THE SPIRITUALITY OF LABOUR:
SIMONE WEIL'S QUEST FOR TRANSCENDENCE

A thesis submitted to
the faculty of the Institute for Christian Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Philosophical Foundations

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Toronto, Ontario

October 1983
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ABBREVIATIONS

Cahiers I, II  Notebooks
CO        La condition ouvrière
EHP       Ecrits historiques et politiques
EL        Ecrits de Londres
FLN       First and Last Notebooks
FW        Factory Work
GG        Gateway to God
HP        "Human Personality," in Reader 313-339
LP        Lectures on Philosophy
N1        Notebooks, vol. 1
N2        Notebooks, vol. 2
NYN       New York Notebook
OL        Oppression and Liberty
Petrement Simone Weil: A Life
PWN       Prewar Notebook
Reader    The Simone Weil Reader
SE        Selected Essays
SL        Seventy Letters
WG        Waiting on God
In her final book, *The Need for Roots*, Weil concluded that physical labour should be the spiritual core of a well-ordered life (NR 302). