state that this view prevails today in the United States and in Western Europe.¹ They do not, however, adopt this idea, mainly because the avowed aims of the Fascist and Communist State are different. Communism aims at a world revolution of the proletariat, while Fascism dreams of world dominance by a particular people or nation.²

¹Op. cit., p. 7.

²It is true to say that originally their theories of the State were quite different, as Lenin for example foretold and expected the gradual 'withering away' of the State.

While it is true to say that the aim of early Communism was certainly world revolution, it is clear that the expansionist ideas of the U.S.S.R. were at least postponed as early as the 14th Party Conference in April 1925, with Stalin's policy of 'socialism in one country'.¹ In fact, Fascism was much more inclined to unlimited expansion in the 'thirties than was Communism. But in the omnipotence and omnipresence of the State, Simone Weil was right in making the comparison between the two. They were both instances for her of social idolatry, simply contemporary forms of the Great Beast, continuing the spirit of colonialism:

Si le sens de l'organisation, du travail efficace et de l'Etat, possédé à un degré supérieur, implique un droit surnaturel à coloniser autrui--et a-t-on jamais justifié autrement la colonisation?--une grande partie du territoire européen peut être regardé comme surnaturellement destiné à une colonisation allemande.

(EH 304)

¹See R. N. Carew Hunt, The Theory and Practice of Communism (London 1950), p. 195. Camus ('L'Homme révolté', Essais, Bibl. de la Pléiade, p. 591) claims that Fascism never really aspired to world domination. 'Tout au plus, Hitler, étonné par ses propres victoires, a été détourné des origines provinciales de son mouvement vers le rêve imprécis d'un Empire des Allemands qui n'avait rien à voir avec la Cité universelle. Le communisme russe, au contraire, par ses origines mêmes, prétend ouvertement à l'Empire mondial.'

F. L. Carsten claims that there exists a vast difference between the old colonial expansion and the desire for world conquest of the Fascist States, in that the leaders of the latter often acted against the interests of their countries in the pursuit of their aims, and were willing to sacrifice the welfare of conquered nations on the altar of their ambitions.¹ But we have seen (II, §2) that colonialism, particularly in the case of France, often ran counter to the interests of the colonising nation. Richelieu's dream of dominance for the prestige it brought to France as the world's civilising agent, for example, is surely not unlike Hitler's conviction of the innate superiority of the German people, although it substitutes a national for a racial element.

As we saw in the case of colonialism, the general tendency of the totalitarian State is to expand. Simone Weil gives a penetrating analysis of the law of expansion which all power obeys in her remarkable essay *Reflexions sur les Causes de la liberté*

¹The Rise of Fascism (London 1967), p. 236. Friedrich and Brzezinski (op. cit., p. 63) argue that 'while the older imperialism was an outgrowth of the industrial economy, the will to conquer the world which animates the totalitarian systems is intimately linked with their ideological preoccupations'.

et de l'oppression' (OL 57-162). Every régime takes advantage of what she calls 'hasards providentiels' which enable it to gain strength for a new period of expansion, which will afford another 'hasard providentiel' to allow new growth once more, and so on:

Ainsi la guerre permettait aux Romains de ravir des esclaves, c'est-à-dire des travailleurs dans la force de l'âge dont d'autres avaient eu à nourrir l'enfance; le profit tiré du travail des esclaves permettait de renforcer l'armée, et l'armée plus forte entreprenait des guerres plus vastes qui lui valaient un butin d'esclaves nouveau et plus considérable.

(OL 101)

(One might argue that the slaves gained through conquest need not necessarily be used to reinforce the army; their labours might have been used exclusively in the embellishment of the State in one way or another. But of course the harassment of the enemy on the frontiers which had caused the State to go to war in the first place provided an ever-present incentive to battle on subsequent occasions. In any case Simone Weil's argument rests on the peculiar logic of a social organism which causes it to grow rather than to dissipate its forces elsewhere.)

In this urge to constant expansion can be found, according to Simone Weil, the fundamental contradiction inherent in any oppressive regime. For power, being subject to the same

laws as everything else on this earth, is necessarily a limited phenomenon. All is well until it comes up against its own natural limits, for then, having unlimited desires, it seeks to go beyond that which it can effectively control, dissipates its energies, and dies:

Telle est la contradiction interne que tout régime oppressif porte en lui comme un germe de mort; elle est constituée par l'opposition entre le caractère nécessairement limité des bases matérielles du pouvoir et le caractère nécessairement illimité de la course au pouvoir en tant que rapport entre les hommes.

(OL 103)

The instrument of expansion thus becomes the instrument of downfall. Nemesis automatically renders justice to anyone overstepping his natural limits (OL 104). Looked at from another point of view, the whole totalitarian concept of expansion is thus unreal, false:

Toute réalité implique par elle-même une limite. Ce qui n'existe pas du tout n'est jamais limitable. C'est pour cela qu'il y a affinité, alliance entre le totalitarisme et le mensonge.

(EL 134)

This non-acceptance of limits brings about the regime's downfall in another way. Because in the modern totalitarian State all laws are subject to the laws of movement (see above, p. 209), its judgements seem arbitrary, and there is no way for the citizen to be sure of staying on the 'right' side of

the regime. Thus the turnover in party-members and sympathisers is great, since no one can know from one day to the next whether he is still in favour. This process is referred to by Simone Weil in her article 'Réflexions en vue d'un bilan' (EH 306), where she gives it as one of the fundamental weaknesses of the totalitarian regime.

Another weakness perhaps more destructive in the long run is the state of inertia to which such a regime reduces its citizens (EH 307 ff.). Because men are manipulated as matter rather than as human beings, they begin to lose their human initiative and production suffers. For a totalitarian regime to succeed, the state of mass enthusiasm in which it was born must be preserved throughout its existence. This is contrary to human nature:

Le véritable écueil du régime ne réside pas dans le besoin spirituel qu'éprouvent les hommes à penser d'une manière indépendante, mais dans leur impuissance physique et nerveuse à se maintenir dans un état durable d'enthousiasme, sinon pendant quelques années de jeunesse.

(EH 308)

Hence probably the apocalyptic nature of the totalitarian regime. The people exist in the future, on the promises of their leader, accepting present hardship for glories to come. The apocalyptic vision is very often necessary to take people's

minds off the lack of the ordinary rewards of remunerative work and the stimulus of competition.

The oppression which results from the exercise of totalitarian ideas is obvious and observable. Simone Weil is probably right in ascribing it uniquely to an advanced state of civilisation. As she says, society's oppression of the individual grows in proportion as the burden of nature upon man decreases:¹

On dirait que, si la collectivité humaine s'est dans une large mesure affranchie du poids dont les forces démesurées de la nature accablent la faible humanité, elle a en revanche pris en quelque sorte la succession de la nature au point d'écraser l'individu d'une manière analogue.

(OL 107)

It is simply a question of exchanging one state of slavery for another. That man, having rid himself of the burden of subservience to nature, should have himself created a new instrument of oppression is a dismal fact of human nature:

L'histoire humaine n'est que l'histoire de l'asser-

¹This is a Marxist idea. Cf.: 'At the same pace that mankind masters nature, man seems to become enslaved to other men or to his own infamy.' 'Speech on the Anniversary of the People's Paper, 1856', Selected Works of Marx and Engels (Moscow 1962), I, 359.

vissement qui fait des hommes, aussi bien oppresseurs qu'opprimés, le simple jouet des instruments de domination qu'ils ont fabriqués eux-mêmes.

(OL 95)

The chief ill of human society is not that each man pursues his own selfish interest, but that each one sacrifices himself and his neighbours to what are in fact only the means to living. Power becomes deified, and society, which should be a mediating force for mankind, becomes an end in itself (*ibid.*). This is clearly illustrated in the ideas of Alfredo Rocco, theorist of Italian Fascism and Mussolini's Minister of Justice. He defines Fascism as the absolute antithesis of older liberal doctrines, in which the State existed for the benefit of the individual. For Rocco, the State must have priority over each individual member. Society has 'historical and immanent ends of preservation, expansion, improvement, quite distinct from those of the individuals which at a given moment compose it; so distinct in fact that they may even be in opposition'.¹ The State is quite separate from its members, has an autonomous if anonymous life of

¹'The Political Doctrine of Fascism; Fascism as Action, as Feeling, and as Thought', in Kariel, op. cit., p. 101.

its own. How well Rocco's definition of society accords with Simone Weil's indictment of the Great Beast: 'For Fascism, society is the end, individuals the means, and its whole life consists in using individuals as instruments for its social ends.'¹

Simone Weil asserts, and with reason, that it is the infinite complexity of modern life that has made it thus. The form of government known as enlightened despotism, always utopic, would be impossible in our day, because no human being has the capacity to be enlightened about all the problems presented by contemporary civilisation (OL 157). The impersonal State takes over, and the region in which the individual can think and make decisions for himself becomes more and more reduced (cf. OL 144). The resulting intellectual void is simply a breeding-ground for totalitarianism:

Là où les opinions irraisonnées tiennent lieu d'idées, la force peut tout. Il est bien injuste de dire par exemple que le fascisme anéantit la pensée libre; en réalité c'est l'absence de pensée libre qui rend possible d'imposer par la force des doctrines officielles entièrement dépourvues de signification.

(OL 155)

¹Loc. cit..

The lack of any significant intellectual life was illustrated, Simone Weil thought, by the incoherence of, for example, Nazi propaganda. Such an incoherence could only be a 'reflet de l'incohérence essentielle du peuple allemand dans sa situation présente' (EH 152). In fact, the incoherence of totalitarianism in general is willed to a large extent, in order to keep the people in a constant state of uncertainty. If man-made laws are abolished to give place to the higher laws of 'history' which is interpreted through the acts of man, there is room for any amount of change of position above and beyond the terrifying logicity of such a law. On the other hand, as Rocco was to say, the question of means was always a secondary one to Fascism; what mattered was the end in view:

This indifference to method often exposes Fascism to the charge of incoherence on the part of superficial observers, who do not see that what counts with us is the end and that therefore even when we employ the same means we act with a radically different spiritual attitude and strive for entirely different results.¹

Simone Weil had, as we mentioned earlier, first-hand acquaintance with the development of German Fascism. She spent the summer of 1932 in Germany as an observer, and as a

¹Rocco, op. cit., p. 98.

result wrote the series of articles which appeared in L'Ecole émancipée from December 1932 to March 1933, as well as several others. Apart from the severe criticism of the regime which forms the main subject of the studies, she finds much to admire in the German youth. Deprived of a future, social dignity and usually the chance to earn a living as well, they are full of courage and the determination to create a life somehow out of the ruins of the old society. They are not even particularly susceptible to Nazi propaganda, though Simone Weil sees a time coming when, driven to desperation by hunger and enforced idleness, they might be tempted by the dynamic character of the new doctrine (EH 150-1).

It was natural, given her views, that she should make the comparison between the policies of Nazi Germany and those of Imperial Rome. She quotes the opinion of Bernanos, 'l'hitlérisme, c'est la Rome païenne qui revient' (E 146). Had she written at greater length on Fascist Italy she would probably have made the same comment, though such a comparison was of course the avowed intention of the Italian leaders. As it is, her only writings on Italy are the fresh and lively letters to Jean Posternak, where her concern is much more with

the grim realities of its political present. She does however express horror at the stifling atmosphere among certain young people absorbed in Fascist propaganda. After a conversation with a friend of Jean Posternak's, a Fascist supporter, she jokingly remarks that he would no doubt condemn her to work in a salt mine if he had the chance, but then goes on more seriously in her letter,

. . . si j'avais le choix, je choisirais plutôt de peiner et de crever au fond d'une mine de sel que de vivre avec l'horizon étroitement borné et limité de cette jeunesse. La mine me semblerait moins étouffante que cette atmosphère, cette obsession de la nation, cette adoration de la force sous sa forme la plus brutale, à savoir, la collectivité (voire le gros animal de Platon, République, I, V), cette divinisation déguisée de la mort.¹

But no comparison with Ancient Rome appears in these letters, even when she was in Rome itself. The comparisons made with Hitler's Germany, however, are numerous; the article 'Réflexions sur les origines de l'hitlérisme' (EH 11-60) contains the longest and most detailed comment on the Romans in her published works. The foreign policy of both Romans

¹Nuovi Argomenti, No. 2, 1953, p. 91. These letters have never been collected in book form in the original French, but they appear in translation in Sir Richard Rees' volume of Seventy Letters (London 1965).

and Nazis was based on domination, and their methods were indiscriminate so long as they worked. We have already discussed the Romans' frequent lack of honour in their dealings with foreign lands, and it does not need a very great step back in time to recall Hitler's complete disregard for the normal code of diplomacy, and his contempt for treaties and agreements which did not suit his purposes. Simone Weil refutes Hitler's claim to 'l'éternelle Allemagne' by indicating the vast differences between the Germans of the time of the Roman Empire--free, hospitable, honest--and the present-day Germans. It is true she relies heavily on Tacitus, who saw in the barbarians a reflection of Rome's past dignity contrasted with the vice and indulgence of the period when he was writing. It is also true that Simone Weil has a tendency to idealise barbarians and peoples untainted by Western civilisation in general. But her comparisons of the temperament of the Romans, especially of the Republican epoch, with that of Hitler's Nazis seems exact:

La vertu propre de Rome était la même qui d'un certain point de vue met l'Allemagne du XXe siècle au-dessus des autres nations, à savoir l'ordre, la méthode, la discipline et l'endurance, l'obstination, la conscience apportées au travail.

(EH 40)

We do not, however, says Simone Weil, recognise these

parallels unless they are pointed out to us. We become indignant, and rightly so, over cruelty practised in our own day, but time has softened the contours of the brutality of past ages. Thus

les déportations massives de paysans dans le Sud-Tyrol et l'Europe orientale nous font justement horreur; Elles ne nous rappellent pas cette première églogue de Virgile sur laquelle nous avons rêvé dès l'enfance et ceux qui disent: 'Nous, nous quittons la terre de la patrie et nos champs bien-aimés . . . Nous allons vers l'Afrique pleine de soif'.
(EH 46)

Neither do we always recognise brutality when it forms a part of our heritage. Simone Weil, as we have noted earlier, gives such figures as Louis XIV and Richelieu a prominent position in the development of totalitarianism. Inevitably she gives Napoleon the same role. The greatness for which he is remembered is of the sort which surrounds Hitler (it must be remembered that Simone Weil was writing at the very beginning of the war, before the true monstrosity of Hitler was realised):

On prétend que Napoléon a propagé, les armes à la main, les idées de liberté et d'égalité de la Révolution française; mais ce qu'il a principalement propagé, c'est l'idée de l'Etat centralisé; l'Etat comme source unique d'autorité et objet exclusif de dévouement.

(EH 13-14)

But we must not suppose that because Napoleon failed in his

'tentative de domination universelle' (EH 297), Hitler will necessarily do so to. Napoleon, like Charles-Quint and Louis XIV, did not possess the means of oppression, that is, the State in a highly developed form. Hitler thus harks back to the Romans rather than to any intermediate attempt at total domination, and Simone Weil rather implies that the present-day Germans have as much chance of succeeding as the Romans (EH 304). Considering her views on the latter, one can see that for her the Nazis presented a real threat, not simply for the immediate future but for hundreds and perhaps thousands of years to come.

It was naturally the German working class rather than any other which aroused Simone Weil's interest and sympathies during her visit. She felt that the whole hope of the international workers' movement lay in 'cette classe ouvrière allemande, la plus mûre, la plus disciplinée, la plus cultivée du monde' (EH 150). The aim of Hitler was obviously the crushing of the workers' resistance, and of the Communist party in particular. Simone Weil notes, however, a curious parallelism between the avowed intentions on the economic front of the two movements (at least from August of that year to 6 November). Both wanted to revolutionise 'le système', both looked forward

to 'le socialisme'. Although Hitler's movement was against the class struggle, it was capable of giving strong support to a strike, as in the Berlin transport strike, when the occasion demanded it. The immense solidarity of the working class was shown in the dominance of proletarian ideas, even in the face of Hitlerian propaganda. Hitlerians and Communists would argue, but about the relative merits of their programmes on behalf of the working class, and not about the national issue, for example (EH 154-6).

The very weakness of the reformist trade unions in Germany, however, lay in their close affinity to the State interests which were coming more and more to be identified with the Hitler movement. Simone Weil indicates why this should be so in an analysis of the history of the workers' movement in Germany (EH 158 ff). Since it had always operated legitimately and within the area controlled by the State, it was in the present crisis tending increasingly to fall back on the one element of stability left in the country, namely the State. The Communist party, while being numerically strong and with a proud history behind it, was practically speaking 'un parti de chômeurs' (EH 169). In addition, its relations with the other parties, that is the Nazis and the Social-Democrats, its

only hope of gaining strength, were calculated to alienate the most important elements (EH 170).

In the German question as elsewhere we see Simone Weil's intense preoccupation with the welfare of the working class, whether of Communist allegiance or not. This must not however be taken as approval of the Communist State, as embodied for example in the U.S.S.R.. Simone Weil was always very critical of the defects of Communism as practised in Russia, all the more so because she felt in it the betrayal of the workers' highest hopes. As we have seen, she equated Communism with Nazism in its totalitarian aspects. While working for the improvement of the French trade-unionists' situation, she was never for one moment blind to the true nature of the bureaucracy which ruled the world's first Communist State. In Russia as elsewhere, the proletariat was always subordinate to this bureaucracy, never independent of it. She asks:

Est-il possible d'organiser les ouvriers d'un pays quelconque sans que cette organisation secrète pour ainsi dire une bureaucratie qui subordonne aussitôt l'organisation à un appareil d'état, soit celui du pays lui-même, soit celui de l'U.R.S.S. ?

(OL 43)

Many of the articles which she wrote for the syndicalist paper L'Effort show a deep disillusionment with Russia as the

leader of the international proletariat. In her report of the disarmament conference of 1932, she expresses dismay at the retreat of the Soviet Union from international militancy on behalf of the working class, and at its complicity with capitalist States for the maintenance of the status quo.¹ Stalin's apparent conciliation of the United States also excites her indignation:

Le fait que Staline, sur cette question qui se trouve au centre du conflit entre capital et travail, a abandonné le point de vue de Marx et s'est laissé séduire par le système capitaliste sous la forme la plus parfaite, ce fait montre que l'U.R.S.S. est encore loin de posséder les bases d'une culture ouvrière.²

She remarks bitterly that Jews fleeing from Hitler's Germany find refuge in capitalist countries much more readily than in Russia, and criticises strongly the Germano-Soviet pact,³ and the Soviet leaders' conciliation of Hitler. She quotes a passage from the German Communist paper Welt am Abend, which had fallen into the hands of Hitler, which expresses the view that there is no fundamental disagreement between the policies

¹'La Conférence du désarmement', L'Effort, No. 295, 20 févr. 1932, p. 1.

²'U.R.S.S. et Amérique', L'Effort, No. 314, 2 juil. 1932, p. 1.

³'La Patrie internationale des travailleurs', L'Effort, No. 389, 22 juil. 1933, p. 4.

of the Soviet Union, Fascism and National-Socialism.¹

This, Simone Weil comments, is only too true; one dictatorship much resembles another, and once the good of the individual is sacrificed to that of the collectivity, or of the minority of bureaucrats who operate the system, the oppression is uniform. She quotes Rousseau's criticism of the 'reason of State', by which each individual is susceptible to liquidation where necessary, except the masters themselves.² It is to be noted that here, where she is dealing with specific instances of oppression, and pleading for a specific cause, Simone Weil looks on totalitarianism as a conflict between the oppressed masses and the privileged few, taking a conventional Marxist line, whereas in her more general writings on the subject, and in particular in the essay 'Causes de la liberté et de l'oppression', her analysis, more penetrating, is of universal oppression by a State machine set in motion by the people themselves, and which spares nobody, a self-made juggernaut.

¹Ibid..

²'Le Problème de l'U.R.S.S.', L'Effort, No. 406, 2 déc. 1933, p. 4.

France itself of course is by no means spared in the analysis of the ills of the present-day Western world. Simone Weil comments on the gloomy atmosphere of the country in a letter to Jean Posternak, regretting the hold which the Communist party has over the workers.¹ To the uncertainty of the pre-war period is linked the frustration of the reduction of France's world role. This need not reduce the quality of its civilisation however:

Mais le passage d'une de ces situations à l'autre est dur pour un peuple encore ivre de Louis XIV et de Napoléon, qui ~~se~~ s'est toujours cru à la fois la terreur et l'amour de l'univers.²

The whole question of France's pre-war situation, and the shattering blow of the Nazi occupation is of course dealt with at length in L'Enracinement. Simone Weil feels that unless the French can immediately find a source of inspiration in a patriotism based on 'la compassion pour la patrie', and not on the worship of the State, their present state of rootlessness will lead inevitably to Communism or Fascism. (E 157). Not that there is a will to either of these alternatives, but the very absence of will can create the situation where their

¹Letter to Jean Posternak (Spring 1938), Nuovi Argomenti, No. 2, 1953, pp. 101-2.

²Ibid..

rejection is impossible.

An unpublished letter to her brother, written probably in 1940, is very revealing on the state of France at the time:

Une atmosphère lourde, opaque, étouffante, s'est établie sur le pays, de sorte que les gens ont le cafard et sont mécontents de tout, mais d'autre part sont disposés à encaisser n'importe quoi sans protestation et même sans surprise.

She mentions the opinion of the chief of British censorship, that France was a Fascist country by the beginning of the war, and comments:

Il manque certains caractères spécifiques du fascisme (pouvoir d'un parti, violences physiques en public); mais l'atmosphère ne diffère plus tellement de celle de l'Italie.²

She then gives as example the taking over of judiciary powers by the administration, and the imposing of impossibly severe penalties for passing opinions which might be detrimental to the country's morale.

In the context of France's moral and military defeat of the early war years and her more recent history, it is interesting to note in passing the situation of General de Gaulle. Simone

¹Unpublished letter to André Weil, seen by courtesy of the writer's executors.

²Ibid..

Weil, with certain reservations, accepted his leadership of the Free French in 1940. She discusses the question of the legitimacy of his claim in the article 'Légitimité du gouvernement provisoire' (EL 58-73), claiming that in the complete abdication of nationhood by the French in 1940, de Gaulle had simply taken the nation in charge until it could be restored to its rightful owners. The people had let the nation drop from their hands; de Gaulle 'l'a ramassé, rangé, et a fait savoir publiquement qu'il s'en constituait le gardien jusqu'au jour où le propriétaire serait en état de le réclamer' (EL 61). It is not hard to imagine what Simone Weil's feelings would have been if, more than a quarter of a century later, she could have seen this same man revert to a policy of national grandeur and the pursuit of the glory of France at the expense of all else, thus entering the French tradition which Simone Weil saw as beginning with Richelieu and Louis XIV.¹

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¹General de Gaulle's heritage and the frequent disparity between theory and practice in French political life is noted in the Observer leader, 19 May 1968: '. . . France, although the home of much democratic ideology, has seldom been the home of democratic practice: General de Gaulle's regime has a long ancestry, including the two Napoleons. Much French ideology has had to be written by French émigrés living among the more deeply freedom-loving and self-disciplined Swiss.'

Our review of Simone Weil's ideas on the development of totalitarianism has taken in a wide range of political regimes and moments in history, and has had to be of necessity somewhat summary in places. But it should have become apparent that there is a strong thread of continuity linking these various manifestations of totalitarianism. For Simone Weil, what mattered was not so much the composition and character of a particular regime--it will be obvious after our analysis that Friedrich and Brzezinski's definition of the totalitarian State does not apply to many of what Simone Weil considers to be its manifestations--but rather the spirit that inspires it. The worship of the collective, the expansion of the Great Beast, can take many forms. All are equally objectionable, as all imply the pursuit of collective grandeur as the ultimate aim of society, and the abdication of individual responsibility which is the necessary condition of tyranny. Simone Weil's protest has lost none of its actuality.

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II, §4

ISRAEL AND IDOLATRY

It may seem at first sight out of place in a discussion of idolatry to consider Simone Weil's relationship with Judaism. The Jewish religion above all other is generally considered to have escaped the practice of idolatry, in its avowed purpose at any rate, and to have condemned it in all its manifestations. But reference to the wider concept of idolatry as defined in the first chapter of this section will make clear to what sort of idolatry Simone Weil was referring when she accused Israel of practising it. This notion of idolatry will serve as the focal point of this chapter, but since Simone Weil's relationship to Judaism as a whole is an extremely complex issue, it will be necessary first to consider certain generalities and other points of importance.

It is certainly a problem to trace the causes behind her deep-seated antipathy towards certain aspects of Judaism, particularly towards the revelation of the Old Testament. Her own opinions on her 'Jewishness', and the lack of affinity which she felt for any part of the Jewish tradition; are set out in the forthright letter to Carcopino, the Minister of Education in 1940, when she wrote to him asking the reason for her not having been accorded a teaching post after her

sick-leave.¹ She supposes that this omission is due to her being classed as Jewish, and asks the Minister to enlighten her as to the official definition of the term 'Jew', as she is unable to see in her background either religious or ethnic anything which might qualify her for such a description. She declares the alien nature of Judaism and her affinity with the Christian tradition:

Je n'ai certainement rien hérité de la religion juive La tradition chrétienne, française, hellénique est la mienne; la tradition hébraïque m'est étrangère.²

Critics such as Jacqueline Mesnil, however, do not take this at its face-value, and suggest that, in a spirit of self-accusation, she rejects Judaism because she is too much a Jew:

Brûlante nature juive qui dans sa soif d'absolu et sa conquête de l'Impossible a gardé quelque chose de la clameur des prophètes jusque dans l'écho de son propre cri, il semble bien qu'elle ne renie le judaïsme que parce qu'elle s'y reconnaît trop . . .³

¹ 'Lettre à M. le Ministre de l'Instruction publique' (Carcopino), Etudes matérialistes (Cannes), n° XVII (déc. 1947), pp. 2-4.

² Ibid... It should be remembered that Christianity in Simone Weil's opinion had its roots in Greece rather than in Israel.

³ 'Simone Weil, l'auteur de L'Enracinement, renie le judaïsme parce qu'elle s'y reconnaît trop', La Terre retrouvée, 1^{er} janv. 1950.

But the idea that Simone Weil's criticism of Judaism might be related to prophetic chastisement of sin presupposes that she was as much a part of the tradition as were the prophets, which was clearly not the case. There seems no reason to doubt her sincerity when she affirms that Judaism played no part in her upbringing, and that the Greek and Christian tradition was paramount. But although this might be expected to produce indifference towards Judaism, it hardly explains the active hostility towards that tradition which she in fact manifested. It is clear that the roots of this hostility go much deeper than any accident of birth.

Simone Weil seems to have been acutely conscious of the gulf separating the Greek and the Jewish worlds, and her hostility to the latter was, if not caused by, at least intensified by her great devotion to the former. She seems to have shown little interest in any meeting of the two cultures, considering for instance their highly fruitful union in Hellenism from an essentially Greek standpoint and ignoring the Jewish contribution. It is perhaps true to say that Judaism was fundamentally too unphilosophic to appeal to Simone Weil, the Old Testament too much the account of a direct relationship between God and his people. Gerald Abrahams implies the con-

trast with Greek thought when, considering developments in Judaism, he writes:

Their theology was too intimate to be philosophical. In the spirit of a Book in which the only proof of the Godhead is by revelation they thought of God as near and not remote, as humanly thinkable, not as a comprehensive predicate of reality.¹

But it must be admitted that Simone Weil knew little of Rabbinic Judaism, or of any part of the tradition outside the account of the Old Testament. Indeed, there is a certain irony in the fact that her knowledge of Judaism seems to have been restricted to that part of it which has come through into Christianity, although she repeatedly disclaims this filiation in so far as it concerns 'true' Christianity, the Greek component. Even when restricting the field to the Old Testament she does not seem to have had a deep knowledge of much of it, confining her attention for the most part to the less Hebraic elements, the sapiential literature and pre-patriarchal mythology. This partial character of her knowledge explains the loss of objectivity in many of her judgements. It means nevertheless that her particular brand of 'anti-semitism' bears little or no relation to the type which was raging in Europe

¹The Jewish Mind (London 1961), p. 76.

at the time of her death. It was based not on race (although there is an element of race in her conjectures on the sons of Noah and their descendants, in which the Hebrews come out badly)¹ but on the Old Testament concept of God's relationship with man, and its effect on man's view of his position in the universe. The anti-semitic trend in France, at least in its nineteenth- and twentieth-century manifestation, based as it was on the exploitation of irrational fears as to Jewish power and influence,² must have seemed abhorrent to her, and she was urgent in her condemnation of Nazi Germany, although not, it is true, specifically because of the persecution of the Jews. The writings of her later years, however, condemning the Old Testament concept of divinity, must have been seen in the context of the time as anti-Jewish, adding fuel to the fire, and must be criticised as lacking in a sense of occasion, to say the least. It is perhaps surprising too that, seeing the persecutions which the Jews were undergoing, she did not immediately, even exaggeratedly, avow her Jewishness, finding frater-

¹'Les trois fils de Noé et l'histoire de la civilisation méditerranéenne', AD 177-189.

²See e.g. Henri Drumont, La France juive (Paris 1886).

nity in adversity. While this would not have been a natural reaction for everybody, it would have fitted the inner logic by which she acted when confronted with oppression.

Having established the restricted area within which Simone Weil's critique operated, an attempt should now be made to define the precise nature of her criticism.¹ It can be divided into different but interrelated points. Firstly, and this is fairly commonplace, there is her revulsion against the cruelty frequently portrayed in the Old Testament. 'Jusqu'à l'exil, il n'y a pas un seul personnage de race hébraïque mentionné dans la Bible dont la vie ne soit souillée de choses horribles' (PSO 57). 'Dans Moïse, les préceptes de charité sont rares et noyés parmi quantité de commandements d'une cruauté et d'une injustice atroces' (PSO 49). These accusations of barbarity are not of course original to Simone Weil, but form part of the traditional rationalist critique of the Old Testament. Their immediate ancestry can be traced to Alain, who also was persuaded that 'la Bible, ce livre cruel, n'a pas fini de massacrer',² but within the French tradition

¹The fullest account of this criticism is to be found in Raper, op. cit., passim.

²'Le Dieu cruel', Saisons de l'esprit, Propos LXXXIV. Quot. A. Lunel, 'Simone Weil et Israël', Revue de la pensée juive, juillet 1950.

they can be discovered much earlier, in Voltaire for example, who compared the high moral standards of the deists with the barbarities of Old Testament tradition.¹ In Simone Weil's case the comparison is made with the piety expressed in the Egyptian Book of the Dead, where the soul renders an account of the high ethical standards it has observed during life (see PSO 47). It will be obvious that these criticisms involve a partial use of material, and an ignoring of the development towards a higher concept of morality within the Old Testament.

If this was the extent of Simone Weil's criticism, it could be rejected as superficial and unjust, but there is a great deal more to it than that. The crux of the matter lies in a concept of God rather than in one of morality, although the two are ultimately related. It was not so much that the early Hebrews were lacking in gentleness that earned her condemnation, but that their God claimed direct responsibility for the atrocities they committed. The entry into Canaan and the massacre of the peoples the Israelites found there

¹L. Poliakov, Histoire de l'antisémitisme, III, De Voltaire à Wagner (Paris 1968), p. 104.

was a direct result of Israel's being chosen by God to occupy that land. In Simone Weil's eyes, if the spirit of the true God had been in them, they would have preferred to remain enslaved in Egypt rather than to commit such atrocities in the pursuit of freedom (PSO 54). Her concept of God was rooted in the idea of his goodness (see I, §2), and this meant that whatever atrocities man might commit, God could have no part in them:

Car la vérité essentielle concernant Dieu, c'est qu'il est bon. Croire que Dieu peut ordonner aux hommes des actes atroces d'injustice et de cruauté, c'est la plus grande erreur qu'on puisse commettre à son égard.

(LR 11)

In this respect, Simone Weil is not making any assessment of relative morality; she admits the horrors performed by other peoples, such as, for instance, the destruction of Troy by the Greeks. The difference was simply that, whereas for example the occupation of Canaan remained for the Jews an instance of triumph, although the methods used might later be considered regrettable, for the Greeks the destruction of Troy was an act of shame, and recognised as such:

Cette guerre de Troie était bien l'entreprise de destruction de toute une civilisation. L'entreprise réussit. Homère appelle toujours Troie 'la sainte Ilion'. Cette guerre fut le péché originel des Grecs, leur remords.

(AD 188)

The reason why the Jews never displayed the same sense of shame over their conquests was because of their basic error on the nature of God. Simone Weil claims that whereas for the Greeks God was good before all else, for the early Hebrews he was essentially powerful;

. . . d'après l'Ecriture, les Hébreux avant Moïse n'ont connu Dieu que comme 'Tout-Puissant'. Autrement dit ils ne connaissaient de Dieu que l'attribut de puissance, et non le bien qui est Dieu même. (PSO 47-48)

It cannot be denied that the emphasis in the earlier books of the Old Testament is on the powerful presence of God as he appeared to the Jews. This presence was moral above all; God was a constant critic and director of their collective life, commanding and punishing when Israel departed from the standards he set. As J. Guttman puts it:

The distinctiveness of biblical religion is due to its ethical conception of the personality of God. The God of the prophets is exemplified by his moral will; he is demanding and commanding, promising and threatening, the absolutely free ruler of man and nature.¹

But for Simone Weil this educative role is lost in the concept of God as powerful defender of his people, 'le Dieu des armées'.²

¹Philosophies of Judaism: The History of Jewish Philosophy from Biblical Times to Franz Rosenzweig (London 1964), p. 5.

²Raper suggests that the Hebrew term 'adonai tsebaoth' translated as 'Lord of Hosts' or 'l'Eternel des Armées' does not necessarily mean this, but could refer simply to the heavenly company of angels. Op. cit., p. 3.

This is not a new or original attribution either: the fact that it is a well-known Gnostic criticism of 'le Dieu juste' provides another line of attack for Moeller when he accuses Simone Weil of Cathar tendencies.¹ But it reappeared also in the mouth of certain thinkers of the Enlightenment; Rousseau was unable to accept the 'Dieu des combats' which he found in the Old Testament,² and this seems as likely a source as any for Simone Weil's criticism. Among modern critics, H. B. Parkes provides an example of the distaste often felt for this period in Jewish history:

Even by the standards of the second millennium, Jehovah was a barbaric deity, far less humane than the cosmic spirit worshipped by the Pharaoh Ikhnaton or the Babylonian Sun-god who had dictated the laws of Hammurabi.³

Criticism of Yahweh as powerful rather than good is associated in Simone Weil's mind with another criticism, that of the idea of God intervening in human affairs, which is based

¹Littérature du XXe siècle . . . , p. 238.

²Poliakov, op. cit., p. 120.

³Gods and Men: The Origins of Western Culture (London 1960), p. 94. Stendhal puts the same criticism into the mouth of Julien Sorel, when he refers to 'le Dieu de la Bible, petit despote cruel et plein de la soif de se venger . . .'. Le Rouge et le noir, §XLIV.

on the concept of time and history which we noted in ~~the~~ a previous chapter (p.164). The essential quality of the Jewish consciousness concerning time is the importance attached to the idea of becoming, of development, of the significance of the individual historical moment. The contrast between this attitude and the more static Greek concept is made by Guttman:

in

It is/the unique historical process and not in the unchanging being of nature that the revelation of God's will and the satisfaction of all religious aspirations are to be found For biblical religion, the world does not dissolve into empty nothingness; on the contrary, the moral activism of the Bible envisages the world as the scene of the realisation of a divine order, which is an order of moral will and moral life.¹

God is therefore fulfilling his purposes in the historical process, and to this end has chosen Israel to be the instrument of his will. The fact of Israel's election was one which Simone Weil was unable to accept, partly because she failed to appreciate the historical process involved in it. The Old Testament is the record of a people gradually losing its national exclusiveness with regard to its deity, gradually realising that the God of Israel was also the universal God

¹Op. cit., p. 12.

to whom all people owe allegiance. Although the Old Testament records many instances of petty nationalism,¹ nevertheless there is a growing awareness of the nature of election, and the responsibility it entails. Abrahams indicates clearly the nature of this responsibility within the concept of election:

The Jew, be it understood, makes no claim to the status of 'chosen' in any invidious sense. . . . If he uses, in his prayers, words like 'exalted', the context is of ethical inspiration. The meaning is that he has been 'elected' to be the best behaved among the nations, and his language has been made the vehicle of great ethical thought.²

To Simone Weil however only the political consequences of election were apparent; a God who 'chooses' a people cannot present at the same time the impartiality which, we have seen, was necessary to her concept of the true God. The idea of God's will working itself out in history, of his ability to alter the course of nature to fulfil his own ends, was fundamentally antipathetic to one who believed, as she did, that God in creating the world submitted himself to necessity (see I, §2).

¹See Sir G. Adam Smith & others, The Legacy of Israel (Oxford 1927), p. 75.

²Op. cit., p. 32.

For her the love of God is to be seen more clearly in the order of the world than in the notion of Yahweh who is able to move mountains in defence of his people. God does not intervene in human affairs, and therefore 'la notion même de peuple élu est incompatible avec la connaissance du vrai Dieu' (PSO 51). The fact that Yahweh's promises to Israel referred to the temporal sphere, being promises regarding the destiny of that people, makes her accuse him of being an earthly deity, and Moses of being a politician rather than a spiritual leader:

[Moïse] était avant tout un fondateur d'Etat. Or, comme dit très bien Richelieu, le salut de l'âme s'opère dans l'autre monde, mais le salut de l'Etat s'opère dans ce monde-ci. Moïse voulait apparaître comme l'envoyé d'un Dieu puissant qui fait des promesses temporelles.

(PSO 50)

She supposed that in Egypt Moses had learned ~~and learned~~ of other revelations, but had refused them, 'parce que, comme Maurras, il concevait la religion comme un simple instrument de grandeur nationale'.¹ Moses' mission was certainly that of a national leader in so far as he was chosen to lead the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt, and to impart to them God's promise of better things to come. But Simone Weil ignores

¹'Lettre à Jean Wahl', Deucalion, no. 4 (oct. 1952). See Appendix C.

the spiritual element in God's commandments to Israel, with their far-reaching ethical consequences. For her, the nationalistic conception of Israel outweighed all other considerations.

The idea of God's direct intervention in the affairs of the world, so that his designs could be seen working themselves out in history, has unfortunate consequences which Simone Weil was not slow to point out. If God is seen as a father-figure rewarding the righteous and punishing the wicked, this leads inevitably to a confusion between prosperity and virtue:

Aux yeux des Hébreux (du moins avant l'exil, et sauf exceptions) péché et malheur, vertu et prospérité sont inséparables, ce qui fait de Iahweh un Père terrestre et non céleste, visible et non caché. (LR 68)

This can hardly be called a false charge, given the prevalence in the earlier books of the Old Testament of comments such as the following concerning Joseph (Gen. XXXIX. 2-3):

And the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man . . .

And his master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand.

Even in the Psalms, where there is frequently a deeply personal sense of sin as being wrong in itself, rather than as a prelude to punishment, the same equation is made; the Psalmist asks

God for relief from the affliction into which his wrong-doing has led him, and God promises the Psalmist victory over his enemies.¹ Although it could be argued that there are many instances in which God's forgiveness prevails, and sin does not reap its punishment, this does not really alter the fundamental premise that God, being just, has a right to reward and punish according to deserts, whether or not he exercises it. The prevalent spirit is that when Israel does right in the sight of the Lord, the nation prospers: when it disobeys God's commandments, then misfortune befalls Israel, battles are lost and the enemy triumphs. When seen from Israel's point of view, this could be regarded as a necessary educational measure towards a recalcitrant nation, but its corollary, that the defeated enemy is guilty simply because it is defeated, is quite unacceptable to Simone Weil:

Les Hébreux voyaient dans le malheur le signe du péché et par suite un motif légitime de mépris; ils regardaient leurs ennemis vaincus comme étant en horreur à Dieu même et condamnés à expier des crimes, ce qui rendait la cruauté permise et même indispensable.

(SG 41)

¹See e.g. Psalms XXVII, XXXIV, XXXVII, LXXXIII, CXXIX.

One of the few exceptions to this spirit is shown in the Book of Job, which Simone Weil admired because she felt it illustrated the incomprehensibility of God's purposes for man, even supposing he had any. (It may be noted in passing that this book was one of the few in the Old Testament which found favour with Voltaire, partly because Job was exterior to the Hebrew tradition.)¹ The same exception of the Book of Job is made by Simone Pétrement in her criticism of the equation sin-affliction:

Ce qu'il y a de terrible dans l'Ancien Testament, c'est la confusion trop fréquente de la justice et de la puissance, de la vertu et de la réussite, du bien et de la destinée. Peu de pitié pour les vaincus, car s'ils sont vaincus, c'est que Dieu les a punis. Si les Israélites eux-mêmes sont vaincus, c'est qu'ils ont péché. Une seule protestation peut-être avant l'Evangile: c'est le livre de Job. Là seulement un malheureux n'est pas représenté comme coupable, et lui-même soutient courageusement, contre l'opinion de ceux qui l'entourent, que son malheur n'est pas une punition.²

In sharp contrast to this is the Greek concept of a world ruled by necessity, where misfortune is either a result of the common human condition, or the natural consequence of certain actions ('Arès est équitable, et il tue ceux qui

¹Poliakov, op. cit., p. 105.

²DP, p. 182.

tuent', quot. SG 21). One is thus discouraged from passing judgement on one's less fortunate fellows. The world obeys mechanical laws which are not broken even by a divine sovereign, and if we wish to deal justly with man we must follow the example of the Father who 'maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust'.¹ Simone Weil comments:

Le reproche le plus amer que fassent les hommes à la nécessité, c'est son indifférence absolue aux valeurs morales. Justes et criminels sont également frappés d'insolation, noyés dans les inondations. C'est précisément cette indifférence que le Christ nous invite à regarder comme l'expression même de la perfection de notre Père céleste et à imiter.

(IP 150)

We are reminded of Simone Weil's discussion of the Iliad, and of the passage where Zeus takes his golden scales and against his own personal inclination gives the victory to the Greeks (PSO 56). It is interesting to note that Western Europe is today so conditioned to the idea of an omnipotent deity that Zeus' inability to influence the battle 'according to the divine will' seems to be more of a weakness on his part than a virtue.

¹Matt. V. 45. It is interesting to note that Marcion uses this as the basis of an attack on Judaism, saying that if God treats saints and sinners alike, then his justice must be divorced from the concept of goodness. See A. Marmorstein, Studies in Jewish Theology, ed. J. Rabinowitz & M. S. Lew (London 1950).

It is sometimes argued that in her criticism of the Old Testament, Simone Weil took no account of the dialectic within which the tradition developed, of the fact that cruelties and chauvinism were balanced by prophetic criticism. The Old Testament is a people's record of its own growth, and contains both the rebellion from God and the exhortation to return to him. In this connexion Raper suggests that Simone Weil simply misunderstood the Book of Jonah, for example, seeing in it an example of Jewish vindictiveness rather than disapproval of it.¹ This criticism is justified in part, especially as regards Simone Weil's condemnation of cruelties committed by the Hebrews, and the unfavourable comparison she makes with other cultures. It is clear that she makes no allowances here either for atrocities committed by the other cultures in question, or for the gradual process towards a more enlightened way of dealing with one's neighbours recorded in the Old Testament. The continual dialectic between the often crude reactions of a primitive people and the undercurrent of higher spiritual awareness is made aptly by Abrahams:

The people whose story is reflected in the Bible were primitive enough, and later, chauvinistic enough, to

¹Op. cit., p. 5.

express thoughts about God in terms of the lower levels of experience; boasting of His powers and His favours, and invoking fear in a crude way. But the higher tradition, the tradition of emotional sublimity, was early, and was never lost; and in the Exile it gained strength.¹

But, as we have seen, the object of Simone Weil's castigation was not so much cruelties in themselves, but the idea that God could order and approve cruelty, and that he could intervene to assist his people at the expense of other nations. This is a feature that was never questioned by the prophets, who invariably condemn Israel's falling away from God, and the nation's idolatry and worship of false gods, but operate within the concept of election. A religion which still celebrates the Passover as a symbol of deliverance from past bondage has obviously a very developed sense of the purpose of God in history.

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It is this sense of the presence of God in the temporal sphere which forms the basis for the charge of idolatry which Simone Weil brought against Israel. This is not to say of course that she failed to recognise the essential monotheism

¹Op. cit., p. 170.

of Judaism: she in fact claims, as did Renan,¹ that the religious mission of Israel was to proclaim the unity of God (every nation in antiquity having a vocation with regard to one aspect of the divinity [see SG 77]). But she would claim at the same time that the unity and utter transcendence of God claimed by Judaism were in the end too difficult to live by without compromise of one sort or another. As Alain puts it, 'visant trop haut, il [Israël] a vécu trop bas'.²

There is great purity in the basic concept of Yahweh: Israel is forbidden to attach the name of God to anything on earth, forbidden to make images of the Almighty. Judaism in its transcendent element is very conscious of the utter otherness of God, of the vast abyss separating him from man because of man's sinful nature, but not of the necessity for any mediating principle to bridge the gap:

. . . for the restoration of harmony, in Jewish teaching, man does not stand in need of a mediator. The various mediating terms in use in the Bible such as the 'Holy Spirit' and the rabbinic Memra (Word) denote only aspects or qualities of the Deity, and are not to be regarded as beings of any kind, much less as

¹L'Histoire du peuple d'Israel', Oeuvres complètes, VII (Paris 1955), p. 97.

²'La Bible', Saisons de l'esprit, Propos LXXXIV. Quot. Lunel, art. cit..

personal beings. So are the angels considered mere instruments used by God, and not intermediaries to bridge some imaginary gulf between God and the world, or God and man.¹

The use of the word 'imaginary' to qualify 'gulf' would seem to indicate that to the Jewish way of thinking, even though man has aroused God's anger by his wrong-doing, nevertheless his isolation from God is only temporary, and full communion can be restored through a return to righteousness. Indeed, this isolation is a form of relationship, since it is based on God's disapproval, a positive attitude of person to person. In this sense it is unreal to the Jewish mind to speak of a gulf between God and man because, while he is infinitely more than man can comprehend, man was nevertheless made in his likeness, and the relationship of God to man is that of a father to his son.

For Simone Weil, as we have seen, the separation of God from man was much more radical and much more real. She would claim that any relationship between God and man necessarily involved a mediator, and that, psychologically speaking, this was as true for the Jews as for anyone else. But having

¹I. Epstein, Judaism: A Historical Presentation (Harmondsworth 1959), p. 142.

rejected the idea of mediation revealed to them by surrounding civilisations, Israel tried to use the nation itself as a way to God:

Il ne peut y avoir de contact de personne à personne entre l'homme et Dieu que par la personne du Médiateur. Hors lui il ne peut y avoir de présence de Dieu que collective, nationale. Israël a en même temps, du même coup, choisi le Dieu national et refusé le médiateur. Israël a tendu peut-être de temps à autre au véritable monothéisme? Mais toujours il retombait, il ne pouvait pas ne pas retomber, au Dieu de tribu. (C3 255)

The attempt to make the collective unit of the nation act as mediator must end in failure, since a true mediator partakes of the nature of both extremes, and the true God can have no place in the interests of the collectivity. Simone Weil's hatred of the national mission of Israel is a clear example of her antipathy towards Plato's 'gros animal', and her judgement on Israel, that it had made a god out of the nation itself, blinded her to the very real achievements of the Jewish people:

Israël est une tentative de vie sociale surnaturelle. Il a réussi, on peut le supposer, ce qu'il y a de mieux dans le genre. Cela suffit. Inutile de recommencer. Le résultat montre de quelle révélation divine le gros animal est susceptible. La Bible, c'est la révélation traduite en sociale. (C3 106)

The depth of the chasm separating this kind of reasoning from orthodox Jewish thought can perhaps best be illustrated by

giving a passage from the work of Epstein to which reference has already been made, in which the fact of Israel having received a collective revelation is a mark of its authenticity:

The scope and substance of Israel's universal priestly mission was indicated in the inaugural revelation on Mount Sinai with the giving of the Ten Commandments. The psychological experience involved in this Sinaitic revelation, like all other disclosures of the Divine, cannot be determined, but it is unique in its claim to have been shared by a whole nation. This collective national experience of Israel served to authenticate for the people the revelational claims of the individual Patriarchs as well as those of Moses.¹

One can well imagine Simone Weil's reaction to such an idea. Religion for her could never be a matter between God and the nation, but between God and the individual.

A la révélation surnaturelle Israël opposa un refus, car il ne lui fallait pas un Dieu qui parle à l'âme dans le secret, mais un Dieu présent à la collectivité nationale et protecteur dans la guerre. Il voulait la puissance et la prospérité. (AD 183)

While it would be possible to show that she overstates her case, it is nevertheless true to say that in so far as God is made to represent the national interest of a people,

¹Op. cit., p. 20. The idea of the corporate personality of Israel was elaborated by writers contemporary to Simone Weil, e.g. Johannes Pedersen, in Israel: Its Life and Culture, I & II (London 1926-40), p. 476. There is no evidence that Simone Weil knew of this theory, however. See Raper, op. cit., p. 106.

he will be in danger of being confused with immediate ends and tangible successes. The entry into Canaan of the Israelites may well have been considered as part of God's plan for humanity by the Israelites themselves; but one can hardly expect the peoples thus exterminated to view it in the same way. The event can hardly justify any assumption other than that here was an instance of the idea of a universal God being used for national purposes. For Simone Weil, the whole concept of a national God amounts to idolatry, whether or not there is any actual worship of images: 'On ne faisait pas de statue à Jéhovah; mais Israël est la statue de Jéhovah. On a fabriqué ce peuple, comme une statue de bois, à coups de hache' (Cl 167).

The worship of images being consistently forbidden in Israel, idolatry took on a new and more insidious form, the worship of temporal power incarnate in the State. In Simone Weil's view, the very notion of a chosen race implied idolatry:

La véritable idolâtrie est la convoitise (Coll. III. 5), et la nation juive, dans sa soif de bien charnel, en était coupable dans les moments mêmes où elle adorait son Dieu. Les Hébreux ont eu pour idole, non du métal ou du bois, mais une race, une nation, chose tout aussi terrestre. Leur religion est dans son essence inséparable de cette idolâtrie, à cause de la notion de 'peuple élu'.

(LR 15)

It seemed to Simone Weil, and this is incomprehensible to the

orthodox Jewish mind, that this social form of idolatry was far worse than the worship of statues attributed to surrounding pagan religions, even if these involved human sacrifice: 'Les sacrifices humains à Baal? Mais les exterminations de peuples entiers sont bien plus affreuses' (C3 245). It is clear that she is not here concerned with sheer weight of numbers, but with the motives behind the killings. The distinction she is drawing is that between ritual sacrifice, where the victim is generally one of the tribe, and the motive is the appeasement or pleasing of a deity, or is part of a ritual cleansing, and mass slaughter in the pursuit of territorial advantage, where the victims are outside the community and therefore unable to participate in any active sense. The distinction is a fine one, and it could be argued that it is of no consequence, that each type of slaughter was 'barbaric' and to be condemned.

Simone Weil herself admits elsewhere that the general debauchery which was part of many of the pagan rites was to be deplored, but claims that abuses were less frequent than one nowadays imagines: 'On a raison d'alléguer contre certains de ces cultes les débauches qui les accompagnaient--mais, je crois, beaucoup plus rarement qu'on ne le pense aujourd'hui'

(LR 14). She does not attempt to substantiate this claim, and gives the 'pagan idolaters' the benefit of the doubt on rather slim evidence. To support her claim she would no doubt add that since history is written by the victors, it is impossible to believe Hebrew accounts in this particular instance. The corruption and impiety of the Canaanite cities would thus be 'des inventions calomnieuses des Hébreux contre leurs victimes' (LR 18). It is as well to remember too that what may strike us today as obscene and debauched was certainly not considered so in its origins, though the possibility of later debasement is always there.

Simone Weil also comments on the restrictions imposed on the Israelites in the matter of the worship in high places. She saw in these restrictions a refusal of mediation: 'Dans Israël, interdiction des sacrifices sur les hauts lieux et au pied des arbres. Tout ce qui se rapporte à la médiation leur était interdit' (C3 244). This is only true in so far as she attributed the acceptance of mediation to the Canaanite tribes and its refusal to the Jews. The 'high places' were in fact forbidden to Israel quite simply because they were the old worshipping-places of the Canaanites, and if allowed to worship there the Israelites could very soon have abandoned

the worship of Yahweh--as in fact they did at intervals throughout their history. The best element of Judaism wanted above all a pure religion, and it is in the light of this desire, with its elevated and sometimes harsh demands, that Judaism can best be understood. Their lapses are often only the corollary to the moral earnestness of their faith, just as their intolerance, as Renan remarked, was a direct result of their monotheism.¹ Without a constant reminder of their monotheistic mission Israel would sooner or later have been assimilated by the surrounding tribes. Mircea Eliade, while not underestimating the importance of the Baal cults during a considerable period of time, speaks of the gradual ascendancy of Hebrew monotheism over these:

. . . the Semites at one time in their history adored the divine couple made up of Ba'al, the god of hurricane and fecundity, and Belit, the goddess of fertility (particularly the fertility of the earth). The Jewish prophets held these cults to be sacrilegious. From their standpoint--from the standpoint, that is, of those Semites who had, as a result of the Mosaic reforms, reached a higher, purer and more complete conception of the deity--such a criticism was perfectly justified The 'divine form' of Yahweh prevailed over the 'divine form' of Ba'al; it manifested a more perfect holiness, it sanctified life without in any way allowing to run wild the elementary forces concentrated in the cult of

¹op. cit., p. 87.

Ba'al, it revealed a spiritual economy in which man's life and destiny gained a totally new value; at the same time it made possible a richer religious experience, a communion with God at once purer and more complete.¹

Simone Weil seems to have felt however that this greater purity was only achieved at the expense of increased intolerance, and an exclusivist attitude to the deity.

She also accuses the Hebrews of not accepting the mediation of Osiris while they were in Egypt. The cult of Osiris, or of his Greek counterpart Dionysos, was of course widespread in the ancient world, but it is not difficult to see why the Jews were unable to adopt him in the same way as other peoples. Simone Weil however evolves from this a theory according to which Israel was considered accursed by the ancient world for refusing the revelation of Osiris. This would explain, she claims, why Israel is not so much as mentioned by Herodotus, although it is inconceivable that he knew nothing of that nation:

Si on admettait qu'Israël était regardé par les anciens comme un peuple maudit parce qu'ayant refusé la notion du Dieu médiateur, souffrant et rédempteur révélée à l'Egypte, on comprendrait ce qui autrement est

¹Patterns in Comparative Religion, trans. Rosemary Sheed (London & New York 1958), pp. 3-4.

inexplicable: à savoir qu'Hérodote, si avide de toutes les curiosités d'ordre religieux, n'ait jamais parlé d'Israël.

(LR 79)

She mentions also the passage where Herodotus 'énumère une grande quantité de peuples helléniques et asiates, parmi lesquels un seul avait un "Zeus de armées"' (LR 12).

The objectivity of this kind of interpretation taken as historical criticism is of course reduced by her central pre-occupation: the conviction that the Yahweh of pre-exilic Juda ism, because of the barbarities he at times commanded, was not and could not be the supreme God. The question put to the Benedictine Dom Clément in 1942 reads more like an affirmation:

Est-on anathème quand on pense que la source d'où est issu pour Israël le commandement de détruire les villes, de massacrer les peuples et d'exterminer les prisonniers et les enfants n'était pas Dieu; et qu'avoir pris Dieu pour l'auteur d'un tel commandement était une erreur incomparablement plus grave que les formes même les plus basses de polythéisme et d'idolâtrie; et qu'en conséquence, jusqu'à l'époque de l'exil, Israël n'a eu presque aucune connaissance du vrai Dieu, alors qu'une telle connaissance se trouvait parmi l'élite de la plupart des autres peuples?

(PSO 72)

But behind the lack of objectivity or of any compromise with accepted notions, there is the implacable logic of her conviction: God is the Good, and therefore cannot command evil.

We have already discussed Simone Weil's interpretation of the idea of idolatry (II, §1). What we think of as idolatry is to a large extent, she thought, the product of Jewish fanaticism. In the history of missionary activity it is certainly true that the envoys of a monotheistic religion such as Christianity have tended to assume that any images or representational figures found among non-Christian peoples are objects of worship and gods in their own right. By this reckoning, Simone Weil contends, the early Hebrews would see idolatry in Christianity itself, and act accordingly:

Si les Hébreux de la bonne époque ressuscitaient, et si on leur donnait des armes, ils nous extermineraient tous, hommes, femmes et enfants, pour crime d'idolâtrie. Ils nous reprocheraient d'adorer Baal et Astarté, prenant le Christ pour Baal et la Vierge pour Astarté. (LR 14)

This latter charge has just sufficient truth in it to make it credible. It is perfectly accurate to say that Jewish religious teaching has never and will never be able to accept the deity of Christ: the Jews' own concept of a Messiah and his mission was vastly different from the historical figure of Christ and the Church he founded. As Epstein puts it,

. . . the Messiah in Jewish teaching is not a supernatural being, nor a divine being, having a share in the forgiveness of sin; much less is he to be confused with God. At the highest the Messiah is but a mortal leader who will be instrumental in fully rehabilitating Israel in its ancient homeland, and through a restored Israel

bring about the moral and spiritual regeneration of the whole of humanity, making all mankind fit citizens of the Kingdom.¹

This obviously has little in common with the cult of a dying and resurrected saviour-god which Simone Weil considered to be one of the corner-stones of religion. But it must nevertheless be admitted that Christianity owes more to Judaism than Simone Weil likes to think. James, in the work already mentioned, claims that the conception of God in the two religions is not essentially different.² The Christian recognition of the Three-in-One does not, he says, conflict with the absolute monotheism of Judaism; the New Testament emphasis on the single creator and sustainer of the universe gives ample proof of Christianity's essential monotheism. He goes on to write of the polytheistic trend which reappeared with the cult of the saints, but stresses that care was taken to distinguish between worship (latria), which may legitimately be addressed to God alone, and veneration (dulia), which should be directed towards saints and heroes of the faith. He realises however

¹Op. cit., p. 140.

²Op. cit., p. 105.

that this is a theological distinction which is in practice very difficult to sustain. Mohammed indeed drew from a form of Christianity prevalent in his time that the Christian Trinity consisted of God, Mary and Jesus, with the archangel Gabriel as the Holy Spirit.¹

Similarities in their conception of the Godhead, however, cannot alter the fact that in Judaism there is no place for an incarnate God. And for Simone Weil incarnation was a most important feature of authentic religious experience (see e.g. C3 231-2). She naturally enough brings the charge of refusing the notion of incarnation against Islam, as well as against Judaism. In general terms, Islam does not seem to have excited her curiosity; in her extremely wide-ranging notes about all kinds of religious phenomena, Islam is scarcely mentioned.² Allah, for Simone Weil, shares Yahweh's characteristic of being a God of war (C3 255); this can readily be observed in the notion of Jihād, or holy war, put forward by Mohammed himself, and carried out in practice through the

¹Koran, Sura 3, quot. James, op. cit., p. 106.

²But see Appendix B.

raids on his neighbours which he undertook while at Medina.¹

She claims however that

le Bien-Aimé des mystiques du Xe siècle n'est pas cet Allah. Il est le Médiateur, le Mithra perse, seul dieu adoré par les Perses à côté de Zeus, équivalent de l'Aphrodite Céleste.

(C3 255)

Presumably she is writing here of the Sufi, although these had a long history whose origins can be found in the period following Mohammed's death, and are by no means confined to the tenth century. It is certainly true to say that the God whom the Sufis worshipped was conceived differently from the Allah of orthodox Islam, although the movement never broke away from Islam, and claimed to find its inspiration in the mysticism of the Prophet himself. But, as G. G. Scholem has pointed out, the God of mysticism is necessarily far removed from the God of institutional religion, even where mysticism develops (as it generally does) at the heart of an institution.² It is difficult to state categorically however that the God worshipped by the Sufis was in fact Mithra and

¹A. C. Bouquet, Comparative Religion (Harmondsworth 1941), p. 269.

²Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism (London 1955), pp. 7-8.

not Allah. Worship of Mithra is attested a long way back in Persian civilisation. He is depicted for example in the Avestan hymns as the god of heavenly light and the guardian of oaths, as well as an arch-foe of the powers of evil and hence a god of battles. Later, when Mithraism sprang up in the West, as a result of the Persian conquests, his function as creator of life and mediator between man and the higher gods was stressed (Plutarch gives an account of him as intermediary between the good and evil powers¹).

But this does not prove that he was an object of veneration for the Sufis. Moreover, he was not the 'seul dieu adoré par les Perses à côté de Zeus'; Herodotus claims that the Persians worshipped, besides Zeus, the sun, moon and earth, fire, water and winds.² He also states that they learned from the Assyrians and Arabians the cult of Uranian Aphrodite (the equivalent, as Simone Weil says, of the Persian Mithra). It is interesting to note too that throughout his history, both in Persia and in the West, Mithra kept his warrior-nature, as illustrated by the ease with which the cult spread among the Roman legions.

¹Moralia, 369e.

²The Histories, I, 131.

But to return to Allah. In Simone Weil's opinion, Allah, like Yahweh, was a cause of totalitarianism. But this was never developed to the same degree because the Arabs have never formed a state in the same way that the Jews have done, or desired to do. Allah was a God of war, but not of an expansionist war; rather a 'guerre de razzia' (C3 141). In all fairness it should be pointed out that the notion of Jihād has caused at least as much suffering and wanton destruction in its time as the expansionist contentions of the Jews, which after all were confined almost entirely to the early part of their history. Islam is never condemned by Simone Weil to anything like the same extent as Judaism, and one feels that it remained quite foreign to her. The refusal of incarnation, and the resulting problem of the relationship between God and man, were the same for Islam as for Judaism. But, instead of the social idolatry of which she accused the Jews, the result for the Arabs was 'une réussite extraordinaire' (C1 162). She seems to put this down to the outward movement and relative flexibility of Islam, in contrast to the rigid nationalism of Judaism. Islam, she claims, at least made conversions to the religion of the Prophet, and did not perform wholesale extermination of the peoples

it conquered:

Les musulmans ne sont pas retombés dans l'idolâtrie à la manière des Juifs. Ils ont converti, non sans une part de violence. Les Hébreux n'ont presque fait qu'exterminer, du moins avant la destruction de Jérusalem.

(C1 162)

It is strange however that she should mention conversion of the conquered in the Arabs' favour, after all she says elsewhere about missionary activity (see e.g. LR 34). Perhaps conversion is merely the lesser of two evils. But she never holds the proselytising of the Jews during the Hellenistic era in their favour. This is another instance of course of her concentrating on the earlier and bloodier aspects of Judaism to the exclusion of all else.

She considers, however, that the barbarities of pre-exilic Judaism have had a thoroughly baleful influence on Western civilisation right down to the present day. Like Tindal, the English deist, she attributes cruelties committed by the Catholic Church to Jewish influence.¹ Totalitarianism has passed from Israel to Rome, and from Rome to the Church.

¹Poliakov, op. cit., p. 80. See also Parkes, op. cit., p. 94: '... because this tribal deity afterwards became identified with the ruler of the universe, the bloodthirsty actions recorded in the Pentateuch have continued to have an evil influence on Western civilisation down to modern times.'

'L'Empire a succédé à Israël, l'Eglise succède à l'Empire' (CS 172). The heritage is clear; only the nature of the heritage can be disputed. For Simone Weil, the constitution of any sort of Establishment against which there can be no redress is the death of true religion. Nationalism in religion, whether by a nation using religion as a means to political ends, or by a religious institution assuming political power over its members, is utterly condemned, and the association of Church and State can only result in the death of spirituality.

Paradoxically, while Simone Weil blames Israel for much of the savagery of the present-day world, she also denies it any influence at all:

Notre civilisation ne doit rien à Israël et fort peu de choses au christianisme; elle doit presque tout à l'antiquité pré-chrétienne (Germains, Druides, Rome, Grèce, Egéo-Crétois, Phéniciens, Egyptiens, Babyloniens ...).

(LR 19)

Given her usual views on the effect of Israel on Western civilisation, one can only suppose that by 'notre civilisation' she means that pure current of spirituality which she traces back to the ancient world and which runs like a golden thread through the fabric of history, bypassing all institutions and refusing all measure of compromise with 'la Bête'. Otherwise

the statement hardly makes sense, since the influence of Christianity, and through Christianity of Israel, on Western Europe, whether one approves of it or not, is only too apparent.

Because all Simone Weil's energies are concentrated on that period in Jewish history which she abhorred, the pre-exilic period, there are many aspects of the Jewish tradition which she ignored completely. As we have seen, when she considers other, more enlightened personalities or events in the Old Testament, such as are found in the Book of Job, she tends to ignore the fact that these are equally manifestations of the Jewish spirit.¹ She pays very little attention to developments in Judaism since the time of Christ. One might have

¹She gives an account of this non-Hebraic tradition in the following passage from the letter to Jean Wahl quoted above, where she says that after the destruction of the Jewish nation by Nebuchadnezzar, the Jews received a good deal of foreign influence: 'De là viennent, dans l'Ancien Testament, le livre de Job (que je crois être une traduction mutilée et remaniée d'un livre sacré concernant un Dieu incarné, souffrant, mis à mort et ressuscité), la plupart des Psaumes, le Cantique des Cantiques, les livres sapientiaux (qui viennent peut-être du même courant qui a produit les ouvrages dits hermétiques; les écrits attribués à Denys l'Aréopagite en viennent peut-être aussi), ce qu'on nomme le "second Isaïe", certains des petits prophètes, le livre de Daniel et celui de Tobie. Presque tout le reste de l'Ancien Testament est un tissu d'horreurs.' See also Appendix C.

thought that Philo would interest her, because of his attempt to fuse Greek and Hebrew thought, but apart from odd quotations and references the only passage on Philo of any significance is where she mentions his concept of the mediator, the logos:

Philon (s'il faut croire ce qu'on en dit?) conçoit le Médiateur entre Dieu et l'homme. Dégradation de l'harmonie pythagoricienne. La vraie conception est qu'il soit tout à fait Dieu et tout à fait homme, et aussi ordre du monde, lien des deux. (C3 261)

Philo seems to have believed fervently in the immanence of Jewish God, at the same time as emphasising in traditional/fashion his transcendence.¹ It was sacrilegious to him however to think of God being present in the world in human form, and the Christian notion of incarnation had no meaning for him. The logos is sometimes thought of by Philo as almost a second God, sometimes as the chief attribute of the deity, but never as an equal with the Supreme God. He is a sort of concession made to human frailty by the deity: 'The logos is the God of us imperfect people, but the true sages worship the One Being'.²

¹See e.g. N. Bentwich, Philo-Judaeus of Alexandria (Philadelphia 1910), p. 133.

²Philo Judaeus, Legum Allegoriae, III, 73: Of the logos he says: οὗτος γὰρ ἡμῶν τῶν ἀτελῶν ἂν εἴη θεός, τῶν δὲ σοφῶν καὶ τελείων ὁ πρῶτος.
Trans. Bentwich, op. cit., p. 157.

The logos is thus a stage on the way to God, and not God himself. In the same way, the logos can be the divine influence in man, raising him indeed to God, but without becoming incarnate. This was the manner in which Philo conceived the Messianic hope. But of course for Simone Weil such a conception was lacking in the vital element of incarnation. A mediator was not a mediator unless it partook of the nature of both extremes.

The development of angelology in Judaism is a feature which might have interested her had she turned her attention to it. Angels were clearly mediators of a sort, conceived to bridge the ever-widening gulf between the deity and man. Deutsch explains it thus:

The whole angelology, so strikingly simple before the captivity and so wonderfully complex after it, owes its quick development in Babylonian soil to some awe-stricken desire which grows with growing culture, removing the inconceivable Being further and further from human touch or knowledge.¹

But the 'inconceivable Being' was not in fact compromised by the concept of intermediary beings. As Guttman points out, the gulf remains in spite of them:

¹Essay on the Talmud, quot. Bentwich, op. cit., p. 140.

Even where it [personalistic monotheism] pictures a kind of celestial world inhabited by angels, neither the basic difference between God and his creation, nor the uniqueness of God himself is compromised.¹

The fact that this appeared to be unacceptable to Simone Weil, in spite of its purity in keeping apart the realms of the Good and the necessary, has been pointed out by Leslie Fiedler in connexion with the Jewish dogma of the Sephiroth.² She necessarily rejected the notion because in the end she was only concerned with incarnation, whereas the Sephiroth were looked on as intermediaries between the earthly sphere and the heavenly. Certainly in the concept of angels the incarnate element is lacking.

It is in some ways strange however that Simone Weil was not more interested in the development of Jewish mysticism, which has a long and authentic tradition. The ideals of the Jewish mystics redressed many of the wrongs of which Simone Weil accused early Judaism; it was intensely personal, as is all mysticism, and because, obviously, it was unconcerned with

¹Op. cit., p. 8.

²'Simone Weil, Prophet out of Israel, Saint of the Absurd', Commentary (Jan. 1951), pp. 36-46.

territorial conquest, it had none of the earlier belligerency. Jewish mysticism was a genuine attempt to bridge the gap created by the transcendental monotheism of orthodox Judaism; the mystic's role is to re-establish contact:

Mysticism does not deny or overlook the abyss; on the contrary, it begins by realizing its existence, but from there it proceeds to a quest for the secret that will close it in, the hidden path that will span it.¹

Once again however the distinction between man and God at all times is seldom blurred. In the early stages of Jewish mysticism this is particularly true; for the Merkabah mystics the sense of transcendence is overwhelming: 'The infinite gulf between the soul and God the King on His throne is not even bridged at the climax of mystical ecstasy'.² It is significant that the Hebrew expression for the unio mystica is 'devekuth', adhesion to God, a union with and conformity to the divine will, rather than an abandonment of self in the divine. As we have seen however, Simone Weil conceived the mystic goal rather differently, as an annihilation of the individual self

¹Scholem, op. cit., p. 8.

²Ibid., p. 55.

in the divine (I, §5). According to her, man is incapable of loving God except through the presence of divine love within him. Man's task is to deny his own individuality in order that God may love God through him.

L'âme n'aime pas comme une créature d'un amour créé. Cet amour en elle est divin, incréé, car c'est l'amour de Dieu pour Dieu qui passe à travers elle. Dieu seul est capable d'aimer Dieu. Nous pouvons seulement consentir à perdre nos sentiments propres pour laisser passage en notre âme à cet amour. C'est cela se nier soi-même. Nous ne sommes créés que pour ce consentement.

(PSO 102-3)

This is clearly somewhat removed from the vigorous life-affirmation of the best of Jewish thought. One is sorry however that she did not pay more attention to the mystic tradition of Judaism, in which she would probably have found much to praise.

It is a pity too that Simone Weil never seemed to appreciate the ethical precepts set out in Talmudic teaching, as many of these anticipate her own declaration of rights and obligations in L'Enracinement. The right to live, to possess things by which to live, the prohibition of deception and regard for truth, regard for the human person, including liberty and human freedom and equality--all these are included ex-

plicitly or implicitly in Talmudic law.¹ Simone Weil divides her list of human needs into two categories, physical and spiritual, but in essence they are similar to those enumerated in Talmudic teaching. Physical needs, she says, are easy to enumerate, and fairly obvious: 'Ils concernent la protection contre la violence, le logement, les vêtements, la chaleur, l'hygiène, les soins en cas de maladie' (E 12). Among spiritual needs she considers of first importance things such as order, liberty, equality, hierarchy or a sense of one's place in a given order, respect for the human person, security, property both private and collective. From this brief comparison it is possible to see in Simone Weil and the Talmudic teachers a common concern with the practical rights and duties of the individual living in society.

One can only regret that the richness of this tradition remained a closed book to Simone Weil, and that her hatred of the earlier part of Jewish history blinded her to its later, less barbaric phase. At the same time however, it is important to appreciate the stand that she took; her criticism of

¹For an exposition of Talmudic teaching, see Epstein, op. cit., §15, and Abrahams, op. cit., §7.

pre-exilic Judaism, in spite of its occasional excesses and errors of fact, must stand as a just condemnation of brutality carried out in the name of the Supreme God, and as a warning of the dangers inherent in the idea of a God who intervenes in the affairs of man.

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II, \$5

THE CHURCH AS SOCIETY

Simone Weil's reactions to the Catholic Church are to some degree an extension of her views on Judaism; she accuses Catholics of the same worship of the social element, and considers true Christianity to have been betrayed by the incorporation into the Church¹ of Jewish elements utterly alien to the true spirit of Christianity. There is however an important difference; whereas Simone Weil felt herself, in spite of her Jewish blood, a complete stranger to Judaism, in the case of Catholicism she felt a strong affinity which led her to the threshold of the Church, although to the end of her life she remained there, on the threshold, without reaching the point of membership through baptism.

The main sources of her attitude to Catholicism are to be found in the letters to Fr. Perrin,² dating from her time in Marseille, in the long Lettre à un religieux written to the priest Fr. Couturier in America, in one of the letters to Maurice Schumann dating from the months in London, and the profession of belief contained in the 'Dernier texte'. There

¹For convenience we shall refer throughout to the Roman Catholic Church as 'the Church'.

²We shall deal here only with Simone Weil's attitude to the Church as an institution; for her interpretation of the role of Christ, see III, §7.

are also frequent references in the Cahiers, but since these are jottings, experiments in ideas, they can be considered as less definitive than the letters, where she was attempting to explain her ideas.

Because of her association towards the end of her life with prominent Catholics such as Fr. Perrin and Gustave Thibon, and because of the obvious trust she put in these men, Simone Weil was associated from the time of the publication of La Pesanteur et la grâce with Catholicism.¹ This was perhaps unfortunate, since it allowed the general public to think that she was very much nearer entry into the Church than she actually was, and caused a backlash from Catholics anxious to point out that her ideas were not, in fact, in tune with Catholic dogma. The position is thus somewhat confused, and many Catholics in authority have taken up defensive positions against this figure who seems, superficially at

¹The confusion was increased by her apparently free gift of her ideas, in the form of her notebooks, to Gustave Thibon, with the injunction that 'Si pendant trois ou quatre ans, vous n'entendez pas parler de moi, considérez que vous en avez la complète propriété' (PG, Introduction, p. viii). Elsewhere in this letter she notes: 'Pour qui aime la vérité, dans l'opération d'écrire, la main qui tient la plume et le corps et l'âme qui y sont attachés, avec toute leur enveloppe sociale, sont choses d'importance infinitésimale' (ibid., pp. vii-viii).

least, to represent so clearly the modern spirit of anti-authoritarianism, lest she should appear also to represent orthodox Catholicism.¹

Although the writings embodying her dialogue with the Church date from the last two years of her life, the relationship established with Fr. Perrin in June 1941 was by no means Simone Weil's first contact with Christianity. Previous encounters are outlined in the 'Autobiographie spirituelle' (AD 31-51);² first the experience in the Portuguese fishing village, then in 1937 the journey to Assisi where, in the little chapel of Santa Maria degli Angeli, 'quelque chose de plus fort que moi m'a obligée, pour la première fois de ma vie, à me mettre à genoux' (AD 37). Later, the monastery

¹See e.g. J.-M. Perrin, J. Daniélou, etc., Réponses aux questions de Simone Weil (Paris 1964); C. Moeller, 'Simone Weil et l'incroyance des croyants', Littérature du XXe siècle et christianisme (Paris 1954), pp. 220 ff.; M. Moré, 'La Pensée religieuse de Simone Weil', Dieu Vivant, No. 4 (1950), 35-68.

²It is important to note that here she is speaking of 'trois contacts avec le catholicisme qui ont vraiment compté' (AD 36). Other contacts, such as her attendance at mass in Bourges cathedral and her friendship with a fellow-student who was about to enter a convent, have been noted by J. Cabaud, L'Expérience vécue de Simone Weil (Paris 1957). This fact is remarked upon by J.-M. Perrin, Réponses aux questions..., p. 13, n. 1.

of Solesmes was the occasion of the two 'rencontres avec le Christ' which will be considered in III, §7. In addition to these personal encounters, she tells Perrin that her familiarity with the basic message of Christianity gives her the impression of having been born inside it (AD 35). She tells him frankly that he did not in fact introduce her to Christianity:

Vous ne m'avez pas apporté l'inspiration chrétienne ni le Christ; car quand je vous ai rencontré cela n'était plus à faire, c'était fait, sans l'entremise d'aucun être humain.

(AD 32)

She indicates the same early acceptance of the Christian tradition in an unpublished letter to Emmanuel Mounier written probably between 1936 and 1938, in which she says:

Pour moi, personnellement, je ne suis pas catholique; mais je considère l'idée chrétienne, qui a ses racines dans la pensée grecque qui a nourri au cours des siècles toute notre civilisation européenne, comme quelque chose à quoi on ne peut pas renoncer sans s'avilir.

These encounters however were with the spirit of Christianity as Simone Weil saw it, and not with the Church as an institution. Her close relationship with the latter can be said to have begun in 1941 in Marseilles, which indicates that it was concentrated in a short period at the end of her life, of which more than half was spent in Protestant countries, the United States and England. It is thus somewhat precarious

to speculate on what her attitude would have become had she survived the years of the war and returned to France. No final conclusion is possible on the question of whether her attitude would have hardened towards the Church, or whether some of her difficulties would have been resolved by later developments within Catholicism itself.

What can be said however is that she took the question of her possible baptism extremely seriously. This is reflected of course in her contact with Perrin, in the long letters she wrote to him and the visits she paid him for the purpose of discussing her position, in the letter^{to}/Fr. Couturier, which is not, as is sometimes supposed, a series of accusations levelled at the Church, but propositions on which she had been meditating, but neither affirmed nor denied, and as to the orthodoxy of which she wanted a categorical answer.¹ Until such time as her objections to the Church had been met, she was prepared to remain 'au seuil de l'Eglise, sans bouger,

¹ 'Les opinions qui suivent ont pour moi des degrés divers de probabilité ou de certitude mais toutes sont accompagnées dans mon esprit d'un point d'interrogation. Je ne les exprimerai à l'indicatif qu'à cause de la pauvreté du langage; j'aurais besoin que la conjugaison contienne un mode supplémentaire. Dans le domaine des choses saintes, je n'affirme rien catégoriquement' (LR 10).

immobile' (AD 45). She was aware of the distress that this caused her Catholic friends, but, as she wrote to Thibon about Fr. Perrin, 'je ne peux pas entrer dans l'Eglise pour ne pas lui faire de la peine'.¹ Her conviction that this was the place God wanted her to occupy was very stable, secure as she was in the belief that if one desired the truth sufficiently one would not go unrewarded (AD 34). Because of this, she says, 'je suis loin d'éprouver aucun tourment' (AD 45).

But it must be admitted that she found barriers of incomprehension between her and the Church, even among those members of it to whom she was nearest, barriers which for example the Lettre à un religieux and the 'Questionnaire' were designed to remove. She confesses to failing to understand Fr. Perrin at times; it is fairly clear that they were not always on the same wavelength: 'Je ne comprends jamais exactement de quoi il parle'.² It is clear that she was worried by divergences among opinions given her by different

¹J.-M. Perrin & G. Thibon, Simone Weil telle que nous l'avons connue (Paris 1952), p. 55.

²Letter to Thibon, ibid.

priests on matters of faith; this, she held, made for an incoherence which was at odds with the apparent rigidity of the Catholic system (LR 47-8). In particular, she held that the belief that salvation was possible outside the visible Church was illogical, 'car tout l'édifice est construit autour de l'affirmation contraire' (LR 48).

She was concerned too about the apparent contradiction between an infallible Church and its evolution in history (LR 46); that is, she was conscious of the element of chance involved in the gradual building up of dogma, much of which seems to have only a very tenuous connexion with Biblical teaching. These contradictions necessitated a complete rethinking of the Church's position, in her opinion. Her efforts to clarify certain aspects of the Church's teaching did not always meet with success: she never received an answer to the letter written to Fr. Couturier, although this perhaps due to the difficulties of communication in a world at war rather than to any desire to remain silent on his part.¹

¹Some sort of a reply seems indicated by a remark in Fr. Perrin's preface to the Réponses aux questions..., p. 11, where he speaks of Fr. Couturier 'qui avait obtenu, avant de communiquer le texte paru sous le titre de Lettre à un religieux que cet écrit ne serait pas publié sans sa réponse'. But no reply is indicated in the official Gallimard publication of the text.

The answer which she eventually received in the form of the Réponses aux questions de Simone Weil, even if it had not had to be posthumous, would scarcely have satisfied her, since the writers, having praised her personal qualities and admitted her spiritual insight, invariably have recourse to judgements of 'right' and 'wrong' rather than the 'orthodox' and 'unorthodox' which she sought.

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What then were her objections to the Church? As we have seen, she sets them out at great length. But if we analyse the Lettre à un religieux and the letters to Perrin, we find the same themes treated in every case; the conviction that God wants her to remain outside the Church, her love for all that is not contained in the Church which prevents her asking for baptism, criticism of the exclusiveness of the Church. Her love for manifestations of the religious spirit outside the visible Church and her attempt to encompass these within Christianity have led to the charge of syncretism on the part of some of her critics, and will be dealt with more fully in other chapters (e.g. III, §3). It is important to remember however that in the ideas she was evolving on matters of comparative religion, Simone Weil was working against time

in conditions which would have reduced most people to silence, and that she never came to any final conclusion on the question.

The very fact that she was able to ask the questions she did in the Lettre à un religieux indicates that she saw a possibility of reconciling her ideas on other religions with the Church. It is possible that had she received a favourable reply from Fr. Couturier she would have felt herself one step nearer baptism. But here she apparently failed to see the great gulf which in fact separated her from the Church, and to realise that although she might eventually feel herself reconciled with Catholicism, the Church could not possibly admit as a member someone who left her mind open even to the possibility of revelation outside Christianity which was of equal value to it. The position here is unambiguous; while the Church has come--increasingly in recent years--to realise the value of other religions and the genuine spirituality which can be generated by them, nevertheless the true revelation can be through Christ alone, and the Church as guardian of this revelation is alone charged with the mission of bringing men to the truth. 'Aucune mission ne se réalise pleinement hors de l'Eglise',¹ was Perrin's answer to Simone Weil's hesi-

¹Perrin & Thibon, p. 80.

tations concerning her baptism, a remark similar to that made by Henri de Lubac when he wrote that something is lacking in all religion that is not a following of Christ; outside Christianity nothing attains its end.¹ The message was essentially reiterated by Pope Paul VI when, speaking of the adherents of other monotheistic religions and of the great Afro-Asian religions, he said:

Obviously we cannot share in these various forms of religion nor ~~we~~ can we remain indifferent to the fact that each of them, in its own way, should regard itself as being the equal of any other and should authorize its followers not to seek to discover whether God has revealed the perfect and definitive form, free from all error, in which he wishes to be known, loved and served. Indeed, honesty compels us to declare openly our conviction that there is but one true religion, the religion of Christianity. It is our hope that all who seek God and adore him may come to acknowledge its truth.²

¹Catholicism, trans. L. C. Sheppard (London 1950), p. 111. Karl Adam affirms a similar superiority in Catholicism when he writes: 'Catholicism is the positive religion par excellence, essentially affirmation without subtraction, and in the full sense essentially thesis. All non-Catholic creeds are essentially anti-thesis, conflict, contradiction and negation. And since negation is of its very nature sterile, therefore they cannot be creative, productive and original, or at least not in the measure in which Catholicism has displayed these qualities throughout the centuries.' The Spirit of Catholicism (London 1929), p. 12.

²Encyclical on the Church, 6 Aug. 1964. Quot. in B. Leeming, S. J., The Vatican Council and Christian Unity (London 1966), p. 288. Against this should be set however the very positive approach to other religions of a Catholic such as

Thus the Church claims an absolute superiority, though not an absolute monopoly, in access to God's truth. Because this truth is uncontaminated by historical accident, historical 'mistakes' such as the Inquisition, made by the Church, although regrettable, are of no consequence in the end, since they are a sign of the evil inherent in history and not in the Church itself. Thus Perrin claims:

Il est à remarquer que les préjugés que nous déplorons, dans le moyen-âge, par exemple, ne sont pas imputables à l'Eglise ni au message chrétien, mais au contraire que ce sont les défauts du moyen-âge qui ont fait peser leur imperfection sur tel ou tel saint.¹

Adam too argues that mediaeval persecutions did not spring from the nature of the Church, since there were non-Catholic persecutions too, but from the mediaeval concept of the State.² But Simone Weil would doubtless reply to this that allegiance to the Beast will always result in persecution, and that it is

Louis Massignon, whose work regarding Islam is based not on any missionary zeal but on a genuine love for this religion, and a respect born not of an idle intellectual curiosity but of a recognition of its uniqueness. See e.g. the essays of Parole donnée (Paris 1962). Simone Weil seems to have been unaware of Massignon's contribution to the comparative study of religion.

¹Commentary to Attente de Dieu (1st edn, Paris 1950), p. 58. The numbering of the pages of this edn is different from that of subsequent edns.

²Op. cit., p. 205.

the duty of the Church to preserve dogma and the sacraments, and not to associate itself with the secular State. The Cathar Church, for instance, persecuted nobody. For Simone Weil the tree is known by its fruit: good produces only good, and evil can produce only evil, so that evil in the Church could only proceed from a fundamentally evil inspiration. There must have been a divergence at some point from the true teaching of Christ: 'L'Eglise a porté trop de fruits mauvais pour qu'il n'y ait pas eu une erreur au départ' (LR 32).

It should be noted that Simone Weil's difficulty in accepting the historical aspect of the Church does not spring from an incapacity to separate the visible Church and the message of Christianity contained therein. She herself makes the distinction when speaking of those aspects of the Church which she loves--the sacraments, the Incarnation, and so on (see 'Dernier texte', PSO 149), and the social aspect which prevents her from seeking baptism. She makes the same distinction between the vessel and its contents in other spheres; in speaking of the sacraments, for example, she repeats Catholic dogma in affirming that the perfection of the Eucharist does not depend on the quality of the elements of bread and wine, nor on the moral rectitude of the priest administering

them (AD 142). Again, the truth which she believed herself to be carrying was in no sense a value-judgement on herself; she only hoped that that truth would not die in the womb as a result of her own inadequacy (AD 68). One can only assume that the reason why she accepted the imperfection of the vehicle in the one case and not in the other was because of the Church's claim to be a vehicle superior to all others, while in the case of the sacraments or of a human being, it was only one vehicle among many.

*

Returning to the question of the Church in history, it would be as well to survey the development of the Church as an institution, in order to understand the tendencies to which Simone Weil objected. Firstly there is the question of the links between the Church and the Roman Empire. It may be that Simone Weil over-emphasised the influence of Rome on the developing Church, ignoring the conflict between the two, but Perrin's rather naïve statement that the Church 'ne doit aux Césars que la potence où fut crucifié Pierre et le glaive qui décapita Paul'¹ is hardly borne out by the facts of history.

¹Commentary to AD, p. 109.

The fact that it was Rome that became the capital of the Western Church was perhaps a historical accident, in the sense that it could well have been Constantinople, but it remains true nevertheless that the recognition of Christianity and the subsequent association of the Church with the State ensured that much that was purely Roman passed into the Church. Constantine was a Roman Emperor, none the less Roman for being Christian, and the place occupied by Christianity under Constantine was very much the same as the situation of the old Roman religion in the pre-Christian State. In taking a firm stand on the question of religious practice, and in associating religion with the State in the person of the Emperor, Constantine was only continuing the Roman tradition. S. L. Green-slade puts it thus:

Roman religion had been very much an affair of the State. The cults were maintained at public expense in order to secure the favour of God for the State, and the Emperor was pontifex maximus. . . . The real paradox, the real revolution, would have come to pass if the Emperor had renounced ultimate control over the Church or any part of the life of his subjects.¹

It is of course slightly ambiguous to speak of Constantine

¹Church and State from Constantine to Theodosius (London 1954), p. 12.

as a Christian Emperor; scholars are still undecided as to the depth of his religious conviction. He was primarily a statesman, as is shown by the way in which he sided with the stronger party and sought peace before doctrine in for example his dealings with the Donatist and Arian heresies.¹ His own profession of faith, recorded--approvingly--by Eusebius, makes it clear that he regarded Christianity as a success-philosophy in the same way that previous Emperors had placated the State gods in order to obtain peace and prosperity:

. . . it appears that those who faithfully discharge God's holy laws and shrink from the transgression of His commandments are rewarded with abundant blessings and endued with well-grounded hope as well as ample power for the accomplishment of their undertakings. On the other hand, those who have cherished impiety have experienced consequences in keeping with their evil choice.²

One can understand why Simone Weil considered Constantine's recognition of Christianity as one of the two 'catastrophes de l'histoire du christianisme' (SG 170). She saw only too that the State must be concerned for the physical well-being of its subjects, and that to link this with religious practice.

¹See J. Zeiller, L'Empire romain et l'Eglise, Histoire du Monde (Paris 1928), V, 69 ff.

²Quot. C. N. Cochrane, Christianity and Classical Culture (New York 1957), p. 184.

would inevitably lead to Constantine's attitude.

Catholicism was not however finally established as the State religion until the edict of the Emperors Gratian, Valentinian II and Theodosius I in 380. This document is important for the definitive statement of faith which it made after a century of controversy on the nature of the Trinity, and for the intolerant wording in which it was couched. The Emperors define the elements of the Christian faith as they would have them, and then continue:

We order those who follow this doctrine to receive the title of Catholic Christians, but others we judge to be mad and raving and worthy of incurring the disgrace of heretical teaching.¹

Not that Simone Weil was much more enthusiastic about the Church in the Roman Empire before its official recognition by the State. One might have thought that while Christianity was visibly weak and persecuted, her natural instinct to side with the oppressed would have prevailed. But she was suspicious of the joy of the martyrs as they went to their death; in her view this sprang from an illusory feeling of strength and

¹Quot. S. Z. Ehler & J. B. Morrall, Church and State through the centuries (London 1954), p. 7. Cf. the equation of unorthodoxy and lunacy in present-day Russia.

from the conviction that their sufferings would be rewarded in a material sense. She compares the difficulty of faithfulness to the despised and rejected Christ at the time of the crucifixion with the comparative ease of faithfulness to the risen and triumphant Christ, surrounded by a Church of followers:

Il était difficile d'être fidèle au Christ.
C'était une fidélité à vide. Bien plus facile d'être fidèle jusqu'à la mort à Napoléon. Bien plus facile pour les martyrs, plus tard, d'être fidèles; car il y avait déjà l'Eglise, une force, avec des promesses temporelles. On meurt pour ce qui est fort, non pour ce qui est faible; ou du moins pour ce qui, étant momentanément faible, garde une auréole de force. (C2 11)

On the other hand her interpretation of Rome as the Beast of the Apocalypse (see II, §2) is the interpretation of the persecuted early Christians, when the conflict between the new religion and the pagan State was at its height.

The link between Rome and the Christian Church was obviously accepted by St. Augustine. The De civitate Dei is built on the assumption that the heavenly city is a spiritualised version of the earthly one, and those virtues which had impelled the Romans in pursuit of earthly glory could be employed for the gaining of the heavenly city. The Roman Empire was an example to Christians:

Wherefore there were two reasons why the Roman Empire was expanded and won glory from men; first, that due reward might be given to its citizens who were of the character which I have described; secondly, that the citizens of the eternal city during their sojourn here might study with sober diligence the examples set before them in Roman history, and might perceive how much affection they owe to their heavenly country in order to win eternal life if the earthly city has inspired such affection in its own citizens that they may win glory among men.¹

Simone Weil is perhaps not altogether unjustified in her judgement of Augustine; having commented on the transfer of the religious inspiration of the Hebrews to the Romans she continues: 'La Cité de Dieu marque un nouveau transfert. L'Empire a succédé à Israël, l'Eglise succède à l'Empire' (CS 172). Her main criticism of Augustine however was that, like Thomas Aquinas, he considered the pagans to have gone wrong not in their actions but in their worship of false gods. This, for Simone Weil, was the 'blasphème contre l'Esprit [qui] consiste à affirmer que le mal peut produire du bien pur, ou que du bien pur peut produire du mal' (C2 31C).² His attitude thus reflected

¹Proinde non solum ut talis merces talibus hominibus redderetur Romanum imperium ad humanam gloriam dilatum est; verum etiam ut cives aeternae illius civitatis, quamdiu hic perigrinantur diligenter et sobrie illa intueantur exempla et videant quanta dilectio debeatur supernae patriae propter vitam aeternam, si tantum a suis civibus terrena dilecta est propter hominum gloriam.' De civitate Dei, V, §16. Quot. R. H. Barrow, Introduction to St. Augustine 'The City of God' (London 1950), pp. 52-3.

²This is a commentary on Matt. xii. 32-3. Barrow (op. cit.,

the same sort of social idolatry with relation to the Church as the Hebrews' idolatry of Israel (CS 64).

To be fair to Augustine, he expressly states his belief that men living before Christ and foreign to the tradition of Israel have lived according to God and therefore belong to the spiritual Jerusalem.¹ Job is one example (this surely would have pleased Simone Weil). Moreover, he holds that this could only be granted to men who had received from God a revelation of the one Mediator of God and man, Jesus Christ, surely an example for Simone Weil of the working of the Spirit outside the visible boundaries of Christianity.

Simone Weil's dislike and suspicion of early Christianity's acceptance by Rome and the resulting influence of the one on

p. 161) vindicates Augustine as follows: 'It is easy to miss what St. Augustine means by this constant assertion (that the life of the nations was vitiated because they worshipped false gods) and to assume that in his zeal for the god of Christianity he is simply affirming the jealousy of a jealous God. When he says that pagan thought and ambitions and the institutions which were their outcome went wrong because the pagans worshipped false gods, he means that they analysed their experience incorrectly; because their analysis was incorrect, they failed to see what were the absolute presuppositions upon which their sciences rested.'

¹De civitate Dei, XVIII, §47.

the other was, it is clear, only a manifestation of her repugnance at the idea of the Church itself becoming a State, whether this were absorbed into the secular State, a tradition which was continued in the Eastern Empire in the form of Caesaro-papalism, or formed a rival of like nature to it. She ignores any possible benefit which the situation might produce, such as the tempering of the secular power by the sacred, and vice versa.¹ As far as she was concerned, the more powerful the Church became temporally, the more difficult it was to follow Christ.

As the Roman Empire disintegrated, and the Dark Ages closed in upon Europe, the temporal power of the Church grew rapidly, however. H. Marrou shows how, with the decay of the Imperial institutions, the Church gradually acquired administrative power by rising to fill a gap every time one occurred, so that by the thirteenth century a great deal of temporal power had been amassed and the Church was a force to be reckoned with in Europe.² On the other hand it can be argued

¹See Greenslade, op. cit., p. 34.

²J. Daniélou & H. Marrou, The Christian Centuries, I: The First Six Hundred Years, tr. V. Cronin (London 1964), p. 440.

that this power was necessary to the very survival of the Church in conflict with the nascent nationalisms of the mediaeval period.¹ For example, it is possible to predict that the history of Europe would have taken a very different course if the Emperor Frederick II's designs on Rome and the reconstitution of the Roman Empire had been realised. What it is unfortunately impossible to specify however is the precise nature of this difference, or the way in which Christianity would have developed if deprived of its Roman heart. Perhaps the focus of Christianity would have swung to the East, leaving only pockets of the Church in the West to develop divergently. Would Simone Weil have been satisfied with the disappearance

¹The case is made out for the temporal rule of the mediaeval Popes by Dom Cuthbert Butler, The Vatican Council 1869-70 (London 1930), p. 14. He writes of the immense power of the secular Emperors of the Franconian and Suabian Houses, and concludes: 'In the contest for the independence of the Church against such rulers the modern Pope, interested only in the welfare of religion, wielding only spiritual authority, could not have counted, would have had no power for good, in those times of brute force and turbulence. Only that union of spiritual and temporal force that seems so strange to us, could have withstood the evils and achieved the great work for Western Christendom, which the mediaeval Papacy would seem to have been providentially raised up to achieve in the transitional period while the Teutonic principalities were being welded into the nations of Europe.'

of the Church as an institution? It seems unlikely, since though she attacked the social aspect of the Church she realised that as a body it had an important function to fulfil, which we shall discuss later in this chapter.

What she did criticize bitterly however was the rise in the mediaeval Church of a totalitarian concept of its role, and this is the centre too of her criticism of the Church as an institution. She saw a totalitarian stranglehold on the intellect in St. Thomas' definition of faith as ^u submission to the Church; which for her was pure idolatry:

L'adhésion inconditionnée et globale à tout ce que l'Eglise enseigne, a enseigné et enseignera, que Saint Thomas nomme la foi, n'est pas la foi, mais de l'idolâtrie sociale.

(CS 82)

The mediaeval Church in her opinion set itself up as a 'Dieu terrestre' which was in all respects the equivalent of the national God of Judaism, or Hitler's incarnation of the German 'soul' in Wotan (C3 136). This worship of the social element was even more dangerous in the case of the Church than in that of a secular society, because it was 'une société à prétention divine', containing an 'ersatz du bien' (C2 239). This claim to divine inspiration was capable of more harm than the actual evil which marred it.

It is not possible to deny the attempt at temporal domination by the Church in the high Middle Ages. Whether this is justified by the Church's desire for survival or not, it is clear that the Church thought fit to use the weapons of politics for political ends. It is also true that this development of the ascendancy of the spiritual power over the temporal can be traced back to Augustine's claim of submission of the earthly city to the heavenly, whatever his intentions were. The Bull Unam Sanctam issued by Pope Boniface VIII in 1302 is one of the clearest expositions of the logic of the position.¹ He argues the superiority of the spiritual power, and the right of the secular power to wield the 'material' sword only under the supervision of the priest--although most of his arguments are a priori, and he depends in several instances on 'it is necessary that' as an argument--ending on a note that has a doctrinal as well as a political implication: 'Consequently we declare, state, define and pronounce that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff'.

Exactly the same line is taken by Pope Innocent IV in his

¹Quot. Ehler & Morrall, op. cit., p. 89.

encyclical Eger cui levia, except that this Pope is more open in tracing his lineage back to the Roman Emperors. According to him it was not even necessary for the Pope to receive temporal authority from Constantine's fusing of Church and State, since he had it potentially and by the nature of things.¹ It is this use of the spiritual for temporal ends, and the assumption that all men are in reality under the Church's jurisdiction that caused Simone Weil's denunciation of the mediaeval Church as a 'gros animal totalitaire' (C3 312), the Great Beast who, as we saw in the preceding chapters, is unsatisfied while anything remains outside his sway.

On the question of the Crusades there is of course the same difficulty of a fusion and confusion between temporal and spiritual ends. Since the Church was a political power, it must use political and military force to repel what was after all a military attack. The immediate incentive of the First Crusade was the request by the Byzantine Emperor Alexis Comnenus for military assistance to keep out the invading

¹ An extract of this encyclical is to be found in A. Fliche etc., Histoire de l'Eglise depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours, X: La Chrétienté romaine 1198-1274 (Paris 1950), p. 240.

Turks.¹ An attack on the Eastern frontier of Christendom was an attack on the Church itself, and the Church had to respond.² The Albigensian crusade, the one which scandalised Simone Weil perhaps the most deeply (see III, §5), began as the purely religious issue of fighting heresy within the Church, but passed through all shades of political involvement right up to the purely political aims of the adventurer Simon de Montfort.

It is interesting to compare the attitude of Simone Weil and Fr. Perrin towards the Crusades and other episodes of the mediaeval Church's history. Perrin, as we saw, holds that the deeds committed earlier by the Church and now regretted cast no shadow on the Church itself nor on the message of Christianity, since they were simply the imperfection of the

¹See M. W. Baldwin, The Mediaeval Church (New York 1953), pp. 100 ff.

²See P. Alphandéry & A. Dupront, La Chrétienté et l'idée de croisade (Paris 1954). The writers describe the emotional background to the Crusades, beginning with the pilgrimages to the Holy Land which became ever more popular during the Middle Ages, and the idea, after the fall of Jerusalem to the Muslims in 1009, that the privilege of pilgrimage might have to be fought for.

age reflected through otherwise holy men.¹ Simone Weil on the other hand tells Perrin:

Des saints ont approuvé les Croisades, l'Inquisition. Je ne peux pas ne pas penser qu'ils ont eu tort. Je ne peux pas récuser la lumière de la conscience. Si je pense que sur un point je vois plus clair qu'eux, je dois admettre que sur ce point ils ont été aveuglés par quelque chose de très puissant. Ce quelque chose, c'est l'Eglise en tant que chose sociale.

(AD 22)

Contact with the message of Christ is thus inevitably lost, in her opinion, the more temporally powerful one becomes. With great candour she directs the same criticism at Perrin himself; she reproaches him for defining something as 'faux' when he meant 'non orthodoxe', sees in this slip a lack of objectivity and intellectual integrity, and therefore an imperfection, and puts this imperfection down to 'l'attachement à l'Eglise comme à une patrie terrestre' (AD 64).

It should be noted that Simone Weil's objection to the more barbarous aspects of the mediaeval Church's policy is not simply their physical crudity. In our supposedly more delicate age the Church is at one with enlightened opinion in condemningⁿ the use of physical force in persuading either

¹Commentary on AD, p. 58.

pagans or heretics to conform. Cardinal Bea admits the errors of coercion in the history of the Church:

Une . . . aberration d'un amour mal entendu de la vérité se trouve dans les douloureuses guerres de religion, quand au nom de la vérité on a tenté d'imposer avec la force certaines convictions aux autres hommes, reniant un fait non moins fondamental de l'amour de la vérité, à savoir la liberté de l'homme.¹

In other words coercion as a means of imparting the truth is condemned. But for Simone Weil the idea of persuasion itself is wrong. She was convinced that a change of religion was a very dangerous thing, and that missionary work was a waste of time even where it was not directly evil:

Personnellement, jamais je ne donnerais fût-ce vingt sous à une oeuvre de missionnaires. Je crois que pour un homme le changement de religion est chose aussi dangereuse que pour un écrivain le changement de langue.

(LR 34)

Her interpretation of what mission work should be about was quite different from the usual:

Quand le Christ a dit: 'Enseignez toutes les nations et portez-leur la nouvelle', il ordonnait de porter une nouvelle, non une théologie. . . . Probablement il voulait que chaque apôtre ajoutât . . . la bonne nouvelle de la vie et de la mort du Christ à la religion du pays où il se trouverait.

(LR 31)

¹La Liberté des consciences, in Ferrin, etc., Réponses aux questions..., p. 180.

Spreading the good news should thus not involve peoples in having to renounce the faith and traditions which were a part of themselves; such an attitude could only end in 'déracinement' (LR 32-3). De Lubac likewise criticises the attitude that conversion of 'the nations' involves a destruction of the manifestations of religion already present. It is a mistake, he holds, to abolish a pagan religion, even if it contains error, and to 'start afresh' with Christianity.¹

It is thus easy to understand how Simone Weil, having so broad an interpretation of the Christian community, should have such a horror of anathema and excommunication; spiritual persecution is in her eyes worse than physical, and the suggestion that a soul is damned because it finds itself--even wilfully--outside Catholic orthodoxy is very repugnant to her.² It is unfortunate that her criticism of the Church's use of the anathema should have been answered only by Perrin's contention: 'Pour reprocher à l'Eglise ses "anathèmes", il faut oublier quelles larmes ils lui arrachent, car, comme

¹Op cit., p. 144.

²The attitude of the Church on this point has of course undergone considerable modification. See the end of this chapter, pp. 343-4.

l'Apôtre, "c'est en pleurant qu'elle parle".¹ As an attitude however this comes dangerously near to the claim of the mediaeval Church that heretics were condemned to the stake for the good of their souls.

And yet, once again, it is easy to see how, given the temporal rule of the Church, persecution could arise and the Inquisition come into being. If society is Christendom, and members of that society are at the same time members of the Church, there being no distinction between the two communities, then heresy is anti-social and must be punished as such. As Baldwin puts it:

In the religio-political society of those days heresy was tantamount to treason, and its persistence endangered the immortal souls of the faithful. . . . What is perhaps most difficult for the modern mind to grasp is the mediaeval view that, to those who had been duly baptised into the Church, religious belief was not a matter of free individual choice.²

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The resulting abdication of intellectual freedom was an impossible and undesirable position for Simone Weil. As far as she was concerned, there was no such thing as collective

¹Commentary on AD, p. 110.

²Op. cit., p. 62.

thought (this attitude is brought out clearly in the essay 'Note sur la suppression générale des partis politiques', (EL 126-148). Faithfulness at the same time to the truth and to a social group, whether it be political or religious, was impossible:

Il est impossible d'examiner les problèmes effroyablement complexes de la vie publique en étant attentif à la fois, d'une part à discerner la vérité, la justice, le bien public, d'autre part à conserver l'attitude qui convient à un membre de tel groupement. La faculté humaine d'attention n'est pas capable simultanément des deux sou-

(EL 139)

It is not that membership of a group is necessarily repugnant to Simone Weil; on the contrary, she admits envy for those who have found a terrestrial home, but knows that for her it is forbidden:

Il existe un milieu catholique prêt à accueillir chaleureusement quiconque y entre. Or je ne veux pas être adoptée dans un milieu, habiter dans un milieu où on dit 'nous' et être partie de ce 'nous', me trouver chez moi dans un milieu humain quel qu'il soit. En disant que je ne veux pas je m'exprime mal, car je le voudrais bien; tout cela est délicieux. Mais je sens que cela ne m'est pas permis.

(AD 23)

It is not permitted because it would involve an abandoning of her intellectual vocation, which is to witness to the truth wherever it may be found. It is a travesty of true faith to put oneself in the hands of the Church and submit to the

Church's authority in deciding what was truth and what was not:

Un converti qui entre dans l'Eglise . . . a aperçu dans le dogme du vrai et du bien. Mais en franchissant le seuil il professe du même coup n'être pas frappé par les anathema sit, c'est-à-dire accepter en bloc tous les articles dits 'de foi stricte'. Ces articles, il ne les a pas étudiés. Même avec un haut degré d'intelligence et de culture, une vie entière ne suffirait pas à cette étude, vu qu'elle implique celle des circonstances de chaque condamnation. Comment adhérer à des affirmations qu'on ne connaît pas? Il suffit de se soumettre inconditionnellement à l'autorité d'où elles émanent.

(EL 141-2)

In this way, even though there may be great joy in belonging to the Church as a social unit, the idea is finally repugnant to Simone Weil. In addition she felt the time perhaps not appropriate for adhesion to the Church claiming to be a mystical body, since so many other collectivities were claiming to be mystical bodies too, generating in their members the same collective enthusiasm (AD 48-9):

L'image du corps mystique du Christ est très séduisante. Mais je regarde l'importance qu'on accorde aujourd'hui à cette image comme un des signes les plus graves de notre déchéance. Car notre vraie dignité n'est pas d'être parties d'un corps, fût-il mystique, fût-il celui du Christ. Elle consiste en ceci, que dans l'état de perfection, qui est la vocation de chacun de nous, nous ne vivons pas en nous-mêmes, mais le Christ vit en nous; de sorte que par cet état le Christ dans son intégrité, dans son unité indivisible, devient en un sens chacun de nous, comme il est tout entier dans chaque hostie. Les hosties ne sont pas des parties de son corps.

(AD 48)

Given this intense suspicion of immersion in a collectivity, what of Simone Weil's critics who claim that it is intellectual arrogance which provokes this response? Is her hostility to the Church proof of the debt she owed to the rationalistic Greeks, a symptom of the division between religious thought, dependent upon revelation, and philosophy which appeals to reason for its criteria? There is no need to suppose this. While the intellect obviously played an important part in Simone Weil's scheme of things, she was equally conscious of its impotence in the mysteries of religious truth. In fact, she claims that the Church makes a wrong use of the intellect; it is not its task to affirm or deny articles of faith:

Les dogmes de la foi ne sont pas des choses à affirmer. Ce sont des choses à regarder à une certaine distance, avec attention, respect et amour. (LR 50)

Dans l'Eglise en tant que chose sociale, les mystères dégénèrent inévitablement en croyances. Si on y adhère seulement en tant que mystères, peut-on honnêtement entrer dans cette chose sociale? (C2 220)

She is thus ready to love the mysteries of Christianity, but not to assent to the theological elaborations with which the Church has surrounded them (EL 198). In her search for truth, she was completely devoid of all self-seeking, of all desire for material or spiritual gain. Obedience is for her of far

more value than eternal life:

Si j'avais mon salut éternel posé devant moi sur cette table, et si je n'avais qu'à tendre la main pour l'obtenir, je ne tiendrais pas la main aussi longtemps que je ne penserais pas en avoir reçu l'ordre. Du moins j'aime à le croire. . . . je ne désire pas autre chose que l'obéissance elle-même dans sa totalité, c'est-à-dire jusqu'à la croix. (AD 25)¹

The importance of the individual conscience is of course recognised more fully these days by the Church. Cardinal Boia, speaking of the freedom of man, defines it as

le droit de l'homme de décider de son propre destin librement, selon sa propre conscience. De cette liberté, naît le devoir et le droit de l'homme de suivre sa propre conscience, droit et devoir auxquels correspondent le devoir de l'individu et de la société de respecter cette liberté et cette décision personnelle.²

Long before this, Thomas Aquinas had affirmed the obligation of the erroneous conscience, the obligation not to profess belief in something, though it be Christ himself, unless one's conscience could truly accept it.³

Conscience in Simone Weil's view was simply the conviction

¹It is a mark of her integrity that she adds after this, 'Pourtant je n'ai pas le droit de parler ainsi. En parlant ainsi je mens.'

²Op. cit., p. 180.

³Adam, op. cit., p. 233.

which she had had from adolescence that if one desires truth ardently and long enough, one will not be disappointed (AD 34). This is in no way incompatible with Christianity, in her view, because Christ is the truth. She comments on Dostoyevsky's statement that if Christ is not truth, he prefers to be outside the truth with Christ, and calls it 'le plus affreux blasphème' (E 212). Thus there is no real incompatibility between Christianity and a vocation of intellectual integrity. The discomfort of the intellect in the Church, which has been at times so evident in spite of the distinction of a whole tradition of Catholic scholarship,¹ stems, as far as Simone Weil is concerned, from an inability in the Church to establish a correct relationship between the individual and the collectivity:

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

¹Even in recent times the Church has unfortunately been linked only too often with reactionary movements in society. For examples of this in nineteenth-century France, see A. Dansette, Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine (Paris 1948), t. II. Bernanos for his part (see Les Grands cimetières sous la lune) bitterly criticises the collaboration between the Church and acts of repression carried out by the Nationalists during the Spanish Civil War, although he was himself a Nationalist supporter.

Saint-Esprit parlant au corps de l'Eglise et le Saint-Esprit parlant à l'âme.
(CS 25)

This assessment is perhaps unfair in one sense, in that the mystical tradition in Catholicism, which is the highest form of 'le Saint-Esprit parlant à l'âme', has been on the whole successfully incorporated into Catholic orthodoxy. The Church has in general accepted the different outlook of its mystics and revered them accordingly.

But her final answer to those who accuse her of pride would surely be that by remaining outside the institution of the Church she was in a position of great weakness, dependent utterly and entirely upon the mercy of God, without any social element with its false grandeur and security to act as a screen between herself and the truth. In her view nothing was better calculated to inflate a person's self-esteem than adhesion to a collectivity:

La vertu d'humilité est incompatible avec le sentiment d'appartenance à un groupe social choisi par Dieu, nation (Hébreux, Romains, Allemands, etc.) ou Eglise.
(CS 264)¹

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¹The need for intellectual and even doctrinal humility was emphasised by Archbishop Eugène D'Souza at the Second Vatican Council. See Leeming, op. cit., Appendix VIII.

What then was the role Simone Weil wanted the Church to play in the development of Christianity? Firstly, it is to point the way for the faithful:

Je lui reconnais la mission, comme dépositaire des sacrements et gardienne des textes sacrés, de formuler des décisions sur quelques points essentiels, mais seulement à titre d'indication pour les fidèles.

(PSO 149)

It has no right to impose commentaries as truth itself, or to use the threat of excommunication or deprivation of the sacraments in order to impose conformity (PSO 149-50). Dogma should be defined by the Church, but without the exercise of sanctions (C3 282). In any case, the intelligence cannot be compelled to adhere to dogma; attention alone is voluntary, and is therefore the only obligation (LR 64). The Church may put its members on guard against the practical implications of certain speculations of the intelligence, but on no account suppress them (AD 46). It may however condemn as heretical certain opinions which would reduce the value of the mysteries of Christianity (she gives as examples mitigating either the human or the divine element in Christ, or reducing the bread and wine of the Eucharist to mere symbols, C2 82). It may in this case prevent these opinions being taught within the Church, but not exclude the person concerned from the Church. The

only case in which she envisages deprivation of the sacraments is where the Church has been attacked in its main function, that is, in its role as conserver of dogma. Since she mentions Luther, saying that the Church had perhaps been right in excommunicating him, she presumably means anyone who attempts to set up rival dogma. But Luther's movement began as a protest within the Church, and it is hard to see exactly what she means here.¹

Finally, and most important in Simone Weil's view, the Church is the conserver of the sacraments. It seems that she had a very great and spontaneous love for this aspect of the Church, although Perrin found her prejudiced against religious practices when he first met her in 1941. 'Elle n'avait qu'aversion pour les pratiques religieuses, pour les sacrements, et se contentait trop, là-dessus, des idées reçues dans les milieux anticléricaux'.² In the months which she

¹In any case, she does not appear to have regarded Protestantism in a very favourable light. She notes, for example, that 'chez les Protestants, qui n'ont plus d'Eglise, la religion est devenue dans une large mesure nationale. De là le regain d'importance de l'Ancien Testament' (CS 174).

²Perrin & Thibon, op. cit., p. 51.

spent in Marseilles however she must have moved far from this position, as the section 'Amour des pratiques religieuses' of the essay 'Formes de l'amour implicite de Dieu', written during this period, and the 'Théorie des sacrements' (PSO 135-45), composed in London, indicate.¹

The practical implications of what Simone Weil understood the Church's function to be are obviously more difficult to work out. Perhaps the clearest idea can be obtained from the 'Note sur la suppression générale des partis politiques' (EL 126-148), in which she discusses, with occasional reference to the Church, the impossibility of acting according to conscience if one always has to take into account the fact that one is representing a party. Her solution to this situation in political life is to take away party labels, leaving each man free to work out his policies on every issue. Those elected would therefore be chosen for their personal attitude towards certain concrete problems. In government itself, there would be a natural association and dissociation among the elected, according to the subject under discussion.² It

¹We shall deal more fully with the significance of the sacraments for Simone Weil in III, §2, since they were for her a form of mediation.

²This seems to be based on the Rousseauesque idea discussed

seems that she envisaged the Church as such a loose association of like-minded people, free to dissent or to agree because individuals rather than members of a collectivity whose interests must be put first. The conflict between individual and collectivity must be resolved in all urgency if the Church is to be the catholic force it ought to be:

L'incarnation du christianisme implique une solution harmonieuse du problème des relations entre individus et collectivité. Harmonie au sens pythagoricien; juste équilibre des contraires.

(AD 46)

One wonders what Simone Weil's reactions to subsequent developments in the Church would have been, and whether she would in fact have been brought any nearer baptism by throwing off certain previous attitudes. She certainly judged the tree of the Church by its fruits historically speaking, and was perhaps unfair in her emphasis on the Constantinian tradition as opposed to the undercurrent of protest and apocalyptic vision which was also part of the Church. Garaudy, in his attempt to reconcile the ends of the Church and of Communism,

in the previous chapter, of the natural convergence of men in truth. Truth is one, falsehood is diversity. The practical objection to Simone Weil's proposition in political life is of course that among the elected, on certain issues at least, there would be so much divergence of opinion that nothing would ever get done.

emphasises the constant dialectic within the Church of these two traditions, and holds that any dialogue between the Christian and Communist worlds must come about as a result of the Church shedding its Constantinian past, and allowing the tradition of social protest and vision to come to the fore.¹

Garaudy is obviously convinced of the Church's ability to do this, and Perrin voices the same conviction when he writes:

Le Concile Vatican II, en abandonnant la forme d'anathèmes pour ses décisions doctrinales, en prenant cordialement à coeur les besoins des peuples sous-développés et en se plaçant au coeur du monde moderne avec ses aspirations et ses malheurs, avec son universalité et ses angoisses, en voulant montrer l'Eglise du Christ comme l'Eglise des pauvres, répond à bien des questions que Simone Weil posait à l'Eglise catholique.²

It is true that much excellent work was done at the Second Vatican Council, but at the same time it must be pointed out that the Church did not--could not--in fact abandon its conviction of its own superiority, however humbly worded, to other Churches and religions. The real value of such pronouncements as the 'Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions' lies in Pope John's desire

¹De l'anathème au dialogue (Paris 1965), pp. 42 ff.

²Perrin etc., Réponses aux questions..., p. 10.

to see in different religions only the elements uniting them, and his concept of the charity which should be extended to religions outside Christianity rather than in any precise formulation of dogma.¹ We have already quoted Pope Paul's encyclical defining the attitude of the Church to the other great religions of the world. In the same encyclical he defines the relation of mankind to the Church: 'We think it can be described as consisting of a series of concentric circles around the central point in which God has placed us'.² The concentric circles refer to divisions of humanity, atheists being on the outer rim, the 'separated brethren' on the inner, with adherents of various other religions in between, and Catholicism in the centre as the depository of truth and the only true way to God. The terms in which it is couched may have evolved, but surely this is the same claim to absolutism (incidentally made by certain of the 'other religions' too) which Simone Weil found unacceptable. The same sort of attitude is echoed by Fr. Daniélou when he says, on the subject

¹See W. M. Abbott, S.J. & J. Gallagher ed., The Documents of Vatican II (London & Dublin 1966), pp. 660-8.

²Encyclical on the Church, quot. Leeming, op. cit., p. 284.

of the danger of changing one's religion:

La conversion au christianisme . . . n'est pas un changement de religion. Elle est le passage de la religion à la révélation, c'est-à-dire de la question à la réponse.¹

Christianity, embodied in the Church, is for him not only superior to other religions, but different in essence. One cannot imagine Simone Weil accepting this point of view. Such a conviction indicates that while the language may have changed, and discussion with other points of view be possible, all other ways to God are somehow inferior to that offered by Catholicism. The implication of this is surely that if all men were to perceive the truth, they would become members of the Church;² such an implication is totalitarian in essence, since it does not admit of any final value outside its own boundaries. Because of Simone Weil's belief in things out-

¹Perrin etc., Réponses aux questions..., p. 26.

²Such an implication is given direct expression by de Lubac. Writing of the unbeliever who comes into contact with the Church, he claims 'as long as she is shown to him in her true likeness, he has a strict obligation actually to enter her fold. For if in truth, by the very logic of his correspondence with grace, he already aspires to her in secret, he would deceive himself if he shirked answering her summons. Those who do not know the Church are saved by her, therefore, in such a way that they incur the obligation of belonging to her even outwardly directly they come to know her.' Op. cit., pp. 118-9.

side the Church and of equal spiritual value to its own tradition, she was in the end obliged to remain 'à l'intersection du christianisme et de tout ce qui n'est pas lui' (AD 44).

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SECTION III

MEDIATION

PREFATORY NOTE

From a study of the false resolution of those opposites which were outlined in section I, we now pass, in the idea of mediation, to their true resolution. As was suggested in the Introduction to this study, Simone Weil's concept of mediation is in effect her scheme of man's salvation, the way in which man can fulfil his earthly vocation of reunion with the divine. It is hoped to show that this reunion in no way implies contradiction--unless it be 'contradiction' in Simone Weil's sense of the word--with the idea considered in section I of a transcendent and unknowable deity; the one in fact implies the other, mediation is impossible without the sense of an irre-mediabile gulf fixed between the human and the divine.

Before passing to the discussion of mediation proper, there are two main points to be noted, points which cause difficulty in any attempt at orderly consideration of the concept. The first is purely practical, and involves the way in which the idea is to be broken down into manageable units. Simone Weil's contention, that '*tout . . . est médiation divine*' (IP 166), is splendidly all-embracing, but is unhelpful to the student wishing to conduct an analysis of the term. Moreover, and more seriously, there is in Simone Weil's use of the term a constant overlapping of categories, a constant

equivalence made between apparently unrelated concepts. Her use of the word logos will serve to illustrate this difficulty. It is already a complex enough notion with a long theological history, but Simone Weil takes this complexity to its ultimate extreme, using the term extensively in her mathematical theorising and in her speculations on comparative mythology, as well as accepting its conventional use as denoting the Incarnate Word in Christ. This ultimately brings a great enrichment to the concept, of course, but makes it extremely difficult to deal with. Eliade points to precisely this fact when discussing the complexity of moon-symbolism; as he puts it,

there is no such thing as a symbol, emblem or power with only one kind of meaning. Everything hangs together, everything is connected, and makes up a cosmic whole.¹

He underlines the difficulty in handling this type of material by concluding 'such a whole would certainly never be grasped by any mind accustomed to proceeding analytically'. Any attempt to reduce such concepts to logical categories is therefore in a sense doomed from the outset, but the use of cross-references will perhaps help to mitigate the difficulty.

¹Patterns in Comparative Religion, trans R. Sheed (London & New York 1958), p. 156.

The second problem relates to the concept of mediation itself which presents some ambiguities which must be, if not resolved, at least borne in mind during any discussion of the subject. The first of these concerns the moment at which things can become mediators. To use Plato's cave-image again, mediation seems to be both the means by which one is able to leave the cave and progress towards the sun and the vision resulting from the sight of the sun, the 'new way' of looking at things on re-entry to the cave. In other words, one cannot leave the cave without that particular perspective which sees all earthly things as means rather than ends, but this perspective is itself granted through the sight of the Good. This ambiguity can perhaps best be put into relief by making an analogy with the general concept of mediation expressed above; as the understanding of the distance which separates the Good from the necessary leads automatically to a vision of all things as only a means to the end which is the Good, so the realisation of the mediating power of the objects in the cave is in itself productive of the vision of the sun. One lays emphasis on distance, the other on the objects of mediation, but in the end the one implies the other.

The second ambiguity relates to the sphere in which

mediation operates. In the last chapter of section I it was established that it is necessary to create and to preserve a void in order for objects to become mediators: 'Pour penser les intermédiaires, il faut supporter un vide' (C2 35). Our present concern will be to show how these mediators operate in society, how in fact Simone Weil's whole concept of the renewal of society and of any valid spirituality in society was based on the idea of mediation in man's everyday social existence. And yet in a late note, written in America, she states: 'Le vide ne sert qu'à la grâce. Il faut donc l'éliminer tant qu'on peut de la vie sociale . . . ' (CS 112).

Even allowing for her essentially pessimistic view of society, she seems here to be implying that the way of salvation is so exclusively personal that social life is incapable even of providing a 'milieu vital' for spirituality to grow and flourish in, a view that is not borne out by her more positive attitude to society, indicated for example in L'Enracinement. The apparent contradiction is perhaps only a difference in emphasis caused by her acute consciousness of the dangers of the collectivity, and the fact that society is only rarely a means of salvation. In fact, both the concept of the void and that of mediation imply a refusal to

confuse means and ends, and a refusal of the immediate gratification of one's desires.

We mentioned above the perspective in which earthly things lose their illusory finality, and become what they essentially are, means. It will be our concern in the following chapter to examine the conditions in which this perspective is possible, how it is brought about, and its effect on the way man looks at the universe in general.

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III, \$1

THE BEAHTY OF THE WORLD

In the last chapter of section I, we examined the idea of decreation, the process by which man abandons his egocentric view of the universe and recognises himself for what he is, a being subject to necessity and deprived of the Good which is the object of his desire. This chapter will attempt to illustrate the vision of beauty which is the result of decreation, but must begin by examining an allied notion to decreation, that of consent, and the relation of this concept to obedience, both of fundamental importance in Simone Weil's thought, and an understanding of which is essential to her idea of beauty.

As we have seen (I, §3), necessity forms for Simone Weil the fabric of our universe with its physical laws to which all things are subject. In this sense, all things obey necessity, and hence obey God who has willed necessity eternally. The most perfect model of this obedience is thus matter which obeys with complete docility; Simone Weil interprets Christ's injunction to consider the lilies of the field as a commandment to man to obey implicitly, as do the lilies. In so far as matter is subject to force as well as obedient to God it partakes of two orders, mediated by necessity 'comme un plan horizontal est l'unité de la face supérieure et de la

face inférieure' (IP 154).

Man, however, is more complex than mere matter, and his relationship with necessity is more subtle. As a desiring individual, continually projecting into the future and engineering his own self-expansion, he sees necessity as an enemy, or at best as an obstacle to ~~him~~ be overcome (IP 144). What he does not always realise though is that however much he asserts his individual will and struggles against necessity, he is still obedient to it. Obedience is the human condition (EL 52); the universe is a 'masse compacte d'obéissance', and

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. (IP 162)

In this rigorously deterministic picture one may well ask what has happened to the idea of free will. If everything is subject to necessity, in what way is a human being endowed with consciousness different from a stone? Simone Weil's answer is that man alone has the freedom to consent or not to necessity (IP 147). This consent is at the same time a renunciation of the power to think 'in the first person', a renunciation of the 'I', and consequently an act of decreation (IP 153). It is thus a mediator between blind obedience and God in two ways: to express the first Simone Weil compares

the universe to a great mass of blind obedience 'parsemée de points de consentement' (IP 163), each representing supernatural love in the soul of a thinking being. The second is an extension of it: every human being is composed of a mass of obedient matter with, in the centre, 'un point de consentement' (ibid.).¹ In each case consent is mediator between obedience and God. It is also a mediator in that it lifts the soul automatically on to a higher plane. Simone Weil notes, 'l'obéissance acceptée porte le centre de l'âme dans l'éternité' (CS 75), in the sense that it is unconditional and therefore a renunciation of personal desire. This crucial renunciation is the only liberty we know, and Simone Weil can thus claim '. . . être libre, pour nous, ce n'est pas autre chose que désirer obéir à Dieu' (IP 152).²

It is to be expected that the result of this consent is not a privileged position with regard to necessity; the slings and arrows are felt equally before and after consent has been

¹Elsewhere she expresses consent as mediating between the 'partie naturelle' and the 'partie surnaturelle de l'âme', since it is a function of the supernatural part but needs 'une certaine complicité de la partie naturelle de l'âme' (IP 157).

²In the political sphere too, Simone Weil defines liberty as 'la possibilité réelle d'accorder un consentement' (EL 51).

given. There is a difference however, and Simone Weil in expressing it uses one of her most characteristic images of necessity, that of the sea:

Nous sommes comme des naufragés accrochés à des planches sur la mer et ballottés d'une manière entièrement passive par tous les mouvements des flots. Du haut du ciel Dieu lance à chacun une corde. Celui qui saisit la corde et ne la lâche pas malgré la douleur et la peur,¹ reste autant que les autres soumis aux poussées des vagues; seulement ces poussées se combinent avec la tension de la corde pour former un ensemble mécanique différent.

(IP 162-3)

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Before asking in more detail what constitutes this 'ensemble mécanique différent', it will be necessary to indicate at least a parallel concept to that of consent: that of attention. There are two kinds of attention for Simone Weil. Firstly there is 'l'attention intellectuelle', which by being 'créatrice de connexions nécessaires' (CS 35) is a kind of image of creative Wisdom which brought order out of chaos (IP 155). Although it is not creative as such, it is for us a source of reality, or rather of semi-reality (ibid.). This type of attention is a mediator in the same way as consent is, 'à l'intersection de la partie naturelle et de la partie sur-

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¹MS: no comma.

naturelle de l'âme' (ibid.). (The faculty of intelligence is described by Simone Weil, as by Plato, as being intermediary between the other parts of the soul [CS 357].) The second kind of attention is superior to the first in the sense that it is more closely allied with the supernatural part of the soul, and is defined by her as being 'acceptation, consentement, amour' (IP 155). This 'spiritual attention' is thus an acceptance of all that is and has been, a complete abandonment of individual will in the all-embracing divine purpose.¹ Simone Weil defines supreme justice in a sense as 'l'acceptation de la coexistence avec nous de tous les êtres et de toutes les choses qui en fait existent' (IP 156)--it is permitted to have enemies but not to wish for their destruction. In this way one imitates the perfect absence of choice displayed by matter; consent is seen to be indistinguishable

¹Acceptance of the world-order does not of course mean the denial of individual responsibility. Simone Weil resolves any apparent conflict in the following note: 'Un être que j'aime; il est mortel. Quelque chose en moi doit être prêt à accepter sa mort quand elle aura été inscrite dans le monde, non en tant que sa mort, mais en tant que chose inscrite dans le monde. Mais s'il est en péril mortel et qu'en étendant la main je puis le sauver? Ce pouvoir que j'ai fait partie de la réalité, de la matière (situation de mon corps dans l'espace, énergie mécanique qu'il contient). Quant à lui, sa vie, non sa mort, est un fait. Mon désir qu'il vive aussi est un fait.' (Cl 79-80).

from detachment, and detadhmnt from contemplation (IP 157).

Thus the difference between the man who rebels against necessity and the one who consents to it is a difference not of fact but of perspective:

Regardé du point où nous sommes, selon notre perspective, le mécanisme de la nécessité est tout à fait aveugle. Mais si nous transportons notre coeur hors de nous-mêmes, hors de l'univers, hors de l'espace et du temps, là où est notre Père, et si de là nous regardons ce mécanisme, il apparaît tout autre. Ce qui semblait nécessité devient obéissance.

(AD 91)

This new perspective is frequently identified by Simone Weil with the Stoic amor fati. She speaks of it like consent as the 'oui sans condition' which makes of it 'la vertu d'obéissance, la vertu chrétienne par excellence' (IP 58). She sees it as related to the Buddhist extinction of desire, the abandonment of the individual will in perfect detachment (C3 210), the acknowledgement that my destiny is of no real importance in the overall scheme of things (since the world-order is in no way changed by what I do) (C1 203).¹ Although Simone

¹This attitude is in complete contrast to Claudel's, for whom the world-order is changed by the emergence of any new existence into it. Cf. 'L'Esprit et l'eau' (loc. cit., p. 238):

Toute chose

Subit moins qu'elle n'impose, forçant que l'on s'arrange d'elle, tout être nouveau

Une victoire sur les êtres qui étaient déjà!

Weil calls this a 'vertu chrétienne', it is certainly far removed in spirit if not in fact from the Christian idea of a loving Father tending his creatures individually. But it arises logically from the view that everything without exception is obedient to God; in the Christian scheme of things it is possible for man to disobey, in Simone Weil's it is not.

Although Simone Weil constantly expresses admiration for Stoicism in its Greek form, and although much of her thinking is clearly influenced by it, there are developments in Simone Weil, or rather differences of emphasis, which make her diverge from pure Stoic thought. Ottensmeyer speaks of the illusory nature of evil in Stoicism and assumes that Simone Weil holds the same views,¹ but in fact evil for Simone Weil was very real, and not simply a result of the individual's subjective view of things. Although evil for her was primarily a result of the distance between God and creation (see I, §2), this distance was an integral part of creation, and not to be dismissed by a change in perspective. This change of perspective simply meant that the individual saw everything as obedient and governed by a single divine law. It is true

¹H. Ottensmeyer, S. J., 'Simone Weil, perspective chrétienne', Revue des Lettres modernes, no. 35, 1958, 1-20.

however, as Rouquette points out, that this is not a Christian point of view, since for Christianity it is man's sin which has caused the distance between man and God, rather than creation itself.¹

Similarly, whereas Zeller sees Stoicism essentially as a materialist pantheism,² Simone Weil's system is neither materialist nor pantheistic. The spiritual element in her view is of supreme importance, as has been shown; it is that which makes consent, amor fati, possible. And at no time does she reduce God to the world-order, although it is true she speaks of the world-order being an incarnation of the Word (see below, p.375). But at the same time it is essentially obedient to God, which it makes it impossible to identify the two, since the idea of obedience to something implies distance from it. In addition, Simone Weil sees the amor fati, like consent, as a 'bridge' between microcosm and macrocosm, in other words, as a form of mediation between the natural and the supernatural (Cl 204), which would be impossible

¹R. Rouquette, 'Mystère de Simone Weil', Etudes, 268 (janv. 1951), 88-106.

²E. Zeller, The Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics, trans. Reichel (London 1892), pp. 126, 156 etc.

if God were already identified with the universe.

The resignation which constitutes the amor fati is not however for Simone Weil a negative concept. She puts a strong emphasis on the first element of the term, on the love which is necessary before consent is possible. She speaks of 'la vertu stoïcienne authentique, qui est avant tout amour' (AD 64) distinguishing it from 'la caricature qu'en ont faite quelques brutes romaines' thereby establishing a sharp contrast between the loving acceptance of the world-order which she considered formed the essence of second-century Stoicism and its more muscular and voluntaristic form developed by the Romans (which, she thinks, came into French culture through Corneille).¹ It is the obedience of the world-order which claims our attention: 'L'ordre du monde doit être aimé parce qu'il est pure obéissance à Dieu' (E 244). In describing the faith which has led her to Christianity, she speaks of 'l'amor fati stoïcien' and defines it as

l'amour pour la cité de l'univers, pays natal,
patrie bien-aimée de toute âme, chérie pour sa beauté,
dans la totale intégrité de l'ordre et de la nécessité
qui en sont la substance, avec tous les événements qui
s'y produisent.

(PSO 81)

¹Montaigne and Amyot in his translations of Plutarch are earlier and arguably more direct exponents of the Roman form of stoicism in France.

Simone Weil here suggests a link between 'amour' and 'beauté' which should now be considered. Love is not something which can be produced by any act of will, but is in a sense involuntary, the result of some external factor acting upon the soul. The connexion between love and beauty is the relationship of each with the experience of reality: 'Il n'y a pas de sentiment de réalité sans amour, et cette liaison est à la racine du beau' (C2 227). Belief in the reality of the external world--that is, belief that it exists independently of my particular desire concerning it--automatically produces love, can even be defined as love (C2 243), and this love, which is consent, reveals the world as beautiful: 'Partout où il y a amour il y a beauté sensible' (SG 120). Simone Weil would approve the definition of love given by the Renaissance Neo-Platonist Marsilio Ficino: 'Desire for be^auty'.¹

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Before considering in detail Simone Weil's ideas on beauty, it would be as well to note her views on the function and purpose of science, since these relate directly to the

¹Commentary I, iii, quot. M. C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present* (New York 1966), p. 118.

concepts of 'l'ordre du monde' and of love. An exhaustive study of Simone Weil's scientific writings has still to be undertaken, although Nancy has given an outline of her ideas on science,¹ and it is not relevant here to consider them except in so far as they relate to the concept of mediation.²

Simone Weil expresses in various ways what she considers to be the chief object of science:

La science a pour objet l'étude et la reconstruction théorique de l'ordre du monde. (AD 127)

La science et l'art ont un seul et même objet, qui est d'éprouver la réalité du Verbe ordonnateur. (C3 43)

La science n'a pas d'autre objet que l'action du Verbe, ou, comme disaient les Grecs, de l'Amour ordonnateur. (EH 83)

L'objet de la science n'est pas le vrai, mais le beau. (C3 205)

There arises here a difficulty of terminology, since 'ordre du monde' and 'beauté' seem to be used as equivalent one to another. In general Simone Weil does not seem to make much distinction between the two, though in discussion of scientific

¹Simone Weil: Malheur et beauté du monde (Paris 1967), pp. 55-89.

²Particular aspects of mathematical science will be considered in III, §6.

matters she uses more frequently 'ordre du monde'. The relation between the two is indicated in the following observation: 'La beauté du monde, c'est l'ordre du monde aimé' (AD 127). This love enables the scientist to see the real object of his study, and is at the same time a condition of his success:

L'esprit de vérité peut résider dans la science à la condition que le mobile du savant soit l'amour de l'objet qui est la matière de son étude. Cet objet, c'est l'univers dans lequel nous vivons. Que peut-on aimer en lui, sinon sa beauté? La vraie définition de la science, c'est qu'elle est l'étude de la beauté du monde.

(E 221-2)

Bearing in mind this slightly fluid terminology we can now pass to a consideration of what for Simone Weil was the function of science, as distinct from its object. In a note on Greek mathematics she gives a suggestion:

Il semble clair que le chemin qui va des sciences mathématiques ~~regardé~~ à Dieu regardé comme le bien, ce chemin doit passer par la notion d'ordre du monde . . . , de beauté du monde.

(SG 108)

This comment is revealing in that it implies tacitly that science can have a relationship with the absolute Good, and that a path leads from one to the other by way of the order of the universe considered as beauty. These are not notions which have wide currency in twentieth-century scientific comm-

entary. A similar suggestion is made in a note:

[L']idée de l'ordre du monde comme objet de contemplation et d'imitation peut seule faire comprendre ~~qu'elle~~ quelle est la destination surnaturelle de la science.

(IP 39)

From this it is obvious that science, like all other human activities, has a supernatural purpose. What she considers this to be is stated clearly and unequivocally in the note on Greek mathematical science referred to above: '[Les] sciences [mathématiques] sont sans valeur en elles-mêmes. Ce sont des intermédiaires entre l'âme et Dieu' (SG 107). She realises that this is not the only way of looking at science, however, and enumerates the others:

L'intérêt de la science. Il ne peut y en avoir que trois: 1) applications techniques--2) jeu d'échecs --3) chemin vers Dieu--(Le jeu d'échecs est agrémenté de concours, prix et médailles.)

(C3 64-5)

But in a note on the same page she indicates which of the 'ways' she considers to be the correct one, when she states her policy: 'Rendre à la science sa destination de pont vers Dieu' (C3 64).

If this 'destiny' is to be 'given back' to science, it follows that it must somehow at some time have lost it. This loss forms the basis of Simone Weil's criticism of modern science, which she compares unfavourably with Greek science,

and, in the essays of Sur la science, with post-Renaissance science. It is basically the spiritual content of Greek science, which most modern minds would call 'unscientific', whose loss she regrets; as she says, 'la science, l'art, la recherche de Dieu, unis chez les Grecs, sont séparés chez nous' (SS 266). In the long essay 'La Science et nous' she analyses the progressive degradation of science since the time of the Greeks, through the classical post-Renaissance period, to our twentieth-century science. Greek science, according to her, was based on essentially spiritual concepts, so that man could read in the physical univers signs of his relationship to the Good; the notion of equilibrium, for example, dominated Greek scientific thinking and was interpreted in the moral sphere as the concept of justice (SS 137). This relationship between science and the Good was lost with the development of post-Renaissance thought, which substituted a relationship with technology (SS 138) and the relationship between a desire and the conditions of its fulfilment (SS 143). It also discarded the idea of the correlation of opposites implicit in the notion of equilibrium, for example retaining only the continuous from the opposites continuous/discontinuous (SS 201).

Post-Renaissance empirical science did retain a vestige

of the connexion with the Good which Greek science had manifested, since it kept some relationship with the rest of human thinking, according to Simone Weil. Twentieth-century science has however committed the ultimate impiety by shattering the final link with common sense (SS 157).¹ Scientific theories are no longer accessible to the intelligent layman, because they correspond to nothing in the physical world. Simone Weil delivers a devastating attack on Planck in the essay 'Réflexions à propos de la théorie des quanta', in which she quotes Planck himself confessing that the calculations of modern physics have nothing to do with measurable reality (SS 197). She attributes this detachment in large measure to the increase in importance of algebra, which by reducing everything to signs blurs real distinctions and relationships (SS 194). And yet, because of the prestige of modern science, people assume that obscurity means profundity:

. . . les commentateurs profanes et mêmes quelques

¹P. Frank holds that this common accusation is based on a misunderstanding. The 'common sense' laws of classical physics are valid when dealing with phenomena which occur in daily experience, that is to say with large bodies and small velocities. Modern science however frequently deals with the behaviour of things which do not occur in everyday experience, such as small bodies with large velocities. New laws are required to express such behaviour, and these by their nature will not be expressed in the language of 'common sense'. Modern Science and its Philosophy (Harvard 1941), §7.

savants cherchent avec une persévérance touchante la signification profonde, la conception du monde contenue dans la science contemporaine. Bien vainement, car il n'y en a pas.

(SS 195)

A clear instance, she concludes, of the Emperor's new clothes.

It is evident that if science no longer has meaning for man, it can no longer serve as a bridge towards God. This way of mediation has, in Simone Weil's view at least, been temporarily eclipsed. But there are others, and it will be relevant now to turn our attention back to the idea of beauty and the ways of mediation which it offers.

*

On considering Simone Weil's theory of beauty in general, apart from its particular manifestation in science, it is immediately clear that it provides a rich source in a study of mediation. Indeed, she names 'la beauté du monde' as one of 'les trois objets d'ici-bas où Dieu soit réellement, quoique secrètement présent' (AD 99). Her theory of beauty involves callistics rather than aesthetics properly speaking, as her theory of art is very much subordinate to her general theory of beauty, and this in its turn is a central part of man's quest for the Good. Thus her theory of beauty is pre-

dominantly ethical in character,¹ and critics such as Moré are wide of the mark when they suggest that her 'amour de la beauté du monde' was a purely aesthetic concept, and that she confuses religious and aesthetic experience.² She only 'confuses' them in the sense that for her there was no essential difference between them, since they proceeded essentially from the same source. Indeed, Vetö is perhaps nearer the truth when he criticises her for having 'a concept of the beautiful which is somehow almost robbed of any distinctive content by its being a tautology of the real'.³

The starting-point for this concept is to be found in Plato, where beauty is seen as a reflection of the Good. For Simone Weil, 'on ne peut pas concevoir le bien sans passer par

¹In this respect her ideas on beauty are thoroughly Greek: as J. G. Warry points out, 'It is no exaggeration to argue that for the Greeks beauty was primarily a moral term; and in support of such a statement we may cite their word for beauty's contrary, "aischos", which combines the meaning both of shame and ugliness. Beauty was for the Greeks pre-eminently the opposite of the shameful--a thoroughly moral conception.' Greek Aesthetic Theory (London 1962), p. 50.

²Op. cit., pp. 63-4.

³Op. cit., p. 251.

le beau' (C2 234). In her interpretation of Plato's cave-myth, the moon which is the object of contemplation immediately preceding the sun, becomes beauty as a reflection of the Good (IP 88). Beauty is thus a way in which the Good may be apprehended: 'Grâce à la sagesse de Dieu qui a mis sur ce monde la marque du bien sous forme de beauté, on peut aimer le Bien à travers les choses d'ici-bas' (CS 89). It is thus the sensuous form of the Good. Simone Weil's 'le beau, c'est le contact du bien avec la faculté sensible' (CS 44) echoes Hegel: 'Beauty is merely the Spiritual making itself known sensuously',¹ and is a common theme of artistic and aesthetic theory.²

If beauty is considered as a reflection of the Good (which for Simone Weil represents God) then it is not difficult to see in beauty a proof of God's existence. Simone Weil bases this

¹Philosophy of Religion, II, 8, quot. Underhill, op. cit., p. 21.

²Julien Green's definition of aesthetic experience as 'une irruption de l'invisible dans le monde visible' (Journal, 16 sept. 1950, quot. Janine Carrel, L'Expérience du seuil dans l'œuvre de Julien Green, Zurich 1967, p. 57) is based on the same concept, as is Baudelaire's theory of the Beautiful which reveals a correspondance between Heaven and earth: 'C'est cet ~~est~~ admirable, cet immortel instinct du Beau qui nous fait considérer la Terre et ses spectacles comme un aperçu, comme une correspon-
dance du Ciel.' 'Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe' (1857), Nouvelles Histoires extraordinaires (Paris 1933), p. xx.

on an interpretation of Plato's Timaeus:

Une statue grecque par sa beauté inspire un amour qui ne peut pas avoir pour objet de la pierre. De même le monde par sa beauté inspire un amour qui ne peut pas avoir pour objet la matière.

(SG 129)

Simone Weil relates this proof by the beauty of the world to the previously discussed ontological proof (I, §2), since beauty is identical with reality: 'La preuve ontologique par le beau est toujours applicable, car le beau, c'est le réel' (CS 21). It is hardly necessary to point out that the beauty of which she is speaking is not a mere aesthetic notion, or a partial admiration of nature, but a love of the order of the universe as it is, in its perfect obedience to the will of God.

In one respect, however, Simone Weil goes further than making beauty the mere reflection of the Good. It is in a sense the real presence of the Good, the presence of God in matter. Simone Weil claims to find this doctrine in Plato: in a commentary on the Phaedrus (250) she notes: 'Platon pense que dans tout ce qui est purement, parfaitement et authentiquement beau ici-bas, il y a présence réelle de Dieu' (SG 146). She notes the same elsewhere, and continues:

Il y a comme une espèce d'incarnation de Dieu dans le monde (Timée) dont la beauté est la marque. . . . Le beau est la preuve expérimentale que l'incarnation est possible.

(C3 43)

This incarnation allows us to perceive God physically: 'La beauté du monde est celle même de Dieu, comme la beauté du corps d'un être humain est celle même de cet être' (IP 93). This sounds distinctly pantheistic,¹ but should be read in conjunction with Simone Weil's ideas on the Incarnation of the Word (Verbe). According to her, the incarnation of the deity in the physical world takes two forms: one is the incarnation of a divine being, the supreme example being Christ, and the other the incarnation of the 'Verbe ordonnateur' in the world-order (C2 140; 379). It can be argued that just as the presence of God in the world in the figure of Christ does not imply that God is reduced to the earthly figure of Christ, so to say that God is incarnate in the world-order does not reduce him to this incarnate presence, and does not therefore imply pantheism.

This incarnation of the Word in the world-order is considered by Simone Weil to be beauty itself (SG 139, CS 28). And in so far as beauty is a manifestation of the real, the Word is an incarnation of Plato's *τὸ ὄν*, being or reality (SG 126, C2 337). Simone Weil also identifies it with the

¹See p. 364 above.

world-soul as it appears in Plato's Timaeus, defining it as 'l'ordre du monde conçu comme une personne' (IP 152). Both l'âme du monde and le Verbe ordonnateur are of course considered to be mediators, because they are images of the Son (C2 403), and (here Simone Weil is following Plato closely) because of the world-soul's special mediating position between time and eternity (C2 347) and between this world and 'the other':

Le fond, l'essence de l'âme du monde [chez Platon] est quelque chose qui constitue une moyenne proportionnelle entre Dieu et l'univers matériel. La moyenne proportionnelle, c'est l'idée même de médiation. (SG 134)

Whether Plato would have developed this idea in quite the way Simone Weil did in this commentary on the Timaeus is doubtful. But the central idea of the world-soul's being an intermediary between the divine nature and matter is certainly to be found in Plato.

It is in this incarnation of the Word in the world-order, experienced by man through the perception of beauty, that it is possible to understand the function of beauty as mediator. It is mediator firstly between the necessary ~~and~~ and the Good; Simone Weil speaks of the 'contemplation de la Sagesse divine dans la beauté du monde où s'unissent les deux contraires, la nécessité et le bien' (CS 90). In other words, beauty is

composed of the network of relationships which constitute the physical world, and the imprint of the Good which has willed necessity: 'Le beau est le nécessaire qui tout en demeurant conforme à sa loi propre et à elle seule obéit au bien' (C2 358). This relationship of the Good and the necessary in the beautiful is not however something which can be comprehended by the rational intellect; it is essentially a mystery:

Nous sommes régis par ~~un~~ une double loi, une indifférence évidente et une mystérieuse complicité de la matière qui constitue le monde à l'égard du bien; le rappel de cette double loi est ce qu'il nous atteint au cœur dans le spectacle du beau.

(SS 133)

Sometimes Simone Weil expresses the material part of this liaison differently, as for instance when she defines beauty as 'l'harmonie du hasard et du bien' (C2 192). Since 'hasard' and 'nécessité' are contradicting terms, it must be assumed that she is viewing necessity here from the individual's point of view where he seems to be completely subject to an apparently capricious chance or fortune.

From the point of view of the individual who is sensitive to the beauty of the world, however, the opposites united in this beauty perform the function of lifting the individual on to a higher plane, of permitting him to grasp what is essentially

ungraspable:

Les trois formes de valeur distinguées par Cousin, le vrai, le beau, le bien, ont la même essence: l'union des contradictoires en tant que pinces pour saisir l'insaisissable.

(C2 397)¹

She sees Kant's concept of the beautiful which she defines as 'finalité sans fin, ordre sans concept, plaisir sans attrait' (C3 172)² as couples of contradictory notions, and it is the Kantian elements in Simone Weil's theory of the beautiful that should now be considered.

To explain Kant's concept of the beautiful as finality without end, Simone Weil uses the comparison between the universe and a work of art, and contrasts these with human activity in general.³

¹The idea of the harmony of opposites will be dealt with more fully in III, §6.

²See the Kritik of Judgement, trans. J. H. Bernard (London 1892), Part I, 1st Division, 1st Bk., 1st Moment, §2, 5.

³Vetö considers that Simone Weil's use of the term makes it completely unrecognisable as Kant: 'Simone Weil takes the concept out of the Kantian structure without paying very much attention to the manifold reasoning and premises which made it intelligible in its original context. Simplified and somehow impoverished since Simone Weil is interested in it as far as it could be useful for her own speculations, keeping only a nominal identity with its original Kantian meaning, the term becomes a sort of key-word of her aesthetics.' Op. cit., p. 272.

Toutes les fabrications humaines sont des ajustements de moyens en vue de fins déterminées, sauf l'oeuvre d'art où il y a ajustement de moyens, où il y a évidemment finalité, mais où on ne peut concevoir aucune fin. En un sens la fin n'est pas autre chose que l'ensemble¹ des moyens employés; en un sens la fin est tout à fait transcendante. Il en est exactement de même de l'univers et le cours de l'univers, dont la fin est éminemment transcendante et non représentable, puisque c'est Dieu lui-même.

(IP 23-4)

As in a poem, if one can explain why a particular word is in a particular place, the poem is not truly beautiful, so one should not seek particular ends in the structure of the universe (IP 40).² But it is equally important that one should have a feeling of finality in contemplating the universe, even though this can have no tangible object (IP 168). It is precisely this feeling which makes of beauty a mediator, 'une voie'; beauty arrests our attention by awakening our desire for finality, but does not satisfy it, allowing the soul to pass through it towards the Good beyond.

As was seen earlier, beauty for Simone Weil involves consent, is the vision accorded after consent has been given. It

¹MS: l'ensemble même.

²Although it is true that pleasure may be had from the beauty of a poem whether or not it is analysed, it seems exaggerated to say that the possibility of analysis precludes the poem's being truly beautiful. But there is clearly a final beauty in art and in the world which cannot be explained in terms of its component parts.

is the acceptance of the world-order as it is: 'le beau est ce qu'on ne peut pas vouloir changer' (C3 339). In the experience of the beautiful there is complete absence of desire, of the will to do, change, modify, take possession of: 'Souiller, c'est modifier, c'est toucher. . . . Prendre puissance sur, c'est souiller. Posséder est souiller' (ibid.) This is a constant theme of Simone Weil's; beauty means renunciation, renunciation of possession, 'un attrait charnel qui tient à distance et implique une renonciation' (C2 293), like Kant's definition of the beautiful as that which pleases without interest.¹ To illustrate this she uses the Upanishadic image already quoted (I, §4) of the two birds, one of whom eats the fruit while the other watches (CS 251-2). The contemplative part of the soul is content to look at the fruit, eminently desirable, without consuming it. This fruit is beauty: 'Beauté. Un fruit qu'on regarde sans tendre la main' (C2 218). There is a slightly disconcerting passage in l'Enracinement, where Simone Weil criticises the 'aesthetic' attitude to beauty which consists in 'playing' with beauty and looking at it. The correct attitude, she feels, is that 'la

¹Kritik des Urteilskraft, pp. 208-9; see Vetö, p. 266.

beauté est quelque chose qui se mange; c'est une nourriture' (E 122). But this apparent contradiction with her general attitude is resolved in a passage from the essay 'La Personne et le sacré' where she picks up again the metaphor of the two parts of the soul, and says:

[La beauté] suscite une faim, mais il n'y a pas en elle de nourriture pour la partie de l'âme qui essaie ici-bas de se rassasier; elle n'a de nourriture que pour la partie de l'âme qui regarde. (EL 37)

Beauty means the refusal to possess; it also means refusal to invest an object with the particular fancies of our imagination, the refusal to project our desires on to the object. Beauty is 'maked', refuses to be clothed in human fancy (C3 215), and in fact seems to refuse human aspiration completely except in so far as it is a channel for human desire for the Good. In this respect it is for Simone Weil a primary means of man's 'décréation', since beauty is in her eyes essentially impersonal. It is the means by which we can lose our false and individual perspective, and be reunited with the whole: 'Beau. On ne peut pas dire que ce soit un ordre 'perspectif'. Arrache au point de vue' (C2 140). Beauty and 'malheur' because of their impersonality are complementary means for making contact with the real (see III, §2):

Je suis convaincue que le malheur d'une part, d'autre part la joie comme adhésion totale et pure à la parfaite beauté, impliquant tous deux la perte de l'existence personnelle, sont les deux seules clés par lesquelles on entre dans le pays pur, le pays respirable, le pays du réel.

(PSO 83)

Loss of the individual existence which projects itself into the future, and which only sees things as objects of desire, is thus a necessary condition, the 'key', to reality. In a sense beauty and reality are revealed together, since, as already noted (p. 376), the real is incarnate in the world-order. The attitude which hopes and projects will therefore of itself prevent beauty from being revealed; one function of 'waiting' is to cause beauty to appear: 'Le regard et l'attente, c'est l'attitude qui correspond au beau. Tant qu'on peut concevoir, vouloir, souhaiter, le beau n'apparaît pas' (C2 413). This creative passivity, this waiting in the certainty that the Good exists and will descend if desired ardently enough, is linked to another idea, closely related but not identical with it. This is the already mentioned notion of attention, whereby the loving soul can, as it were, produce reality by a sufficiently pure degree of attention directed towards an object. In this loving attention, the soul realises that the object contemplated exists in reality,

and not merely by reference to the soul's own desires. All true human values, thinks Simone Weil, are produced by the attention:

Les valeurs authentiques et pures de vrai, de beau, de bien, dans l'activité d'un être humain se produisent par un seul et même acte, une certaine application à l'objet de la plénitude de l'attention. (C3 58)

Claudel was no doubt thinking of the same phenomenon when he wrote: 'Le génie poétique suprême . . . est une certaine Grâce d'attention'.¹

*

Simone Weil's own ideas on artistic and literary creation, are, as has been mentioned, very much subordinate to her theory of beauty in general. Like Claudel, she associates inspiration with attention (E 185), but on the whole her concept of inspiration derives directly from Plato, for whom artistic inspiration had the same source as universal creation. In order for a work of art to be truly beautiful, inspiration must be transcendent, and not derive merely from physical or psychological phenomena (IP 23). This, according to Simone Weil, vindicates

¹ 'Introduction à un poème sur Dante', Ouvres en prose (Bibl. de la Pléiade 1965), p. 423.

Plato's much-attacked art criticism:

Le mépris de Platon pour les artistes s'adressait à ses contemporains qui étaient décadents. Arts d'imitation, non d'inspiration. Imitation du modèle qui passe.
(C2 348)

(In fairness to his critics it must be added that Plato never actually suggested that any kind of, for example, poetry was possible, other than the imitative kind.) But her central theme is clear: all art aspires to the condition of supernatural beauty:

Pour produire des vers où réside quelque beauté, il faut avoir désiré égaler par l'arrangement des mots le beauté pure et divine dont Platon dit qu'elle habite de l'autre côté du ciel.
(E 275)

In the end, the true aim of art is to provide a reflection of universal and supernatural beauty, which alone constitutes the reality of the universe:

L'art est une tentative pour transporter dans une quantité finie de matière modelée par l'homme une image de la beauté infinie de l'univers entier. Si la tentative est réussie, cette portion de matière ne doit pas cacher l'univers, mais au contraire en révéler la réalité tout autour.
(AD 126)

This seems to give art a decidedly inferior role, and it comes as no surprise to find Simone Weil admitting that in her view even the most beautiful work of art is not 'really' beautiful, because it is less than the total beauty of the universe:

Les accomplissements même les plus élevés de la recherche de la beauté, par exemple dans l'art ou la science, ne sont pas réellement beaux. La seule beauté réelle, la seule beauté qui soit présence réelle de Dieu, c'est la beauté de l'univers. Rien de ce qui est plus petit que l'univers n'est beau.

(AD 132)

The diminishing of the value of artistic endeavour is perhaps inevitable when all human values have a supernatural origin, and can therefore be said at best to 'partake of' the supernatural original. One can only say that things 'ont part à la beauté, . . . en sont des imitations' (AD 123). But if it is inferior to true beauty, man-made beauty still serves a purpose in Simone Weil's view:

Toutes ces beautés secondaires sont d'un prix infini comme ouvertures sur la beauté universelle. Mais si on s'arrête à elles, elles sont au contraire des voiles; elles sont alors corruptrices.

(ibid.)

Here it is clear that art and perceptible beauty in general have become a mediator between man and universal beauty which is not experienced by the senses. And since to mediate is the highest function of creaturely things, the role of art is perhaps not such a mean one after all.

The idea that beauty, in which God is so to speak incarnate, is a mediator, and that man's role is to wait on beauty, to consent to beauty, leads in Simone Weil's thought to the concept of God's search for man. In her view, to say that man is

engaged in a search for God is meaningless (Pascal's acceptance of this idea is yet another point for which Simone Weil reproved him: PSO 42, 44);¹ the only attitude which man is entitled to take up in relation to the deity is one of attente, of loving consent directed to the source of the Good. God in his love descends to man, and one of the ways in which he is able to engage our consent is through the beauty of the universe. While the spiritual part of the soul is still asleep, God must approach by the physical part: 'la beauté séduit la chair pour obtenir la permission de passer jusqu'à l'âme' (C2 270).

This 'piège de Dieu' in which God 'traps' the unwary soul, is illustrated for Simone Weil in folklore, for example in the 'Conte des trois nuits' to which she frequently refers.² This concerns a prince who has an animal form during the day but a human form at night. A princess marries him, but, tiring of the situation, destroys her husband's animal form. He disappears, and the princess goes in search of him. After a long

¹ Simone Pétrement points this out as an important feature of dualist thinking. The idea of grace for dualist philosophers tends to imply that while God can descend to man, man without grace cannot ascend to God. DP, p. 221.

² The following account of the tale is taken from IP 13-14.

time she finds him about to marry again, having forgotten her, but the princess, offering a beautiful dress to the new fiancée by means of a magic nut she has been given, obtains permission to spend three nights with the prince. He however sleeps during two of them, and only awakens at the end of the third night. He recognises the princess and sends away the new fiancée.

In Simone Weil's interpretation, the princess represents God searching for the soul, represented by the prince. When God wishes to strip the soul of its animal nature, the soul flees and prepares for an adulterous union with the flesh. God then searches for the soul, painfully and lengthily, and finally obtains access to it, having seduced it with beauty. The soul is still asleep, however, and only awakens and gives consent at the last minute. Simone Weil gives an abbreviated account of the symbolism involved in a short note:

La princesse, c'est la divinité descendante. Elle s'unit à l'être charnel dans la nuit. Mais à la première lueur de grâce la créature se dérobe. L'âme s'évanouit. Le bien doit séduire la chair pour pouvoir se montrer à l'âme. La beauté est cette séduction. (C2 343)

She gives a similar interpretation to a better-known legend, this time the Greek myth of Kore or Persephone.¹ In

¹ Simone Weil interprets the figure of Kore as an image

this myth it is Kore who becomes for Simone Weil a symbol of the soul, Hades that of God, and the narcissus that of beauty. (Narcissus is a symbol of the only beauty that can be an object for itself, divine beauty: IP 11; this interpretation obviously depends on the idea of God incarnate in the beauty of the universe.) She thus constructs with great assurance and interpretative skill a pre-Christian account of the salvation of the soul. God, in order to entice the soul, lays a 'trap' of physical beauty which takes the soul unawares, just as Kore was taken off her guard at the sight of the narcissus. The soul is then abducted in spite of itself, but released later into the world, not however before eating the fateful 'grain de grenade', which represents the consent given by the soul to God.

Simone Weil recognises the rather special nature of this 'consent':

Le grain de grenade, c'est le consentement que l'âme accorde à Dieu presque à l'insu d'elle-même et sans se l'avouer, qui est comme un infiniment petit parmi toutes les inclinations charnelles de l'âme, et cependant décide pour toujours de son destin.

(IP 11-12)

sometimes of the soul, sometimes of Christ. This latter interpretation will be considered in III, §3.

'Consent' here does not seem to mean what is normally meant by the idea, a willing acceptance of certain conditions made in a state of mind as free as possible from external pressures which would prejudice the issue. Even if Kore did in fact 'consent' to eating the pomegranate seed, she had been placed in exceptional circumstances against her will (though as a result of her own action), and in any case was unaware of the consequences of eating the seed. But there is no need to suspect that Simone Weil was unaware of the blow she dealt at the modern concept of the liberty of the individual by this interpretation of consent, since liberty to Simone Weil was always a very relative term. Although, as has been shown, she lays great stress on the difference between obedience and consent, in the London notebooks she describes beauty as 'un piège de Dieu pour nous faire consentir à l'obéissance dans laquelle il nous ramène par contrainte' (CS 316). It seems as if once the vision of the beauty of the universe has been granted, the soul would find it very difficult to refuse the God manifested in this beauty. This is a natural consequence of Simone Weil's concept of unconditional consent; the soul does not consent 'provided that' but consents to what is essentially unknown (C2 395). Otherwise consent would be limited

like earthly phenomena and would be incapable of transporting the soul to a higher plane. As Simone Weil puts it,

L'âme accorde ce consentement presque par surprise et sans le savoir, en un instant de joie surnaturelle, et quand elle a le loisir d'y réfléchir, elle est déjà engagée. Grain de grenade de Coré.

(C2 365-6)

The images of rape and death which she uses in connexion with this myth to describe the action of the Spirit on the soul are certainly violent, and their tone is different from traditional Christian expression on the subject, but the notion of the death of carnal man in order that a spiritual man may be reborn is at the centre of Christian mysticism. On a purely textual level, her interpretation displays well the connexion of the myth with the Greek mysteries, which had at their heart the same cycle of death and rebirth. The death-and-resurrection myths which Simone Weil used will be examined later in this section (§3), but in the next chapter it is proposed to consider the more general theme of suffering as a form of mediation, to which they are clearly linked.

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III, §2

THE WAY OF SUFFERING

Few thinkers of this century have returned so constantly to the theme of suffering as Simone Weil, and few have analysed it so rigourously or defined so clearly the part it has to play in the human condition. When suffering is evoked by modern thinkers it is usually to justify a pessimistic or nihilistic view of the world, or to prove the lack of spiritual forces at work in the universe. Simone Weil departs completely from modern pessimism and returns to archetypal myth to establish the universality and inevitability of suffering, and, more important, the part it plays in man's salvation.

The link in Simone Weil's thought between suffering and 'la beauté du monde' which we noted at the end of the last chapter in connexion with the myth of Kore, showed that consent implies suffering. In general, suffering is looked on by Simone Weil as a way towards the vision of the beauty of the world, as this chapter will attempt to illustrate, but occasionally the two are looked on as separate paths. This occurs for example when Simone Weil is discussing the conditions necessary for the soul to perceive reality (she uses here the metaphor of the silence of God which pierces the soul and joins with the soul's silence). 'Il n'y a que deux voies possibles pour cette opération, à l'exclusion de toute

autre. Il n'y a que deux pointes assez perçantes pour entrer ainsi dans notre âme, ce sont le malheur et la beauté' (PSO 129-30). 'Malheur' and beauty are here considered as separate means used by God to procure the soul's salvation. Later in this same argument she notes: 'Ne pas accorder d'attention à la beauté du monde est peut-être un crime d'ingratitude si grand qu'il mérite le châtiement du malheur' (PSO 130), which certainly indicates a difference between the two.

A difference is also indicated in the following passage, where Simone Weil is discussing man's instinctive urge to ask finality of the universe:

C'est seulement le malheur qui nous oblige à la demander, et aussi la beauté, car le beau nous donne si vivement le sentiment de la présence d'un bien que nous cherchons une fin sans jamais en trouver. (PSO 128)¹

If however we consider the word used by Simone Weil in a related sense to that of 'malheur', 'douleur', we see that it is most often opposed to 'joie' as a way of experiencing 'la beauté du monde'. This occurs for example in the following passage:

La joie et la douleur sont des dons également pré-

¹Cf. also the passage from the letter to Joé Bousquet, quoted above, p. 383.

cieux, qu'il faut savourer l'un et l'autre intégralement, chacun dans sa pureté, sans chercher à les mélanger. Par la joie la beauté du monde pénètre dans notre âme. Par la douleur elle nous entre dans le corps.

(PSO 101)

'Joie' and 'douleur' seem here to be the same experience relating to different parts of the human being.

The difficulty may well concern Simone Weil's terminology, and some attempt should now be made to establish what she meant by the three separate but related concepts: 'malheur', 'douleur' and 'souffrance'. They seem frequently to overlap, but some basic distinctions can nevertheless be drawn. The clearest indication of both the distinctions and the overlapping is perhaps to be found at the beginning of the first of the two long essays, 'L'Amour de Dieu et le malheur'. The essay starts: 'Dans le domaine de la souffrance, le malheur est une chose à part, spécifique, irréductible' (PSO 85). 'Souffrance' is here the general term, 'malheur' a specific example of it. She continues: 'Il est tout autre chose que la simple souffrance', and here 'souffrance' seems to be reducible to physical suffering. This interpretation is borne out by the following paragraph which begins: 'Le malheur est inséparable de la souffrance physique; et pourtant tout à fait distinct'. The two are thus seen to be related and yet differentiated.

She then elaborates the concept of 'souffrance':

Dans la souffrance, tout ce qui n'est pas lié à la douleur physique ou à quelque chose d'analogue est artificiel, imaginaire, et peut être anéanti par une disposition convenable de la pensée.

(PSO 85)

Here we have a distinction made between 'souffrance', which reverts to its earlier meaning of suffering in general, and 'douleur', which is physical pain. This physical pain has however a wider meaning than general, since Simone Weil explains that it can include a feeling of loss at the death of a loved one, which is experienced physically if it is real. This physical pain forms the 'noyau irréductible' around which all real suffering is centred (PSO 86). But Simone Weil seems to realise that this is stretching the idea of pain a little, since she adds that pain which is only physical is of very little account, and is soon forgotten when it is over.

'Douleur' thus seems to be restricted in Simone Weil's terminology to physical pain of one sort or another, even though this category is broader for her than is normal. 'Souffrance' however seems to be a much more floating term, meaning both physical pain and something more. This can perhaps be illustrated in Simone Weil's use of Aeschylus' formula $\tau\tilde{\upsilon} \pi\acute{\alpha}\sigma\epsilon\iota \mu\acute{\alpha}\theta\omicron\varsigma$, which she translates 'par la souffrance

la connaissance' (e.g. SG 43). Since the phrase is here applied to Prometheus, and Simone Weil extends it to cover all types of suffering or redemptive figures, it is clear that the kind of 'souffrance' involved is not merely physical. Simone Weil indicates her awareness of the inadequacy of the term in the following comment:

J'aimerais presque autant mettre: ceux qui ont subi, au lieu de ceux qui ont souffert, pour bien marquer que ceux qui savent, ce sont ceux qui ont subi le malheur, non ceux qui se tourmentent par pure perversité ou par romantisme.

(SG 45)

A link between 'souffrance' and 'malheur' is thus established.

On the meaning of 'malheur' Simone Weil is much more precise. The essay referred to above on 'L'Amour de Dieu et le malheur' indicates quite clearly what she means by it:

Le malheur est un déracinement de la vie, un équivalent plus ou moins atténué de la mort, rendu irrésistiblement présent à l'âme par l'atteinte ou l'appréhension immédiate de la douleur physique.

(PSO 86)

The presence of physical pain is necessary, Simone Weil explains, because only physical pain has 'la propriété d'enchaîner la pensée' (ibid.). If physical pain is absent, then the mind can hide the reality of its condition by flights of imagination.

In addition, for 'malheur' to be experienced, every part

of the soul must be affected, physical, psychological and social. 'Le facteur social est essentiel. Il n'y a pas vraiment malheur là où il n'y a pas sous une forme quelconque déchéance sociale ou appréhension d'une telle déchéance' (PSO 87).

'Malheur', then, which has usually been translated 'affliction' by Simone Weil's translators (although she herself suggested 'misery' for it¹) is by far the broadest of the three terms we have been considering, and together with the wider meaning of 'souffrance' indicated above will form the central concept of this chapter.

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It is clear that any consideration of the concept of affliction in Simone Weil's thought must begin with her own experience, since it was largely through this that the ~~term~~ term came to have so profound a meaning for her. Nancy is the latest critic to point out the importance of Simone Weil's personal experience in any evaluation of the concept. He underlines the significance of her factory year, and connects

¹Letter to an Englishman, unpub. MS. 1938-9? See Vetö, op. cit., p. 212.

this 'discovery of reality' with her awakening spiritual vocation:

Cette découverte est celle du passage en usine, et c'est celui-ci qui véritablement ouvre l'histoire spirituelle. . . . Entre ce moment et tout de suite il y a l'unité d'une histoire; et s'il [y] a eu conversion, c'est là qu'elle a commencé.¹

Simone Weil herself indicates the decisiveness of this experience in her 'Autobiographie spirituelle', emphasising the difference between ~~the~~ the factual, objective knowledge of affliction which she had previous to it, and the intimate, personal contact which resulted from it:

Jusque-là je n'avais pas eu l'expérience du malheur . . . Je savais bien qu'il y ~~en~~ avait beaucoup de malheur dans le monde, j'en étais obsédée, mais je ne l'avais jamais constaté par un contact prolongé.

(AD 36)

It has been suggested that Simone Weil over-dramatised her account of working conditions at that time, and that because of her physical constitution and academic background she recoiled from what was accepted as perfectly normal by the average worker. It is probably true that she suffered more physically than people brought up to that type of work,

¹ Michel Narcey, Malheur et beauté du monde (Paris 1969), p. 14.

but in her accounts of her experience she invariably lays emphasis on the psychological rather than the physical aspects; indeed, she accepted that a certain amount of physical suffering was probably necessary in factory work, and could be borne quite easily in the right psychological conditions. (CO 243). As to her background, she was aware that someone coming from the outside ran the risk of making false judgments, and would not necessarily see things in the same light as someone who worked there on a permanent basis. She did not feel that this was necessarily the case, however:

Mais si, étant parvenu à oublier qu'il vient d'ailleurs, retournera ailleurs, et se trouve là seulement pour un voyage, il compare continuellement ce qu'il éprouve pour lui-même à ce qu'il lit sur les visages, dans les gestes, les attitudes, les paroles, dans les événements petits et grands, il se crée en lui un sentiment de certitude

(CO 252)

If affliction does not often find the kind of expression Simone Weil gave it then it is presumably because in her eyes the essence of affliction is to render expression impossible (CO 251); if a man fights back, it is because he is wounded rather than afflicted. There is no reason to doubt the authenticity of Simone Weil's testimony, or to suspect her of 'literature' when she observes 'les visages contractés par l'angoisse de la journée à traverser et les yeux

douloureux dans le métro du matin' (CO 252).

The workers' condition corresponds in Simone Weil's analysis to the elements outlined above which must be present for affliction to be experienced. Firstly there is physical suffering. Simone Weil describes graphically the state of constant exhaustion which she experienced, owing not so much to her frail physique as to the necessity of working at an inhuman speed, since she and the other workers were on low-paid piece-work. A moment 'wasted' meant a lower wage, hunger, hardship. Particularly painful was the complete destruction of the natural rhythm of a man's work, the rhythm which demands a moment of respite between each mouvement. As Simone Weil says,

Il est naturel à l'homme et il lui convient de s'arrêter quand il a fait quelque chose, fût-ce l'espace d'un éclair, pour en prendre conscience, comme Dieu dans la Genèse; cet éclair de pensée, d'immobilité et d'équilibre, c'est ce qu'il faut apprendre à supprimer entièrement dans l'usine, quand on y travaille. (CO 248)

The unnatural speed at which a man is obliged to work is, for Simone Weil, a result of factory rationalisation, 'taylorisation' as time and motion study was then called, which consists in breaking down each job to be done into its elementary 'work-units', timing these, and from this estimating the time necessary for the whole job--assuming a first-rate work-

man (CO 223-4). Obviously this method leaves no room for the moments of respite in between each movement.

The other elements of affliction--psychological and social--present in factory-work at the time spring from the same source. They have as their common feature the sense that man as an individual or even as a human being counts for nothing in the process of production. He is merely an extension of the machine. Simone Weil's thinking has Marxist overtones when she says:

Les pièces ont leur histoire; elle passent d'un stade de fabrication à un autre; [l'ouvrier] n'est pour rien dans cette histoire, il n'y laisse pas sa marque, il n'en connaît rien.

(CO 250)

Man is thus reduced to the state of a tool where he should be creative, feels himself a stranger where he should have a sense of belonging, of identity. He lives in a nightmare world where normal values are reversed: 'Les choses jouent le rôle des hommes, les hommes jouent le rôle des choses; c'est la racine du mal' (CO 248).

One of the ways in which Simone Weil seems to have suffered most acutely this reduction to the status of a mere thing was in the humiliations she suffered in every aspect of her work in the factory. As she noted in the Journal d'usine, 'le fait capital n'est pas la souffrance, mais l'humiliation'

(CO 107). The orders of the foremen in particular, she found, constituted a continual denial of humanity in the workers. It seems to have been not so much the fact of the implicit obedience necessary, but the manner in which the orders were given which caused her anguish: 'Le travail nouveau est imposé tout d'un coup, sans préparation, sous la forme d'un ordre auquel il faut obéir immédiatement et sans réplique' (CO 244). It is easy to understand the humiliation she must have felt when obliged to carry out without question orders she did not always understand, thus being totally at the disposal of the production-line down to the last second of her time. Thus, although the monotony of the work was at times unbearable, relief was only obtained at the expense of humiliation, and was therefore unwelcome:

Si la pensée veut éviter cette monotonie, imaginer du changement, donc un ordre soudain, elle ne peut pas voyager du moment présent à un moment à venir sans passer par une humiliation.

(CO 245)

Simone Weil's whole attitude towards her experience is of course based on the conviction that what she suffered, the great majority of the workers suffered too. The fact that they were silent about it meant nothing; as she notes in her Journal d'usine:

Ceux qui souffrent ne peuvent pas se plaindre, dans cette vie-là. Seraient incompris des autres, moqués peut-être de ceux qui ne souffrent pas, considérés comme des ennuyeux par ceux qui, souffrant, ont bien assez de leur propre souffrances. (CO 83)

Even for her, it was a constant effort to go on reacting, to note her own impressions, to keep alive the power of sensation which meant suffering:

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 pas penser, seul et unique moyen de ne pas en souffrir. (CO 51)

Only by accepting the state of inert object to which one was reduced could one hope to escape from suffering. But although Simone Weil did not entirely succumb to this experience of affliction, it marked her for life. She describes later how 'ce contact avec le malheur avait tué ma jeunesse' (AD 36), and the difficulty she has in believing she counts for something as a human being:

Ce que j'ai subi là m'a marquée d'une manière si durable qu'aujourd'hui encore, lorsqu'un être humain, quel qu'il soit, dans n'importe quelles circonstances, me parle sans brutalité, je ne peux pas m'empêcher d'avoir l'impression qu'il doit y avoir erreur et que l'erreur va sans doute malheureusement se dissiper. (AD 36)

The image of slavery recurs constantly in her writing, and it seems as if in this experience she learnt for the first time

the real nature of slavery, which she was to write of later for instance in the Iliad essay:¹

J'ai reçu là pour toujours la marque de l'esclavage, comme la marque au feu rouge que les Romains mettaient au front de leurs esclaves les plus méprisés. Depuis je me suis toujours regardée comme une esclave.

(AD 36)

This seems to have been the decisive experience for Simone Weil, which provided the material and ~~and~~ the conviction for the later elaboration of the theory of affliction.² Like any other human phenomena, affliction is for Simone Weil capable of analysis, and it is this capacity which enables her to make use of the affliction which in any case existed. Affliction is a way of salvation, and as such can be charted accurately, while, like beauty, remaining a mystery in the sense that it is incomprehensible (PSO 87), will not answer our demands for finality.

As was noted in I, §5 on 'décréation', it is important to emphasise that affliction in Simone Weil's view must not be sought for its own sake, as a way perhaps of speeding up

¹SG 11-42; cf. also PSO 80-1 (Lettre à Joë Bousquet) and I, §3.

²The relationship between work and affliction and decreation is discussed by M. Bourgeois in 'La Spiritualité du travail selon Simone Weil', unpubl. thesis (Paris 1961), passim.

the salvation-process. In a marginal note in the early notebook which she set aside from the main body of the Cahiers, writing on it 'Ne compte pas', she comments: 'Je crois à la valeur de la souffrance dans la mesure où on fait tout (ce qui est honnête) pour l'éviter' (C1 11, NE). Deliberately to court suffering as a way to salvation would in any case be contradictory, since affliction which is sought is no longer affliction. It is by definition something which is undergone against the wishes of the sufferer:

Le malheur est ce qui s'impose à un homme bien malgré lui. Il a pour essence et pour définition cette horreur, cette révolte de tout l'être chez celui dont il s'empare.

(PSO 122)

But it is just this, from which a man's whole being turns in revolt, that Simone Weil says we are to love. Even where a man is not in fact subject to affliction he must constantly bear in mind the possibility of affliction, and love that possibility (PSO 111), because it is an expression of the human condition: 'Etre deux créatures, ce n'est pas nécessairement être malheureux, mais c'est nécessairement être exposé au malheur' (PSO 123). There is nothing morbid about such a love: it is a simple recognition of fact. This is what Simone Weil understands by man 'bearing his cross': 'Porter sa croix, c'est porter la connaissance qu'on est entièrement soumis à

[la] nécessité aveugle' (PSO 110). In this way it is possible for a man to enjoy the good things of life, and 'bear his cross' at the same time:

Un homme parfaitement heureux peut en même temps pleinement jouir du bonheur et porter sa croix, s'il a réellement, concrètement et à tous moments la connaissance de la possibilité du malheur. (PSO 110-1)

It is clear that this 'knowledge' is simply another expression of the 'consent to the order of the world' already discussed. Consent to the possibility of affliction is the reverse side of consent to the order and beauty of the world, and necessity is the common element in them, mediating between them, since necessity is both obedience and constraint.

This recognition, in Simone Weil's eyes, has the effect of putting man into perspective, and revealing his frailty. Some of Simone Weil's most remarkable insights stem from her intense consciousness of man's vulnerability; when discussing it she takes no destructive pleasure in man's weakness, and does not exult in his self-deception. There is only a great compassion based on what she felt to be a recognition of the truth:

Les trois faces de notre être . . . sont toujours exposées [au malheur]. Notre chair est fragile; n'importe quel morceau de matière en mouvement peut la percer, la déchirer, l'écraser ou encore fausser pour toujours un

des rouages intérieurs. Notre âme est vulnérable, sujette à des dépressions sans causes, pitoyablement dépendante de toutes sortes de choses et d'êtres eux-mêmes fragiles ou capricieux. Notre personne sociale, dont dépend presque le sentiment de notre existence, est constamment et entièrement exposée à tous les hasards.

(PSO 109)

This frailty, far from diminishing man's sense of joy in the world, on the contrary increases it: La joie en devient seulement d'une douceur plus pénétrante et plus poignante, comme la fragilité des fleurs de cerisiers en accroît la beauté' (PSO 110).¹ Here the relationship between affliction and beauty is obviously very close.

There are other similarities in the workings of beauty and affliction. Affliction, like beauty, compels man to recognise his inability to alter the world-order, to recognise the perfection of creation apart from our particular desires:

Telle est la destination du malheur, de nous permettre de penser que la création de Dieu est bonne. Car tant que les circonstances se jouent autour de nous en laissant notre être à peu près intact, ou seulement à demi entamé, nous croyons plus ou moins que notre volonté a créé le monde et le gouverne. Le Malheur nous apprend tout d'un coup, à notre très grande surprise, qu'il n'en est rien. Si alors nous louons, c'est vraiment la création de Dieu que nous louons.

(PSO 122)

¹The idea that transience heightens beauty is a constant theme of French poetry from Baudelaire onwards.

In Simone Weil's eyes, it is the element of physical pain in affliction which has the power to strip us of our illusions. We can accustom ourselves to anything, she says, delude ourselves into thinking we have 'chosen' what happens to us in every case except that of prolonged physical pain. When a human being is transformed into a kind of paralysed animal, particularly when this transformation is accompanied by social reprobation, he can no longer have the illusion that he is in control (PSO 112).

Thus affliction removes from man his individuality, everything which he has considered makes him a human being. This is why Simone Weil constantly uses the slave-image for the afflicted person; like the slave, 'les malheureux ne croiront jamais plus qu'ils sont quelqu'un' (PSO 93). Affliction, like slavery, is anonymous, 'il prive ceux qu'il prend de leur responsabilité et en fait des choses' (ibid.). The afflicted one is entirely defined, in his own eyes and those of other people, by his relationship to affliction, he becomes an 'example' of a particular 'kind' of affliction (PSO 118). It is typical of Simone Weil's thought however to develop this idea of anonymity by indicating that in fact the afflicted one is not actually deprived of his personality; he simply realises

what was true all along, namely that he is nothing. Interpreting Plato's definition of the philosopher's task, 'Philosopher, c'est apprendre à mourir', in the light of her concept of affliction, she says:

Il ne s'agit pas en réalité pour l'âme de mourir, mais simplement de reconnaître la vérité qu'elle est une chose morte, une chose analogue à la matière
 . . . ce que nous croyons être notre moi est un produit aussi fugitif et aussi automatique des circonstances extérieures que la forme d'une vague de la mer.

(PSO 115)

In this way affliction is a means for wearing down the 'I', the illusory self which must be decreed for the soul to come into contact with reality (C2 232).¹

If affliction serves the purpose of revealing to man the truth about his condition, it is clear that anything which attempts to cover up the truth will be an evil. This explains Simone Weil's attitude towards the consolation of affliction. As she says in a letter to Joë Bousquet: 'Pour quiconque est dans le malheur le mal peut peut-être se définir comme étant tout ce qui procure une consolation' (PSO 83). She adds,

¹A similar duality of selves is expressed by Valéry's M. Teste: 'Je ne sais pas telle chose; je ne puis pas saisir telle chose, mais je sais Portius qui la possède. Je possède mon Portius, que je manoeuvre en tant qu'homme et qui contient ce que je ne sais pas.' 'Monsieur Teste', Oeuvres (Bibl. de la Pléiade), Paris 1960), II, 37. But for Teste it is specifically the senses which prevent him from experiencing reality, whereas

however, that 'les joies pures' which one can experience while suffering are not consolation, and, on the contrary, consolation can be sought in a kind of morbid aggravation of suffering (presumably because this gives the victim some feeling of power over his destiny, and some imaginary enjoyment). Earlier in the same letter she elaborates on the same idea in the form of 'la rêverie' which she sees as 'la racine du mal' (PSO 78). She almost seems to admit that it is indispensable for anyone who is afflicted, since it is a way of projecting into the future and escaping from the horror of the present, but demands that we should recognise it for what it is: 'sous toutes ses formes sans exception elle est le mensonge' (PSO 79).

If the afflicted person lies to himself he may find consolation for his affliction, but he will miss the unique opportunity of a real contact with God, miss the mediating power of affliction. Simone Weil insists that it is the physical pain in affliction which renders this contact possible.

Simone Weil's 'natural man' includes every part of the individual, including his intellectual faculties.

Only physical pain is radical enough to teach^a man obedience, or rather, to teach him that everything is in fact obedient to God (PSO 100). Physical pain is the world-order entering our body (cf. Cl 40, 210):

Chaque fois que nous subissons une douleur, nous pouvons nous dire avec vérité que c'est l'univers, l'ordre du monde, la beauté du monde, l'obéissance de la création à Dieu qui nous entrent dans le corps.

(PSO 100)

To realise this is to give consent to it; the experience of pain and rebellion against it gives way to the experience of the world-order. Not that pain is any the less once the vision of the world-order has been attained; as we saw earlier, consent to necessity does not alter subjection to necessity:

La douleur est la coloration de certains événements. Devant une phrase écrite à l'encre rouge, celui qui sait lire et celui qui ne sait pas voient pareillement du rouge; mais la coloration rouge n'a pas la même importance pour l'un et pour l'autre.

(PSO 100)

Pain is a way to experience the order of the world; suffering in general is the experience of contradiction, contradiction between man's desire for good and the reality to which he is subjected, between his aspirations to being and the destruction of that being, through affliction. We experience this contradiction, according to Simone Weil, in

the feeling of impossibility which accompanies extreme suffering (C2 369; cf. C1 228, C2 18). It is essential that this experience of contradiction be kept alive, although the soul's automatic impulse is to seek refuge in insensibility (ibid.). Only then can it be used as a way of transporting the soul on to a higher plane:¹

Il faut user de la souffrance en tant que contradiction éprouvée. Par cet usage elle est médiatrice, et par suite rédemptrice. Il faut en user en tant qu'écartèlement.

(C2-369)

It is in the use of suffering (though not in seeking it) as opposed to the attempt to find a way out of it, that Simone Weil sees the greatness of Christianity (ibid.). To say that Christianity is not merely an insurance policy against suffering in this world is not of course saying very much, although in this respect Simone Weil would apparently rate Christianity higher than Buddhism, founded as it is on the idea of an escape from suffering through the annihilation of desire.² But she does seem characteristically to neglect the Christian notion of resurrection as a triumph over death.

¹For the mechanism of contradiction see §6 below.

²Cf. 'The Four Holy Truths', Buddhist Scriptures, trans. E. Conze (Harmondsworth 1959), pp. 112-3.

For Simone Weil the Cross suffices, and is its own way of salvation; the Resurrection is not disputed, it is simply ignored.

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The idea of suffering being experienced as contradiction, as 'écartèlement', is developed in Simone Weil's thought in another concept, that of distance. For her, the distance between God and creation is mirrored and intensified in the distance between God and God in the person of Christ on the Cross. Christ was the 'malheureux par excellence', condemned by man and stripped not only of his divinity, but even of his humanity (cf. PSO 92). As we shall indicate in a later chapter (III, §7), for Simone Weil this distance between God and God was at the same time supreme harmony and union, and man, therefore, by association with the Cross of Christ, can participate in this union. An afflicted man is already at the foot of the Cross; all that he has to do is to continue to desire Good in the depths of his affliction, and the experience of distance between himself and God will become one of union, 'une harmonie pure et déchirante' (PSO 92). And then 'ceux qui persévèrent dans l'amour entendent cette note tout au fond de la déchéance où les ~~amis~~ le malheur' (ibid.).

Simone Weil sometimes develops this image of union arising from distance in a different way, a way connected with the idea of consent discussed in the previous chapter. In is a way which seems to indicate a certain ambiguity which should now be considered. As was noted, in Simone Weil's view it is God who descends to man, and not man who ascends to God. When God in his love comes to man, he plants a seed in the receptive soul, when once consent has been given (PSO 102). It will be remembered that for Simone Weil this giving of consent is man's only positive act in the work of salvation.) When once the seed has been planted man has nothing more to do but to nurture it and remove the weeds which might impede its growth; the seed does the rest. But God, having planted the seed, returns whence he came, and the distance between the soul and God is as great as before. How is that distance to be bridged? The soul still cannot ascend towards God of its own accord. The answer is that the seed has now grown into a tree, and that tree is the Cross. The soul, without knowing it, has consented to the suffering of the Cross (PSO 103).

In this image Simone Weil appears to be saying that affliction is the necessary result of consent to God. Even if this were not difficult to square with her affirmations already

noted that joy in beauty was an equally valid way of approach to the divine, it would still leave the question of the value of the affliction which is not a result of consent. Affliction, in Simone Weil's terminology, is part of the human condition, the result of our subjection to necessity, and not merely a divine technique for the saving of souls.

The same criticism applies to the image of the nail which follows it (PSO 103-4), which has the added disadvantage of being horrific in its portrayal of the divine plan. The nail represents affliction, its head being the whole weight of necessity spread through time and space. The point of the nail is applied to the centre of the soul, and Simone Weil describes the whole exercise as follows:

Le malheur est une merveille de la technique divine. C'est un dispositif simple et ingénieux qui fait entrer dans l'âme d'une créature finie cette immensité de force aveugle, brutale et froide. La distance infinie qui sépare Dieu de la créature se rassemble tout entière en un point pour percer une âme en son centre. (PSO 104)

The visual image of the divine carpenter taking obvious pleasure in the efficiency of his scheme is difficult to accept. And yet the message is clear. The soul must go on loving in spite of the torment, must remain orientated in the right direction, and then will find itself nailed to the very centre of the

universe, 'le vrai centre, qui n'est pas au milieu, qui est hors de l'espace et du temps, qui est Dieu' (PSO 104). The nail takes on the symbolism of the cosmic tree, the axis mundi, as Simone Weil describes the union with the divine which results from persistence in love in the midst of affliction:

Selon une dimension qui n'appartient pas à l'espace, qui n'est pas le temps, qui est une tout autre dimension, ce clou a percé un trou à travers la création, à travers l'épaisseur de l'écran qui sépare l'âme de Dieu.

Par cette dimension merveilleuse, l'âme peut, sans quitter le lieu et l'instant où se trouve le corps auquel elle est liée, traverser la totalité de l'espace et du temps et parvenir devant la présence même de Dieu.

(PSO 104-5)

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So far mention has been made only of affliction with regard to oneself. And yet a right attitude to the affliction of others is indispensable, according to Simone Weil, if it is to be used as a way of salvation. The automatic reaction in the face of others' suffering, she says, is disgust and hatred; in fact, we behave exactly as if the afflicted man were responsible for his affliction, as if it were a crime:

Tout le mépris, toute la répulsion, toute la haine que notre raison attache au crime, notre sensibilité l'attache au malheur. Excepté ceux dont le Christ occupe toute l'âme, tout le monde méprise plus ou moins les malheureux.

(PSO 90)

Compassion for affliction is indeed very difficult, since those

who have not experienced it do not understand it, and those who have are in no position to share their experience or help others in the same situation:

Ainsi la compassion à l'égard des malheureux est une impossibilité. Quand elle se produit vraiment, c'est un miracle plus surprenant que la marche sur les eaux, la guérison des malades et même la résurrection d'un mort.

(PSO 88)

The only way for compassion to be shown to someone in affliction is for the one who wishes to help to transfer his own being into the afflicted one, thus restoring, even momentarily, the being of which affliction has deprived him (PSO 118). This is obviously an impossibility, since it involves assuming affliction voluntarily, whereas the essence of affliction is to be imposed against a man's will (PSO 119).

What is impossible to the natural man, however, can be accomplished supernaturally, and Simone Weil seems to imply that there is a technique for achieving it. In a recurrence of the nail-image, she writes to Joë Bousquet:

Pour penser le malheur, il faut le porter dans la chair, enfoncer très avant comme un clou, et le porter longtemps, afin que la pensée ait le temps de devenir assez forte pour le regarder.

(PSO 75)

If in his sufferings a man can take upon himself the sufferings of his epoch, then affliction can become very much more than a

means to personal salvation:

Heureux ceux pour qui le malheur entraînait dans la chair est le malheur du monde lui-même à leur époque. Ceux-là ont la possibilité et la fonction de connaître dans sa vérité, de contempler dans sa réalité le malheur du monde. C'est là la fonction rédemptrice elle-même.

(PSO 78)

The idea of redemptive suffering which must now be considered plays an important part in Simone Weil's thinking. For her it was not enough that man should through affliction be able to bridge the gulf between himself and the divine; there must in addition be models of this to which man could assimilate himself, divine or perfectly pure beings who could take upon themselves the evil of humanity and transmute it into suffering. It is appropriate therefore to turn our attention to the use made by Simone Weil of various mythological figures and deities who represented for her some aspects of the archetypal salvation-through-suffering theme.

III, §3

SAVIOURS AND REDEEMERS

The difficulties of examining the vast collection of mediator-
 -figures whom Simone Weil ^{groups} under the same heading are obvious
 at a glance. The 'liste des images du Christ' drawn up in
 America (CS 290-1) shows the extent of the problem. Leaving
 aside the question as to whether these figures can in fact
 be related to the figure of Christ,¹ we are confronted with
 a list of mythological personages who have their origin in
 Greece, in India, in the Middle East, in Scandinavia, in China,
 some of whom are deities properly speaking, some characters in
 folk-tales, one a figure of Greek geometry ('la moyenne pro-
 portionnelle'), and one which is much more a philosophical
 concept than a religious figure (the Tao). She clarifies the
 issue a little when writing of her interpretation of the
 Hamitic tradition in the essay 'Les trois fils de Noé et
 l'histoire de la civilisation méditerranéenne', when she says
 that this tradition gave to the world

la connaissance et l'amour d'une seconde personne
 divine, autre que le Dieu créateur et puissant et en même
 temps identique, à la fois sagesse et amour, ordonnatrice
 de tout l'univers, institutrice des hommes, unissant en
 soi par l'incarnation la nature humaine à la nature divine,
 médiatrice, souffrante, rédemptrice des âmes. (AD 181)

¹The figure of Christ will be considered separately in
 III, §7.

This 'seconde personne divine' was known by many different names, among which were 'Dionysos, Prométhée, Amour, Aphrodite céleste, Hadès, Coré, Perséphone, Minos, Hermès, Apollon, Artémis, Ame du Monde. Un autre nom qui eut une merveilleuse fortune est Logos, Verbe ou plutôt Rapport, Médiation' (AD 182). Some of these appear in the previous 'liste des images du Christ', some do not.

The question inevitably arises as to whether one can make any legitimate comparison between these myths and figures, and this in turn leads to the whole problem of Simone Weil's so-called syncretism. It is true that in her account of myth she tends to ignore national variations of a theme, and sees only the similarities running through each version. But as Raper notes:

A syncretistic approach makes many into one, by affecting a synthesis, whereas Simone Weil's approach finds that the many are one, anyhow, at the deepest level which attention can reach. . . . Thus the radical 'monism' of Simone Weil's concept of religion is by no means synthetic. The adding together of all the 'languages' of religion into some sort of religious Esperanto would certainly represent a misinterpretation of her view.¹

Other points can be noted too. Firstly there is the fact

¹Op. cit., pp. 132, 134.

that when dealing with the myths of a suffering and redeeming deity, Simone Weil draws largely on the various myths associated with the Mystery religions of the early Christian centuries, when 'syncretism' was a prominent feature of religious life, and deities were considered to be equivalent from one culture to another. Isis at this time is represented as saying: 'The whole earth worships my godhead, one and individual, under many a changing shape, with varied rites and by many divine names.'¹ Secondly, the fundamental nature of myth must be borne in mind. Although it is obvious that an individual myth grows up in a geographically and temporally determined milieu, the similarities between myths the world over, even where no historical connexions can be established, leads one to suppose that these are different expressions of a basic human vision. A myth concerns itself with the fundamental experiences of humanity--the cycle of birth and death, the rotation of the seasons, suffering and self-preservation--and not with the accidental, and these are basically the same in all parts of the world. The originality of Christianity itself

¹Quot. in S. Spencer, Mysticism in World Religion (Harmondsworth 1963), p. 154.

is said to lie in the fact that in spite of the striking resemblances between the Gospel accounts of Christ's birth, life and death, and pagan myths of the time, the Gospel account is based on historical fact whereas the pagan versions are 'merely' myths. In other words, Christianity is superior because it is not a myth, not because it is a superior myth. A large part of structuralist anthropology is based on the comparability of myths in different parts of the world; Lévi-Strauss emphasises the eminently translatable nature of myth, that in spite of the most severe linguistic deformation it can still retain its original sense,¹ and claims that to analyse a myth correctly it is necessary to have as many variations as possible.²

In view of this we do not propose to take separately every single one of the mediator- or saviour-figures enumerated by Simone Weil and examine to what extent her use corresponds to accepted practice. It will be a question rather of considering how these figures fit into her general scheme of mediation and salvation. It is proposed in this chapter to consider only

¹'The Structural Study of Myth', Structural Anthropology trans. Claire Jacobson & B. G. Schoepf (New York 1963), p. 210.

²Ibid., p. 218.

mythical figures of one sort or another, and to leave figures of a mathematical nature to another chapter (III, §6).

Even when the field is restricted in this way, the question of how these myths are to be categorised still remains. Owing to the interchangeability of the myths in Simone Weil's use of them, it is impossible to divide them in any absolute way; but on scrutiny they do seem to fall into two categories, although these overlap a great deal. One category relates to the Mystery-gods, to the concept of an incarnate divine figure who suffers death for the sake of humanity. In this category belong too those deities whom Simone Weil identified with the Mystery-gods. The second category contains those figures of which the prototype is perhaps Plato's ideally just man. Here it is a question again of justice suffering at the hands of men, but the emphasis is on the humanity of the figure involved, and although he suffers, it is not usually a case of a ritual death and resurrection. It must be emphasised however that these categories are very artificial, and are adopted only for the sake of handling the material.¹

¹The whole concept of the mediator-saviour, its universality as well as the different emphases indicated above, is illustrated by C. J. Bleeker: 'The saviour is an essential factor in religion, because many religious people are convinced

As a prelude to a discussion of these two expressions of the saviour in Simone Weil's thought, we may take the figure of Love which she developed from Plato, and which embraces many of the characteristics of both categories. Plato's figure appears in Socrates' speech in the Symposium, where the characters concerned are discussing the nature of love.

that the domain of men and the world of the gods are separated by a deep cleft. In order to link up these two worlds a bridge must be laid across the cleft. Man is unable to perform this act. It should be done by a creature who unites the two worlds by his nature. That is the saviour. He is a divine or semi-divine Being, who descends from the domain of the gods to the dwelling-places of men, or who operates through other gods for the benefit of men. The figure of the saviour shows many varieties. As he combines in himself a human and a divine element, the emphasis may alternatively be put on the one or the other side of his nature. Saviours, in whom the human factor dominates, are the sacral king, the hero, the prophet, the sage and the saint. It is evident that in the saviour-god, i.e. the god who functions as saviour, the divine nature fully prevails. Yet the human factor is not absolutely absent. It finds its expression on the one hand in the human feelings which the god displays and on the other side in his interest in the destiny of men. Moreover, he often passes a severe trial, so that he is a consoling example to suffering humanity, and he conquers death, so that in man the hope of immortality awakens. The saviour-god thus shows two striking and nearly related features: he is a dynamic personality and he cares for the welfare of men, indeed he sometimes takes part in human sufferings.' The Saviour God: Comparative Studies in the concept of Salvation, presented to Edwin Oliver James, ed. S. G. F. Brandon (Manchester 1963), p. 2.

Socrates reports what the wise woman Diotima told him concerning Love. He is 'half-way between mortal and immortal', 'a great spirit (*δαίμων*)', 'half-god and half-man', 'being of an intermediate nature, a spirit bridges the gap between them, and prevents the universe from falling into two separate halves. . . . God does not deal directly with man; it is by means of spirits that all the intercourse and communication of gods with men, both in waking life and in sleep, is carried on. . . . Spirits are many in number and of many kinds, and one of them is Love.'¹ Simone Weil comments on this passage, and on the use of the word *δαίμων*, by saying that sometimes in Greek it bears the meaning of 'god', sometimes that of a being above man but below the gods, like an angel, and sometimes, as here, 'les médiateurs, les intermédiaires entre l'homme et Dieu' (IP 64).²

She goes on to interpret Plato's account of Love's birth.³

¹Symposium, 202-3.

²P. Friedländer also claims that Plato uses gods and demons interchangeably, but that he used these two categories nevertheless, 'placing the demonic as a sort of proportional mean between the human level and the divine'. Plato: An Introduction, trans. H. Meyerhoff (London 1958), p. 42.

³Symposium, 203-4.

On the day Aphrodite was born, Poverty (Simone Weil calls her 'Misère') lay with the god Contrivance ('Ressource') who was drunk with nectar, and conceived a son, Love. Love is thus a son of God, 'auteur de l'harmonie la plus complète, au sens pythagoricien, c'est-à-dire de l'unité entre les contraires les plus contraires possible--à savoir Dieu et la misère' (IP 70). But she reminds us that as well as being the son of a God, Love is also described as equal with God. Quoting Agathon's speech, she says, 'J'affirme que parmi les dieux, l'Amour est le plus heureux, le plus beau et le plus parfait' (195, quot. IP 49). Simone Weil has no scruples about assimilating the two speeches, and concludes that this makes Love both the supreme God and a mediator between God and man.

Concerning the nature of Love, and the life he leads, she again refers to Socrates' speech, and translates:

D'abord il est perpétuellement misérable, et il s'en faut qu'il soit délicat et beau comme la multitude le croit. Il est durci et desséché, nu-pieds, sans abri, toujours gisant à terre à même le sol, dormant devant les portes et sur les routes, en plein air. Ayant la nature de sa mère, il est toujours le compagnon de la privation.

(204, quot. IP 66)

She comments: 'Cet Amour représenté tout à l'heure comme roi des dieux est ici un misérable vagabond. C'est qu'il l'a voulu. Il a voulu naître fils de la Misère' (IP 68). So

Love is poor, wanders from place to place, is homeless and wretched. The son of God suffers. His wanderings and sufferings are a parallel of course to those already considered in the folk-tale of the 'Duke of Norroway', where God seeks the soul, and are equivalent for Simone Weil to any similar account, for example Orestes' wanderings before his reunion with Electra (CS 262).

But what Love suffers he does so willingly. He is an image for Simone Weil of consent, consent to affliction. Referring back to Agathon's speech, she translates lines which she considers to be 'peut-être les plus belles de Platon':

Le plus important, c'est que l'Amour ne fait ni ne subit injustice, soit parmi les Dieux soit parmi les hommes. Car lui, il ne souffre pas par force, quand il lui arrive de souffrir, car la force n'atteint pas l'Amour. Et quand il agit, il n'agit pas ~~par~~ par force, car chacun consent à obéir en tout à l'Amour. L'accord qui se fait par consentement mutuel est juste, selon les lois de la 'cité royale'.

(196, quot. IP 52-3)

Another characteristic which should be mentioned is that of divine healer. Love is described by Aristophanes as 'le médecin des maux dont la guérison serait pour l'espèce humaine la suprême félicité' (189, IP 43), and Simone Weil interprets this in common with Christ's healing mission, as the healing of original sin. Whether or not her interpretation is correct

--or whether it is even possible to speak of 'original sin' in connexion with the Greeks--it affords an interesting parallel with Serapis, a form of Osiris worshipped in the Egyptian Myteries. Serapis was identified with Asclepius, the divine healer, and also with Zeus, Dionysos and Helios.¹ (Apollo himself, father of Asclepius, was also a healer.)

Simone Weil uses several images to describe the action of Love, Love's 'descent', and these seem to apply to the very concept of a mediator-figure in her thought. One of the most common is that of the thunderbolt, or a 'descending fire'. She finds this in the Stoic concept of $\pi\nu\epsilon\upsilon\mu\alpha$, the energy which supports the universe, of which the celestial form is the thunderbolt (SG 162, comm. Cleanthes' Hymn to Zeus). She continues:

D'après la conception antique, le lieu naturel du feu est en haut, comme celui de la terre en bas. Le feu tend à monter comme les corps solides à descendre. Un feu qui descend est contre nature. Par là la foudre est l'image de la folie d'amour qui contraint Dieu à un mouvement descendant vers les hommes. (SG 162)

Elsewhere she writes again of the thunderbolt being 'le lien d'amour entre le Ciel et la Terre' (CS 255). The difficulty

¹Spencer, op. cit., p. 156.

of her interpretation here is that she identifies Love with the Holy Spirit rather than with the incarnate mediator-figure (cf. SG 162). Love is the fire which Christ came to give to men, the fire which Prometheus stole, and given the Gospel identification of fire with Spirit, the relationship is an obvious one. Presumably this was for Simone Weil simply another manifestation of Love, since the mediator-figure and the Spirit are different aspects of the same divine Being.

A more puzzling image, but one which seems to be related to that of a 'descending fire', is that of chlorophyll, whose property of capturing the sun's energy Simone Weil sees as an image of divine love (IP 62). It almost seems as if the sun ought to be the mediator here, since it is a 'descending fire' which will cause the plant which receives it to grow upwards. But perhaps she is thinking on a more literal level, of the chlorophyll mediating solar energy and transferring it to the plant. (Compare for instance the note: 'Si nous avions de la chlorophylle, nous nous nourririons de lumière, comme les arbres', CS 245.) She makes this more explicit in the following passage:

La chlorophylle est l'intermédiaire entre l'énergie solaire et nous, comme la lune nous permet de contempler face à face et longtemps la lumière solaire, ainsi la chlorophylle nous permet de manger et de boire l'énergie solaire.

(C3 198)

With this may be compared Claudel's use of the image of chlorophyll as mediator.¹

According to Simone Weil's analysis outlined above then, Love is both equal to God and the son of God; a mediator between God and human misery, he suffers and is outcast when on earth, but suffers willingly. He benefits mankind by providing a remedy for their evil-doing, and yet the very act of his descent to earth is against nature. These are all characteristics which will recur in the consideration of other mediator-figures which should now be undertaken.

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The death-and-resurrection myths which form the first category to be discussed are often considered to derive from one of the oldest and most widespread forms of religion in Europe, the cult of the Earth-mother.² As the male role in human procreation came to be understood, so this divine figure of fertility was joined by a consort, a lover or a son, who died and was resurrected with the decay and rebirth of the

¹See 'Traité de la co-naissance du monde et de soi-même' in Oeuvre poétique (Bibl. de la Pléiade, Paris 1957), p. 162.

²Cf. A. H. Krappe, La Genèse des mythes (Paris 1952), p. 73: 'Tous [les peuples de langue indo-européenne] ont connu ou connaissent toujours une terre-mère, sous une grande variété de noms.'

natural world. The cult of this pair became especially vigorous in the Near East and Mediterranean regions, and as H. B. Parkes tells us,

with regional variations, they were worshipped under the names of Ishtar and Tammuz in Mesopotamia, Isis and Osiris in Egypt, Astarte and Adonis in Syria, and Cybele and Attis in Anatolia, while in classical Greece a similar tale was told of the harvest goddess Demeter and her daughter Persephone.¹

This fertility god, alternatively consort or child of the Great mother, followed the cycle of the seasons in his growth, death and subsequent resurrection, and very early came to be symbolised by the moon, whose phases seemed so intimately connected with the universal cycle of birth and death. Many scholars have underlined this intermingling of moon and vegetation. Eliade points out that a large number of fertility gods are also moon-deities, including Dionysos and Osiris,² and it is certainly one of the merits of Simone Weil's use of this theme to have perceived the connexion between such medi-

¹Gods and Men (London 1960), p. 45. Cf. Sir J. G. Frazer, The Golden Bough (abridged edn, London 1949), pp. 324-5.

²Patterns in Comparative Religion, tr. M. R. Sheed (London & New York 1958), p. 162. Cf. R. Graves, The Greek Myths (Harmondsworth 1955), pp. 15 ff and G. Durand, Les Structures Anthropologiques de l'imaginaire (3e edn, Paris 1969), pp. 341-351.

ator-gods and the moon. As regards the mediator-gods, she sees moon-symbolism in various of their attributes:

Tous les dieux médiateurs, assimilables au Verbe, sont des dieux lunaires, porteurs de cornes, de lyres, ou d'arcs qui évoquent le croissant (Osiris, Artémis, Apollon, Hermès, Dionysos, Zagreus, l'Amour...).

(LR 25)

Such a connexion is of course heightened for her by her reading of Plato; in the cave-myth the moon is obviously a reflection of the sun, more easily perceived by man who is blinded by the direct light of the Good. There is a mingling of Platonism with modern theories of religious symbolism in her claim that

si le soleil est l'image du Père, la Lune, reflet parfait de la splendeur solaire, mais reflet qu'on peut contempler, et qui souffre la diminution et la disparition, est l'image du Fils.

(ibid.)

Although she does not expressly state the relationship noted above between lunar and chthonian deities, she seems to indicate such a relationship in the following affirmation:

Beaucoup de choses se trouvent éclaircies dans la mythologie si on suppose que tout ce qui a rapport à la lune, à des cornes parce qu'elles sont images de la lune, et à la sève végétale, symbolise le Verbe.

(IP 89)

She uses this relationship for example in her treatment of the Kore myth. As was indicated above (III, §1), Kore for

Simone Weil symbolised the soul which by eating the pomegranate seed gave its consent to God. Kore, in her interpretation, is also however a figure of Christ. She is an instance of the god which is 'autre que le Dieu suprême et en même temps identique à lui' (AD 182), and in a note representing a brief speculation on the subject, she is also equated with Osiris: 'Si Déméter est Isis, Coré est Osiris, le Verbe incarné, et Zagreus n'est pas le fils de Coré, mais le même être' (C3 88).¹

Another parallel which Simone Weil makes between Coré and Christ, which is less improbable than it sounds, is in the connexion of each with corn and hence with bread. When she notes: 'Si Coré (Perséphone) représente vraiment le grain de blé, c'est une figure du Christ' (C3 244), she is probably thinking of the symbolism of the Eucharist. Clearly she is not attempting to reduce Christ's function to that of a corn-god, but the identification of Christ's body with bread in

¹Krappe associates Isis and Demeter when referring to the former as 'la Nature, mère des choses, maîtresse de tous les éléments' (after Apuleius) and to the former as 'Terre-Mère des peuples de langue indo-européenne'. Op. cit., pp. 103 & 58. Simone Weil calls them both 'la divinité maternelle dont le symbole est la terre' (IP 88). Cf. Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology, p. 17.

the Eucharist points to a symbolism which did not originate with Christianity.

When Simone Weil denotes Hades, the god normally associated with the Kore myth, as a mediator-figure too, she seems to be on flimsier ground. She puts him, with Kore and others, in the category of gods who are the same as the supreme God and at the same time different from him (AD 182), and when considering Kore as the human soul makes Hades a figure of the Word:

Coré (il est si évident que c'est l'âme) est fille de Zeus et de Déméter, de Dieu et de la Terre; c'est Zeus qui dans sa sagesse la donne pour épouse à Hadès. 'Nul ne vient à moi, sinon ceux que me donne mon Père'.

(C2 353)

The interpretation is ingenious, but does not carry the conviction of some others; there seems to be no case for considering Hades to represent here anything but death, which is overcome by the rebirth of the moon or of vegetation. Following Heraclitus, she also identifies Hades with Dionysos, which would seem to add weight to her argument, but it is to interpret them as figures of the Spirit, rather than of the Word (C2 353, C3 89).

Simone Weil moves easily between the various aspects of a deity, however, and it is natural that when considering

Dionysos it is primarily his character of mediator-god which should concern her. The death-and-resurrection of the god becomes a symbol of man's spiritual death and regeneration, and this symbol is played out in the drama of the mystery-religions (SG 86). Eliade indicates the necessity for this regeneration by 'death', linking it with human symbolism:

Dans la 'perspective lunaire', la mort de l'homme, comme la mort périodique de l'humanité, sont nécessaires, tout comme le sont les trois jours de ténèbres qui précèdent la 'renaissance' de la lune. La mort de l'homme et celle de l'humanité sont indispensables à leur régénération.¹

And so when criticising Nietzsche's interpretation of Dionysos, Simone Weil identifies the god as

le Dieu que l'homme doit imiter pour sauver son âme, qui a rejoint l'homme dans sa souffrance et la mort, et que l'homme peut et doit rejoindre dans la perfection et la félicité. Exactement comme le Christ. (SS 232)

Dionysos is a lunar deity, like other mediator-figures; Simone Weil seems to deduce this mainly from the fact that he was a horned deity, horns being a lunar symbol (IP 12, C3 185), and from the passage where Sophocles calls him 'Feu, chef du chœur des astres qui respirent, gardien des voix

¹Le Mythe de l'éternel retour (Paris 1949), pp. 132-3.

nocturnes, répartiteur' (IP 89).¹ She could equally well have referred to the new-moon boat in which he made his voyage²--or for that matter to the fact that his mother was Semele, 'la souterraine', whose chthonic nature has obvious lunar implications.³ As a moon-god, he suffered eclipse, in his case being torn in pieces by the Titans. Simone Weil notes a similarity between this treatment and crucifixion and links the two with the Manichean image of the spirit crucified and scattered across time and space (C2 354).

Dionysos was also of course a wine-god, and Simone Weil does not hesitate to draw from this a parallel with Christ when he said 'I am the vine' (PSO 61). The fact that Dionysos was credited with planting the first vine leads her to identify him with Noah, who was held to have performed a similar service for humanity (AD 178).⁴ He resembles Noah

¹We have been unable to locate this reference. F. Ellendt, Lexicon Sophocleum (Hildesheim 1958) gives only two references to Dionysos, neither of which is appropriate.

²Graves, §27.6. In other traditions the moon-god journeys or crosses the sky in a boat. The Egyptian Khons identified by the Greeks with Heracles, the saviour god par excellence, is an example of this. See Larousse Encyc. of Mythology, p. 34.

³C. Kerényi, La Mythologie des Grecs tr. H. de Roguin (Paris 1952), p. 252. Cf. H. J. Rose, A Handbook of Greek Mythology (6th edn, London 1964), p. 149.

⁴Genesis ix. 20.

also in being 'un rédempteur dont le sacrifice a sauvé l'humanité' (CS 57). Again, to make the parallel, she could have mentioned Dionysos' voyage, which is supposed to be a similar excursion to that undertaken by Noah in his Ark.¹ This parallel would strengthen her case, since it would presumably give Noah lunar connexions, and thus make of him a kind of 'dieu médiateur'.

Simone Weil makes the usual association between Dionysos and Zagreus, the Cretan child-god who, like Dionysos, was a 'son of God' i.e. of Zeus, and like him was torn to pieces and devoured.² Because of his horns, Simone Weil considers him to be a lunar deity (IP 184, CS 291), and as such one who suffers a passion, an 'eclipse' (IP 174). She gives a curious interpretation of the mirror given to Zagreus, finding an analogy between the idea of a reflected god in the case of Zagreus, a nailed God in the case of Christ, and a measured god in the case of Osiris (Osiris in his coffin). In each case, God is limited, 'trapped' (C3 131).³

¹Graves, §§27.6, 38.3.

²Rose, op. cit., p. 51.

³Graves explains the mirror as one of the instruments used in the Orphic mysteries, representing the other self, or ghost, of the initiates (§30.1).

This parallel with Osiris is a natural one, and Simone Weil carries it out to its fullest extent. Osiris, like Dionysos, is a god who has lived on earth, suffered and died, and was resurrected (C2 323, PSO 47). The manner of their deaths--being torn to pieces--is also similar (C2 354, 368), and Osiris too bears lunar attributes, for example when he appears in his form as the bull Apis (IP 12);¹ or in his incarnation as Onuphis (IP 88). Like other redemptive saviours, Osiris instructed man in the civilised arts (CS 313, E 252).² Simone Weil notes an interesting parallel between Osiris and Deucalion, claiming that the same Greek word was used for Deucalion's ark as for the coffin in which Osiris was cast into the Nile and carried out to sea (AD 178). In relation to this she sees a symbolism in the wood used for their construction:

Le bois de l'arche [de Noé] a rapport au symbolisme du bois qui apparaît dans l'arbre du péché originel, dans le coffre en bois d'Osiris, dans les obélisques de bois en son honneur . . . , dans la Croix. (C3 232)

¹The bull was the most important of the Egyptian sacred animals, and when he died was worshipped, as were all the ~~mmmm~~ dead, as an 'Osiris' under the name Osiris-Apis (Greek Osorapis). In life he was supposed to be the reincarnation of Ptah. Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology, p. 44.

²Simone Weil does not mention it, but like Dionysos he is credited with the introduction of the vine.

There is certainly a relationship between 'l'arbre du péché originel' and the Cross,¹ and the tree-symbolism could well have extended to Osiris as he was originally a vegetation-god,² but on the other hand wood is the natural material for making a boat or floating coffer, and the symbolism should not be pressed too far.³

Another figure identified by Simone Weil as a 'figure du Christ' (CS 290) is Adonis, the Greek version of the Syrian Tammuz, spirit of vegetation.⁴ He seems also to have been the equivalent of Kore, since he suffered the same division of the year between the earth and the underworld. Simone Weil mentions the tradition that he was killed as were Osiris, Zagreus and others, by a wild boar (C3 274).⁵ Rose interprets

¹See III, §4.

²Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology, p. 16.

³See however p. 500 below.

⁴Kerényi, op. cit., p. 67.

⁵Frazer suggests that Demeter and Persephone, as well as Attis and Adonis, were believed to be embodied as pigs, and that these in connexion with the rites of Osiris were sacrificed annually to the moon, giving them lunar symbolism. Op. cit., pp. 471-2.

the story as 'an Oriental myth of the Great Mother and of her lover who dies as the vegetation dies, but comes to life again',¹ and Simone Weil is obviously considering Adonis as a vegetation-god when she writes of 'les fêtes d'Adonis, dont les cultes mystiques enseignent que c'est un simulacre des moissons mûres' (CS 202).

Parallel to Adonis is Attis, another 'figure du Christ' whom Simone Weil identifies specifically with Kore as being a vegetation-god, and hence with Christ:

Toutes les divinités mortes et ressuscitées figurées par le grain, Perséphone, Attis, etc. sont des images du Christ, et le Christ a reconnu cette ressemblance par la parole 'Si le grain ne meurt...'.
(PSO 61, cf. LR 21)²

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The deities so far considered have all followed a fairly recognisable pattern. They have all been lunar and vegetation gods who suffer and die with the dying vegetation, and are re-

¹Rose, op. cit., p. 125.

²His affinities with other deities already mentioned, although these are not specifically discussed by Simone Weil, include his death; according to one tradition, he was killed by a wild boar, like Adonis, and to another he castrated himself, as Osiris was castrated. See Frazer, op. cit., p. 347.

surrected with its rebirth. Simone Weil however sees lunar symbolism in a great many other deities, and thus considers them to be mediator-figures, even where no death-and-resurrection is involved. At first sight her case for considering them thus does not seem to be particularly strong, since the element of suffering would seem to be a prerequisite of the mediator-god, but in fact many of them did have lunar connections. In any case, they provide an interesting example of her extension of a series of symbols outside their normally accepted sphere.

Firstly there is Hermes, whom Simone Weil identifies with Osiris, Dionysos, Prometheus, Love, Apollo, 'et beaucoup d'autres' (IP 12). She thinks that the lyre which Hermes invented bears the same symbolism as the bow of Artemis and Apollo, and represents the moon (IP 89).¹ Presumably the cattle which he stole as a child are also in the north of Greece recognised as lunar symbols, being horned. Kerényi claims that Hermes was the spouse and son of a great goddess of fertility,² and elsewhere notes that both he and Prometheus

¹For the myth of Hermes see Kerényi, op. cit., pp. 162-179.

²Ibid., pp. 171, 175.

were moon-gods.¹ In his role as messenger of the gods Hermes is seen by Simone Weil as a mediator of the same kind as Love (IP 65), and as the inventor of fire forms a parallel with Prometheus (C3 251). Graves suggests that 'the invention of fire-making was ascribed to Hermes because the twirling of the male drill in the female stock suggested phallic magic',² and if this is correct it affords an interesting parallel with the Vedic figure of Agni who produced fire in the same way, and about whom there is a legend strongly resembling the story of the birth of Christ.³

¹Kerényi, Prometheus: Archetypal Image of Human Existence, tr. Mannheim (London 1963), p. 52.

²Graves, op. cit., §17.3.

³Cf. H. F. Marcy, Le Mythe du feu et le symbole de la Croix (Paris 1954), p. 7: he writes of 'la première étincelle qui paraît dans la cavité où réside la "vierge Maya", le "petit enfant", la "frêle et divine créature" que les prêtres déposent sur de la paille qui s'enflamme. On amène à côté du feu naissant la vache qui a fourni le beurre, l'âne qui porte le soma, la paille et le bois. . . . Puis Agni est porté sur la paille et les branches amassées sur l'autel; on verse sur lui le soma liqueur spiritueuse qui lui donne la force, puis le beurre qui le nourrit; Agni devient alors l'oïnt (akta en sanskrit, christos en grec), et la flamme surgit, semble monter au ciel au milieu d'un nuage de fumée. Agni va retrouver Savistri, la père céleste, qui l'a envoyé sur terre pour le salut du monde. Et le soma et le pain (farine et beurre) sont alors présentés à Agni sur l'autel: il les consume et l'offrande monte avec lui en vapeur et fumée, vers le soleil; le Feu est à la fois sacrificateur et victime et les prêtres, les fidèles

Apollo too, as we saw, has lunar attributes according to Simone Weil's interpretation, since he is both a god of hunting equipped with a bow, and the patron of music bearing the lyre (IP 89). The opposition made by Nietzsche between Dionysos and Apollo she describes as 'de la pure fantaisie, car les Grecs les mêlaient dans les mythes et semblent parfois les identifier' (SS 232). She sees him as both a solar and a lunar deity, and thinks that it was as the moon that he was banished from Olympus for offending Zeus, since 'le soleil ne disparaît jamais, même à Noël. La lune seule disparaît' (C3 198). Since Apollo's offence was to have sided with his son Asclepius who had resurrected a dead man, a parallel could be indicated with Prometheus, whose crime too was to have loved mankind too well. Simone Weil also notes his functions as shepherd (CS 217), which could account for his use of the bow,¹ and as healer (IP 61), recalling 'l'Amour médecin' already referred to (p.429 above).

The lunar attributes of Artemis, described with others as 'le dieu qui est autre que le Dieu suprême et en même temps

boivent et mangent une partie de l'offrande qui n'a pas été consumée et qui est considérée comme renfermant Agni qui s'en va renforcer dans les corps le principe de vie.'

¹Cf. Rose, op. cit., p. 136.

identique à lui' (AD 182), are more debatable, according to Rose, who holds that lunar symbolism came late into her cult.¹ In any case she was originally a mother-deity, and hence identifiable with Isis rather than with Osiris, with Cybele rather than with Attis. Simone Weil correctly assumes her silver bow to be a lunar symbol (C3 137) but her identification of Artemis with Dionysos (IP 89) seems to confuse the goddess and her consort.

In describing the god Pan as the Logos, Simone Weil is following Plato in the Cratylus (IP 89, LR 27). She elaborates on this however by emphasising the god's goat-characteristics (CS 20)--his horns would thus be a lunar symbol--and the fact that he was a shepherd (CS 217).² The death of Pan caused her to speculate that Christ came to replace him: "Le grand Pan est mort!--Ce n'est pas le Christ qui a tué le grand Pan. C'est parce que Pan est mort que pour le remplacer il a fallu que le Christ naquît" (C2 285).³

¹Op. cit., p. 113.

²Graves, op. cit., §26.e.

³The quotation at the beginning of this note derives from the myth of the announcement of Pan's death as told by Plutarch; it was shouted from the shore of the island of Paxos to the Egyptian Thamuz, pilot of a ship becalmed near

A god who attracted Simone Weil's attention, but whom she does not think fits into the category of lunar or vegetation gods, is Prometheus. Kerényi however, as has been noted, considers Prometheus along with Hermes to be a moon-god. Like Hermes too he was a giver of fire to mankind; Graves thinks that the name 'Prometheus', 'fore-thought', might have originated in a Greek misunderstanding of the Sanskrit 'pramantha', the swastika or fire-drill,¹ and if this is so then the same comment would apply to the parallel with Agni as was made for Hermes. For Simone Weil his name means 'pour la

the island. Rose holds that this story is true, but that what the pilot really heard was *Θαμουζ, Θαμουζ, Θαμουζ Παμμέγας τέθνηκε*, 'Thamuz, Thamuz, Thamuz the all-great is dead', *Παν μέγας* and *παμμέγας* being indistinguishable at that distance. The people were thus lamenting ceremonially for Thamuz (Tammuz), or Adonis, and not mourning Pan's death. (Rose, pp. 170, 179 n. 17.)

Elsewhere Simone Weil suggests that 'le grand Pan est mort' might refer in fact to the death of Christ, he being 'le grand Pan, le grand Tout' (LR 27). Rose states that the name Pan is derived from the same root as the Latin *pasco*, and means 'the Feeder', 'the pasturer of flocks' (p. 167). The association of Pan with Christ is an old idea. E. B. Browning's poem 'The Dead Pan' is a protest against Plutarch's myth that in the hour of Christ's agony the cry of 'Great Pan is dead!' went up. *Poetical Works* (London 1897), pp. 282-6.

For an account of the whole Pan legend and its development, see W. R. Irwin, 'The Survival of Pan', *PMLA*, LXXVI (1961), iii, 159-167.

¹Op. cit., §39.8.

connaissance' which, because of the sufferings he endured, she associates with the Sophoclean 'par la souffrance la connaissance' (PSO 58). His giving of fire to mankind she relates to Christ's mission of bringing a fire to earth, and notes other similarities between the two:

Prométhée est le Christ même, avec la détermination du temps et de l'espace en moins; c'est l'histoire du Christ projetée dans l'éternité. Il est venu jeter un feu sur terre. Il s'agit du Saint-Esprit comme plusieurs textes le montrent (Philèbe, Prométhée enchaîné, Héraclite, Cléanthe). Il est rédempteur des hommes. Il a subi la souffrance et l'humiliation, volontairement, par excès d'amour.

(PSO 60)

Kerényi too is aware of the parallels between the two, particularly of their common intercession for man, but notes that whereas Christ is a God made man, Prometheus remains a god. He queries whether there is not

a profound bond between him [Prometheus] and the still more unfortunate human race? This question . . . does not necessarily point to a need of salvation in the Christian sense. However, it is a question that we shall do well to keep in mind as we make our way through the classical texts to this mysterious god of Greek mythology, wounded, in need of redemption, and also redeemed . . .¹

The essential features of Prometheus for Simone Weil are his great love for humanity which caused his suffering (SG 111),

¹Prometheus, p. 32.

his teaching mission (SG 45), and the way of knowledge through suffering which he opened up for humanity by his own example (C3 74). He seems to be for Simone Weil the archetypal suffering saviour, a universalisation of the Christ-figure, who, because he was not limited to a single historic incarnation, reached back in time to the affliction of men long before Christ.

In connexion with the sufferings of Prometheus another figure should be mentioned, and that is the World-Soul, whose functions have already been noted (I, §2, III, §1). Simone Weil finds it significant that the World-Soul should have been 'crucified' as was Prometheus, and thus suffered (SG 135, Timaeus, 36). The World-Soul by its very composition she felt was a mediator, since it was fashioned 'de la substance indivisible, éternellement identique à elle-même, et de celle qui est relative au corps, laquelle est devenir et divisibilité' (SG 134, Timaeus, 35). But from these cosmological theories of Plato to the sufferings of the anthropomorphic Prometheus the distance seems greater than Simone Weil recognises.

Another suffering figure, a mysterious one too, in whom Simone Weil read Christian symbolism, was the Nordic Odin. Odin was a god of battle and also a god of the dead, but it is

the episode of his sufferings which holds Simone Weil's attention. In the Havamal Odin recounts how he was pierced by a spear and hanged on a tree where, by lifting the runes which lay at his feet, he attained wisdom.¹ The fact that Odin says here that he was offered 'to himself' aroused Simone Weil to speculate on similarities with Christ's sacrifice (CS 56), and his attainment of wisdom through his sufferings reminds her both of Prometheus and of the conviction of St. John of the Cross 'qu'on pénètre seulement par la croix dans les secrets de la Sagesse de Dieu' (CS 56). H. R. Ellis Davidson notes that Odin's was a voluntary sacrifice, and that this image of the suffering god hanging from the tree was at one time thought to derive from the Christian tradition:

But despite certain resemblances, it would seem that here we have something whose roots go deep into heathen thought, and which is no late copy, conscious or unconscious, of the central mystery of the Christian faith. By hanging on a tree, Odin is not sharing in the suffering of the world or saving men from death, he is there to win the secret of the runes.²

Although the difference in the purpose of the sacrifice is important, this would be unlikely to deter Simone Weil who tended to emphasise the gaining of wisdom through suffering,

¹See H. R. Ellis Davidson, Gods and Myths of Northern Europe (Harmondsworth 1964), p. 51.

²Ibid., p. 144.

and the exemplary role of Christ rather than his saving purpose. Nor would the fact that direct Christian influence on the Odin myth is slight bother her, since she was not concerned with detecting 'influences', but rather the universal and spontaneous representation of the same truths wherever they occurred and at whatever period in time.

One last figure in this first category should now be mentioned, although in the interpretation given to him by Simone Weil his functions often fit him rather for the second category. This figure is Krishna, who at first sight seems to have little in common with the Western saviour-gods who have been considered up to this point. Simone Weil seems to have had a particular affection for this deity, as is shown by the frequent references to him in the personal letters written at the end of her life (EL 216-257). Krishna is an incarnation of Vishnu, who is a friend of mankind in that he comes to earth whenever 'righteousness is weak and unrighteousness exults in pride'.¹ Simone Weil suggests that he is one in the line of deities belonging to the religious tradition in which revelation implies incarnation (C2 317). He is the

¹Bhagavad Gita, IV, 7.

incarnation of the personal deity, Vishnu, as opposed to the impersonal Brahma (C2 429), and an incarnation of the Word (LR 18). Durand indicates an interesting etymological link between Krishna and Christ, Khristos meaning 'anointed', and Krishna meaning oil or perfume, derived from the verb khrio, 'I anoint, I rub'.¹ There are other parallels however with the deities we have been considering; his prodigious youth in which he performed feats of skill and daring, often mischievous, recalls the child-god Hermes, and like Hermes he had an early encounter with cattle, being brought up by a poor cow-herd.² His death recalls that of Achilles, since he was shot by an arrow in his heel, the only vulnerable part of his body.³

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¹Op. cit., p. 380.

²Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology, pp. 380-1.

³Graves notes that the Thessalian sacred king was ritually killed by his tanist by this method, and that the hunter Jara who killed Krishna is sometimes referred to as his brother, i.e. tanist (§92.10). He also notes (ibid.) that Krishna was identified by Alexander's Greeks with Heracles, the type of the divine saviour. Although Simone Weil does not mention these details, they provide a fruitful source of parallels for her theme.

The other function of Krishna, that of redeemer who transforms evil into pure suffering (C3 173) brings us to our second category, that of 'perfectly pure beings', who in one way or another redeem mankind, by taking upon themselves the evil done by others. The notion of redemptive suffering elaborated by Simone Weil is a characteristically mechanistic one, and is related to, or an extension of her ideas already noted on the 'gravity' which makes an individual want to restore the psychological balance which evil or hurt has upset, and transfer that evil to another (I, §5). This chain reaction of evil being passed from individual to individual can only be broken by one person refusing to pass it on and retaining it in the form of suffering. We have noted the way in which this can be done within the individual, by transferring the evil from the impure to the pure part of the soul (ibid.).

In addition to this, Simone Weil clearly believed in the existence throughout history of certain perfectly pure beings who were able to perform this neutralising of evil for humanity. Sometimes these are preserved in folk-tales to which we have lost the key, for example the tales of Snow-White and of the Almond-tree, both of which, according to Simone Weil, tell the story of the death and resurrection of a perfectly pure

being (C3 257). This redemptive function of certain individuals reveals, she thinks, the profound meaning of 'fate' in connexion with Greek tragedy:

On a très mal compris ce qu'on nomme la fatalité dans la tragédie grecque. Il n'y a pas de fatalité mais cette conception de la malédiction qui, une fois produite par un crime, est transmise par les hommes les uns aux autres, et ne peut être détruite que par la souffrance d'une victime pure, obéissante à Dieu.

(IP 20)

The notion of purity here is important, since in Simone Weil's view only purity has the power to dissolve the mixture of sin and suffering which makes up evil. She analyses the mechanics of it:

Le contact avec la pureté produit une transformation dans le mal. Le mélange indissoluble de la souffrance cesse d'être mélangé de péché; d'autre part le péché se transforme en ~~peine~~ simple souffrance.

(PSO 16)

Simone Weil finds one example of this in the Hindu king Rama (another incarnation of Vishnu), who is obliged to harm his wife and kill the Sudra, in each case because his particular status obliges him to, he is constrained to it by 'necessity':

Souffrance rédemptrice en Rāma. L'être parfaitement pur, s'il est contraint par obligation d'état de faire le mal, subit passivement cette contrainte; il n'est que le lieu par où passe du mal venu du dehors; et là encore, passant par lui, le mal se transforme en douleur pure.

(C3 146)

A figure whom Simone Weil considers could have been the 'same incarnation' as Rama and Krishna is Melchizedek (C3 226). From the biblical references to him we learn only that he was a king of Salem, and a 'priest of the most high God'.¹ Other biblical references simply confirm his priesthood,² except for one crucial passage which Simone Weil uses as a basis for her interpretation of Melchizedek as an incarnation of the Word. She quotes it in a note (without giving a reference):

'Roi de la paix [King of Salem], sans père, sans mère, sans généalogie, n'ayant ni commencement de sa vie ni fin de ses jours, rendu semblable au fils de Dieu, il demeure prêtre à perpétuité'. (CS 61)³

Graves recognises the mythological elements connected with this figure, suggesting that the fact that he is reputed to have no mother makes him resemble other divine children or future leaders around whom myths have accrued; in the stories of Moses, Romulus, Cretan Zeus, the child is removed from his mother as soon as he is born.⁴ Simone Weil concentrates on

¹Genesis xiv. 18; Heb. vii. 1.

²Ps. cx. 4; Heb. v. 6, 10; vi. 20; vii. 17, 21 etc.

³Heb. vii. 3.

⁴The White Goddess (London 1961), p. 162.

the symbolic purity of the figure (CS 233, 239), suggesting that he is one of the biblical 'personnages parfaits en tout' (CS 245), Abel, Enoch, Noah, Ham, Nimrod, Job and Daniel being the others.

The list is a curious one, and illustrates the way in which Simone Weil looked for a single unifying feature among diverse figures. We shall concern ourselves in detail with only two of the principal ones, Noah and Job, except to note in passing that Abel was possibly a version of Heracles, as agricultural and pastoral king reigning alternately with his twin,¹ which would link him with the saviour figures already discussed. Raper has dealt fully with these Old Testament figures, especially with Ham and what Simone Weil considered to be the Hamitic tradition.²

Noah, as well as being a 'personnage parfait', was in Simone Weil's interpretation a redeemer whose sacrifice had saved humanity from destruction (CS 57). She suggests that along with other figures of perfection he may have been an incarnation of the Word (CS 232), and hence a prefiguration

¹Ibid., p. 127.

²Op. cit., pp. 27 ff.

of Christ (CS 291). On the symbolism surrounding Noah she has several interesting things to say, which link him closely with mediator-figures already mentioned. The rainbow after the flood is a fairly obvious symbol of mediation, and represents God's mercy '[qui] comble cet abîme que la création a établie [sic] entre Dieu et la créature' (CS 49). She contrasts it with the tower of Babel:

L'arc-en-ciel de Noé . . . est une médiation entre le ciel et la terre, une voie de salut. La Tour de Babel voulait être cela; mais elle venait de la terre et non du ciel; c'est pourquoi elle était mauvaise.

(CS 289)

The Ark in which he sailed recalled for Simone Weil the coffer in which Osiris was put out to sea, both of them being 'bois qui ont sauvé l'humanité avant celui de la Croix' (LR 29), and this parallel is confirmed by Graves, who writes of Noah being a 'counterpart' to Osiris.¹ He thinks too that both vessels were made of the same wood, wild acacia or 'shittim-wood', as was the Ark of the Covenant. If there is a parallel with Osiris, it is likely that there should be one with Dionysos too, and Simone Weil finds it in the tradition concerning Noah's drunkenness (C3 233). Here again Graves parallels her hypo-

¹The White Goddess, p. 264.

thesis by noting that 'the moral story of Noah's drunkenness and the bad behaviour of his son Canaan (Ham) recalls the myth of the wine-god Dionysos'.¹

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The figure of Job plays an important role in Simone Weil's thinking, representing for her one of the most perfect of all the prefigurations of Christ, a suffering redemptive figure granted a mystical vision of divine beauty at the end of his trials.² The accepted relationship of the Book of Job to the

¹Ibid., p. 467, n. 1.

²Simone Weil is not of course the first to make the parallel between Job and Christ. The tradition relating to this is noted by Hastings (A Dictionary of the Bible, Edinburgh 1889, s.v. Job): 'It has often been said that Job is a type of Christ. The Christian holds that throughout the OT there were hints and foreshadowings of spiritual ~~truth more~~ truth more fully revealed in the NT, and the suffering of the upright man under the earlier disposition prepared the way for and was in time explained by the suffering of the only Sinless Man, the Mediator of a new covenant. Mozley says, "The Crucifixion is the one consummate act of injustice to which all others are but distant approaches." The Cross of Christ is at the same time the darkest and the brightest spot upon earth, because there is most fully seen the meaning of that world-old problem of the suffering of the righteous in an evil world. What appears 'injustice' is intended to be a part of redemption. The author of Job did not clearly see, perhaps never dimly guessed at that mysterious solution of a mystery. But he grappled with the moral difficulties of his own time like a giant and left upon record some lessons concerning suffering and its significance, which neither the world nor the Church has fully learned yet.

Old Testament tradition, and the divergences from it in Simone Weil's interpretation, have been studied by Raper,¹ who doubts whether Job could ever be classed as a mediator-figure, since his right is never maintained by God, and Job learns in the end to submit to God's sovereignty.² Simone Weil suggests that he may well have been an incarnate deity (CS 218) rather than a historical figure (PSO 89), and puts forward the idea that in 'another version' of the Book of Job he may have been described as dying and resurrected (CS 291). This is a somewhat flimsy hypothesis, and she gives no evidence for the existence of this 'other version'; Raper tends to discount any idea of Job's death and resurrection.³

The most important feature of Job's story for Simone Weil however is undoubtedly the account of his sufferings and subsequent vision. Job is afflicted, suffering physical pain, moral outrage and social reprobation in a society where misfortune was considered to be the direct consequence of sin, of

¹Op. cit., pp. 15 ff.

²Ibid., p. 17.

³Ibid., pp. 17-19.

displeasing God. The link between physical pain, 'douleur', and the vision of the beauty of the world is emphasised by Simone Weil (SG 46, IP 37); pain tears the 'veil' of the flesh which separates us from beauty (IP 164, PSO 112). It alone is capable of bringing about that 'détachement' considered in the last chapter, and is a way of passing from time which is future-orientated, to a vision of eternity (C2 111). Job in his rebellion against his torment asks the vital question why, and illustrates the impossibility of submission to necessity, the contradiction which must be faced for the soul to perceive reality:

Job. Comment le cri pur de la misère humaine, imité, est-il si beau? Ce que la réalité ne nous donne jamais, jamais. Et c'est la réalité pure, nue.

C'est ὅμοια ὅμοια qui apparaît. L'âme absolument soumise, par contrainte, à cette nécessité, et le caractère impossible de cette soumission.

(C2 184)

This affliction is necessarily meaningless:

Si je pensais que Dieu m'envoie la douleur par un acte de sa volonté et pour mon bien, je croirais être quelque chose, et je négligerais l'usage principal de la douleur, qui est de m'apprendre que je ne suis rien.

(CS 185)

Job has only to continue to love God, or if this is impossible, to desire to love God, throughout his affliction, ignoring the advice of his friends who in Simone Weil's interpretation 'laissaient fonctionner en eux l'imagination compensatrice'

(C2 226). He has only to pay attention to his affliction, that most difficult of all acts of the soul, and the rest follows automatically:

La contemplation attentive de la misère, sans compensation ni consolation, pousse jusqu'à dans le surnaturel, et alors on ne peut pas ne pas en aimer la source.

(C2 226)

Job, au bout de sa nuit obscure, qu'il a traversée sans consolation, voit manifestement la beauté du monde. Il faut avoir passé par la misère totale.

(C2 185)

Raper notes that in the text the beauty of the world serves to remind Job of his smallness and of the creative majesty of God, rather than indicating a perfection beyond this world and a grace granted to Job after his suffering.¹ But in Simone Weil's interpretation Job indeed sees his 'smallness', his insignificance in the dimension of cosmic order as a self-willed individual. The nature of Job's suffering as Simone Weil sees it, and the parallel she makes with Christ's sacrifice, is however questionable, since at no point is it indicated that Job's suffering is redemptive, that it is suffering for anyone else. The mystical vision which according to Simone Weil he receives at the end is comparable perhaps to that of the saint who passes through the dark night of the

¹Op. cit., p. 16.

soul, but hardly to the universally redemptive figure of Christ. As in the case of Odin's agony, it is a question of Job's attaining wisdom through suffering, rather than obtaining salvation for the sins of man.

Simone Weil links both Job and Noah with another concept which has already been mentioned as a sort of prototype for this category, that is, the perfectly just man (AD 84, LR 43).¹ This is a figure developed from the passage in the Republic (361-2) where Plato describes the perfectly just man stripped of all prestige, of everything except his justice, so that he has the appearance of injustice. He will be tortured and crucified, appearing unjust, and it is only by appearing thus that he will in fact be just. Simone Weil speculated on the contradiction which is evident here:

Le juste parfait: union de l'extrême justice à l'apparence de l'extrême injustice. Le Christ n'a pas simplement souffert, il a souffert une souffrance pénale, le traitement des criminels. Il n'a pas été traité en martyr, comme les saints, mais en criminel de droit commun. L'extrême justice unie à l'apparence de l'extrême injustice, c'est un exemple de la contradiction qui mène à Dieu.

(C2 367-8)

The sufferings of Christ as a perfectly just man form the

¹The mathematical implications of 'le juste' will be considered in III, §6.

common element according to Simone Weil in such figures already mentioned as Prometheus, Dionysos, the World-Soul, Love (in the Symposium), who is also described as 'perfectly just', and who only suffers evil voluntarily. Conscious as always of the corrupting power of affliction, Simone Weil concludes that a truly just man, that is, one who is not corrupted by suffering, must be God incarnate:

Dieu seul peut subir l'injustice sans que cela lui fasse aucun mal. Pour être parfaitement juste, il faut pouvoir subir l'injustice sans en recevoir aucun mal. Autrement on devient vite injuste sous l'oppression. Le juste parfait ne peut être que Dieu incarné.

(C3 323)

The association of perfect justice with the appearance of injustice is seen by Simone Weil also in the Greek Hippolytus (C2 360), who suffers because he has loved God too well.¹ She sees in him an illustration of the conviction that there can be no commerce between God and man without suffering (C2 274, 127), and a kind of inversion of the symbolism of Prometheus, who suffered because of his great love for mankind:

La fonction de médiation, par elle-même, implique l'écartèlement.

¹See Frazer, op. cit., pp. 4, 5, 301, 477.

C'est pourquoi on ne peut concevoir la descente de Dieu vers l'homme (Prométhée) ou l'ascension de l'homme vers Dieu (Hippolyte) sans écartèlement, sans souffrance.

(C2 359)

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The theme of redemptive suffering, of the just man who appears unjust and who is afflicted because of it, finds its expression in Simone Weil's own work in the figure of Jaffier, the hero of her unfinished tragedy Venise sauvée.¹ The connexion with the figures which we have been considering is obvious immediately in her intention in writing the play: 'Reprendre, pour la première fois depuis la Grèce, la tradition de la tragédie dont le héros est parfait' (P 52). If he were not perfect, he would be unable to perform the act of redemption. Briefly, the play, based on the Abbé de Saint-Réal's narrative of the Spanish conspiracy against Venice in 1618, concerns Jaffier and the band of adventurers who prepare the plot against the city. Jaffier at the last moment cannot bring himself to destroy the city, and reveals the plot to the leaders of the city, having been given assurances that his companions would not be victimised. They are however

¹Richard Rees has outlined the theme of redemptive suffering to be found in this play in Brave Men. A Study of D. H. Lawrence and Simone Weil (London 1958), § 10.

arrested, and Jaffier has to bear the knowledge that he has betrayed them, as well as the contempt and punishment meted out by the city itself for having plotted against it. He goes to his death in the knowledge that the city is safe, but that he as an individual must perish. Jaffier accepts the void, refuses the compensation offered by 'gravity' and by the imagination, by refusing to pass on to Venice the evil represented by the Spanish Empire and the conspiracy. There is thus 'transmission automatique du mal jusqu'à la souffrance rédemptrice' (P 48).

The significance and purpose of Jaffier's 'passion' is further elaborated in the following note:

Jaffier. Passion. Un des sens de la passion est peut-être que la douleur, la honte, la mort qu'on ne veut pas infliger autour de soi retombe sur soi, sans qu'on l'ait voulu. Comme si mathématiquement le malheur devait compenser le crime écarté, pour que l'âme reste soumise au mal (mais autrement soumise); réciproquement, la vertu consiste à garder en soi le mal qu'on souffre, à ne pas s'en délivrer en le répandant au-dehors par les actes ou l'imagination. (Acceptation du vide).

(P 44)

Redemption thus consists in accepting what one has not wished for. Jaffier could not possibly have wanted the affliction which he suffered, he was in no sense a martyr. His affliction destroyed his 'I', and plunged him into a nightmare of

unreality (P 45). In another sense however by obliterating the 'reality' of the outside world, Jaffier was able to accede to a higher reality. Like Job, detachment born of suffering revealed to him the beauty of the world:

. . . Le détachement parfait permet seul de voir les choses nues et sans ce brouillard de valeurs mensongères. C'est pourquoi il a fallu à Job les ulcères et le fumier pour la révélation de la beauté du monde. Car il n'y a pas de douleur supportée sans haine et sans mensonge qu'il n'y ait détachement.

(Que la Venise sauvée reproduise ce mouvement.)

(P 46)

The detachment which Jaffier attains to is a result of his truly paying attention to the reality of Venice. In the moment of attention the city is no longer an object of desire on to which Jaffier projects his own wishes and aspirations, but an object which is beautiful in its own right and which therefore claims his love. Love is simply this act of believing in the reality of an object, and as soon as Jaffier realises that Venice exists he can no longer plot to destroy it (P 48). He has put a distance between himself and the city, the distance always demanded by beauty, and through beauty the supernatural has irrupted into the natural sphere:

La miséricorde est un attribut proprement divin. Il n'y a pas de miséricorde humaine. La miséricorde implique une distance infinie. On n'a pas compassion de ce qui est proche. Jaffier.

(P 48)

By his action Jaffier has broken the monotonous sequence of 'natural' time and has received a glimpse of eternity (P 47). The play ends with Jaffier contemplating the city as he goes to his death. But already his torment is ended, ~~has~~ has expiated the evil, and is capable of seeing the beauty in what is before him:

La mort vient me prendre. A présent la honte est passée.

A mes yeux bientôt sans regard que la ville est belle!
 Sans retour il faut m'éloigner des lieux des vivants.
 On ne voit nulle aube où je vais, et nulle cité.

(P 133)

This is perhaps Simone Weil's fullest expression of the idea of the use of suffering by the affliction of a perfectly pure being, which grants a vision of the beauty of the world-order at the same time as it prevents evil from being trans-
 mitted by the transformation of that evil into pure suffering. The horizontal movement of evil in time and space has been replaced by a vertical mediating movement, the descent of divine love in the form of beauty, and the subsequent ascent of the consenting soul to God.

The mediating power of perfect purity is not restricted to human or divine persons however. It can also be present

in an object possessing the same purity, and a consideration of the nature of these objects will form the subject of the next chapter.

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III, §4

GOD IN MATTER

Simone Weil's belief in the mediating power of matter in its various manifestations is a result of her conviction that God can be present in matter here on earth. This in its turn is based on her belief that in certain circumstances matter can be perfectly pure, transparent, a vehicle for divine grace and a fit receptacle for the incarnation of deity. The ideas on matter which have already been outlined (I, §3) predispose her of course to such a view; again and again the passivity of matter, and its consequent obedience to God, are emphasised (e.g. PSO 97, 98). Matter is impartial, indifferent to man and his desires, and forms a counterpart to the impersonal Providence of God, the only form of Providence which Simone Weil recognised (E 223). Water is the most perfect example of matter's docility to necessity, and Simone Weil takes up a very ancient image in relating 'matière, mère, mer, Marie', which, she says, 'se ressemblent au point d'être presque identiques' (IP 143).¹ She continues this idea in a note where she writes: 'Cette docilité de

¹Claudel uses the same parallel matière-mère-mer in 'L'Esprit et l'eau' (Cinq grandes odes, Oeuvre poétique, Bibl. de la Pléiade, Paris 1957, p. 236). This whole ode illustrates the way in which matter can mediate between man and God.

maternelle

la matière, cette qualité/de la nature, a été incarnée dans la Vierge' (CS 89).

The docility of matter thus renders it eminently suitable to reveal the presence of God. Sometimes this presence is revealed through what are traditionally held to be sacred objects, sometimes through the artistically beautiful (which may or may not surround religious objects and practices), sometimes through objects which, by virtue of the correspondence between the natural and the supernatural realms, become symbols of what is beyond them. All these mediators for the presence of God are of equal value in Simone Weil's eyes, and if we begin with traditionally acknowledged religious manifestations it is only for the sake of convenience.

In her essay on the 'Formes de l'amour implicite de Dieu', Simone Weil compares love of religious practices with love of one's neighbour and love of the beauty of the world, and concludes that all are implicit rather than explicit forms of love, all are equally valid: 'Dieu est présent dans les pratiques religieuses, quand elles sont pures, de la même manière que dans le prochain et dans la beauté du monde; non pas davantage' (AD 137-8). It is the purity of religious practices which assures their efficacy. As was seen in the last

chapter in the case of redemptive figures, only absolute purity has the power to destroy evil: 'La vertu des pratiques religieuses consiste dans l'efficacité du contact avec ce qui est parfaitement pur pour la destruction du mal' (AD 141-2). Prayer and sacraments in general are able to transmute sin into suffering (C3 143).

One may ask however what is the meaning of 'purity' in this context. The innate purity of matter, as has been indicated, predisposes towards a view of the purity of religious practices, but it is not the whole answer. Simone Weil explains the mechanism of the soul's contact with the Good through the purity of matter in the 'Théorie des sacrements' (PSO 135-45), the first part of which should now be resumed briefly. The argument is based on the assumption, expressed in the first paragraph, that a spiritual, or 'non-corporeal' desire must have its corresponding manifestation in the body for it to have any reality. The most fundamental human desire is a desire for pure good. We do not possess this pure good, but it will come to us infallibly if only we fix our attention and our desire on 'le bien pur, parfait, total, absolu'. But this desire must be rooted in the physical, must have its corresponding object in earthly things. The

problem is thus to prevent this desire from stopping short in earthly things, and failing to find its true object. As Simone Weil puts it,

. . . les mouvements et attitudes du corps ne pouvant avoir d'objets qu'ici-bas, comment pourrions-nous-il y avoir pour ce désir passage dans l'état de réalité à travers la chair?

(PSO 136)

She explains how this is possible:

Pour que le désir de bien absolu passe à travers la chair, il faut qu'un objet d'ici-bas soit par rapport à la chair le bien absolu, à titre de signe et par convention.

Qu'il soit le bien absolu par rapport à la chair, cela ne veut pas dire qu'il est un bien de la chair. Il est par rapport à la chair le bien absolu de l'esprit.

(PSO 136-7)

In the symbolism of the Eucharist for example, a piece of bread signifies the person of Christ, 'par une convention établie par Dieu entre Dieu et les hommes' (PSO 137), and the bread, while retaining its nature and appearance of bread, takes on a transcendent and superior 'reality'.

Simone Weil has been taken to task by various critics for her use of the word 'convention' in relation to the Christian Eucharist.¹ But these criticisms seem to be

¹See e.g. Moré, p. 52.

based on the notion that 'convention' signifies something rather less than real, which is not the case in Simone Weil's use of the word, indeed, given her premises, it is difficult to see what other term she could have used. Desire for perfect goodness needs an earthly object, but no object by itself has the power to lift the soul beyond the earthly. It is then inevitable if this desire is to be satisfied that a 'convention' should be established whereby the object may be given powers it did not originally possess. Simone Weil emphasises that this is a convention established by God, implying a direct revelation from God, even an Incarnation (PSO 137), and notes the difference between an earthly convention established between men, and a convention established by God:

Dans les conventions établies entre hommes, la signification d'une chose a moins de réalité que la matière qui la compose. Dans une convention établie par Dieu, c'est le contraire. Mais la signification divine l'emporte infiniment plus en degré de réalité sur la matière que ne fait la matière sur la signification humaine.

(PSO 137)

Another way in which Simone Weil describes this 'convention' is by saying that the sacraments are pure 'par hypothèse' (e.g. AD 142), in the same way as a triangle is a triangle by hypothesis, by definition. It is in no way dependent on the accuracy with which it is drawn, just as the purity of

religious practices does not depend on the purity of their material constituents. Although the expression is mathematical, Simone Weil is saying something of great spiritual value when she writes of the independence of this purity:

L'église peut être laide, les chants faux, le prêtre corrompu et les fidèles distraits. En un sens cela n'a aucune importance. C'est ainsi que si un géomètre, pour illustrer une démonstration correcte, trace une figure où les droites sont tordues et les cercles allongés, cela n'a aucune importance. Les choses religieuses sont pures en droit, théoriquement, par hypothèse, par définition, par convention. Ainsi leur pureté est inconditionnée. Nulle souillure ne peut les atteindre. (AD 142)

There seems to be one condition only for the efficacy of this convention, that of belief and desire. The soul has only to believe that this contact with bread is in fact a contact with God, to wish to put the desire for contact to the test by submitting it to the 'reality' of bread, and contact with God will automatically follow (PSO 137-8). Belief which in the natural sphere is productive of illusion is in the supernatural sphere 'productrice de réalité' (PSO 138). Simone Weil emphasises that this is not merely a matter of suggestion, but of a precise mechanism which in the same conditions will always operate in the same way (CS 257).

It is to be noted that this concept of 'convention' provides the clearest possible refutation of any charge of

'aestheticism' in Simone Weil's religious experience. She was certainly susceptible to the beauty of the Catholic liturgy, and considered that in fact the purity of 'les choses religieuses' was invariably manifested in the form of beauty-- music, architecture and so on (see e.g. AD 142-3:

Mais au centre même il y a quelque chose qui est entièrement dépourvu de beauté, où rien ne rend la pureté manifeste, quelque chose qui est uniquement convention. . . . L'architecture, les chants, le langage . . . tout cela est autre chose que la pureté absolue. La pureté absolue présente ici-bas à nos sens terrestres comme chose particulière, cela ne peut être qu'une convention qui soit convention et rien d'autre.

(AD 143)

This 'convention' remains a mystery however; it is not a matter of rationally ascertainable 'fact', one which can be demonstrated, but of 'vérification expérimentale' (AD 142). The experience afforded by the intermediary of the host is a real one; Simone Weil indicates her interpretation of the 'real presence' in the following note:

Eucharistie. Le dogme signifie seulement que ce morceau de pain est l'intermédiaire d'un contact réel avec Dieu. S'il était seulement un symbole, il serait seulement intermédiaire entre nous et notre idée de Dieu (ce qui est le cas de la plupart des gens). Mais ceux qui le méritent, il les tire vers Dieu. Il les déplace réellement.

(C2 391)

Her definition of the Eucharist as a 'convention' does not seem to involve any diminution of the miracle of Christ's

real presence in it.

She is unorthodox however in her division of the faithful into those that deserve and therefore obtain the true contact with God and those that do not, as implied in the above passage. Moré has accused her of Catharism for this supposed division into 'parfaits' and 'croyants',¹ and it is certainly possible that she was influenced by what she knew of Catharist practices in making this distinction, although there is no reason why this should represent an 'accusation'. She elaborates her views in a letter to Father Perrin, describing the value of the sacraments as of two kinds: as a real contact with God, and as symbols and ceremonies having a purely human value (AD 15). She continues:

Je crois que la plupart des fidèles ont contact avec les sacrements seulement en tant que symboles et cérémonies, y compris certains qui sont persuadés du contraire.

(ibid.)

This is a necessary step on the road to true participation:

Pourtant ce n'est pas là une participation aux sacrements comme tels. Je crois que seuls ceux qui sont au-dessus d'un certain niveau de spiritualité peuvent avoir part aux sacrements en tant que tels. Ceux qui sont au-dessous de ce niveau, quoi qu'ils

¹Op. cit., p. 49.

fassent, aussi longtemps qu'ils ne l'ont pas atteint, n'appartiennent pas à proprement parler à l'Eglise.

(AD 15-16)¹

The 'Church' seems here to be something quite different from what is normally understood by the term. Her expression on the subject of the sacraments is certainly far from strictly orthodox, but is perfectly consistent with the rest of her thought, and frequently contains real spiritual insight. As Perrin said of her interpretation of the Eucharistic Bread, 'ses formulations seront parfois très inexactes, mais elles diront cette orientation profonde de sa pensée religieuse'.²

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The relationship between the sacraments and grace would seem to be an obvious one, since the efficacy of the sacraments implies a grace which is not of man's making. Simone Weil elaborates a very coherent theory of the workings of grace, which should now be considered, as it is the basis for

¹This distinction seems to rest on the assessment of the whole being of man in his relationship to the Good, and not just his moral or intellectual life. In the same way, when Simone Weil divides Christians into those who 'deserve' true contact with God through the sacraments, and those who do not, she is not really making an intellectual distinction, but one which involves man's soul in its integrity.

²Simone Weil telle que nous l'avons connue, p. 53.

any theory of the presence of God in matter. She was convinced of the possibility of defining the 'laws' of grace, just as one could define the laws of any other phenomena; as she puts it, 'pour être gratuite, la grâce n'est pas arbitraire' (C2 62).

She identifies the working of the sacraments with the working of grace:

Le sacrement est un arrangement qui correspond d'une manière irréprochable, parfait, au double caractère de l'opération de la grâce, à la fois subie et consentie . . .

(PSO 138)

This refers to the idea that God gives his grace equally to all men--this is his 'impersonal Providence', illustrated for her in the parable of the sower (E 223)--but claims that it is necessary for a soul to consent to grace for it to have any reality (there is an obvious parallel here with the dual nature of the sacraments mentioned above). Another way of expressing this 'consent' is that the soul should remain orientated towards the Good (SG 124), or that the soul should desire the Good. She speaks of her early conviction of the relationship between desire and grace: 'La certitude que j'avais reçue, c'était que quand on désire du pain on ne reçoit pas des pierres' (AD 34). The mechanism is rigorous,

and works infallibly given the right circumstances:

Tout désir d'un bien pur, à partir d'un certain degré d'intensité, fait descendre le bien correspondant. Si l'effet ne se produit pas, le désir n'est pas réel, ou il est trop faible, ou le bien désiré est imparfait, ou il est mélangé de mal.

(E 223)

She opposes this kind of desire, 'attente', to any use of the will, illustrating this by reference to the folk-tale about the giant and the little tailor who had a contest to see who could throw the further. The giant threw a stone a great distance, thinking that the tailor would not be able to do as well, but the tailor released a little bird, who flew up and away and disappeared from sight. This for Simone Weil is an image of grace: 'Ce qui n'a pas d'aile¹ finit toujours par retomber' (AD 149). She uses elsewhere the wing as an image of grace, interpreting for example the passage in Plato's Phaedrus (246), 'la propriété essentielle de l'aile est d'amener en haut ce qui est pesant', by saying: 'Impossible de dire plus clairement que l'aile est un organe surnaturel, qu'elle est la grâce' (SG 113; Simone Weil's italics). In another note she compares genius with grace, saying that it is 'l'aile qui fait aller en haut ce qui est pesant' (C3 158). Grace is

¹MS: ailes.

thus figured by an ascending movement.

It is also however a descending movement. There is a passage in the Cahiers describing the way in which the universal (God) joins the particular (C2 255). She gives incarnation, the Eucharist, and inspiration as instances of this, and concludes: 'La grâce, c'est la loi du mouvement descendant. Le montant est naturel, le descendant surnaturel' (ibid.). This appears to be in contradiction with the idea that natural phenomena can only 'rise' when assisted by grace. But Simone Weil clarifies the issue a little in a later note:

La création est faite du mouvement descendant de la pesanteur, du mouvement ascendant de la grâce, et du mouvement descendant de la grâce à la deuxième puissance
 . . .

(C2 372)

It seems that grace can be seen as an ascending movement--like the bird--or as a descending movement--incarnation in one form or another. The only difficulty which remains is that logically one would expect the descent of grace to precede its ascent, since incarnation, whether the physical incarnation of a divine being or the indwelling presence of the divine in some physical object, is a prerequisite of the soul's salvation, of its ability to 'ascend'.

As well as taking the wing as an image of divine grace, Simone Weil makes use of another group of images, connected with the sun and the growth of plants. Grace is like solar energy which descends into plants and animals and can thus be used by man, but over which man has no power:

Nous ne pouvons pas capter l'énergie solaire. C'est elle qui d'elle-même se transforme, prend une forme telle que nous puissions la saisir. C'est une grâce. Nous ne pouvons que disposer les choses pour qu'elle y descend. Nous ne faisons rien. (C3 199)

This is reiterated in another passage, this time marking clearly the distinction between descent according to the laws of gravity, descent according to the laws of grace, and ascent in response to this:

La seule puissance capable de vaincre la pesanteur est l'énergie solaire. C'est cette énergie descendue sur terre dans les plantes et reçue par elles qui leur permet de pousser verticalement de bas en haut. . . . Cette énergie solaire, nous ne pouvons pas aller la chercher, nous pouvons seulement la recevoir. C'est elle qui descend Elle est l'image de la grâce, qui descend sans se velir dans les ténèbres de nos âmes mauvaises et y constitue la seule source d'énergie qui fasse contrepoids à la pesanteur morale, à la tendance au mal. (PSO 17-18)

We have already noted (III, §3) the power of chlorophyll in Simone Weil's interpretation to mediate the sun's energy for our use. Chlorophyll, or 'sap' as 'the Ancients' called it, 'qui capte l'énergie solaire, qui fait monter les plantes

et les arbres tout droit contre la pesanteur' (PSO 19), is an image of the mediating Son. In a somewhat complex image Simone Weil also defines grace as 'notre chlorophylle' (C2 341). By this she appears to mean the power which operates the synthesis between the descending $\pi\upsilon\epsilon\upsilon\mu\alpha$ and the 'water' which the soul has become, in the operation of the soul's regeneration.

In addition to these images connected intimately with the mechanics of grace, Simone Weil uses a great many images taken from the physical world to symbolise spiritual truths. Constantly present here as before is the idea that the microcosm is an image of the macrocosm, and the laws of each, in so far as they refer to physical phenomena, can be established. In this way earthly phenomena have the power to lead the soul upwards by virtue of their purity which arrests the normal progress of time and allows a momentary glimpse of eternity. In her study of Julien Green, Janine Carrel defines this attitude of attentiveness to phenomena which will transport the soul into another world as 'la position de seuil de Green; une position d'ouverture vers ce qui fait irruption dans notre vie de la part de Dieu . . .',¹ and this would be an apt

¹Op. cit., p. 59.

characterisation of Simone Weil's position too.

Some of the images derived from earthly phenomena represent the mediating process itself, and are illustrative for Simone Weil of the gulf which separates us from where we truly belong. Such an image is the well-known one of the bridge, which is used by Simone Weil to illustrate the capacity of every activity, rightly envisaged, to bring us nearer God. She states the three positions it is possible to take:

On ne peut prendre que l'un de ces trois partis:
ou abandonner Dieu. Ou abandonner toute activité . . .
Ou faire de toute activité, sans exception . . ., un pont
vers Dieu. (C2 247-8)

Modern Europe has adopted the first course of action; Greece tried the third, but because she excluded work, perished in modern industrial society.

Greece however remained for Simone Weil the finest example of a society dedicated to the building of bridges. Again and again she refers to Greece in this context, and it is clear that this constituted in her eyes one of the most important features of Greek civilisation. It was a consequence of the

révélation de la misère humaine, de la transcendance de Dieu, de la distance infinie entre Dieu et l'homme.
Hantée par cette distance, la Grèce n'a travaillé qu'à construire des ponts. Toute sa civilisation en est faite. Sa religion des Mystères, sa philosophie, son

art merveilleux, cette science qui est son invention propre et toutes les branches de la science, tout cela, ce furent des ponts entre Dieu et l'homme. (EH 77)

The temporal as such was thus a bridge for the Greeks (C3 70), as it was also for the Provençal civilisation of the twelfth century (C3 54). We have inherited these bridges, says Simone Weil, but we no longer know what to do with them:

Nous croyons maintenant qu'ils sont faits pour y habiter. Nous ne savons pas qu'ils sont là pour qu'on y passe; nous ignorons, si l'on y passait, qui l'on trouverait de l'autre côté. (EH 77, cf. C2 344)

The sin of idolatry is thus everywhere in the modern world.

It is interesting to contrast Simone Weil's use of the bridge-image with other writers' use of it. Hugo, for example, in the poem entitled 'Le Pont', names the figure of Prayer as the builder of the bridge that will span

l'abîme,

Qui n'a pas de rivage et qui n'a pas de cime
between the soul and God.¹ Certainly for Simone Weil prayer was a form of mediation, an 'attente' which by the force of its desire would bring about a descent of grace. But it is noteworthy that she never refers to it as a 'bridge'.² Her

¹Les Contemplations, VI, 1.

²It is however sometimes described as a 'levier'. See below, p. 505.

'bridges' are essentially natural activities which can be directed to supernatural ends by rendering them transparent and devoid of personal desire.

Another contrast can be made with the dualist philosophers' use of the bridge-image. In the Ode of Solomon rushing torrents are described, symbolising the gulf between man and the divine:

Le Seigneur y a jeté un pont par sa parole;
Il y entra et à pied traversa.
Ses traces sont restées dans l'eau intactes;
Elles sont comme un bois solidement enfoncé . . .¹

The bridge is for the descent of the Saviour, however (although one supposes that the soul will ascend afterwards by means of the same bridge). But as has been noted, for Simone Weil the bridge is a natural object of function, which reaches out towards the divine by virtue of the grace which has de^scended into it. The descent is of primary importance, but the descent of itself is not a bridge.

The same comment applies to another image extensively used by Simone Weil, that of the door. In the Ginzâ this image is used in the following manner, referring again to the Saviour:

¹Quot. DP, p. 174.

Il ouvrit les portes et vint,
 Il fendit le firmament et se manifesta.
 Il ouvrit les portes et vint.
 Il ouvrit devant moi les portes,
 Et il écarta les Sept de mon chemin.¹

Here the door is something which the Saviour opens in order to descend to man. For Simone Weil it is opened for man to receive a vision of the divine. Man is passive in this operation, can only knock and wait for the door to be opened. Sometimes the door is described by Simone Weil as 'l'impossibilité':

L'impossibilité--l'impossibilité radicale, clairement perçue, l'absurdité--est la porte vers le surnaturel. On ne peut qu'y frapper. C'est un autre qui ouvre.

(C2 409)

This mention of impossibility recalls Simone Weil's definition of affliction as a feeling that what one is suffering is impossible, and this association is borne out by various other references to the two concepts. In her poem 'La Porte', the waiting which opens the door to the mystical vision seems to be accompanied by physical pain and distress (P 35-6). The identification of suffering with the door itself is made elsewhere; the Cross of Christ is described as 'la seule porte de la connaissance' (C3 50), and 'la porte vers les profondeurs

¹Ginzâ, 586, 23-27. Quot. DP, p. 174.

de la sagesse de Dieu' (C3 192). In another note she writes that 'la douleur' turns the key representing harmony which opens the door and allows the soul to pass to the other side, so that finally, after passing through many such doors, the soul arrives at the 'chambre centrale où Dieu nous attend de toute éternité' (C3 246; cf. IP 164).

When Simone Weil identifies the door with Christ himself, she would seem to be following the tradition established by Christ with his words 'I am the door' (of the Kingdom) (John x. 9). But the expression is characteristically hers. She speaks of the three mysteries in human existence, beauty, the workings of the intellect in the contemplation of theoretical necessity, and 'les éclairs de justice, de compassion, de gratitude qui surgissent parfois au milieu de la dureté et de la froideur métallique des rapports humains' (IP 165). These three supernatural mysteries present in human experience are 'trois ouvertures qui donnent directement accès à la porte centrale qui est le Christ' (*ibid.*). But in the end everything can be a door to the supernatural, if it is viewed correctly. Simone Weil shows a keen sense of the ambivalence of the image of the door when she writes: 'Ce monde est la porte fermée. C'est une barrière, et en même temps c'est le passage' (C3 121).

An image connected intimately with the metaphor of the door is that of the threshold, which contains an obvious symbolism for someone as conscious as Simone Weil of man's supernatural vocation. The two worlds, the natural and the supernatural, are sharply divided, and the threshold lies between the two, both commanding man to wait until summoned, and giving him the promise of access. Like the door, it is at once barrier and passage.¹ In fact Simone Weil invariably uses the image in this sense; it is a critical point on the road to knowledge of the divine, where the natural faculties are no longer of any help and the soul must wait for grace to descend to open the door. This is indicated clearly in the following note:

Le passage au transcendant s'opère quand les facultés humains--intelligence, volonté, amour humain--se heurtent à une limite, et que l'être humain demeure sur ce seuil, au delà duquel il ne peut faire un pas, et cela sans s'en détourner, sans savoir ce qu'il désire et tendu dans l'attente.

(CS 305)

She says the same thing of intellectual attention, which must be exhausted before the soul can be released from the cave:

¹M. Eliade, Le Sacré et le profane (Paris 1965), p. 24. For the use of this image by a poet, see Roger Little, 'The Image of the Threshold in the Poetry of Saint-John Perse', Modern Language Review, LXIV, 777-792.

Quand on a atteint . . . la limite de l'attention, fixer le regard de l'âme sur cette limite avec le désir de ce qui est au delà. (N'est-ce pas le seuil de la caverne?) La grâce fera le reste. Elle fera monter et sortir.

(C3 174-5)

Here again the soul is passive in the operation; it can only wait on the threshold and desire what is on the other side. The most active term used by Simone Weil to describe the soul's attitude at the threshold is that of consent: 'Le seuil, c'est la consommation du grain de grenade, c'est un instant de consentement inconditionné au bien pur' (C2 410). Sometimes Simone Weil considers that there are two thresholds, and in that case the threshold of consent would be the second of the two:

Deux seuils, l'un quand Dieu nous arrache à ce monde, l'autre quand il fait entrer dans notre âme un atome de la joie de l'autre monde. Sauf trahison, ce second seuil est définitif.

(C2 363)

The passage between the two thresholds, when links with the world have been broken but union with the divine has not yet been achieved, is of course the 'dark night of the soul', the suffering experienced by the soul which feels abandoned by both natural and supernatural. Simone Weil indicates as much by relating it to Plato's cave-image: 'Les deux seuils sont dans la Caverne de Platon: chute des chaînes avec mise en

mouvement du corps, entré dans la lumière' (ibid.).

A final image denoting the link between the two worlds must now be indicated. This is the image of the way. Like the others, it is by no means original to Simone Weil, but unlike her use of for example the door-image, she does not really develop it very far for her own purposes. She applies it first of all to God, in a passage illustrating God's mediating function in the world: 'On ne peut passer de rien à rien sans passer par Dieu. Dieu est l'unique chemin. Il est la voie' (IP 165). The way is also a means by which God can make his presence known to us. In the 'Formes de l'amour implicite de Dieu' she writes of the beauty of the world being 'presque la seule voie par laquelle on puisse laisser pénétrer Dieu' (AD 121), the modern world having destroyed all other possible 'ways'.

This ambivalence of the concept, the idea that the way is both God himself and a means of access to him, is developed most clearly in Simone Weil's association of it with a mediator-figure. This is generally done by comparison with the Chinese tao, as in the following passage: 'Taoïstes. Nommer du même nom, tao, voie, d'une part la voie vers Dieu, d'autre part Dieu même, cela n'implique-t-il pas une idée de médiation?

"Je suis la voie" (C3 70). She qualifies this definition of the tao as God elsewhere by pointing out that it refers to God in his impersonal aspect:

/La parole du Christ/: 'Je suis la voie' est à rapprocher du Tao chinois, mot qui veut dire littéralement la voie, et métaphoriquement, d'une part la méthode du salut, d'autre part le Dieu impersonnel qui est celui de la spiritualité chinoise, mais qui, bien qu'impersonnel, est le modèle des sages et agit continuellement.

(LR 28)

The definition of the tao as 'l'action non-agissante', implied here, she considers as another parallel with 'Je suis la Voie', since the Way is a means of action while not itself being active (C2 221).

The identification made by Simone Weil between the tao of Chinese tradition and the Christian Way in Christ seems to stretch both concepts a good deal. The tao was certainly a means of mediation between Heaven and Earth, a sort of axis mundi along which Heaven and Earth entered into communion at given sacred moments.¹ But this bears little relationship to the person of Christ who by his death and resurrection mediated between man and the Father. What could be said is that Christ by choosing the image of the Way deliberately

¹See M. Granet, La Pensée chinoise (Paris 1950), p. 325.

de-personalised the idea of mediation; the Way is the least anthropomorphic of all its expressions.¹

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There is another series of images used by Simone Weil, concerning not so much objects in the world but the forces which govern them. These are frequently condensed into symbolic objects, but objects which owe their spiritual possibilities to the forces inherent in them. Such a symbolic object is the cross, which in Simone Weil's use has a significance far beyond that of the instrument of Christ's torture, although this is included as well.² As usual, in her view to reduce anything to its mere historical function was to impoverish it, and she would no doubt have greeted with

¹It remains closely related however to the idea of Christ as a historical figure, as is indicated by C. K. Barrett's commentary on John xiv. 6: 'The second half of the verse shows that the principal thought is of Jesus as the way by which men come to God; that is, the way which he himself is now about to take is the road which his followers must also tread. He himself goes to the Father by way of crucifixion and resurrection; in future he is the means by which Christians die and rise.' The Gospel According to St. John (London 1958), p. 382.

²See J. P. Little, 'The Symbolism of the Cross in the Writings of Simone Weil', Religious Studies, VI, 175-183.

enthusiasm Guénon's statement of the universality of the cross as symbol:

La croix est un symbole qui, sous des formes diverses, se rencontre à peu près partout, et cela dès les époques les plus reculées Le christianisme tout au moins sous son aspect extérieur et généralement connu, semble avoir quelque peu perdu de vue le caractère symbolique de la croix pour ne plus la₁ regarder que comme le signe d'un fait historique

She would also have appreciated Rylands' analysis of the cross as a sacred symbol long before Christianity.² He mentions the outstretching of Moses' arms during the battle with the Amalekites and its symbolic significance in the cult of Osiris, as well as the representation of Prometheus in a crucified position, and the sufferings of Plato's ideally just person.

Simone Weil herself does not seem to differentiate between the various types of crosses, and her use of the symbol implies, generally speaking, either the Greek or Latin type. She does not mention the Egyptian ansate cross, although this would no doubt have been of great interest to her, given its symbolism

¹R. Guénon, Le Symbolisme de la croix (Paris 1957), p. 12. Le Comte Goblet d'Alviella, in La Migration des Symboles (Paris 1891), gives a very full account of the development of the cross as symbol.

²The Beginnings of Gnostic Christianity (London 1940), p. 188.

as the 'key of life'. Nor does she comment on the misappropriation of the swastika by the Nazis, although one would expect this to have struck her. In her development of the idea of the cross as balance or lever however she seems to presuppose either consciously or unconsciously the tau cross.

Her use of Plato's description of the composition of the World-Soul in the Timaeus has already been noted in the context of the World-Soul's suffering (I, §2). Simone Weil comments on the disposition of the demi-god:

Les deux moitiés de l'Ame du Monde sont croisées l'une sur l'autre; la croix est oblique, mais c'est quand même une sorte de croix. . . . Les deux cercles qui servent ici d'image à Platon sont celui de l'équateur qui détermine le mouvement diurne du ciel des étoiles fixes, et celui de l'écliptique qui détermine le mouvement annuel du soleil.

(IP 27)¹

Simone Weil associates this disposition with the suffering occasioned at the origins of the world by the World-Soul's contact with space and time. The use of the cross in general

¹J. M. Robertson makes the following comment: 'Plato's doctrine is doubtless a mere theosophizing of the usage of representing the earth as a globe divided in four by crossing bands', Christianity and Mythology (London 1936), p. 375, n. 4. The astronomical significance of the cross recognised here by Simone Weil is of course common to a whole tradition of hermetic philosophy. See e.g. J.-M. Ragon, Rituel du grade de Rose-Croix, pp. 25-8, quot. Guénon, op. cit., p. 26.

as a spatial and temporal symbol is of course not original to Simone Weil, but she develops it in a way that is personal to her. In relationship to time the cross is a way of mediation:

Un médiateur est nécessaire parce qu'il n'y a aucun rapport possible entre Dieu et le temps.

L'être déchiré le long du temps. Dieu sur la croix.

(C2 162)

It becomes thus the 'intersection of the timeless with time', a way of arresting the forward movement of time and thrusting it upwards into eternity. The cross whether as temporal symbol or instrument of affliction provides a path of mediation.

Its use as a spatial symbol is also noted by Simone Weil (cf. C1 28). Again, it is not difficult to see the significance of this particular symbol, uniting within itself the total dimensions of the universe. Of particular interest here is Simone Weil's use of the three-dimensional cross (of which the weather-vane is of course a common example). She brings together both temporal and spatial significance to describe the 'dimension merveilleuse' where one is enabled to reach God himself at the centre of the universe, which is 'le vrai centre, qui n'est pas au milieu, qui est hors de l'espace et du temps' (PSO 104). She notes the 'rôle

médiateur et synthétique du Centre de l'espace',¹ describing this point as being

à l'intersection de la création et du Créateur. Ce point d'intersection, c'est celui du croisement des branches de la Croix.

Saint Paul songeait peut-être à des choses de ce genre quand il disait: 'Soyez enracinés dans l'amour, afin d'être capables de saisir ce que sont la largeur, la longueur, la hauteur et la profondeur, et de connaître ce qui passe toute connaissance, l'amour du Christ'.

(PSO 105)²

The third dimension indicated here is also implicit in Plato's description of the World-Soul noted above, since the four branches of the cross which compose it are described as joined together in pairs to form a sphere. The connexion between the cross and the circle is of course of very ancient origin; Jung would claim that in the form of the mandala it is fundamental to the human psyche.³ Simone Weil notes the relationship thus: 'Rapport de la roue, du cercle, et de la croix. "Rose-Croix". Croix du Timée formée par deux cercles'

¹Durand, op. cit., p. 58.

²Guénon also comments on this use by St. Paul of the three-dimensional cross, and the description (which he attributes to Clement of Alexandria) of God at the 'heart' of the universe, op. cit., pp. 30 ff.

³C. G. Jung and C. Kerényi, Introduction to a Science of Mythology (London 1951), p. 18.

(C3 131). This is somewhat obscure, but is clarified by what follows a little later: 'La croix. Diamètre, lieu du mouvement droit oscillant, et élévation vers le cercle par le perpendiculaire au diamètre' (C3 159). If the following definition is added: 'Le mouvement alternatif du point qui va et vient sur le diamètre, enfermé par le cercle, est l'image du devenir ici-bas, fait de ruptures d'équilibre successives et contraires' (IP 159), we have the idea expressed in the widespread image of the relationship between the cross, time, and the two strands used in weaving, the warp being the eternal principle (the vertical branch of the cross) and the weft the contingent (the horizontal branch). In the Avesta, Night and Day are two sisters who weave the fabric of passing time,¹ and the alternating movement of weaving is brought out in the story of Penelope, who undoes by night what she weaves during the day, a Greek anthropomorphising of the lunar deity who undoes during the day her previous night's weaving, by which the ancients explained the phases of the moon and the recurrent nature of her work.² It is perhaps not unreasonable

¹A. H. Krappe, La Genèse des mythes (Paris 1952), p. 125.

²Ibid., p. 122. See also Eliade, Patterns in comparative Religion, pp. 180-1. An extension of the same weaving image to the spider's web, where the radiating threads are the verti-

to see in this another parallel between the crucified saviour-god and the moon.

The comparison of the cross to a tree also held Simone Weil's attention; such a comparison, she felt, 'doit avoir rapport à des mythologies aujourd'hui disparues' (LR 21). The connexion between the cross and tree is well attested in mythology; and in the various manifestations of a tree-god ritually sacrificed is an extension of the death and resurrection of vegetation deities already considered (III, §3). Robertson gives several instances of the ritual worship of a tree symbolising a god, and cites in particular the custom in ancient Mexico of making the sacred tree into a cross on which was exposed the baked-dough figure of the god.¹ Simone Weil is fascinated in particular by the relationship between the trees of Paradise (the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Know-

cal elements and the concentric circles connecting them are the horizontal, could be indicated as a parallel to Simone Weil's mention of the wheel. The spider is of course widely associated with the moon; the Paresi of Brazil believe that the moon is a spider, and in Borneo the lunar god took the form of a spider in order to create the world (the spider's apparent ability to spin its web from nothing, giving it mysterious creative power, could account for some of the symbolism here). See Krappe, p. 24.

¹Op. cit., pp. 372 ff.

ledge of Good and Evil) and the Cross of Christ. She does not mention specifically the mediaeval Legend of the Cross, in which the Cross of Christ was made from the wood of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil,¹ so that the instrument of the fall of man becomes the instrument of his salvation, but she was obviously thinking on similar lines when she noted:

Le bois de l'arche [de Noé] a rapport au symbolisme du bois qui apparaît dans l'arbre du péché originel, dans le coffre en bois d'Osiris, dans les obélisques de bois en son honneur . . . dans la Croix. (C3 232; cf. III, §3)

She makes a similar parallel between the two in the following paradox: 'L'arbre qui nourrit tue, et l'arbre du supplice sauve' (C2 197), which she later develops in an original and typical manner:

L'arbre du péché fut un vrai arbre, l'arbre de vie fut un poutre. Quelque chose qui ne donne pas de fruits, mais seulement le mouvement vertical . . . On peut tuer en soi l'énergie vitale en conservant seulement le mouvement vertical. Les feuilles et les fruits sont

¹An excellent plastic illustration of the relationship between the Tree of Life (this being identified with the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil) and the cross is to be found in the absidial mosaic of the Upper Church of St. Clement at Rome. The Tree of Life is shown on the mountain of Paradise, and the Cross emerges from it. Illustrated in Gérard de Champeaux & Dom Sébastien Sterckx, O.S.B., Introduction au monde des symboles (La-Pierre-qui-vire 1966), pl. 66.

du gaspillage d'énergie si l'on veut seulement monter.

(C3 160)¹

One may compare the relationship established by Durand between tree and cross and the principle of ascension:

La croix est souvent identifiée à un arbre, tant par l'iconographie que par la légende, elle devient par là échelle d'ascension, car l'arbre . . . est contaminé par les archétypes ascensionnels.²

The notion that Christ was 'hung' on the Cross, associated in Simone Weil's mind with the passage concerning Odin's 'hanging' already mentioned in connexion with this god as a mediator-figure (III, §3), gives rise to several original images connected with the relationship of weights and the counterbalancing of natural forces. It is noteworthy that in these images Simone Weil seems to be using the tau cross rather than the Latin or

¹One is reminded here of Thibon's comment, when he says that for Simone Weil what mattered was the direction taken, rather than the countryside crossed in the process: '. . . Simone Weil est avant tout un guide sur le chemin entre l'âme et Dieu, ~~et beaucoup de ses formules gagnent à être interprétées, non pas comme une description du pays traversé, mais comme des conseils aux voyageurs.~~ Le premier de ces conseils est de ne pas emporter de bagages: le moindre poids alourdit et paralyse la marche vers Dieu.' Simone Weil telle que nous l'avons connue, p. 170.

²Op. cit., p. 379.



Greek.¹

The tree is, firstly, a symbol of the union of contrary forces: 'Symbolisme de l'arbre. L'énergie solaire descend dans un arbre et le fait monter' (C3 248). This same principle can be applied to the notion of an object suspended from a tree:

Quand on pend un objet (notamment un supplicié;...) à une branche d'arbre (et il en est de même aussi pour un fruit), c'est la pesanteur qui tire dessus, mais c'est l'énergie solaire cristallisée dans l'arbre qui le maintient au-dessus du sol et permet que la pesanteur le tire. Combinaison, équilibre de la force descendante et de la force ascendante.

(C3 200)

The cross is thus seen as a kind of balance, in which descent of one element is a condition of the elevation of the other:

'Croix comme balance, comme levier. Descente condition de la montée. Le ciel descendant sur terre soulève la terre au ciel' (C3 224).² Clearly this is a parallel for Simone Weil

¹ Marcy maintains that the cross on which Christ was crucified was in fact a kind of T-shaped gibbet, a 'tau cross', and this would lend weight to Simone Weil's argument. Op. cit., p. 12.

² A poetic parallel to this can be seen in Saint-John Perse, 'Neiges', Oeuvre poétique (édn revue et corrigée, Paris 1960), p. 213. The falling snow creates an optical illusion in which its descent is necessary to the 'growth' of the New York skyscrapers: 'Et toute la nuit, à notre insu, sous ce haut fait de plume, portant très haut vestige et charge d'âmes, les hautes villes de pierre ponce forées d'insectes lumineux n'avaient

to her interpretation of grace noted above (p. 481), and gives added significance to the aphorism 'l'arbre qui nourrit tue, et l'arbre du supplice sauve' (C2 197); or in other words, 'le salut s'opère par mouvement non ascendant, mais descendant'. (ibid.). Simone Weil elaborates this mechanical symbolism by reference to Archimedes and his principle of the lever:

Levier. 'Donne-moi un point d'appui, et je soulève le monde'. La Croix a été ce point d'appui. Levier, mouvement descendant comme condition d'un mouvement montant. (C3 220-1)

This lever-image is given a notable development in the following passage:

La théorie de la balance ou levier . . . qui est chez lui [Archimède] rigoureusement géométrique, repose entièrement sur la proportion. Il y a équilibre quand le rapport des poids est l'inverse du rapport des distances de ces poids au point d'appui . . . La croix fut une balance où le corps du Christ a fait contrepoids au monde. Car le Christ appartient au ciel, et la distance du ciel au point de croisement des branches de la croix est à la distance de ce point à la terre comme le poids du monde est à celui du corps du Christ. (IP 178)

cessé de croître et d'exceller, dans l'oubli de leur poids.' J. Paulhan, in Les Fleurs de Tarbes (Paris 1941), mentions the same sort of illusion, this time in connexion with a waterfall, where the rocks behind it appear to rise as a result of the water's descent (pp. 123-4).

In order that the world might be lifted up, the 'point d'appui' had to be outside the world, but at a finite distance from it, while being at an infinite distance from 'la main qui agit', that is, God. The Incarnation was this 'point d'appui'. The imagery is not easy to follow at this point, since the essence of the Incarnation was that Christ came into the world. It becomes clearer when Simone Weil speaks of the same 'point d'appui' being provided by 'tout être humain qui obéit parfaitement à Dieu . . . car il est dans le monde, mais non pas du monde' (IP 179). The power possessed by 'l'être qui obéit parfaitement' is in inverse proportion to his own strength vis-à-vis that of the world. It is by virtue of Christ's perfect obedience that he was able to raise men to God.

Both the lever and the balance images are developed by Simone Weil apart from their specific use in connexion with the cross. The lever image serves to indicate the mechanical process by which the soul is able to come into contact with the supernatural in one form or another. Sometimes she describes the process in relation to the two parts of the soul: 'Par la descente de ce qui appartient au bas, ce qui appartient au haut est élevé' (CS 58). Sometimes it is

described as 'ce qui arrache l'être du paraître' (C2 142). Always it is an instance of the law of man's ability only to rise through descent. The physical use of a lever in everyday life has for Simone Weil deep spiritual significance:

Homme qui soulève une pierre directement (effort)
et par l'intermédiaire d'un levier: relation avec la
contemplation des rapports arithmétiques et géométriques;
avec la vertu; avec le beau (C1 210)

This is made more explicit when she notes:

Le levier, dans l'âme, est l'attention ou la prière.
Le levier dans la société, c'est le beau, les cérémonies, etc. Par suite la religion. (C2 118)

The lever for Simone Weil is perhaps the best example of the use of the intermediary, as opposed to idolatrous desire which reaches straight out for the infinite. It is a kind of 'lateral thinking', or 'action non-agissante' as she calls it, requiring a step backwards in order for progress to be made. She gives an excellent example of the mediating role of the lever in the following passage:

Pierre sur le chemin--Se jeter sur la pierre, comme si à partir d'une certaine intensité de désir (l'effort n'est que désir) elle devait ne plus exister. Ou s'en aller, comme si, soi-même, on n'existait pas.

Penser ensemble l'existence et de la pierre comme chose limitée, et de soi comme être limité, et le rapport des deux; levier. Si on s'appuie simplement sur le levier, tout effort peut même être inutile.

Il faut être détaché de son désir pour concevoir

l'équivalence, par transposition, entre abaisser et élever.

(C2 34)

The use of the lever is thus an instance of detachment, of renunciation of the world and of our desires in relation to it. For the natural man, 'le désir saute dans le temps par-dessus les intermédiaires' (C2 35); the decremented ~~man~~ learns that 'pour penser les intermédiaires, il faut supporter un vide' (ibid.).

The symbolism of renunciation, of 'action non-agissante' which Simone Weil found in the concept of the lever, is repeated in that of the balance, which is in any case closely related to it. She brings in both concepts in referring to what she considers to be the illusory notion of choice; as soon as one has risen above illusion, to the level of necessity, one sees that there is in fact no choice, 'une action est imposée par la situation elle-même clairement aperçue' (C1 93). Actions accomplished thus are a lever, and the body which accomplishes them is a balance: 'Balance juste; c'est le corps qui est la balance, car à chaque moment il ne peut faire qu'une action. Il est une balance juste quand l'attention est égale' (C1 93-4). The negative aspect of this 'action' is expressed in the following passage:

Délibération--instant de contemplation silencieuse des divers partis à prendre sous tous leurs aspects, simultanément. Avant celui-là, instant de non-pensée. Intuition intellectuelle dans la délibération. Le corps s'y transforme en balance.

(C1 150)

She implies the same intimate connexion between the balance and the cross which has already been mentioned, as she continues: 'Instant de non-pensée, pôle, insertion de l'éternité dans le temps' (ibid.). Here 'temps' is identified with the desiring self which projects into the future, whereas the de-created man, the non-desiring man, allows the vertical movement of descending grace. In another note she puts succinctly this relationship between the refusal to move forwards in time and the notion of a spiritual 'balance': 'En s'arrêtant, on devient balance juste' (C2 94).

Another use of the idea of the balance representing action is to be found where Simone Weil equates action with the balance-indicator: 'L'action est l'aiguille indicatrice de la balance. Il ne faut pas toucher à l'aiguille, mais aux poids' (C2 236). In other words, one must accomplish necessary actions, even where they seem less than the best, and attempt to alter future actions by fixing attention on their spiritual source. The 'aiguille' is, quite precisely, the indication of the relative weights in the scale-pans, and

it is these that must be corrected.

This passive acceptance of acts which must necessarily be accomplished is contrasted with the positive, 'God-less' direction of energy into actions tending towards the future, in the following passage:

Notre âme est une balance. La direction de l'énergie dans les actes est l'aiguille de la balance qui marque tel ou tel chiffre. Mais la balance est fausse. Quand Dieu, le vrai Dieu, occupe dans une âme toute la place qui lui revient, la balance est devenue juste.

(C3 103)

When God is the source of action, the indicator shows a correct balance.

The function of the balance rests on the notion of equilibrium, which, according to Simone Weil, 'avait toujours été au centre de la pensée grecque' (SS 137). The balance is the symbol of equilibrium, in the physical world, in the social sphere in the form of justice, and in man's inner being. It is not surprising to find Simone Weil using extensively the image of water or fluids in general to convey the essential idea of equilibrium. She returns frequently to Archimedes' work on the theory of levers and the balance, illustrated by the immersion of objects in water. Archimedes' theory, she holds, 'revient à considérer les fluides comme un ensemble de

leviers superposés où un axe de symétrie jouerait le rôle de point d'appui' (SS 136). In this way an object placed in water is held up by the water-pressure on the other side, as it were, of a central axis. She illustrates this as an image a little later:

Quelle plus belle image que celle d'un navire soutenu par la mer, comme un plateau de balance, par une masse d'eau de mer placée de l'autre côté d'un axe, et qui change sans mouvement à mesure que le navire avance, comme l'ombre d'un oiseau qui vole ?
(SS 145)

The perfect equilibrium and compensation of contrary movements which Simone Weil saw in water (cf. EL 129) she also found in the highest forms of art, which she likened to water because of this. It seems to have been architecture, sculpture and music as the most mathematical of the arts which drew her attention on this point. In the greatest periods of these arts she considered that the same apparent movement and real stillness could be found as was present in water, as she notes in the following passage:

La mer, un mouvement dans l'immobilité. Equilibre ordre du monde Dans l'art. Cela a l'air d'être en mouvement, et c'est immobile. Musique, le mouvement s'empare de toute l'âme--et ce mouvement, ce n'est pas autre chose que l'immobilité.

.
L'explication archéologique de l'immobilité des statues comme règle corporative, exemple de choix de la stupidité contemporaine.
(CS 29)

The correct explanation, she held, was to be obtained by making the analogy with water (cf. CS 18). She thus traces through Greek sculpture the same concern with equilibrium which had prompted Archimedes to his theories on levers.

Simone Weil's enthusiasm for Romanesque architecture was based largely on the same insight. The whole edifice of the Romanesque church was constructed around an invisible fulcrum-point, according to her, and in this she seems to imply that the masons were continuing the tradition of respect for the law of equilibrium which was at the centre of Greek thought. She describes the central inspiration thus:

L'architecture [romane], quoique ayant emprunté une forme à Rome, n'a aucun souci de la puissance ni de la force, mais uniquement de l'équilibre

L'église romane est suspendue comme une balance autour de son point d'équilibre, un point d'équilibre qui ne repose que sur le vide et qui est sensible sans que rien en marque l'emplacement.

(EH 81)

Her intuition is correct in so far as the builders of the Romanesque period were obliged to take particular account of the laws of equilibrium owing to the relatively simple techniques they employed. It was only the close observance of such laws that allowed them to cover their buildings with massive stone vaults, differing here from the Gothic builders who relied more extensively on advanced techniques with which

they were able almost literally to 'defy gravity'. Simone Weil might also have mentioned as well as Romanesque architecture's dependence on the laws of the physical world its dependence on the materials to be found therein. Perhaps no art exhibits quite so well a total dependence on necessity in all its forms and an acceptance of this necessity.

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In the light of these observations on Simone Weil's use of symbol it is easy to see how for her the whole universe was a book in which, given the right disposition of 'attente', spiritual truths could be read and revealed. 'L'univers entier n'est qu'une grande métaphore' (C3 44), she writes, much as Baudelaire had done; and one of her greatest concerns was to convey this truth to others. The Greeks, she felt, had set out on the right road by retaining the spiritual significance of science, but their one failing had been that they never extended this use of spiritual symbol to work, or indeed recognised in work anything of spiritual value at all. It was a grave lacuna, and Simone Weil sets out to remedy it in her analysis of the application of spiritual symbol to both agricultural and factory work.¹ The former is set out

¹The fullest study of Simone Weil's use of symbol in

chiefly in the essay 'Le Christianisme et la vie des champs' (PSO 21-33), supplemented by certain passages from L'Enracinement. She sees her task as one of bringing together the everyday and the spiritual: 'Il s'agit de transformer, dans la plus large mesure possible; la vie quotidienne elle-même en une métaphore à signification divine, en une parabole' (PSO 24). She envisages a mediaeval world in which all things spoke of God to man, in which

Omnia mundi creatura
Quasi liber et pictura¹
Nobis est et speculum.

As for the mediaeval world, so for Simone Weil this transformation was to be accomplished mainly by the revitalisation of biblical parables; thus the peasant in the action of sowing his seed would recall the parable on 'si le grain ne meurt...', and would be reminded of the necessity for the death of the carnal man so that the spiritual man might be born again in

connexion with work, and the spiritual use to which she felt physical work should be put, is to be found in Bourgeois, op. cit., passim.

¹Alan of Lille, 'Rhythmus alter' (PL, CCX, 579A). Quot. M.-D. Chenu, Nature, Man and Society in the Twelfth Century, tr. J. Taylor & L. K. Little (Chicago 1968), p. 117.

God. She concludes:

Pour un tel semeur, les heures de semaille seraient des heures d'oraison aussi parfaites que celles de n'importe quel carme dans sa cellule, et cela sans que le travail en souffre, puisque son attention serait dirigée sur le travail.

(PSO 24)

She continues her analysis with suggestions concerning the role of the Eucharist in agricultural work. Christ identified himself with bread and wine, and the peasant's job is to produce these. But the peasant can only do this by a certain expenditure of energy, by transforming his own flesh and blood in a certain sense into the bread and wine which are the end-products. The peasant's privilege is thus to have a very particular relationship with Christ: 'Son chair et son sang, sacrifiés au cours d'interminables heures de travail, passant à travers le blé et le raisin, deviennent eux-mêmes la chair et le sang du Christ' (PSO 25). She extends this notion to work in general, and compares man's sacrifice in work with Christ's, in the following note: 'Par le travail l'homme se fait matière comme le Christ par l'eucharistie. Le travail est comme une mort' (Cl 126).

view

This ~~may~~ of peasant-life may well seem utopian, if by that one means a desire to return to a period in time when things had more significance, before the spiritual meaning

of certain acts had become obscured and subsequently lost.¹
 It is to be hoped however that some of the symbols which she wished to recapture--that of the death and rebirth of the seed, for instance--which constitute so fundamental a part of our mythical heritage, are not irretrievably lost.²

There may be more room for doubt however concerning her attempt to extend the use of symbol to factory-work, which she outlines in the essay 'Condition première d'un travail non servile' (CO 261-273). This is a natural result of her desire to extend the sacred beyond the bounds usually reserved for it by the modern world, into the secular realm. She writes of the presence in a church of objects which lead the soul towards God, realising how much more necessary it is that such objects should exist in the place where the workman spends most of his life:

¹See J. Servier, Histoire de l'utopie (Paris 1967).

²Simone Weil's ideas on the spiritual value of work are similar in some respects to those of Eric Gill, who was writing in England at about the same time. In his Autobiography (London 1940), p. 163, he criticises capitalist-dominated society, where work was done for profit rather than to provide 'goods for use', and the fact that 'our irreligious commercialism had destroyed the religious basis of society and made all ritual and mythology and hagiography seem ridiculous'.

Les gens vont dans les églises pour prier; et pourtant on sait qu'ils ne le pourront pas si on ne fournit pas à leur attention des intermédiaires pour en soutenir l'orientation vers Dieu. L'architecture même de l'église, les images dont elle est pleine, les mots de la liturgie et des prières, les gestes rituels du prêtre sont ces intermédiaires. En y fixant l'attention, elle se trouve orientée vers Dieu. Combien plus grande encore la nécessité de tels intermédiaires sur le lieu du travail, où l'on va seulement pour gagner sa vie! Là tout accroche la pensée à la terre.

(CO 265-6)

One cannot however in the nature of things tell workers to pray all day. The objects on which they must concentrate are matter, instruments, the actions they perform. Therefore these objects must be transformed into 'miroirs de la lumière' so that 'pendant le travail l'attention soit orientée vers la source de toute lumière' (CO 266). The worker must be allowed to read 'les symboles qui sont écrits dans la matière de toute éternité' (ibid.).

Such symbols for the factory-worker are for example the
and
balance/the lever. In the same way that Christ on the Cross counterbalanced the universe, so every worker who has to carry burdens or manipulate levers becomes a counterbalance too. 'Cela est trop lourd, et souvent l'univers fait plier le corps et l'âme sous la lassitude. Mais celui qui s'accroche

au ciel fera facilement contrepoids' (CO 267).¹

Other mechanical laws can serve as symbols, for instance the law of oscillating movement, which Simone Weil sees as an image of our earthly condition (CO 268). She explains the symbolism as follows: Man is limited, except for his desire which continually tries to break out from earthly limitations:

¹Factory life as it should be would provide this kind of symbolism; factory life as Simone Weil ~~was~~ knew it has already been considered (III, §2). The reality of the difference between the actual and the ideal is illustrated in an unpublished letter which Simone Weil wrote to David Garnett, where she compares T. E. Lawrence's self-mortification with her own motives for entering factory life: 'Having used men, either enemies or servants or allies as material to be grinded for his own ends, though the ends were not personal, he could not forgive himself; that he had gained glory in this way, and that he found involuntary pleasure in the glory was poison for him. He punished himself by degradation to the very level almost of these Turkish slave-soldiers whom he had killed by thousands; and since he could not bear inequality nor make or find equality, it only remained for him to get down in such a degree that no man could be for him an inferior. By nature and by will he had the most rare power of making himself at home among any men.

I think I can the better understand him because--though of course no comparison is possible--I, in my obscurity, have felt such an urge and obeyed it, though weakness of body and will prevented me from long endurance. For a year I made myself a slave in factories; and at the time (1934-5) the fate of working women in Paris factories was as near slavery as can be, especially for those who were prevented, as I was, through weariness and physical weakness, from making any use of their hours of leisure. So the letters that Lawrence wrote in his slave-days hurt me as they cannot hurt those who have always known liberty and social respectability, but in no way do they seem strange to me.' (Simone Weil's English is reproduced here with all its remarkably few faults.)

C'est Dieu qui impose à toute chose une limite et par qui la mer est enchaînée. En Dieu il n'y a qu'un acte éternel et sans changement qui se boucle sur soi et n'a d'autre objet que soi. Dans les créatures il n'y a que des mouvements dirigés vers le dehors, mais qui par la limite sont contraints d'osciller; cette oscillation est un reflet dégradé de l'orientation vers soi-même qui est exclusivement divine. Cette liaison a pour image dans nos machines la liaison du mouvement circulaire et du mouvement alternatif. (CO 268)

If such symbolism were to become a living reality in the minds of the workers, thinks Simone Weil, then the separation of intellectual labour, castigated by Marx, would disappear. 'Le point d'unité du travail intellectuel et du travail manuel, c'est la contemplation, qui n'est pas un travail' (CO 270), and any proposed reforms must aim to foster this 'contemplation'. The kind of attention necessary for manual labour can never be the same as that needed for the resolution of a theoretical problem, but if each one exercises the kind of attention necessary for his particular task, he will assist the growth and development 'd'une autre attention située au-dessus de toute obligation sociale, et qui constitue un lien direct avec Dieu' (CO 271).

The impracticality and remote idealism of Simone Weil's scheme are evident (although it depended as she admitted on

the formation of the right kind of attention at an early age).¹
 But the simple grandeur of her conception is unquestionable, based as it is on a conviction that all human occupations can contain spiritual significance because all reflect spiritual reality, and that every human being can have access to the spiritual realm. 'Attention' which is the basis of genius is open to all who possess the necessary humility, and the humble are more likely to find sanctity than the mighty. The whole created universe can provide a way to God for those who are willing to wait and listen:

Dieu parle avec une extrême douceur aux enfants et ce qu'il a à leur dire, il le leur dit souvent sans paroles. La création lui fournit le vocabulaire dont il a besoin, les feuilles, les nuages, l'eau qui coule, une tache de lumière.²

*

¹Note the sane reaction of a worker: 'Elle était trop instruite, et elle ne mangeait pas.' Quot. Albertine Thévenon, CO 9. Bourgeois (*Op. cit.*, pp. 55 & 63) admits that for a worker to perceive the symbols inherent in work, he would first have had to undergo a very special education. Her symbolism is a 'symbolique orientée' dependent on the assimilation of a particular culture.

²Julien Green, Partir avant le jour (Paris 1963), p. 46. Quot. Carrel, op. cit., p. 86.

III, \$5

SOCIETY AS MEDIATOR

If it is true to say that symbols can be 'read' in the natural order, and that by virtue of this all human activity can have spiritual significance, it is not surprising to find that for Simone Weil society itself can and should act as a way of mediation towards God, and be a fertile soil in which spirituality may flourish. This is not to claim that society automatically performs this function; the Great Beast is only too ready to take control, and history provides a dismal record of the eclipsing of spirituality in society. But such a function is the ideal towards which actual society must strive, and Simone Weil's belief in the accomplishment of this ideal is indicated in the fact that she spent the last months of her life working on a scheme which would provide for the spiritual element in society, and which was published under the title L'Enracinement. The whole concept of 'enracinement' is based on the assumption that society can act as mediator; a society which is 'enracinée' will provide nourishment for the souls of its members, a society which is not will leave itself exposed to the domination of the Great Beast and the practice of idolatry.

These two opposing conceptions of society find literary expression in Venise sauvée. This play has already been men-

tioned in connexion with the idea of redemptive suffering (III, §3), but parallel to this theme can be found the equally important one of the function of society.¹ It is significant in this respect that the play was begun in 1940, and that Simone Weil was working on it until shortly before her death, that is, during the same period that saw the elaboration of L'Enracinement, when the terrible events of the occupation and fall of France, and her subsequent exile, had intensified and matured the social consciousness which had always been present.

The idolatrous concept of society which in historical analysis Simone Weil finds to be that of Rome and of other societies which she labels 'totalitarian', and which have already been discussed at length earlier in this study (II, §§2, 3), is in Venise sauvée that of the Spanish Empire. Because the Great Beast cannot accept that anything else has a right to existence (cf. C3 312), Spain has only one possible reaction when confronting the flourishing city of Venice; the latter must be devoured, absorbed into the Empire, since its very existence outside the Empire is a challenge to the Empire's hegemony. The link with Simone Weil's interpretation of the

¹See J. P. Little, 'Society as Mediator in Simone Weil's Venise sauvée', Modern Language Review, 65, 2 (1970), 298-305.

Roman Empire is obvious; in fact there is evidence that Simone Weil had in mind the Roman precedent when conceiving the role that Spain was to play in her drama. In a note in one of the Cahiers reproduced at the beginning of the play, she comments on the idea of Empire:

Dans le premier acte, idée de l'Empire.
 Social sans racines, social sans cité, Empire romain.
 Un Romain pensait toujours nous. (C2 243, P 44)

The Spaniard, like the Roman, lost his identity in the great collectivity of Empire.

The expansion of this collectivity however was not consciously willed by the imperial powers, but was a law of the collectivity itself. The inevitability of expansion is brought out clearly in the first act of the play, where it is seen as imperative to the peace and unity of Europe that Spain should conquer Venice. Renaud urges his confederates to the task before them, emphasising the wars and discord which will ensue if they do not succeed:

Si la domination des Habsbourg n'impose pas la paix à l'Europe, elle peut être ravagée par trente ans de guerre. La maison d'Autriche est tout près de la domination universelle; si elle la laisse échapper, des luttes sanglantes, longues et ruineuses s'engageront autour.

(I. 2)

And Simone Weil comments in her note:

Nécessité d'une union de la chrétienté etc. Faire apparaître l'Espagne comme poussée à une telle entreprise par une nécessité extérieure.

The external necessity to conquer, and the glory which would fall to the conspirators as a result of their action, are the main motives used by Renaud to encourage his men. It is interesting to note that here Simone Weil changes the emphasis from that in Saint-Réal's narrative. Saint-Réal makes much of the harsh nature of the Venetian government, of the absolute authority which the nobility exercised over the people, of the sufferings which the war against the Uscoques imposed on the poor.¹ According to Saint-Réal,

[ces vexations] montèrent à un tel point que le marquis de Bedmar put raisonnablement s'assurer que la révolution qu'il méditait serait d'abord aussi agréable aux petites gens qu'elle serait funeste aux grands.²

Renaud's speech to the conspirators is full of the injustices from which they are about to save the people of Venice: 'Nous détruisons le plus horrible de tous les gouvernements'.³

¹Abbé de Saint-Réal, Conjuration des Espagnols contre la république de Venise (Paris 1922), p. 45.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 116.

Simone Weil on the other hand speaks of the tyrannical nature of the Venetian government only once, and that in a passage of rhetorical exhortation by Renaud (I. 1). In any case, the force of this is lost later in the play, when he is telling to Jaffier how important it is/crush the Venetians immediately:

Car, quoi que j'aie pu dire dans mon discours aux conjurés, presque tous haïssent l'Espagne et sont passionnément attachés à leur patrie et à leur liberté, le peuple autant que les nobles. (II. 6)

The process of conquest must necessarily therefore involve the uprooting of people from their past. As in the case of Rome, this uprooting became a precise weapon in the hands of the conquerors, a fact which Renaud realises very clearly in his advice to Jaffier to wipe out Venice's past so completely that all thought of rebellion will vanish:

Il faut que toute leur vie soit changée, leur vie de chaque jour. Qu'ils sentent chaque jour qu'ils ne sont pas chez eux, mais chez autrui, à la merci d'autrui; ainsi seulement ils obéiront sans effusion de sang... Il sera bon qu'il y ait beaucoup d'églises et de fresques détruites; on bâtira à la place des églises de style espagnol . . . Il faut que les gens d'ici se sentent étrangers chez eux. Déraciner les peuples conquis a toujours été, sera toujours la politique des conquérants. (II. 6)

If Renaud and his conspirators are able to conceive so clearly of a policy of 'déracinement', it is because they are

'déracinés' themselves. Saint-Réal mentions that they were a band of adventurers, corsairs for the most part, ready for gain by whatever means,¹ but Simone Weil emphasises this aspect, stresses that their actions are an inevitable result of their 'déracinement'. In the very first speech of the play, one of the officers refers to the conspirators as 'une poignée d'exilés', and a little later, in a note, we find:

Faire apparaître dans ce discours, et reparaître sans cesse comme un thème sous-jacent, des allusions à la biographie antérieure des conjurés. Presque tous des aventuriers, et jetés dans l'aventure par la détresse, par des violences subies.

(I. 2)

This rootlessness is the basis of their desire to uproot others. In a note on the composition of the play she states her intentions: 'Dans le 1^{er} acte--et le 2^e--faire bien apparaître que c'est un complot d'exilés, de déracinés. Ils haïssent les Vénitiens d'être chez eux' (P 43-4). As she remarks in L'Enracinement, 'Qui est déraciné déracine' (E 49).

Not only is the Spanish Empire an incarnation of the Great Beast for the conspirators, of course; the conspiracy itself acts as a collectivity which absorbs the individual to

¹ Saint-Réal, op. cit., p. 91.

the point of removing from him all responsibility for his actions: 'L'Espagne, la conjuration est du social pour les conjurés' (P 44). Twice Renaud emphasises that they are about to make history (I. 2; II. 6); he and Jaffier are above the common run of adventurers whose only thought is plunder; the real glory of such an exploit is that they will not be forgotten by history. It is of little significance whether the deed is objectively good or bad; what matters is that they should be remembered for it. They have resolved the contradictions of existence 'en descendant dans l'illimité' (C3 140), by total and unconditional allegiance to a particular social entity.

The Spanish Empire and the conspiracy form one element of the social theory embodied in Venise sauvée. Venice itself represents the other element, the positive function of society as mediator. Simone Weil makes clear the distinction between the two in the following notes:

Venise est une cité.
Cité, cela n'évoque pas le social.
L'enracinement est autre chose que le social.

(P 44)

Et pourtant une cité... (Venise...). Mais cela n'est pas du social; c'est un milieu humain dont on n'a pas plus conscience que de l'air qu'on respire. Un contact avec la nature, le passé, la tradition, un ~~perçu~~ ^{perçu}.

(P 46)

It becomes transparently clear in these two short passages that Venice incarnates for Simone Weil her whole concept of the role of society, and is but an artistic expression of the theory embodied in L'Enracinement. The true vocation of the collectivity is to act as nourishment to the individuals who compose it; it is the sum total of the traditions and history of that collectivity which give its members a sense of being rooted in the past, of belonging to the territory which they occupy. Hence Renaud's insistence on the destruction of everything in Venice which would remind the inhabitants of their past. They must become part of a foreign Empire through the uprooting of all that distinguished them from that Empire. Venice in its independence is a *μεταξύ*, a way of mediation for its citizens. Just as food is a means to the physical survival of the body, but not an end in itself, so the collectivity is a means of spiritual nourishment to the 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--patrie, famille, ou toute autre--, non pas pour elle-même, mais comme nourriture d'un certain nombre d'âmes humaines. (E 13)

The collectivity fulfils this role in several different ways: firstly it is unique, and if it is destroyed can never be re-

placed:

Un sac de blé peut toujours être substitué à un autre sac de blé. La nourriture qu'une collectivité fournit à l'âme de ceux qui en sont membres n'a pas d'équivalent dans l'univers entier.

(E 13)

Thus if Venice is destroyed as a source of spiritual nourishment to its members, all the might and splendour of the Spanish Empire will be unable to replace it. In addition, as we have seen, the collectivity has its roots in the past, being the organ of conservation from generation to generation. In this respect of course it also projects into the future, as the history and traditions of the collectivity are constantly in the making.

Because of its unique role, the collectivity is thus of immense importance, sufficiently vital to the present and to future generations for an individual to give his life in its defence. This does not mean, however, that the collectivity is above and beyond the individual human being; the mere requirement of sacrifice is not a value-judgement. It happens sometimes that a man will give his life to save another in danger, but this implies no superiority on the part of the one who is helped (E 13). It is in this respect that the collectivity as spiritual nourishment differs from the Great Beast in

Simone Weil's eyes; the Great Beast is over and above the individuals who compose the collectivity, feeding on them instead of providing nourishment for them (cf OL 187). It becomes an end in itself, is deified as the source of all good, instead of being a means, a way of mediation. In spite of the concreteness and substantiality implied in the notion of 'nourriture', society when obeying its true vocation retains for Simone Weil a certain transparency. It is a 'way', rather than a 'screen', and is defined by its function rather than by its material constituents. Like all beautiful things, Venice has only the most tenuous links with earthly existence, since it is completely apart from the relationships of force governing worldly phenomena. True beauty is in the end what is most easily destroyed:

Destruction de Troie. Chute de pétales d'arbres fruitiers en fleur. Savoir que le plus précieux n'est pas enraciné dans l'existence. Cela est beau.

(C2 205)

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This frailty which stems from the refusal of force Simone Weil also found in another society, the Languedoc civilisation of the twelfth century. Like Venice, this civilisation had only its beauty to protect it, and in both cases this proved

of no avail against the forces of worldly conquest--even when these appeared in the guise of the Church defending the Faith against the heretic. The spiritual force of the people of the Languedoc was their weakness; as Jacques Madaule writes:

On n'a jamais rencontré chez eux l'ardeur combattive des Hussites de Bohême ou des Luthériens. Telle est, je crois, la faiblesse de laquelle ils ont péri et qui a fait sombrer avec eux l'indépendance possible du Midi .
 . . .¹

It has been suggested that the fact that the Cathar heresy was hunted down and the Languedoc civilisation destroyed made this civilisation more interesting to Simone Weil.² Since in her eyes success and spiritual value, power and truth were incompatible, the weak, the afflicted, and the persecuted were by definition 'right', and to be exterminated was a sign of high spirituality. There is no doubt an element of truth in this criticism, since Simone Weil had a natural tendency to defend weakness. But this was not mere sentimentality; she loved an annihilated civilisation not simply because it was annihilated, but for what this annihilation meant. Dina Dreyfus notes this

¹Le Drame albigeois et le destin français (Paris 1961), p. 94.

²E.g. E. Borne, 'Simone Weil était-elle cathare?', L'Aube, 16 janv. 1951.

tendency in Simone Weil, and concludes that it is the message transmitted by dead civilisations which is important to her:

. . . ce message qu'elles nous ont transmis et qui constituait leur vocation propre, c'est, sous une forme ou sous une autre, l'affirmation absolue de la transcendance et de la misère de la créature; cette vocation ne pouvait que les amener à disparaître devant les puissances temporelles athées, devant le gros animal qui met au centre du monde le nous, monstrueuse prolifération du moi.¹

An annihilated civilisation is thus by definition one which refuses the use of force. (This argument ignores of course the fact that an annihilated civilisation can equally be one which resorted to force, but was less successful than the victor.)

As a result of this it is also one in which there is a high degree of spirituality. This consideration goes a long way towards explaining Simone Weil's intense interest in the Cathars, which many critics have taken to be doctrinal. In fact, although we have already noted certain points of resemblance as regards religious practices and speculation, it was Catharism as a way of life, with its overflowing into and interdependence with the society which nurtured it, for which she had a particular admiration. She seldom speaks of the Cathar religion

¹'La Transcendance contre l'histoire chez Simone Weil', Mercure de France (mai 1951), 65-80.

without referring also to the Languedoc civilisation; for her they formed a whole, each being a particular expression of what she felt to be the true Christian spirit. In her letter to Déodat Roché she explains the particular attraction of Catharism for her:

. . . surtout ce qui fait du catharisme une espèce de miracle, c'est qu'il s'agissait d'une religion et non simplement d'une philosophie. Je veux dire qu'autour de Toulouse au XIIe siècle la plus haute pensée vivait dans un milieu humain et non pas seulement dans l'esprit d'un certain nombre d'individus. (PSO 65)

She makes here a vital distinction between philosophy, which remains an exercise of the intellect, and religion which is thought embodied in a particular human society. It is the same thought, but thought incarnate is of higher value than purely intellectual thought. She elaborates this notion:

Une pensée n'atteint la plénitude d'existence qu'incarnée dans un milieu humain, et par milieu j'entends quelque chose d'ouvert au monde extérieur, qui baigne dans la société environnante, qui est en contact avec toute cette société, non pas simplement un groupe fermé de disciples autour d'un maître. Faute de pouvoir respirer l'atmosphère d'un tel milieu, un esprit supérieur se fait une philosophie; mais c'est là une ressource de deuxième ordre, la pensée y atteint un degré de réalité moindre. (PSO 65-6)

And so it is that Catharism represented for Simone Weil merely one aspect of a culture which was truly religious in its inspiration, and not merely in this outward manifestation

of a religion. She does not examine in detail the relationship between the concept of chivalry which infused the Languedoc civilisation, and the Cathar religion, but implies an affinity between the two in her consideration of their concept of love, based as it was on a refusal of force. Catharism was essentially a refusal of force in all its aspects, a refusal of 'tout ce qui est charnel et tout ce qui est social' (EH 83). This is clearly a surmounting, in Simone Weil's terminology, of the laws of gravity, of the natural urge to fill all available space, and displays the same rejection of the need for gratification which Simone Weil finds in the concept of courtly love. As has already been noted (I, §5), she associates courtly love with the homosexuality practised in ancient Greece, since both were forms of 'l'amour impossible'. That in fact there may have been nothing 'impossible' about courtly love she seems to recognise when she elaborates the notion of consent in connexion with it:

L'amour courtois avait pour objet un être humain; mais il n'est pas une convoitise. Il n'est qu'une attente dirigée vers l'être aimé et qui en appelle le consentement.

(EH 80)

The use of the word 'attente' is of great significance here, and Simone Weil gives the whole concept a religious connotation when she continues: 'Le mot de merci par lequel les troubadours

désignaient ce consentement est tout proche de la notion de grâce' (ibid.). Because this love, although its object was a human being, was not acquisitive in character, and involved a denial, Simone Weil concludes that it was in this civilisation as well as in Greece 'un des ponts entre l'homme et Dieu' (ibid.). The beloved took on a sort of transparency which allowed the love of God to descend towards man. Simone Weil expresses this clearly in a note: 'Un attachement qui enferme une impossibilité est un *μεταβ*' (C2 125).

René Nelli indicates that the troubadours themselves saw no contradiction between love of God and love of 'la dame',¹ and quotes their principle 'qu'il faut tendre au ciel par l'amour d'une femme'.² This was not mere rhetoric either; the lady's role was to nourish her suitor's desire, at the same time keeping him at a distance, so that he might acquire those virtues necessary to his winning her. Love was hence a moral discipline. It was not chaste in its desires, which were carnal, but in the fact that it necessitated continence.³

¹L'Erotique des troubadours (Toulouse 1963), p. 227.

²Ibid., p. 230.

³Ibid., p. 241.

In this contradiction Nelli sees both its similarities and differences in relation to Catharism, which, at least as far as the Perfect were concerned, renounced not only marriage but also the things of the flesh in their entirety. He concludes in a vein similar to Simone Weil's that the similarities between the two were a result of their common background rather than of reciprocal 'influence':

. . . les affinités, parfois profondes, l'espèce d'alliance que l'on devine entre le catharisme et l'érotique d'Oc, s'expliquent moins par une influence doctrinale réciproque que par le fait qu'ils entraient tous deux comme éléments nécessaires et concomitants dans la civilisation occitane de la fin du XIIe siècle.¹

It is interesting to note that whereas the Cathars are generally considered to have been puritanical in their denial of life and procreation, Simone Weil emphasises the sense of freedom and joy which pervaded the whole civilisation. And indeed, if the Cathar religion sprang from this civilisation and represented a genuine facet of it, it is difficult to see how an accusation of puritanism can be justified. As Simone Weil says, 'Ce pays qui a accueilli une doctrine si souvent accusée d'être antisociale fut un exemple incomparable

¹Ibid., p. 235.

d'ordre, de liberté et d'union des classes' (EH 70). Speaking of the Chanson de la Croisade she notes 'l'impression de bonheur' which emanated from the civilisation (EH 71-2), and the strongly developed civic sense which impelled for example the Count of Toulouse to consult the citizens before undertaking any course of action. The notion of chivalry prevented this civic sense from being a cause of dissension between cities, and allowed the flowering of an ardent patriotism which united these small units against the invading enemy. Simone Weil notes that the disaster of invasion caused the population to persecute neither the Cathars as the cause of their misfortune, nor the Catholics through fear of the invaders (EH 67). Although the crusade was a religious issue, men fought out of patriotism rather than out of religious partisanship. Nelli likewise emphasises that although the troubadours adopted anti-clerical attitudes, it is impossible to say in most cases whether this sprang from a genuine adherence to the heresy, or from political and patriotic motives.¹

Another aspect of the spiritual freedom which Simone Weil saw in the Languedoc civilisation, and which has been mentioned

¹Op. cit., p. 232.

in an earlier chapter (II, §2), is their concept of subordination. It struck her forcibly that here was a society in which hierarchy was not compounded of slave-relationships, and in which obedience in no way involved abasement. She defines this concept as one 'qui rend le serviteur égal au maître par une fidélité volontaire et lui permet de s'agenouiller, d'obéir, de souffrir les châtements sans rien perdre de sa fierté' (EH 70). Nelli comments on this unique relationship between ruler and ruled, and makes an interesting comparison with the whole scale of courtly values. Speaking of the troubadour Montanhagol he writes:

Montanhagol savait que le dévouement à leurs comtes et aux barons, avait pris parfois, chez les humbles sujets, un caractère sacré qui n'était pas sans rapport avec l'honneur 'amoureux' dont les troubadours entretenaient le culte. La mort de Raimon-Roger Trencavel, vicomte de Carcassonne . . . avait plongé ses sujets dans un désespoir que ni l'intérêt ni la raison n'expliquent entièrement. Les bourgeois de Toulouse, qui s'étaient voués avec tant d'ardeur à la défense de leurs comtes légitimes, ne s'inspiraient d'aucune autre morale que celle de Parage et de Courtoisie, fondée toute entière sur Amour.¹

But 'Amour' has no weapons to defend herself against force, and no doubt such a civilisation was condemned from the start.

¹Nelli, op. cit., p. 264.

Spiritual freedom of the sort that existed in the Languedoc, of which Simone Weil could write 'les idées ne s'y heurtaient pas, elles y circulaient dans un milieu en quelque sorte continu' (EH 68) lost for its citizens the habit of fighting for their ideas, and consequently, when attacked from the outside, the freedom to think them. Its tolerance was its downfall, rather than its heresy. As Madaule says,

La société méridionale était tolérante avant l'heure, beaucoup plus qu'hérétique. C'est là ce qui a causé sa perte, en l'opposant aux deux plus grandes puissances du siècle.¹

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In the same way as society must become transparent in order to function as a way of mediation for the individuals that compose it, so these individuals themselves must acquire the same transparency in their relationships one with another. Transparency is the necessary result of decreation, and is intimately linked in Simone Weil's thought with the renouncing of the ego which takes place in decreation. The self-regarding, expansive 'I' is seen by Simone Weil as a screen, an opaqueness in what should be loving commerce between God and

¹Madaule, op. cit., p. 247.

his creatures:

Toutes les choses que je vois, entends, respire, touche, mange, tous les êtres que je rencontre, je prive tout cela du contact avec Dieu et je prive Dieu du contact avec tout cela dans la mesure où quelque chose en moi dit je.

Je peux faire quelque chose et pour tout cela et pour Dieu, à savoir me retirer, respecter le tête-à-tête.

(C2 357)

The same notion of interfering in an exchange of confidences is contained in another note, where she emphasises that she does not wish for insensitivity towards creation, but for the means to be a mere channel for creation's 'secrets':

Je ne désire nullement que ce monde créé ne me soit plus sensible, mais que ce ne soit plus à moi qu'il soit sensible. A moi il ne peut dire son secret, qui est trop haut. Que je parte, et la création et le Créateur échangeront leurs secrets.

(C3 16)

The 'je' here is clearly not bodily being, but the self-centred ego. This is made clear in the following note, in which the familiar distinction between death and decreation is implied:

Il ne faut pas désirer mourir pour voir Dieu face à face, mais vivre en cessant d'exister pour qu'en un soi qui n'est plus soi Dieu et sa création se trouvent face à face.

(C3 80)

This implies that God in a sense needs man in order to come into contact with his creation, but it is characteristic that what is needed is something essentially negative, i.e.

man's renunciation of self. God works through man, but not in the positive sense of orthodox Christian theology, since it is the existence of the self in man which in Simone Weil's view prevents this happening automatically. Thus if a man is truly charitable to his neighbour, it is because his self has been decreased, leaving a passage for Christ in his love to descend:

Il ne faut pas secourir le prochain pour le Christ, mais par le Christ. Que le moi disparaisse de telle sorte que le Christ au moyen de l'intermédiaire que constituent notre âme et notre corps secoure le prochain.

(C2 327)

The emphasis is always on God's love for humanity, on his desire to descend, to succour, but Simone Weil always sees herself as standing in someone's light, in preventing the grace of God from reaching its destination. Instead of accepting that light for herself, she feels she must disappear. She is in the way: 'Dieu aime la perspective de création qu'on ne peut voir que d'où je suis, et je fais écran' (CS 16). This discretion, which seems superhuman, almost inhuman at times, finds a reflection in Simone Weil's relationships with other people. Her inability to comprehend God's love for her is in one note based by analogy on the supposed inability of other human beings to love her (C2 335). The only form

of God's love in relation to her own person which she can understand is that noted above, and repeated here, that God loves that particular part of creation visible from where she is. Her function in life is thus to mediate God's love, and not to be an object of it.¹

As well as the transparency of an individual being a means by which God can come into contact with his creation, creation--and the individuals which compose it--can by being transparent provide a way back to God. Supernatural love is directed at creation, but in fact reaches God, creation acting as a mediator:

L'amour surnaturel ne touche que les créatures et ne va qu'à Dieu. Il n'aime que les créatures--qu'avons-nous d'autre à aimer?--mais comme intermédiaires.

. . .

Les choses créées ont pour essence d'être des intermédiaires.

Elles sont des intermédiaires les unes vers les autres, et cela n'a pas de fin. Elles sont des intermédiaires vers Dieu.

(C3 128)

¹See however the 'Prologue' to La Connaissance surnaturelle, where, speaking of the divine presence she has encountered, she concludes: 'Et pourtant au fond de moi quelque chose, un point de moi-même, ne peut pas s'empêcher de penser en tremblant de peur que peut-être, malgré tout, il m'aime' (CS 10).

Although as has been seen Simone Weil describes created beings as a vehicle for God's love for his creation, elsewhere she implies that this love is in fact God's love for himself. 'Son amour pour nous est amour pour soi à travers nous' (C3 303). He only loves in us our consent to abdicate our ego-centric existence. 'Nous ne sommes pas autre chose qu'un endroit par où passe l'Amour divin de Dieu pour soi-même' (IP 167), she claims, and one can see that such an idea was attractive to her. It was not only the result of the personal mistrust of herself which has already been noted; with her conviction of the misery of the human condition and the transcendence of God, she found it difficult to believe wholeheartedly in the miracle of God's love for creation in general. But it seems that she did believe in this love; her own experiences were proof to her of its reality. Thus she was able to affirm:

Dieu non seulement s'aime lui-même à travers les créatures, ce qui n'est qu'un prolongement de l'amour qu'il porte directement à lui-même, mais encore il aime la création à travers les créatures. Pour cela il a besoin d'elles. Il ne peut pas l'aimer autrement.

(C2 290)

It will have been obvious from the preceding argument that, as in the case of society, so it is with man that this mediating function is not accorded him automatically. There

must be renunciation, and as in the case of decreation, this renunciation must be a voluntary one. Consent is necessary; one must abdicate, and not wait to be deposed.

Nous avons la possibilité d'être des médiateurs entre Dieu et la partie de la création qui nous est confiée. Il faut notre consentement pour qu'à travers nous il perçoive sa propre création. Avec notre consentement il opère cette merveille. (C2 391)

Again she emphasises both that this consent to be 'used' is man's function in the world, and that it is necessary in order that God be able to come into contact with his creation, and operate in it:

Chaque créature pensante parvenue à l'obéissance parfaite constitue un mode singulier, unique, inimitable, irremplaçable de présence, de connaissance, d'opération de Dieu dans le monde. (C2 335)

By this consent to perfect obedience we can become like Christ, who was the perfect mediator because perfectly obedient (IP 163). The imitation of Christ is thus a rejection of the obtrusive personality, and a consent to the will of the Father. At one point she seems to suggest that only a being such as Christ can truly fulfil the role of mediator, and this would be the logical conclusion to her position, since perfection for her is transparency, and any purely earthly creature must necessarily fall short of this perfection, and screen the

light of God from his creation:

[Dieu] ne peut aimer le monde visible, et l'âme des êtres pensants dans sa partie naturelle, que par l'intermédiaire d'une créature parvenue à l'état de perfection.

Incarnation.

(C2 290)

Man is nevertheless capable of transferring the love of God to his creation. It is only a question of recognising that one is a contingent being, abdicating one's illusory power over the universe, and accepting the limited nature of every part of creation, including oneself:

Si je pensais tout ce qui est limité comme limité, il n'y aurait plus rien dans ma pensée qui procéderait de je. A travers moi Dieu et la création seraient en contact.

(C3 108)

The paradox of the disappearing 'I' and the self which remains as passage for God's love is intentional and inevitable: St. Paul is conscious of the same paradox when he writes 'I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me' (I Cor. XV. 10). Simone Weil uses the image of translation for this action by a self totally devoid of self; her thoughts when she is writing should not seem to belong to her, as they are not in fact created by her, any more than her actions should be a result of her own personality. She puts it succinctly: 'Ecrire comme un traducteur, et agir de même' (C2 112).

Simone Weil uses other images to convey this idea of being a passage for divine love, or of earthly things being a passage towards God. One of these is the blind man's stick, which she uses in several different though related ways. It is an image firstly of the renunciation of self: 'Bâton d'aveugle. Ne plus percevoir sa propre existence comme telle, mais comme vouloir de Dieu' (CS 333). It is also an image of the part played by creation in man's relationship with God; other created beings form the tangible object of our love, but in reality, if that love is supernatural, it passes through them towards *him*, just as a blind man is in contact only with his stick, but by means of it explores the world (C3 127). Creation can also be a blind man's stick in a profounder sense, and one which accords perfectly with Simone Weil's desire for the decreation of her personal existence. If the whole universe is but an extension of one's sensibility, as a blind man's stick is an extension of his arm, 'another' arm, then personal existence or disappearance is of no consequence:

J'ai beau mourir, l'univers continue. Cela ne me console pas si je suis autre que l'univers. Mais si l'univers est à mon âme comme un autre corps, ma mort cesse d'avoir pour moi plus d'importance que celle d'un inconnu. De même mes souffrances.

Que l'univers entier soit pour moi, par rapport à mon corps, ce qu'est le bâton d'un aveugle, pour l'aveugle, par rapport à sa main. Il n'a réellement plus sa sensibilité dans sa main, mais au bout du bâton. (C1 37)

In general, together with analogy, the 'blind man's stick' is a means of attaining the non-apprehendable through the physical (C2 171). Analogy plays an important part in this phenomenon: as the blind man's stick touches what is otherwise inaccessible to him, so I, through physical objects, 'touch' the supernatural. But Simone Weil emphasises that contact itself also plays an important part; contact with the perfectly pure in the form of ceremonies, sacraments and so forth constitutes a genuine contact with God, and that not merely through analogy (ibid.). (This is clearly a variation of the argument stated in the previous chapter, that the sacraments are not merely symbols, but constitute a real presence.)

A variation of the blind man's stick-image is that of the pen or pencil. In this case, the pen or pencil is the mediating instrument by which thoughts are conveyed from the mind on to paper, and for Simone Weil this image has several ramifications. One interpretation which she gives it identifies it with the contemplation of necessity; one must be able to

'read' God behind every event without exception:¹

. . . il faut sentir la réalité et la présence de Dieu à travers toutes les choses extérieures sans exception, aussi clairement que la main sent la consistance du papier à travers le porte-plume et la plume. (AD 14)

This, naturally, encompasses not only pleasurable events, but pain and suffering too:

. . . Il faut aimer Dieu à travers la douleur (sentir sa présence et sa réalité par l'organe de l'amour surnaturel, le seul qui en soit capable) comme on sent la consistance du papier à travers le crayon. (C2 186)

These images convey the idea of earthly phenomena being a passage towards God. The communication is two-fold, however, as is indicated in the following note, where the soul is seen to be mediator in both directions between the body and God: 'Que mon âme soit seulement au corps et à Dieu ce qu'est ce porte-plume à ma main et au papier--un intermédiaire' (CS 81). In fact, the image is used in the direction God-man just as frequently as its opposite. It is generally seen as an analogy for the charity which man should extend to man, a charity which comes from God and uses man only as an intermediary: 'Etre poussé par Dieu vers le prochain comme le crayon est appuyé par moi sur le papier' (CS 16). The anonymity and

¹Simone Weil uses this image as an analogy of perception, without the religious overtones, as far back as the essay on 'Science et perception dans Descartes' (1929-30). Cf. SS 89.

'blindness' of this process is emphasised in the following note: 'Comme le crayon est pour moi quand, les yeux fermés, je palpe la pointe avec la table--être cela pour le Christ' (C2 391). The impersonality of this kind of charity, which may at first sight seem cold, is in Simone Weil's eyes the only form of giving which truly respects the being of the recipient. It completely discounts any recompense for 'good works', even the knowledge that good works have been done, because for Simone Weil charity, or love of one's neighbour, is no more than strict justice. She comments on the synonymy of 'justice' and 'love of one's neighbour' in the Gospel (AD 101), and claims that it is we who have invented a distinction between the two. 'Il est facile de comprendre pourquoi. Notre notion de la justice dispense celui qui possède de donner. S'il donne quand même, il croit pouvoir être content de lui-même' (ibid.).

The charitable man is thus a transparent one; he is merely a vehicle for the true charity of Christ, the only being capable of looking on affliction. A society made up of such transparent beings for whom justice was a form of love and the minimum required of man, was clearly Simone Weil's ideal. That it was not merely an ideal, but capable of em-

bodiment, she attempted to illustrate in her consideration of those historical societies which have been discussed in the course of this chapter.

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III, §6

“O’APIOMOS METAET

Whereas man and society provide concrete examples of Simone Weil's search for mediators between man and God, there is a whole area of purely abstract speculation which reflects the same preoccupation. This is the field of mathematics, and Simone Weil's concern to use mathematics and related subjects as a way of mediation will now be discussed. The whole field provides a clear illustration of the complete fusion in her mind of intellectual and spiritual research; she is 'la mathématicienne de Dieu',¹ and the two ends, mathematical truth and God, cannot be separated. Like other human activities, mathematics is pointless if it does not bring the soul towards God: 'Ces sciences sont sans valeur en elles-mêmes. Ce sont des intermédiaires entre l'âme et Dieu' (SG 107).

This affirmation is made in a commentary on the Republic, and it is clear that the idea of mathematical sciences in general as a path to spiritual truth was derived from Plato.² Mathematics were in the intermediary rank between what was perceptible by the senses and pure thought, or 'dialectic', and Simone Weil is speaking as a Platonist when she comments

¹André Rousseaux, 'Mathématicienne de Dieu', Littérature du XXe siècle (Paris 1953), IV, 213-57.

²Cf. Republic, VI, 509-14.

on 'un ordre de certitude, à partir des pensées incertaines, et facilement saisissables, qui concernent le monde sensible jusqu'aux pensées tout à fait certaines et tout à fait insaisissables qui concernent Dieu' (IP 125). Mathematics, she continues, are at a point mid-way between the two kinds of thought. Elsewhere she refers them to concepts of mediation already considered, as when she defines them as a 'bâton d'aveugle' (C2 171) or when she groups them on the same level as the $\mu\epsilon\tau\alpha\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\upsilon$ and 'l'amour' (C1 77). Throughout her speculation on mathematics there is evident the same conviction that was noted in connexion with her consideration of science in general, namely that the confusion of the scientific and the religious was not simply a sign of the 'primitive' mind, not yet emancipated from superstition, but a genuine manifestation of spirituality, and that the modern world is the poorer for having divorced the two. It is with regret that she makes the distinction between the attitude towards mathematical truth current in Plato's day, and that of our own times:

Ce qu'on venait chercher quand on allait chez Platon, c'était une transformation de l'âme permettant de voir et d'aimer Dieu; qui songerait aujourd'hui à employer la mathématique à tel usage ? (SS 266)¹

¹She is perhaps less than fair to scientists such as Poincaré who, although he does not formulate it in Simone

Apart from mathematics as an intermediary science in the Platonic tradition, Simone Weil's aim was to find symbols of mediation within mathematics, and more particularly within Pythagoreanism. Pythagorean number-mysticism is well-known, but what seems to have held her attention above all was the development of geometry under Pythagoras and his disciples, a development whose echo she found in certain Platonic texts, the Epinomis and the Timaeus for example (LR 24).¹ Her central contention is that the discovery of geometry was a direct

Weil's Platonic terms, nevertheless expresses a clear link between modern science and 'the Good': 'Science keeps us in constant relation with something which is greater than ourselves; it offers us a spectacle which is constantly renewing itself and growing always more vast. Behind the great vision it affords us, it leads us to guess at something greater still; this spectacle is a joy in which we forget ourselves and thus it is morally sound.

He who has tasted of this, who has seen, if only from afar, the splendid harmony of the natural laws will be better disposed than another to pay little attention to his petty, egoistic interests. He will have an ideal which he will value more than himself, and that is the only ground on which we can build an ethics. He will work for this ideal without sparing himself and without expecting any of the vulgar rewards which are everything to some persons; and when he has assumed the habit of disinterestedness, this habit will follow him everywhere; his entire life will remain as if flavoured with it.

It is the love of truth even more than passion which inspires him. And is not such a love an entire code of morality? Is there anything which is more important than to combat lies because they are one of the most common vices in primitive man and one of the most degrading?'. Mathematics and Science: Last Essays, trans. from Dernières pensées (Paris 1913) by J. W. Bolduc (New York 1963), §8, 'Ethics and Science'.

¹For the texts in Simone Weil's translation, see IP 111-7.

result of the Greeks' search for mediation, and that therefore 'l'apparition de la géométrie en Grèce est la plus éclatante parmi toutes les prophéties qui ont annoncé le Christ' (IP 133), a somewhat startling claim which will be elaborated in the course of this chapter.

There are two main features in the Pythagorean system; firstly there is their identification of everything with number, and secondly there is the use of the opposites--odd and even, limiting and limited and so forth--from which all things were composed. Both aspects will be relevant to a discussion of Simone Weil's use of Pythagorean theory, but we shall begin with a consideration of their theory of number. It was asserted by Aristotle that the Pythagoreans believed all things to be numbers,¹ and this somewhat obscure claim has occasioned different interpretations among critics. Copleston considers that it results from the fact that they regarded numbers spatially--the tetraktys being a well-known example of this. If the number ten was set out as composed of the first four integers arranged triangularly, then, says Copleston, it becomes easy to understand 'how the Pythagoreans regarded

¹Metaphysics N3, 1090a20, quot. Kirk and Raven, The Pre-socratic Philosophers (Cambridge 1962), p. 248.

things as being numbers, and not merely as being numerable. They transferred their mathematical conception to the order of material reality'.¹ The argument is carried further by Kirk and Raven, who point to the 'tacit confusion between the unit of arithmetic and the point of geometry',² so that by analogy with the representation of numbers spatially, any solid would be composed of a great number of points each having magnitude. Burnet however considered that the identification of things with numbers was made as a result of the Pythagoreans' musical discoveries, by which they found that musical sounds could be reduced to numbers, and expressed numerically.³ That is to say, number is fundamentally relationship or proportion. The strings of the lyre, for instance, were tuned so as to form ratios one with another; what mattered was not the pitch of a single string, but its relationship to the other strings.

Simone Weil seems to have had in mind something very similar to this in her interpretation of Pythagorean number-

¹A History of Philosophy, I: Greece and Rome, Part I (New York 1962), p. 51.

²Op. cit., p. 255.

³Early Greek Philosophy (4th edn, London 1930), p. 107.

-theory. Writing of number as intermediary between the one and the indeterminate, the unlimited, she defines what she understands by this 'number':

Ce n'est pas le nombre par lequel on dénombre, ni celui qu'on forme par addition continuellement répétée, qui constitue cet intermédiaire, mais plutôt le nombre en tant qu'il est susceptible de former des rapports.

(SS 142-3)

The forming of relationships is of course essential to human thought and perception; nothing can be 'known' unless it is related to other phenomena, and Valéry defines genius as the ability to establish relationships between things whose continuity escapes the ordinary mind.¹ But it does not seem to be that kind of relationship which Simone Weil has in mind. She continues:

Car un rapport entre deux chiffres, chose infiniment différente d'une fraction, est en même temps rapport entre une infinité d'autres chiffres choisis convenablement et groupés deux par deux; chaque rapport enveloppe des quantités qui croissent d'une manière illimitée sans cesser d'être fidèles à une relation parfaitement définie, comme un angle, à partir d'un point, embrasse un espace

¹ 'Le secret--celui de Léonard comme celui de Bonaparte, comme celui qu'on possède une fois la plus haute intelligence--est et ne peut être que dans les relations qu'ils trouvèrent --qu'ils furent forcés de trouver--entre des choses dont nous échappe la loi de continuité.' Introduction à la méthode de Léonard de Vinci, Variété, in Oeuvres (Bibl. de la Pléiade, Paris 1959), I, 1160.

qui s'étend infiniment au-delà des plus lointaines
étoiles.

(SS 143)

The connexion with Pythagoras' spatially extended numbers is here obvious, and Simone Weil herself makes the association with geometrical figures when she adds that relationship, to be accessible to the mind, must leave the domain of the number and enter that of the angle, 'car le nombre entier supporte mal la substitution du rapport à l'addition; il ne donne aucun moyen d'exprimer, sinon en certain cas, la moyenne proportionnelle' (ibid.). In other words, whereas the relationship between for example nine and unity can be expressed numerically as three, its root, there are a great many numbers for which this is not possible in terms of whole numbers, and which can be better expressed geometrically.

Number is therefore relationship in the sense of proportion, and this must be borne in mind whenever Simone Weil uses one of these three terms. It explains her frequent identification of ἀριθμός with λόγος which, she says, 'sont employés indifféremment l'un pour l'autre dans la tradition pythagoricienne' (SG 111). If ἀριθμός means 'relationship', then it is not difficult to identify it with λόγος which does not mean number in the normal sense of the word, but relation, proportion,

analogy.¹ The ἀριθμός or the λόγος is thus that which establishes a relationship between a number and unity. In Simone Weil's view the whole of Greek science was a search for proportion (IP 123), that is, for something which could harmonise the opposites of existence.

These opposites form the basis of the dualistic aspect of Pythagoreanism, an aspect which is in fact implied by the notion of proportion, since a proportional mean must by definition be established between two exterior entities. In the Pythagorean 'table of opposites', the prime ones were considered to be limit and unlimited, odd and even, one and plurality.² It is not our purpose here to discuss the argument as to whether these opposites constitute a definite dualism of principles, or whether they were preceded by a single and fundamental principle.³ Simone Weil, faithful to her particular dualism,

¹Liddell and Scott, Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. λόγος, B, III. Burnet, in his discussion of Greek music, notes the ratios between the different strings of the lyre, and gives their names as διπλάσιος λόγος (2:1), ἡμιβλῖος λόγος (3:2) etc. Greek Philosophy, Part I: Thales to Plato (London 1924), p. 47.

²Aristotle, Metaphysics A5 986a15, quot. Kirk and Raven, op. cit., p. 238.

³For an account of this argument, see J. E. Raven, Pythagoreans and Eleatics (Cambridge 1948), §II.

seems to have identified the one element--the limiting principle, the One--with God, and the other opposing element with all that is not God. In fact, most of the occasions on which she states specifically the unity of God and the One ~~may~~ refer to Platonic texts,¹ but her account of the Pythagorean doctrine of mediation, and the spiritual value of this doctrine, could not be maintained without such an assumption. It is simply another instance of her embracing of the whole Greek tradition, and making no clear distinction between one part of that tradition and another. Her long essay 'A propos de la doctrine pythagoricienne' (IP 108-171) begins 'La pensée pythagoricienne est pour nous le grand mystère de la civilisation grecque. On la retrouve partout. Elle imprègne presque toute la poésie, presque toute la philosophie,--et surtout Platon, qu'Aristote regardait comme un pur pythagoricien . . .'. Thus when in the course of this essay she quotes the Platonic formula 'Le nombre est l'intermédiaire entre l'un et l'illimité' (Philebus 16; IP 130) and claims 'le un suprême est Dieu, et c'est lui qui limite' (ibid.), we may be sure that she is talking of the 'Pythagorean tradition'.²

¹See also I, §2. There are exceptions to this; see e.g. IP 118, SG 168.

²The equation by the Pythagoreans of the One with God is

This idea of limit is of some importance, and provides not only an instance of mediation for Simone Weil, but also it gives an added dimension to her theoretical notions of creation and of the nature of necessity. The One, the limit and the indefinite seem to form a triad, with limit forming the mediating principle between the One, God, who imposes the limit, and the indefinite which receives the limit (cf. IP 141). Limit is the equivalent of number (CS 31), and number is, according to Philolaos, that which gives a 'body' to things, brings them out from indefiniteness (IP 141).. Simone Weil explains this use of 'number' by reference to the gnomon, the fixed point around which other points revolve (IP 142). No perception is possible without this fixed point which represents necessity, and which is 'un ensemble de lois de variation déterminées par des rapports fixes et invariants' (*ibid.*). She uses Lagneau's example of the cube ~~by taking~~ to illustrate her point; we perceive a cube by taking in successive appear-

attested by late sources only, but is held by W. K. C. Guthrie to be very probable. He quotes Aetius to the effect that 'Of the principles, Pythagoras said that the Monad was God and the Good, the true nature of the One, Mind itself; but the indefinite dyad is a daimon and evil; concerned with material plurality.' A History of Greek Philosophy (Cambridge 1962), I, 248.

ances of it, none of which is in fact a cube, but which revolve around something different from and exterior to these appearances, that is, its 'cubeness' (IP 142-3). The cube consists of the rapport between itself and the successive stages viewed.

Limit is ἀριθμός, and ἀριθμός is λόγος. But λόγος is also the Word, 'le Verbe ordonnateur' which has already been mentioned (III, §1). It is logical therefore to suppose that ἀριθμός = Verbe, the creative force which ordered the universe in the beginning. This consideration reveals how profoundly Greek are her ideas on creation; the Pythagorean 'everything is number' is given added significance by fusion with the Stoic λόγος, although neither doctrine is present in its initial purity. The idea of substituting 'number' for 'Word' may seem fanciful, but when the particular significance of 'number' as 'relationship' is called to mind it will be realised that Simone Weil's ideas on creation involve an ordering by the establishment of a mediating term which brings into relationship two opposing elements, and that this mediating term may go under several different names.

That there is no contradiction between this concept of creation involving the formation of a bond between creator and

created, and the idea of creation being the retreat of God from the world, the establishing of a gulf between the two, can be seen by reference to the idea of the order or beauty of the world, which, itself a mediating form, can only be perceived by an individual who has reached a certain stage of purification (III, §1). The relationship is there, but to be real must be perceived.

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A slightly different angle is revealed when we turn to what Simone Weil considered to be the central preoccupation of the Greek philosopher-geometers of the Pythagorean tradition, their search for mediation between unity and diversity. The notion of proportion here is fundamental; for Simone Weil the most significant discovery made by the Pythagoreans was that of the ἀλογoi ἀλογoi, the 'irrational numbers', which had no arithmetical proportional link with unity. These must now be examined. Burnet holds that the proof of what is known as 'Pythagoras' theorem', that the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides of the triangle, was probably arithmetical in the first place, 'and, as he was acquainted with the 3 : 4 : 5 triangle, which is always a right-angled triangle, he may have started from

the fact that $3^2 + 4^2 = 5^2$.¹ But in the case of many numbers their square root is not a whole number, and the theorem cannot therefore be expressed numerically.² This is the case, for example, in the isosceles right-angled triangle. These numbers whose square roots could not be expressed in terms of whole numbers were the 'irrational numbers' which Pythagoras was said to have hidden from the world because they disproved his theory. According to Simone Weil, however, this discovery of the irrationals was of the highest spiritual importance. What could not be expressed numerically could be expressed geometrically. Geometry provided mediation, a 'moyenne proportionnelle', for numbers which were by nature deprived of one. Hence the possibility that the Greeks invented geometry as a result of their search for mediation (IP 121). 'En tout cas, que la géométrie ait été ou non dès avant sa première origine une recherche de médiation, elle offrait cette merveille d'une médiation pour les nombres qui en étaient naturel-

¹Greek Philosophy, p. 54.

²It is important to realise that the Pythagoreans did not recognise any unit smaller than one; the only fractions they used represented ratios of whole numbers. See Burnet, ibid., p. 85. That this should be so is obvious from their special representation of number, and the identification of the unit with an alpha or dot. One cannot have half a dot.

lement privés' (IP 122). Clearly for Simone Weil this was not merely an intellectual problem to be solved, but was an image of spiritual reality; the identity already mentioned between God and unity makes the image easily comprehensible:

La construction d'une moyenne proportionnelle entre l'unité et un nombre non carré par l'inscription du triangle rectangle dans le cercle était l'image d'une médiation surnaturelle entre Dieu et l'homme.

(PSO 61)

Man is not 'a square number'; he is a being between whom and God there is no natural mediation (SG 168). A mediator must come from outside the natural world, just as geometry, alien to number, must intervene to provide mediation with unity for numbers which are not square:¹

Les nombres pour lesquels il n'existe aucune médiation qui les relie naturellement à l'unité sont des images de notre misère; et le cercle qui vient du dehors, d'une manière transcendante par rapport au domaine des nombres, apporter une médiation est l'image de l'unique remède à cette misère.

(CO 268)

Simone Weil indicates here that it is 'le cercle' which

¹The statement that geometry comes 'from outside' to mediate irrational numbers seems to need some qualification in the Pythagorean context at least, given that, as has been shown, the dividing line between arithmetic and geometry was not as clear-cut for them as it is for us. Number was already conceived geometrically to a certain extent.

comes from outside to provide mediation, and of course this is the case, since the right-angled triangle in question can be inscribed within a circle, whose diameter is the hypotenuse of the triangle. More than that, 'le cercle est nécessaire à la construction de toute moyenne proportionnelle entre quantités dont le rapport n'est pas un nombre rationnel à la puissance seconde' (IP 160). Circular movement presented for Simone Weil 'l'image parfaite de l'acte éternel qui constitue la vie de la Trinité' (IP 159), and the to-and-fro movement of a point on the diameter 'est l'image du devenir d'ici-bas fait de ruptures d'équilibre successives et contraires' (ibid.).¹ If now we add a right-angled triangle whose hypotenuse is the diameter of the circle, the proportional mean which is obtained by dropping a perpendicular from the apex of the triangle (at a point on the circle) to the diameter, will 'mediate' between the circle, representing the life of God, and the diameter, which represents the life of man, at the same time as 'entering' the diameter at a point proportional in terms of quantity to the area of the two triangles now formed, mediating between these two (cf. IP 159-60).

¹On the representation of God as circle see G. Poulet, Les Métamorphoses du cercle (Paris 1961), Introduction.

This proportional mean is an image of the Word.

The idea of proportion also explains Simone Weil's use of 'assimilation', as used by Plato in the Epinomis (990, see IP 115). The 'assimilation des nombres non naturellement semblables entre eux', which Plato considers to be given by God, is achieved by the use of proportion, and on this analogy Simone Weil bases her theory of contact with God:

L'assimilation est l'unique contact avec Dieu, et la foi dans la réalité de ce contact implique la foi dans la possibilité de la médiation.

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Epinomis. L'assimilation de deux nombres, c'est la découverte d'une moyenne proportionnelle. Donc l'assimilation de l'homme à Dieu, c'est la découverte d'une médiation.

(C2 367)

There is no common factor between God and man; in order for them to be 'made like' there must be a mediating term between the two.

This idea of assimilation is extended by Simone Weil in her interpretation of the mysterious Pythagorean formula reported by Aristotle that 'justice is a square number',¹ a formula

¹Magna Moralia, Al 1182a11, quot. Kirk & Raven, op. cit., p. 248. Aristotle's statement is constructed as a refutation of this doctrine: οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἡ δικαιοσύνη ἀριθμὸς ὡς τετράγωνος ἴσος.

that is frequently dismissed by critics as mere theosophising. For Simone Weil it is rather an image of our relationship to God: "La justice est un nombre à la deuxième puissance." Autrement dit, la justice est ce entre quoi et Dieu il y a naturellement médiation' (SG 168). Or 'Le juste est celui entre qui et Dieu la médiation est possible' (C3 287). For sinful man however there is no natural mediation with God; by a slightly different use of the formula, where 'le juste' becomes the mediator rather than the 'square', man is able to assimilate himself to God:

La justice est un carré, i.e. un nombre dont il existe une moyenne géométrique entre lui et l'unité. 1, 3, 9--même pensée. 1 est Dieu, le nombre est le médiateur, le carré est l'homme qui est au médiateur comme le médiateur à Dieu, le disciple du Christ.

(C3 68)

This interpretation, whether it coincides or not with the Pythagoreans' intentions, has the virtues of coherence and of intellectual humility in the presence of ancient writers. It was [~]Simone Weil's undoubted merit, when considering the ancient world in general and the Greeks in particular, to assume that they were talking sense, and that if certain features of their intellectual systems seemed incoherent or fanciful to us, it was because we have lost the key to their inter-

pretation. This feature of her thought constitutes one of the main benefits of her disbelief in the idea of intellectual or spiritual progress; she never treated the ancient world as a childish version of the modern.

Another important ramification of the idea of assimilation is to be found in Simone Weil's use of the fragment quoted by Diogenes Laertius: 'L'amitié est une égalité faite d'harmonie' (IP 118), coupled with the fragment from Philolaos: 'Les choses semblables et de même rang n'ont aucun besoin d'harmonie; celles qui ne sont pas semblables, ni de même racine, ni de même rang, il est nécessaire qu'elles soient enfermées sous clef par une harmonie capable de les maintenir dans un ordre du monde' (IP 112).¹ In order to understand the connexion of this with the idea of assimilation, it is necessary to realise that harmony, for the Greeks, was 'proportion' or 'l'unité des contraires' (IP 127). Burnet also records that when the Greeks

¹Stobaeus, *Eclogia*, I, 21, 8. 6 (B 62), quot. IP 182: τὰ μὲν ὁμοῖα καὶ ὁμόφυλα ἁρμονίας οὐδὲν ἐπέδεικτον, τὰ δὲ ἀνόμοια μὴδὲ ὁμόφυλα μὴδὲ ἰσολαβὴν ἀνάγκη τῶν τοιούτων ἁρμονίᾳ συγκεκλείσθαι οἷαι μέλλοντι ἐν κόσμῳ κατέχεσθαι. It is interesting to see that Giraudoux gives a similar definition, put into the mouth of Alcène in *Amphitryon* 38 (III. v): 'L'amitié . . . accouple les créatures les plus dissemblables et les rend égales.'

spoke of harmony in relation to music they were thinking primarily of notes sounded in succession and not simultaneously.¹ Historically, harmony means first 'tuning' and then 'scale'. Harmony is thus concerned with the ratio between notes, or between the strings of a lyre, and not with two concordant notes sounded together. In Simone Weil's particular interpretation, it was the geometric mean linking opposites (IP 132), and the 'friendship' formed from this harmony is the subject of a long section of the essay on Pythagorean doctrine referred to above. She applies it firstly to God, and then to the relationship between God and his creatures, and finally to the relationship within creation itself, and to that between God and matter.

In each case this involves a pair of opposites. In the case of the relationship 'within' God, she takes up the primary pair of Pythagorean opposites, unity and plurality, and applies them to the Trinity. To understand the function of harmony here, however, it is necessary to add another definition of

¹Greek Philosophy, p. 45. H. Ottensmeyer notes the same point in relation to Simone Weil's use of the term. Le Thème de l'amour dans l'œuvre de Simone Weil (Paris 1958), p. 27.

harmony: 'La pensée commune des pensants séparés'. These definitions are appropriate to the Trinity, she continues, firstly because if one conceives God as One, then either one thinks of him as an object, in which case he cannot be action, or as an acting subject, in which case an object is necessary, and creation would be the result of necessity and not of love. Human creatures can only think of God as perfect if they think of him as subject and object at the same time. But God is essentially subject, which is why the second definition, 'la pensée commune des pensants séparés', is appropriate, since it implies a plurality of subjects. She concludes:

Si on interprète la définition de l'amitié comme une égalité parfaite¹ d'harmonie au moyen de la définition de l'harmonie comme la pensée commune des pensants séparés, c'est la Trinité même qui est l'amitié par excellence. 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.

(IP 129)

The second pair of opposites which Simone Weil considers is that of creator and creature, which she identifies with the Pythagorean opposites limit and the unlimited. This identification of the creature with the unlimited may seem puzzling, but she explains that by the unlimited she means

¹MS: faite.

'ce qui reçoit sa limitation du dehors' (IP 129). Creation is matter limited, put in order by God. The limits imposed are quantities or something akin to quantity, and so one can say that limit is number, the number which is intermediary between One and the unlimited (IP 130). The idea of the universe being ordered by limiting number accords very well of course with the view of the universe which the decremented man should have; in a sense decrementation is the perception of limits. By a complex reasoning Simone Weil then identifies this limit or number with the second term of the opposition seen in the Trinity, that of the One and the many. The many is this number, and, as limit, appears in the opposition creator-creature as the first term.¹ Between God and his creation the limit is therefore something like a proportional mean, but in the form of a person (as the second term of the opposition forming the Trinity, which is essentially person).

This does not, however, entirely resolve the contradiction creator-creation. Creation is basically inert matter, and between God and inert matter there is no natural union. This

¹It must be assumed that Simone Weil understands 'limit' here as 'the limiting principle', a point which she makes elsewhere, e.g. IP 35.

union is made in the person of Christ on the Cross, 'quand les circonstances précédant l'agonie ont été brutales au point d'en faire une chose' (IP 131). This point will be dealt with more fully in the next chapter, since it involves the nature and role of Christ for Simone Weil. For the moment it should merely be noted that Christ is conceived as the 'proportional mean' who is able to create 'harmony' between God and creation by virtue of his nature as God-man.

The idea of harmony is next applied to the relationship between men. Here Simone Weil anticipates a difficulty, since in Philolaos' words, 'Les choses de même espèce, de même racine et de même rang n'ont pas besoin d'harmonie' (IP 134). She finds it significant that the Pythagoreans should have chosen a definition of 'friendship' that applied more readily to God than to man. But friendship between men is possible, because although they are in fact equal, the false perspective from which each individual views his neighbours makes of him the centre of the world. There are several possible results of this situation. Where the relative force of two individuals is unequal, the stronger generally causes the weaker to submit; the weaker then transfers his 'position centrale' outside himself into the other (IP 135). This is

the relationship of slave to master. In the case where the two parties are of equal strength then what Simone Weil calls 'natural justice' is produced; they agree to a compromise, each respecting the egocentricity of the other, but 'sans cesser de penser à la première personne' (IP 136). This is justice, but it is a 'justice sans amitié' (ibid.). Justice produced by friendship is of a different order, and supernatural. It occurs at the meeting point of 'cet être qui est le centre du monde et /de/ cet autre qui est un petit fragment dans le monde' (IP 137), and in order for it to be accomplished it is necessary to recognise

que rien dans le monde n'est le centre du monde, que le centre du monde est hors du monde, que nul ici-bas n'a le droit de dire je. Il faut renoncer en faveur de Dieu . . . à ce pouvoir illusoire qu'Il nous a accordé de penser à la première personne. (IP 137)

It is not clear however why this renunciation should produce 'friendship' in the Pythagorean sense. Simone Weil says that thus the opposites ~~are~~ united are so distant that they can only have their union in God, but does not explain how God comes to be mediator between these opposites of whose nature he does not partake. The difficulty can be partly resolved by Simone Weil's identification of 'amitié' or 'amour' and 'justice' (IP 139), since as we have seen, justice has a natural link

with unity. Two just persons would thus find 'amitié' through their common relationship with God. Another difficulty is the implication that 'amitié' is only possible where there is an unequal relationship of force. Where the relationship is equal, it would seem that 'natural justice' is inevitable. There is perhaps here a reflection of Simone Weil's suspicion of any levelling process and her love of hierarchy. The sort of hierarchy existing in the Languedoc civilisation of the twelfth century, which has already been considered (III, §5), would presumably be an example of an unequal relationship of force which produces 'amitié' and a perfectly free relationship. She bears out this interpretation when she affirms that 'la justice ~~est~~ surnaturelle, l'amitié ou l'amour se trouvent enfermés dans toutes les relations humaines où sans qu'il y ait égalité de force et de besoin il y a recherche du consentement mutuel' (IP 141).

God is thus a mediator between himself and himself, between himself and man, between man and man. He is 'l'unique principe d'harmonie' (IP 139). What she describes as 'une cinquième forme d'harmonie',¹ that between God and matter,

¹It seems in fact to be a fourth rather than a fifth.

the limiting principle and that which receives the limit, would seem to be included in her analysis of mediation between God and creation, involving the number as limit and the person of Christ.

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There is however another application of the idea of harmony, that produced by the union on a transcendent level of opposites within creation. The 'pyramid' thus formed can be compared to Simone Weil's use of the idea of harmony applied to relationships between men; 'horizontal' opposites are reconciled in God. In her development of the concept of the harmony of opposites, Simone Weil is indebted to Heraclitus, whose philosophy she sees as one of overall unity governing apparent conflict.¹ But since for her Heraclitus and the Pythagoreans formed part of the same tradition, this 'harmony of opposites' is seldom attributed to any one individual or school. In any case, the tradition found its most complete expression in Plato, for whom the use of contradiction formed an essential part of the dialectal method (Cl 76).

¹See J. P. Little, 'Heraclitus and Simone Weil: The Harmony of Opposites', Forum for Modern Language Studies, V, 1, Jan. 1969, pp. 72-9.

Contradiction, as was seen in the first section of this study (I, §1), is for Simone Weil an essential element of created existence. 'L'existence, c'est le lieu des contraires' (C2 285) forms an echo to Heraclitus' 'La guerre est mère de toutes choses, reine de toutes choses'.¹ War is fundamental to the human condition, but contradiction is also felt within the individual as a conflict of aims, a hiatus between what we desire and the practical consequences of attaining that desire:

Notre vie est impossibilité, absurdité. Chaque chose que nous voulons est contradictoire avec les conditions ou les conséquences qui y sont attachées, chaque affirmation que nous posons implique l'affirmation contraire, tous nos sentiments sont mêlés à leur contraire.

(C2 407)

This consciousness of the basic contradictions of existence leads to a characteristic dialectic of method, where any observation must be followed by the contrary assertion, in order to obtain a balanced view of the whole. Alain's influence is clearly visible when Simone Weil defines her method of intellectual procedure: 'Méthode d'investigation: dès qu'on a pensé quelque chose, chercher en quel sens le contraire est vrai' (C1 191).² This method of course explains

¹Frag. 53 (1st part); see p. 18.

²Cf. Alain: 'J'ai appris . . . que l'opposition est le

many apparent inconsistencies in Simone Weil's thought, in the Cahiers in particular. As in Plato's use of it, it is a means by which one is able to 'sortir du point de vue' (Cl 76). We may compare Heraclitus' axiom 'La route qui monte et qui descend est la seule et la même',¹ which may be interpreted as meaning that a single object can justify different descriptions, each of which depends on the point of view adopted.²

The method is clearly for Simone Weil another parallel to man's decreation, whereby his personal stance is abandoned for a vision of order and unity. But since perfect decreation is only a goal for man, and seldom a reality, man's

mouvement même de la pensée et le seul moyen de donner du corps aux idées. Cela est sensible dans ces contraires que Platon a dessinés comme par jeu, ainsi le chaud et le froid, le lourd et le léger, le grand et le petit. A force d'y penser, j'ai fini par apercevoir que ces contraires étaient inhérents l'un à l'autre, de façon qu'il soit impossible de juger qu'un corps est petit si l'on ne juge en même temps qu'il est grand, ce qui n'est que parcourir toute l'étendue d'un genre et faire courir l'idée . . . Hegel a trouvé de merveilleuses idées, pleines de matière et de consistance, à force de chercher en chacune son contraire identique à elle.' Histoire de mes pensées (Paris 1950), p. 35.

¹Frag. 60: 'Ὅδος ἑνω κέρω μία καὶ ὅρη, quot. Kirk & Raven, p. 189.

²See Kirk & Raven, pp. 190-1.

natural instinct is to escape the dilemma of contradiction and to take refuge in a lie: 'Le mensonge est la fuite de la pensée humaine devant une contradiction essentielle, irrémédiable' (C1 159). This 'lie' shows itself in idolatry, the worship of force, and of the law of gravity. As has been shown, 'la force délivre du couple de contraires bien-mal' (C3 140).

There is however a way of escaping legitimately from the dilemma of the contradiction, that is, by assuming the full reality and then the unity of the terms of the contradiction. This serves the purpose first of making us conscious of the true nature of the human condition. Simone Weil's comments on the basic conflict within man have a Pascalian ring: 'La contradiction est notre misère, et le sentiment de notre misère est le sentiment de la réalité' (C2 407). But it is not simply a question of contemplating the wretchedness of man; this consciousness must be used as a means to overcome contradiction. Simone Weil uses the lever-image again to describe the action of the equilibrium of opposites whose purpose is to lift the soul on to a higher plane. A really legitimate contradiction, fully accepted, is a mystery to the rational intelligence in that it cannot be either explained or resolved.

When the mind has gone as far as it can, and meets a contradiction, 'alors la notion de mystère, comme un levier, trans-
 porte la pensée de l'autre côté de l'impasse, de l'autre côté
 de la porte impossible à ouvrir, au delà du domaine de l'in-
 telligence, au-dessus' (CS 79). The 'porte impossible à
 ouvrir' is also seen as a limit, here representing the highest
 point which the unaided intelligence can reach, rather than
 the limit imposed on matter by the creator, although the two
 could be described as different views of the same concept.
 There are echoes of the Greek $\mu\omicron\tilde{\iota}\rho\alpha$; the boundary which
 cannot be overstepped without paying a price, in the following
 comment: 'Savoir (en toute chose) qu'il y a une limite, et
 qu'on ne la dépassera pas sans aide surnaturelle, ou alors
 de très peu, et en le payant ensuite par un terrible abaisse-
 ment' (Cl 213).

The limit can be passed through rising to unity, or by
 descent into the unlimited (C3 140). This limit-point is
 compared by Simone Weil with the highest point of a pyramid,
 of a mountain or a church-spire, which forms the limit to
 matter: 'Une montagne, une pyramide, une flèche d'église,
 rendent sensible la transcendance du ciel, en faisant sentir
 que la matière pesante peut aller jusque-là et non pas plus

haut' (C2 406). When this point has been passed, there may well be others. Simone Weil sees spiritual progress as a series of levels, each with its own particular laws, which must be traversed one by one:

Quand quelque chose semble impossible à obtenir, quelque effort que l'on fasse, cela indique une limite infranchissable à ce niveau et la nécessité d'un changement de niveau, d'une rupture de plafond; ainsi s'épuiser en efforts à ce niveau dégrade. Il vaut mieux accepter la limite, la contempler, et en savourer toute l'amertume.

(C1 106)

Typically, it is an attitude of waiting, of non-active activity which brings about the 'rupture de plafond'. Simone Weil expresses the same thought in a comparison between a series of contradictions and the rungs of a ladder to be mounted. Each rung raises the soul to a higher level,

jusqu'à ce que nous parvenions à un endroit où nous devons penser ensemble les contraires, mais où nous ne pouvons pas avoir accès au plan où ils sont liés. C'est le dernier échelon de l'échelle. Là nous ne pouvons plus monter, nous devons regarder, attendre et aimer. Et Dieu descend.

(C2 408)

As in the contemplation of necessity, there is an essential element of suffering involved. In an account of suffering and the harmony of opposites which is not always easy to follow, Simone Weil explains how suffering undoes the harmony which had been present in the soul, so that the soul is obliged

to remake the lost union between opposites: 'La douleur est la dissolution de l'harmonie . . .' (C3 192). This is presumably the process of decreation, a process which is seen here to be inevitable to the soul's reunion with God. But the nature of the harmony which existed in the soul before the decreative process began is obscure; why is decreation and subsequent reunion with God necessary if harmony between the soul and God already exists? The decreative process is usually seen in any case as a destruction of the false harmony in the soul, the false perspective that projects the soul into the future and gives a man the impression of sovereignty. It is clear however from this and from what has gone before that suffering is a necessary prelude to the harmony of opposites, and this harmony for Simone Weil is nowhere better exemplified than in the person of Christ. It is to this central figure that we must now turn in our final chapter, with a consideration of the role of Christ in Simone Weil's personal theology.

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III, \$7

CHRIST

In her 'autobiographie spirituelle', wishing to be as explicit as possible to Fr Perrin on the history of her spiritual development, Simone Weil recounts the circumstances of the first 'meeting' she had with Christ. Having been introduced to the English metaphysical poets by a young Englishman whom she met at Solesmes, she discovered George Herbert's poem 'Love', which she learned by heart and subsequently used to recite as a kind of exercise in attention during her head-ache attacks:

Je croyais le réciter seulement comme un poème, mais à mon insu cette récitation avait la vertu d'une prière. C'est au cours d'une de ces réceptions que . . . le Christ lui-même est descendu et m'a prise. (AD 38)

It is in the light of this fundamental experience, totally unexpected, and other subsequent ones, that all her speculation on the nature and significance of Christ's role must be seen. At the heart of this speculation there lies this 'contact réel, de personne à personne, ici-bas, entre un être humain et Dieu' (ibid.) which she had experienced,¹ and her love of the 'Dieu des philosophes', the God of Plato and the Pythagoreans, must be set against her interpretation of these as mystical philosophers. The rational intellect must go as far as it can,

¹On the idea of contact, see Narcy, op. cit., pp. 10 ff.

but there comes a point where mystical contact is the only form of advance.

Simone Weil's philosophy is essentially Christocentric, not only by virtue of this personal contact with Christ which she experienced, but also through the fact that her intellectual speculation on religion centred around the 'hub' of the figure of Christ. Her great sympathy for the religions of antiquity should not blind us to the fact that it was never Osiris, or Dionysos, or Job, with whom she had mystical contact, but with Christ. Other deities were 'prefigurations' of Christ, who, while not as 'complete' as Christ, nevertheless possessed the same power for salvation for the society in which they were believed to be incarnate. What is of importance here is the degree of love and attention directed towards the deity, whoever he may be.

The central position of the figure of Christ for Simone Weil was due to his mediating role. He is the union of all mediation themes, 'la médiation même' (IP 163), and this chapter will attempt to trace, in Simone Weil's interpretation of Christ, elements of mediation already considered, beginning with the concept of Christ as Saviour-God, and his relationship with other Saviour-gods of antiquity.

The connexion between the Christ-story and myths of death and resurrection (III, §3) is an obvious one, and the anthropological implications of this connexion have long been a subject of study by scholars.¹ But there are radical differences too, which Simone Weil does not appear to have appreciated fully. Her insistence that there may have been 'des incarnations [du Verbe] antérieures à Jésus' (LR 18) implies that, whereas these incarnations may have had the value of prophecies, and have been therefore less complete than Christ's incarnation, they were nevertheless of the same nature as Christ (whether or not they were historical figures; i.e. they fulfilled the same function with regard to man [LR 187]). But the nature of the Christian Incarnation is by its own definition exclusive. The relation of Jesus to God

is of such a kind that it could not be repeated in one other individual--that to speak, in fact, of its being repeated in one other individual is a contradiction in terms, since any individual standing in that relation to God would be Jesus, and that Jesus, in virtue of this relation, has the same absolute claim upon all men's worship and loyalty as belongs to God.²

¹See among others J. M. Robertson, Pagan Christs (London 1911).

²Edwin Bevan, Hellenism and Christianity (London 1921), p. 271, in James, op. cit., pp. 180-1.

Simone Weil does not accept this exclusiveness and uniqueness and consequently can refer to Dionysos, Apollo, Prometheus, Love, Proserpine and so forth, as different names for a single deity, 'le Verbe' (LR 20), which had its most complete incarnation in Christ. Her conviction that other traditions presented equally authentic spirituality is seen also of course in her association of a particular religion with a particular culture, and in her belief that changing one's religion was a very dangerous thing to do (LR 34).

If we consider only the mystery-gods, there is another important difference between their role and that of Christ, which Simone Weil does not seem to have considered significant. The function of the Mystery-religions was essentially to assure everlasting life for their adherents; the Osirian ritual, for example, was designed to secure salvation after death for the souls of the dead by their assimilation with the god.¹ Christ's role on the other hand was the saving of man from sin through belief in his Godhead and in the efficacy of his death and resurrection. Simone Weil's interpretation of the Saviour lies

¹S. G. F. Brandon, 'Ritual Technique of Salvation', in The Saviour God, p. 18.

somewhere between the two. The Saviour's role is to save from sin in the sense of healing the breach between God and man caused by creation. His function is thus mediatory. The emphasis is on distance, and on the need for a mean term to close that distance. There is very little emphasis on everlasting life, which was one of the least of Simone Weil's concerns.

On the historicity of Christ's incarnation, it is difficult to be categoric about Simone Weil's precise belief. She did not deny the historical Incarnation--her interpretation of the symbol of the Cross involves the meeting-point of time and eternity in crucifixion--but, as in her lack of interest in the Resurrection of Christ which she did not actually deny, the impression is given that it was of very little importance to her. What mattered was the eternal significance of incarnation, rather than its particular manifestation. The ambivalence of her position, and the richness of its possibilities, are indicated in the following note:

L'histoire du Christ est un symbole, une métaphore.
 Mais on croyait autrefois que les métaphores se produisent comme événements dans le monde. Dieu est le
 suprême poète.

(CS 150)

As in the case of the other mediator-gods considered in an

earlier chapter, emphasis is placed, in an evaluation of Christ's role, on the part played by suffering. The efficacy of incarnation does not depend on incarnation as such, but on the suffering this entails. In the first place, incarnation necessarily implies suffering, since it involves the separation of God from God (CS 27). In addition, Simone Weil sees Christ, like Plato's god Love, as leading a life of wandering and hardship, 'comme il convient à notre frère' (IP 69). She lays much emphasis on the fact that 'le Christ était pauvre et vagabond' (ibid.), and on his consequent identity with the sufferings of mankind. The connexion which Simone Weil makes between Christ and Prometheus depends on this bond between God and man; Prometheus, the 'instituteur des hommes', was 'crucified' by Zeus for giving wisdom to man: 'C'est en crucifiant Prométhée que Zeus a ouvert aux hommes la route de la sagesse' (SG 45). Simone Weil associates this with the belief of St. John of the Cross when he declares that, in Simone Weil's words, 'la participation par la souffrance à la Croix du Christ permet seule de pénétrer dans les profondeurs de la sagesse divine' (ibid.). Both are examples of the Orphic $\tau\tilde{\upsilon}\ \pi\tilde{\alpha}\tilde{\nu}\sigma\epsilon\iota\ \mu\tilde{\alpha}\rho\varsigma$. She also quotes frequently the passage from the Epistle to the Hebrews, where Christ is

spoken of as being 'made perfect' by his sufferings, and that having been made perfect he became 'the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him'.¹ It is thus only by assimilation to the suffering Christ, by participation in his sufferings, that salvation for man is possible. The Cross for man is consent to death, primarily spiritual death, that of the 'partie charnelle de l'âme', but also implying possible physical death, as in the case of Christ. Since this suffering is the path to knowledge, and since this death is only the extreme limit of suffering, it can truly be said that 'la Croix du Christ est la seule porte de la connaissance' (C3 50). The particular significance for Simone Weil of the term 'knowledge' has already been considered, but it should perhaps be emphasised once again that it is spiritual rather than intellectual knowledge which is meant.

By his crucifixion, Christ also fulfils Simone Weil's particular definition of a redeemer. Christ is the perfectly pure being who transforms evil into suffering, and thus prevents evil from being further transferred. 'Toute la violence criminelle de l'Empire romain . . . s'est heurtée contre le

¹Heb. V. 9. See e.g. C2 242.

Christ, et en lui est devenue pure souffrance' (C3 142); the redemptive function here consists in breaking the horizontal movement of evil and directing it upwards. In this transformation evil is experienced by Christ, but not as evil:

Le mal n'est senti que dans un être pur. Mais il n'y est pas du mal. Le mal est extérieur à soi-même. Là où il est il n'est pas senti. Il est senti là où il n'est pas. Le sentiment du mal n'est pas un mal.

(C3 13)

Of the two forms of evil, sin and suffering, the former is thus experienced by those who commit or pass on violence, the latter by those who consent to break its monotonous chain. Simone Weil emphasises the violence and degradation of Christ's death; redemptive suffering is essentially a violent injustice inflicted by men on another, and consists in submitting to force (C3 143). There was consequently nothing glorious about Christ's death:

Le Christ était un malheureux. Il n'est pas mort comme un martyr: Il est mort comme un criminel de droit commun, mélangé aux larrons, seulement un peu plus ridicule. Car le malheur est ridicule. (AD 88)

Christ's death represents the ultimate conquest of worldly force over spiritual weakness; but had there been no crucifixion there could have been no victory of the spirit. As we have seen, for Simone Weil worldly achievement or con-

quest is incompatible with spirituality. This goes a long way towards explaining her lack of interest in the resurrection, which was in a sense a triumph over Christ's worldly enemies. In Simone Weil's view the spiritual, although emanating from the one God who is the Good, can never beat worldly force on its own ground. It can by definition offer no resistance, since if it resists it is no longer related to the Good.

Christ is mediator between God and man by virtue of his Incarnation and suffering. There is another form of incarnation, however, and this is to be found in the concept of the Eucharist, perfect purity present in matter. God is here present in matter in a very direct sense: Christ by his sacrifice offers himself as flesh and blood to man. The attitude of man towards Christ's presence in the Eucharist must be one of love, rather than one of belief 'pour la partie de moi-même qui appréhende les faits' (C2 149). It is this love which enables the soul to make contact with God through a simple piece of matter, and by love Christ in the Eucharist becomes a mediator: 'Aimer le Christ dans l'eucharistie, c'est l'y rencontrer. Bâton d'aveugle' (C2 171). This meeting with Christ is a source of grace, of spiritual energy, just as chlorophyll mediates the sun's energy and transforms it into

substance for the nourishment of our own bodies (CO 268; see III, §4).

Besides being mediator between man and God Simone Weil considers that Christ is also mediator between man and man, in every case where there is pure 'amitié' of the kind described in the previous chapter. The consent to the abandonment of egocentric interests is automatically consent to the presence of Christ; thus 'en quelque point de l'espace et du temps que se trouvent deux vrais amis, chose extrêmement rare, le Christ est entre eux, quelque [sic] soit le nom du dieu qu'ils invoquent. Toute amitié vraie passe par le Christ' (IP 140). There is clearly here a reference to the idea already considered (III, §6), that the opposites I/another are at such a distance from each other that they can only have their union in God.

The exercise of love for one's neighbour also demands the presence of Christ. This is sometimes described in terms of the in-dwelling of Christ in the 'benefactor's' soul; the benefactor is 'porteur du Christ', and thus causes Christ to enter the soul of the one in need, along with the food which he is given. 'Si ce don est bien donné et bien reçu, le passage d'un morceau de pain à un autre est quelque

chose comme une vraie communion' (AD 101). Sometimes the movement of Christ towards the needy one is described as a three-term combination, in which, as has been seen, the self of the benefactor disappears in order that Christ and the other should come into contact. 'Il ne faut pas secourir le prochain pour le Christ, mais par le Christ' (C2 327). If acts are accomplished thus, then one cannot avoid beneficial acts; one does not do things with half an eye on God, but because attention focused on the plight of the needy one has removed all possibility of acting otherwise. Simone Weil comments on the attitude of those who clothed the naked Christ:

Ils étaient dans un état tel qu'ils ne pouvaient pas s'empêcher de nourrir ceux qui avaient faim, d'habiller ceux qui étaient nus; ils ne le faisaient aucunement pour le Christ, ils ne pouvaient pas s'empêcher de le faire parce que la compassion du Christ était en eux.

(C3 37)

*

So far the roles ascribed by Simone Weil to Christ have been ones which belong in one form or another within the Christian theological tradition. She is less orthodox however in the relationship which she establishes between Christ and the various mathematical mediators seen in the

previous chapter. Christ is, firstly, the proportional mean. This is indicated according to Simone Weil in Christ's use of the various formulae describing Christ's relationship with man in terms of God's relationship with Christ, for example 'as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you' (John XX. 21). Such a formula can be compared with passages where Plato describes mediation between God and man by means of proportion (SG 167) and indicates that Christ thought of himself in these terms, giving at the same time an added prophetic significance to Greek geometry. Eliade also takes up this comparison of Christ's relationship to God and man's relationship to Christ, but gives it a different interpretation. For him it is primarily a question of example to be imitated, an example which has the virtue of conferring salvation on those that follow it:

L'humilité n'est qu'une vertu; mais celle qui s'exerce d'après l'exemple du Sauveur est un acte religieux et un moyen de salut: 'Comme je vous ai aimés, vous aussi, aimez-vous les uns les autres'.¹

This interpretation does not invalidate Simone Weil's, but gives the concept a different emphasis. If one thinks of Christ as an example, then clearly for the example to be effi-

¹Le Mythe de l'éternel retour (Paris 1949), p. 47.

cacious it must be followed, there must be a conscious choice on the part of man to model his life on Christ's. The concept is thus primarily ethical. For Simone Weil however, proportion is established, and contact between ~~man~~ and God made possible, by the very fact of Christ's mediation which, as we noted earlier, is not really dependent on Christ's incarnation in time. Reconciliation with God is thus in a sense automatic, since mediation has existed from the beginning of time. It should be stressed however that this is only the logical extension of Simone Weil's application of mathematical concepts to the figure of Christ. Clearly mathematical concepts are eternal and independent of human history and ethical considerations, but it would be wrong to suppose that Simone Weil considered salvation automatic or independent of morality. The difficulty seems to stem from the comparison itself. Whereas in religious terms Simone Weil was convinced that for mediation to be efficacious man must become Christ-like, in mathematical terms a number has an automatic relationship with unity, when once a proportional mean has been constructed.

The same observations apply to a concept related in Simone Weil's mind to that of proportion: assimilation.

Simone Weil takes as the basic expression of this the passage in the Epinomis where Plato speaks of 'l'assimilation des nombres non naturellement semblables entre eux', adding that 'il est manifeste que Dieu a produit cette merveille et non les hommes'.¹ Assimilation is thus the making alike, through proportion, of numbers which have no natural connexion. In theological terms,

l'assimilation est l'unique contact avec Dieu, et la foi dans la réalité de ce contact implique la foi dans la possibilité de la médiation.

. . . l'assimilation de l'homme à Dieu, c'est la découverte de la médiation.
(C2 367)

If Christ is considered as the supreme mediator, then his incarnation will automatically ensure the assimilation of man to God. There is no essential difference between geometrical assimilation and the assimilation which is made possible by Christ's historical incarnation. The unity between the two is made clear in the following comment:

'L'amitié est une égalité faite d'harmonie'. Si on prend harmonie au sens de moyenne géométrique, si on

¹990, in IP 115: ταῦτα δὲ μαθόντι τούτοις ἐφεξῆς ἐστὶν ὁ καλοῦσι μὲν σφόδρα γελοῖον ὄνομα γεωμετρίαν, τῶν οὐκ ὄντων δὲ ὁμοίων ἀλλήλοις ὀύσει ἀριθμῶν ὁμοίωσις πρὸς τὴν τῶν ἐπιπέδων μοῖραν γεγονυῖα ἐστὶ διαφανής· ὁ δὲ θάυμα οὐκ ἀνθρώπινον ἀλλὰ γεγονὸς θεῖον φανερόν ἃν γίγνοιτο τῇ δυνάμει συννοεῖν.

conçoit que la seule médiation entre Dieu et l'homme est un être à la fois Dieu et homme, on passe directement de cette formule pythagoricienne aux merveilleuses formules de l'Evangile de saint Jean. Par l'assimilation avec le Christ, qui ne fait qu'un avec Dieu, l'être humain, gisant tout au fond de sa misère, atteint une espèce d'égalité avec Dieu, une égalité qui est amour.

(IP 132)

Simone Weil's interpretation of the logos doctrine runs along similar lines. We have already seen how she identified *λόγος* with *ἀριθμός*, and gave to both the meaning of 'relationship' (III, §6). Developing this concept, she considers that *λόγος* in a Christian context should always be translated 'Mediation' rather than 'Word' (SG 162). Christ was given the name of 'relationship' by St. John, she claims (IP 166). Her version of the beginning of John's Gospel thus reads 'A l'origine était la Médiation, et la Médiation était auprès de Dieu, et la Médiation était Dieu' (SG 167). She is implicitly denying here all connexion of the term with the Hebrew 'Word' or 'Wisdom' of God,¹ and the genius of John in bridging in a single word the gulf between the Jewish and Greek worlds.²

¹See e.g. E. Hatch, The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages on the Christian Church, Hibbert Lectures (1888), pp. 199-200.

²H. Chadwick however does not consider the case for regarding John's Gospel 'as an apologia to the non-Jewish world'

For Simone Weil the *λόγος* was Greek, and lost none of its earlier significance on entering the strictly Christian tradition. When she claims that Heraclitus and Cleanthes gave the name *λόγος* to God (SG 159) it is clear that this is a prefiguration of Christ, the supreme *λόγος*, and she would certainly have approved Justin's definition of Heraclitus as a 'Christian before Christ' because of his discovery of the immanent *λόγος*.¹

The idea of the mediation of Christ reaches its culmination in the concept of harmony, that harmony between opposites which is the result of proportion. Christ is in the first place harmony within himself; as the perfectly just redeemer he is the union of perfect justice with the appearance of perfect injustice, and thus reconciles these two opposites (C2 367). He is also harmony within God: 'Dans la Trinité il est l'objet, et l'objet est médiateur entre le sujet et l'acte . . . ' (CS 87). This note should presumably be interpreted in the light of the writing on the Trinity already con-

to be very strong. Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition (London 1966), p. 4.

¹Charles Norris Cochrane, Christianity and Classical Culture (New York 1957), p. 230.

sidered; the 'thought' of God must be another thinking being, since God should not be referred to in the passive voice. Hence the 'thought' of God is the Son, or the Image, or the Wisdom of God, who is mediator between God ~~and~~ the subject and God the object thought (IP 128). The difficulty arising here of course is that the 'objet pensé' should, according to Simone Weil, also be a thinking being, as it is the third person of the Trinity, but this is clearly impossible.

The harmony which Christ establishes between the opposites God and man has already been considered to a large extent in the concept of Christ as proportional mean. A variation on this can be seen in Simone Weil's use of the image of Christ as the 'key', uniting those things which, according to Philolaos, had no common bond and had therefore to be locked together in harmony (IP 164). Christ was the key to this bond holding together Creator and creation (ibid.), the *λόγος* reconciling the unlimited with the limiting (SG 172). He was also a key in the sense of the key of knowledge, since knowledge is a reflection of being. Simone Weil interprets in this highly Platonic fashion Christ's warning to the Pharisees: 'Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge' (Luke XI. 52):

Cette clef, c'était lui-même, que les siècles antérieurs à lui avaient aimé d'avance, et que les Pharisiens avaient nié et allaient faire mourir.

(IP 164)

Christ is mediator between God and man, and God and creation in general, but he also mediates between God and inert matter. This form of mediation seems linked in Simone Weil's mind to that between the principle of limitation, God, and that which receives its limitation from the outside, the 'indeterminate' (see IP 130). It forms for Simone Weil a special case, since God and matter have nothing in common; God can only come into contact with a person, and so all three terms, God, matter, and the principle of union between the two must be persons. The difficulty is resolved in the crucifixion, where God in the person of Christ was reduced on the Cross to mere inert matter; 'cette intersection, c'est un être humain au moment de l'agonie, quand les circonstances précédant l'agonie ont été brutales au point d'en faire une chose' (IP 131). If considering Christ on the Cross to be a 'mere thing' seems to take away the point of the divine sacrifice, it must be remembered that here Simone Weil is expressing what for her was a genuine contradiction, a true 'mystery', and that the nature of language is such that both terms of the contradiction

cannot be expressed simultaneously. Simone Weil cannot mean that Christ was only inert matter, since if he had been his mediating function would have been destroyed. He is God and matter, reconciling those supreme opposites in what for Simone Weil was the only way possible, through the sufferings of the Cross.

The reconciliation of God and matter through the Cross is only one aspect of the supreme harmony of opposites, that between God and Christ at the moment when he cried, 'My God, why hast thou forsaken me?' God forsaken by God gives the maximum of harmony in the Pythagorean sense, the maximum of unity--for God is eternally One--and the maximum of distance. Simone Weil implies that this distance and separation was for a moment complete, so that there might be a perfect model of the harmony of opposites:

Pour qu'il y ait un modèle parfait, absolu, de ré-unification des contraires, il faut qu'il y ait dissolution de l'unité des deux contraires suprêmes. Le Saint-Esprit s'est retiré un moment du Christ. C'est ainsi que la Passion est Rédemption. (C3 192)

But this moment of abandonment is also a moment of supreme love, 'ce moment est la perfection incompréhensible de l'amour. C'est l'amour qui passe toute connaissance' (IP 131). As in human affliction, where the realisation that there is no answer

to the soul's 'why?' is the path to mystical knowledge, so Christ's agonised appeal to his Father and the Father's silence form the 'suprême harmonie' of which the universe is merely the vibration (IP 168-9). The universe is thus grounded in the love between Father and Son which at the moment of crucifixion triumphs over the distance between God and God composed of the totality of time and space. It is a love based on affliction and on the supreme weakness and powerlessness of God. This supreme harmony is a model of that established between the two extreme opposites, between the God who seems so remote that in some ways it is more accurate to deny his existence, and man subject to necessity and incapable of independent spiritual progress, which opposites find their resolution in a Christ-figure who is unbounded by a single historical irruption in time, who is 'l'agneau égorgé depuis la constitution du monde' (IP 27). The harmony of opposites is a perpetual cosmic process, and at their point of resolution in all time is the person of Christ.

CONCLUSION

Christ, the supreme mediator, bridges the gulf which creation has set between man and God. Other creatures and objects can perform this function in so far as, in their several ways, they imitate Christ. But it must be emphasised once again that in this concept of mediation there is no 'once and for all', no moment at which the conflict God-man, Good-necessity is finally resolved. The exigencies of language and of logic have obliged us to present this study in the form of a dialectic, where the statement of opposition and of duality is eventually resolved in mediation. This indicates a historical progression towards unity which is misleading, since in Simone Weil's thought duality and mediation are different facets of the same reality. As we saw (III, §6), contradiction becomes a mediator by being accepted as contradiction, and not by being resolved into non-existence. Any resolution must be above and beyond the contradiction itself.

The concept of paradox is obviously of fundamental importance here. Duality and its resolution in mediation are so inextricably bound together that the apprehension of the one almost necessarily involves the apprehension of the other. To realise the distance between the Good and necessity is already a sort of resolution of duality, but a resolution which

in no way compromises the two poles of the contradiction.

'Savoir que Dieu est séparé, c'est le chemin pour le trouver.'¹
Distance itself becomes a bridge, just as the separation of Father and Son forms the supreme harmony. Conversely, the very notion of bridge implies a gulf to be crossed, a gulf which is not abolished by the building of the bridge. The definition of 'bridge' involves the concept of 'the bridgeable'.

This contradiction is the basis of the 'knowledge' upon which Simone Weil insisted as a means of salvation. It will be obvious that it is not a question of intellectual knowledge alone, that salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and not merely of his reasoning power. The concept of the bridge with its associated dualism is a profoundly moral one as well as a purely religious one, affecting the way man views his condition, and the possibilities for progress within this world, as well as the concept he forms of the Divine Being. To one who grasps clearly the gulf between the Good and the necessary, and draws the correct conclusion, the necessity of a mediator, the confusion between means and ends is impossible, the earth and its creatures become a way, and the sense of

¹DP, p. 276.

exile is complemented by the certainty of the reality--though not necessarily the existence--of the Good.

Another conclusion can be drawn from our analysis. If the concept of mediation depends on the perception of fundamental duality, it becomes clear that mediators have no objective existence as such. They exist of course as objects of perception, but for them to perform the function of mediators it is necessary for man to become conscious of the gulf between the Good and the necessary, a consciousness which brings with it the need for mediation, and hence mediators themselves. Mediation thus depends on a way of looking at things, rather than on objective reality, another proof if proof there need be that the way of knowledge is not the way of intellect alone. The 'unreal' objects of the cave, therefore, which have reality as objects of perception but not as objects of love, take on a new reality as mediators, as bearers of man's love towards its true object.

The role of creatures as mediators is hidden from man, because of his natural tendency to self-expansion, to spill over into things so that he does not see their essential purity. In this way, the concept of mediation implies necessarily a renunciation, a retreat of the 'I' so that man can

perceive the infinitely fragile and precious existence of other beings. This is the root of Simone Weil's asceticism, and it is a bitter comment on accepted values that this affirmation of the absolute right of other creatures to exist, and of their fundamental goodness as means towards the absolute Good, should be the most criticised aspect of her thought. If her concept of salvation necessarily implies suffering, it is only because in a world ruled by force any renunciation of the power to wield force will be experienced as a tearing apart of man's whole being.

So the perception of God in the world, in beauty, in objects and creatures of absolute purity, can only follow and not precede the experience of total isolation from God. Only the soul that has appreciated its complete exile in the world, and has undergone the dark night of the soul, can experience the true presence of God. That this presence, resulting from the apprehension of absence, was a reality to Simone Weil, cannot be doubted. Her expression of the mystical union with God through his mediation in this world reaches its climax in the following joyful affirmation:

Quand on sait qu'il y a identité entre 'le rapport' et 'la médiation divine', on sait qu'on vit dans la médiation divine, non comme un poisson dans la mer, mais

comme une goutte d'eau dans la mer. En nous, hors de nous, ici-bas, dans le royaume de Dieu, nulle part il n'y a autre chose. Et la médiation, c'est exactement la même chose que l'Amour.

(IP 166)

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APPENDIX A

'Un peu d'histoire à propos du Maroc'¹

Dans tous les milieux, dans toute la presse, de l'extrême droite à l'extrême gauche, on s'est beaucoup ému au sujet du Maroc, il n'y a pas encore bien longtemps. A présent que le calme est provisoirement revenu, il est utile de rappeler quelques faits historiques. Il s'agit, bien entendu, de faits avérés, vérifiés, incontestables.

C'est après la défaite de 1871 que des hommes d'Etat Français, en quête de compensations de prestige, se tournèrent vers les conquêtes coloniales. Le gouvernement allemand les encourageait, voyant là un dérivatif à l'esprit de revanche; Bismarck, comme d'ailleurs beaucoup de nationalistes français à cette époque, ne comprenait pas l'importance des colonies. Quand l'Allemagne s'intéressa à son tour aux colonies, la France l'avait devancée de très loin.

Au début du siècle, l'Etat français, qui possédait l'Algérie depuis 1847, la Tunisie depuis 1881, songeait au Maroc. Le Maroc était depuis 1881 l'objet d'une convention internationale qui garantissait des droits économiques égaux aux Etats européens.

En 1904 fut signé un traité franco-anglais, le traité était le résultat d'un marchandage. Jusque là, la France avait défendu contre l'Angleterre l'indépendance du peuple

¹Syndicats, no. 17, 4 févr. 1937. In this article Simone Weil gives expression to some of the ideas on the colonial question outlined in II, §3. It is included here because of its relative inaccessibility.

égyptien, au nom des grands principes; en 1904, elle livra le peuple égyptien à l'Angleterre en échange du Maroc. Le traité, dans ses clauses publiques, garantissait l'indépendance du Maroc, tout en accordant à la France le droit d'y 'maintenir l'ordre'; les clauses secrètes, dévoilées plus tard, prévoyaient le partage du Maroc entre la France et l'Espagne.

L'Allemagne réagit vigoureusement. Elle affirmait que le statut du Maroc, objet d'une convention internationale, ne pouvait être modifié que par une conférence internationale. La folle intransigeance de Delcassé, ministre français des Affaires étrangères, amena l'Europe au bord même de la guerre. Il fut débarqué juste à temps. Son successeur céda. La conférence internationale eut lieu.

Il en sortit l'Acte d'Algésiras (1906), qui garantissait une fois de plus l'indépendance du Maroc, accordait des droits à peu près égaux aux divers Etats européens, et confiait exclusivement la tâche de maintenir l'ordre à une police marocaine, que devaient diriger pendant cinq ans des instructeurs français et espagnols.

En mai 1911, la France envoya une expédition militaire occuper Fez, capitale du Maroc. La raison invoquée était une menace de troubles, qui, disait-on, mettait en danger la vie des Européens. De telles affirmations sont toujours impossibles à vérifier après coup. En tout cas l'occupation militaire de Fez était une violation criante de l'Acte d'Algésiras. L'Allemagne n'avait pas tenté de s'opposer à cette violation, ce qu'elle désirait, c'était moins empêcher le partage du

Maroc qu'y avoir sa part. Elle fit pourtant de sérieuses réserves.

Une fois l'ordre rétabli, la France continua d'occuper Fez, ce qui constituait une seconde violation de l'Acte encore plus grave. En juillet, l'Allemagne, en guise de riposte, envoya un navire de guerre devant la côte marocaine, à Agadir. Une deuxième fois, l'Europe était au bord de la guerre. Caillaux venait d'arriver au pouvoir. Entre lui et le gouvernement allemand il y eut de longs pourparlers, pendant lesquels la guerre sembla plusieurs fois imminente; mais de part et d'autre on préférait alors l'éviter. Un traité fut signé le 4 novembre 1911. L'Allemagne abandonnait le Maroc à la France, et recevait en échange une partie du Congo français, qui venait s'ajouter à son Cameroun.

Ce traité, succès éclatante pour la diplomatie française, fut ressenti en Allemagne comme une défaite et une humiliation nationale. Le ministre allemand des colonies démissionna.

On peut penser que la guerre de 1914 fut pour une part un simple prolongement de ce conflit de 1911. C'était du moins l'avis de Jaurès, qui a dit dans son discours suprême, le 25 juillet 1914: 'Pénétrer par la force, par les armes, au Maroc, c'était ouvrir à l'Europe l'ère des ambitions, des convoitises, et des conflits.'

Aujourd'hui, où l'Allemagne s'apprête à remettre en question les clauses coloniales du Traité de Versailles, peut-il y avoir de nouveau un problème franco-allemand du Maroc?

Il y aurait bien des choses à dire à ce sujet. Ce n'est pas le moment. Mais il y a une question qu'on ne peut s'em-

pêcher de poser, et de poser avec angoisse et honte.

L'histoire va-t-elle se recommencer ? La laisserons-nous se recommencer ?

S. Weill [sic]

APPENDIX B

Extract from a letter to Dermenghem (1940)¹

Je me permets de m'adresser à vous maintenant parce que je compte aller en Afrique du Nord et, si possible, au Maroc. J'y ai demandé d'ailleurs un poste dans l'enseignement; je ne compte guère l'obtenir; mais, de toutes manières, je vais tenter d'y aller. J'aspire depuis longtemps à connaître autre chose que l'Europe; les événements actuels ne sont pas faits pour affaiblir ce désir. Depuis quelque temps, je me sens de plus en plus attirée vers ce qui reste encore de cultures orientales, et notamment vers les choses musulmanes. Je vous serais infiniment reconnaissante si vous pouviez me fournir quelques indications sur les choses et les hommes qu'il y a intérêt à tenter de connaître au Maroc. En ce qui concerne les hommes, je pense aux Français et aux Arabes, mais surtout, bien entendu, à ces derniers.

Je désirerais me rendre compte principalement de deux choses: quel est le véritable caractère du régime imposé à la population, et quels effets il produit sur les âmes; qu'est-ce qui reste encore de vivant, d'authentique, de vraiment intéressant, trace d'un passé plus glorieux et présage peut-être d'un meilleur avenir, par dessous la conquête.

Car je ne pense pas, comme beaucoup des hommes de bonne volonté qui s'intéressent aux populations colonisées, que l'idéal fût pour elles de devenir des provinces françaises

¹This unpublished letter, besides indicating Simone Weil's concern with the colonial problem (see II, §3), shows how her interest in the Arab world and in Islam was developing towards the end of her life (see II, §4).

peuplées de Français moyens. La considération des droits des individus, si importante qu'elle soit, ne me paraît pas plus importante que la conservation de trésors collectifs constitués par les traditions, les mœurs et l'esprit des populations soumises à la conquête coloniale. On peut imaginer peut-être--c'est du moins matière à doute--des situations où l'influence occidentale se combinerait aux traditions pour donner quelque chose d'original et de vivant. Mais même au temps où les Français étaient des citoyens, avoir un empire fait de 110 millions de citoyens français, au lieu de 40 millionsmillions de citoyens et 70 millions de sujets, ne m'aurait pas paru une solution souhaitable.

APPENDIX C

Letter to Jean Wahl (1942)¹

Cher ami,

Je voulais vous écrire depuis longtemps. On s'est manqué de peu à Marseille (une lettre de vous, envoyée d'Aix, m'a suivie ici). On se manque encore ici. Sommes-nous destinés à nous revoir un jour à Paris? Ou jamais? L'incertitude qui enveloppe toutes choses contraint de vivre soit au jour le jour, soit dans l'éternité, soit des deux manières à la fois, ce qui est le mieux.

Vous me dites des choses obscures qui semblent impliquer que certains répandent des bruits bizarres sur moi? Affirmerait-on par hasard que j'ai des sympathies du côté de Vichy? Si c'est cela, vous pouvez démentir. En juin 1940, j'ai ardemment désiré qu'on défende Paris, et je ne suis partie qu'après avoir vu avec consternation sur les murs l'affiche déclarant la ville ouverte. Je me suis arrêtée à Nevers dans l'espoir qu'il y aurait un front sur la Loire. J'ai appris avec consternation aussi la nouvelle de l'armistice, et j'ai immédiatement décidé que je tenterais de passer en Angleterre. J'ai essayé toutes les possibilités qui s'offraient à moi à cet effet, y compris des moyens dangereux. Je n'ai quitté

¹Deucalion, No. 4 (oct. 1952), 253-7. Although this letter has appeared in published form, it is reproduced here because of its relative inaccessibility. It shows clearly Simone Weil's reactions to her exile, and the subjects which occupied her mind at the time, particularly in the field of religious philosophy. For extracts already quoted, see II, §§3, 4.

la France qu'avec cette pensée. En attendant, avant mon départ de France, je participais à la diffusion de la littérature illégale. Aussitôt arrivée ici, j'ai fatigué tout le monde par mes supplications pour obtenir d'être envoyée en Angleterre. Je pars enfin, grâce à André Philip, qui m'embauche dans ses services (soit dit en passant, c'est quelqu'un de très, très bien, tout à fait de premier ordre). Depuis le jour où, après une lutte intérieure très dure, j'ai décidé en moi-même que malgré mes inclinations pacifistes la première des obligations serait désormais à mes yeux de poursuivre la destruction d'Hitler avec ou sans espoir de réussir, depuis ce jour je n'ai jamais varié; et ce jour se place au moment de l'entrée d'Hitler à Prague, c'est-à-dire, si je me souviens bien, en mai 1939. C'était peut-être tardif. J'ai peut-être pris cette attitude trop tard. Je le crois, et je me le reproche amèrement. Mais, enfin, depuis que je l'ai prise, je n'en ai pas bougé. Je vous prie donc de démentir catégoriquement tous les bruits contraires.

Ce qui a pu donner lieu à ces bruits, c'est que je n'aime pas beaucoup entendre des gens parfaitement confortables ici traiter de lâches et de traîtres ceux qui en France se débrouillent comme ils peuvent dans une situation terrible. Il y a un petit nombre de Français seulement pour qui il soit à peu près sûr que ces adjectifs sont mérités; on ne devrait pas les étendre au-delà. Il y a eu une lâcheté, une trahison collective, à savoir l'armistice; toute la nation en porte la responsabilité, y compris Paul Reynaud, qui n'aurait jamais dû démissionner. Pour moi, l'armistice m'a consternée dès le début; mais malgré cela je pense que chaque Français, moi y

compris, en porte la responsabilité autant que Pétain; car sur le moment, à ce que j'ai vu, la nation dans son ensemble a accueilli l'armistice avec soulagement; et il en résulte une responsabilité nationale indivisible. D'autre part, depuis lors, je crois que Pétain a fait à peu près tout ce que la situation générale et son propre état physique et mental lui permettaient de faire pour limiter les dégâts. On ne devrait employer le mot de traître que pour désigner ceux dont on est certain qu'ils désirent la victoire de l'Allemagne et font ce qu'ils peuvent à cet effet. Quant aux autres, certains de ceux qui acceptent de travailler avec Vichy ou même avec les Allemands peuvent avoir des motifs honorables répondant à des situations déterminées. D'autres peuvent être l'objet de pressions telles qu'ils ne pourraient résister sans héroïsme. Or, la plupart des gens qui s'érigent en juges ici n'ont jamais eu l'occasion d'éprouver s'ils sont eux-mêmes des héros. J'ai horreur des attitudes faciles, injustes et fausses, surtout quand la pression générale semble les rendre presque obligatoires.

J'aurais beaucoup désiré vous voir, principalement pour savoir si vos expériences personnelles ont modifié votre 'Weltanschauung', et comment. Je suppose qu'après tout cela le mot 'Dasein' doit avoir pour vous une autre résonance qu'auparavant. Il n'y a rien de tel que la mauvaise fortune pour donner le sentiment de l'existence. Excepté quand elle donne le sentiment de l'irréalité. L'un ou l'autre peuvent se produire. Ou même l'un et l'autre. En tout cas, il me semble que de telles expériences doivent donner une autre signification à tous les mots du vocabulaire philosophique.

Je ne peux pas me détacher assez des événements actuels pour faire des efforts de rédaction, de composition, etc; et pourtant une partie de mon esprit est perpétuellement occupée à des choses absolument étrangères à l'actualité (quoique les problèmes actuels y aient un rapport indirect). Je m'en tire en remplissant cahier après cahier de réflexions notées à la hâte, sans ordre et sans suite.

Je crois qu'une pensée identique se trouve exprimée d'une manière très précise et avec des modalités à peine différentes, dans les mythologies antiques; dans la philosophie de Phérékydès, Thalès, Anaximandre, Héraclite, Pythagore, Platon et des stoïciens grecs; dans la poésie grecque de la grande époque; dans le folk-lore universel; dans les Upanishads et la Bhagavad-Gita; dans les écrits des Taoïstes chinois et dans certains courants bouddhistes; dans ce qui reste des écritures sacrées d'Egypte; dans les dogmes de la foi chrétienne et les écrits des plus grands mystiques chrétiens, surtout St. Jean de la Croix; dans certaines hérésies, surtout la tradition cathare et manichéenne. Je crois que cette pensée est la vérité, et qu'elle a besoin aujourd'hui d'une expression moderne et occidentale. C'est-à-dire qu'elle a besoin d'être exprimée à travers la ^a seule chose à peu près bonne que nous ayons en propre, à savoir la science. Cela fait d'autant moins de difficulté qu'elle est elle-même l'origine de la science. Il y a quelques textes qui indiquent avec certitude que la géométrie grecque a son origine dans une pensée religieuse; et il semble bien qu'il s'agisse d'une pensée proche du christiaⁿisme presque jusqu'à l'identité.

Quant aux Juifs, je pense que Moïse a connu cette sagesse et l'a refusée, parce que, comme Maurras, il concevait la religion comme un simple instrument de grandeur nationale; mais quand la nation juive a été détruite par Nabuchodonosor, les Juifs, complètement désorientés et mélangés à toutes sortes de nations, ont reçu cette sagesse sous forme d'influences étrangères, et l'ont fait entrer dans les cadres de leur religion autant que c'était possible. De là viennent, dans l'Ancien Testament, le livre de Job (que je crois être une traduction mutilée et remaniée d'un livre sacré concernant un Dieu incarné, souffrant, mis à mort et ressuscité), la plupart des Psaumes, le Cantique des Cantiques, les livres sapientiaux (qui viennent peut-être du même courant qui a produit les ouvrages dits hermétiques; les écrits attribués à Denys l'Aréopagite en viennent peut-être aussi), ce qu'on nomme le 'second Isaïe', certains des petits prophètes, le livre de Daniel et celui de Tobie. Presque tout le reste de l'Ancien Testament est un tissu d'horreurs.

Je pense que les 11 premiers chapitres de la Genèse (jusqu'à Abraham) ne peuvent être qu'une traduction déformée et remaniée d'un livre sacré égyptien; qu'Abel, Hénoc et Noé sont des dieux, et que Noé est identique à Osiris, Dionysos, et Prométhée. Que Sem, Japhet et Cham correspondent, sinon à trois races, du moins à trois familles humaines, trois modes de civilisation; et que Cham seul a vu la nudité et l'ivresse de Noé, c'est-à-dire reçu la révélation de la pensée mystique. Sont rattachés à Cham, d'après la Genèse, les Sumériens, les Ethiopiens, les Egyptiens, les Phéniciens, les Egéo-crétois (Philistins); il convient sans doute d'y ajouter les Ibères.

Les peuples rattachés à Japhet et à Sem ont partout conquis et détruit ceux rattachés à Cham, mais n'ont eu de vie spirituelle que quand ils ont consenti à adopter la pensée religieuse et philosophique de ces vaincus. C'est ce qu'ont fait presque tous les Hellènes; les Celtes; les Babyloniens; une partie des Hébreux après le VI^e siècle. Ceux qui par orgueil et volonté de puissance ont refusé d'être instruits, comme les Spartiates, les Romains, les Hébreux avant Nabuchodonosor, probablement les Assyriens, sont restés des brutes sans vie spirituelle et presque sans vie intellectuelle.

Le courant de la pensée 'hamitique' (pour adopter la forme allemande du nom de Cham) se retrouve comme un fil lumineux partout à travers la préhistoire et l'histoire. Il s'est même infiltré dans la mythologie germanique (dans l'histoire de Baldi, dans celle d'Odin pendu à l'Arbre du Monde). Mais partout l'orgueil et la volonté de domination, l'esprit de Japhet et de Sem, tentent de détruire cette pensée. Elle était presque détruite dans toute l'étendue de l'empire romain quand est né le Christ qui en a été une expression parfaite et par suite divine, autant qu'on peut juger d'après les écrits inspirés par lui. Aujourd'hui Hitler et beaucoup d'autres tentent de l'abolir totalement sur toute la surface de la terre.

Je ne vous cacherai pas que le courant de pensée 'existentialiste', pour autant que je le connais, me paraît être du mauvais côté; du côté des pensées étrangères à la révélation reçue et transmise par Noé, ou quel que soit son nom; du côté de la force.

Quoi qu'il en soit, c'est là à peu près l'orientation de

celles de mes préoccupations qui ne se rattachent pas directement à l'actualité. Cela ne m'empêche pas, simultanément, de penser à l'actualité d'une manière continuelle.

Voilà, je crois, plus que des 'hints'. J'aurais plaisir à mon tour de savoir à peu près ce que vous pensez, avant mon départ qui est presque immédiat.

. . . Je souhaite que l'exil ne vous soit pas trop pénible.

Bien cordialement à vous.

Simone Weil

APPENDIX D

'Les Pythagoriciens, Platon et le christianisme'¹

Quand les Pythagoriciens parlent de nombre, il faut savoir qu'ils ont toujours dans l'esprit les rapports géométriques aussi bien qu'arithmétiques, comme les mathématiciens modernes quand ils parlent de nombre généralisé. Ce que les Pythagoriciens nommaient nombre, c'est le rapport de quantité, et d'une manière générale c'est tout rapport.

Ἀριθμός et λόγος sont synonymes dans leur langage.

Logos signifie bien parole, et aussi raison, sagesse, mais avant tout rapport, essentiellement rapport de médiation. C'est bien le sens que ce mot a dans Saint-Jean. 'Au commencement était le Médiateur, et le Médiateur était chez Dieu, et le Médiateur était Dieu.'

Philon, à ce qu'on dit (je ne l'ai pas lu), avait l'idée d'un médiateur, mais différent de Dieu, inférieur à Dieu. Ce n'est pas la pensée de Platon. Car il dit: dans la proportion l'intermédiaire devient premier et dernier; le premier et le dernier deviennent tous deux intermédiaires. Cela n'a aucun sens appliqué à la proportion numérique dont en apparence il est en train de parler, comme 1, 3, 9. Si on pose: 1 est à 3 comme 3 à 9, d'aucune manière 1 et 9 deviennent intermédiaires. En revanche ces mots sont lumineux si on les appli-

¹ Simone Pétrement's title. This unpublished fragment, possibly intended for La Source grecque, is an elaboration of some of the mathematical meditations considered in III, §6.

que à l'Incarnation. Le Christ est Dieu et il est homme. Etant donné que les trois Personnes sont un seul Dieu, par l'Incarnation Dieu est devenu homme-Dieu. D'autre part l'homme devient tel par la foi et l'amour qu'il ne vit plus en lui, mais c'est le Christ qui vit en lui. Platon dit aussi que le lien le plus beau est celui qui a la plus grande capacité de rendre un lui-même et les termes liés. Ce lien lui-même doit donc être unité. Autrement dit il est Dieu.

Quand Platon dit que l'Amour est au milieu de Dieu et de l'homme, il ne s'agit pas d'une égalité de distance. Il s'agit d'une médiation géométrique telle que celle qui apparaît dans de si nombreuses formules de Saint-Jean comme constituant la fonction du Christ. Il y a une inspiration pythagoricienne dans l'évangile de Saint-Jean.

Dans la construction géométrique de la proportion, pour avoir une proportion où le terme intermédiaire soit identique au premier, il suffit de prendre pour premier terme un point. Le second est un diamètre moins un point, c'est à dire le diamètre. La moyenne géométrique entre les deux est alors un point, le point même qui est le premier terme.

Cette interprétation théologique de la géométrie, qui d'ailleurs est simple et lumineuse en elle-même, est appuyée, non seulement par le passage de Proclus cité plus haut, mais encore par un autre fragment de Philolaos extrêmement étrange pour notre mentalité actuelle, et qui montre que depuis la Grèce il s'est opéré à un moment donné un retournement. Ce moment se place sans doute au cours de la Renaissance (non au début). Il s'agirait d'opérer le retournement inverse.

ἴδοις δὲ καὶ οὐ μόνον ἐν τοῖς δαιμονίοις καὶ θείοις πράγμασι τὰν τῷ ἀριθμῷ φύσιν καὶ δύναμιν ἰσχύουσαν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἀνθρωπικοῖς ἔργοις καὶ λόγοις πάντα καὶ κατὰ τὰς δημιουργὰς τὰς τεχνικὰς πᾶσας καὶ κατὰ τὰν μουσικὰν.

On peut voir quelle force a l'essence et la vertu du nombre, non pas seulement dans les choses de Dieu, mais aussi partout dans les actes et les raisonnement des hommes et dans toutes les opérations des diverses techniques et dans la musique.

La métaphore de la porte 'Je suis la porte...' et celle de la clef 'Vous avez ôté la clef de la connaissance' rappelle un des plus beaux textes pythagoriciens sur la médiation entre Dieu et la nature 'Les choses qui ne sont pas semblables, ni de même origine, ni de même rang doivent être enfermées ensemble sous clef par une harmonie qui puisse les entretenir en un ordre du monde.'

Les noms de Logos et Pneuma sont ceux de la Trinité pythagoricienne et stoïcienne, car les stoïciens nommaient Pneuma le feu divin. D'autre part Logos dans le langage pythagoricien et platonicien veut dire avant tout rapport et est synonyme de nombre; et le nombre ou rapport est la médiation entre l'un, qui est Dieu, et l'illimité, qui est la nature.

Bien entendu, plusieurs passages de Platon peuvent être regardés comme des prophéties. Ainsi 'Si la Sagesse devenait visible, elle susciterait d'étranges amours', et le passage de la République sur le juste parfait, humilié et torturé, et néanmoins parfaitement ~~heureux~~ bienheureux, qui est 'à tous égards la même chose que la Justice en soi', c'est à dire la Justice divine.

Un poème scandinave, qui se trouve dans un recueil postérieur à l'introduction du christianisme, mais est très probablement antérieur, étant donné que des textes du Xe siècle semblent y faire allusion, commence: (c'est Odin qui parle)

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Abbreviations used in this section:

Ef = L'Effort (Lyon)
 FLQ = Feuilles libres de la quinzaine (Lyon-St. Cloud)
 CdS = Cahiers du Sud
 LP = Libres propos
 RP = La Révolution prolétarienne
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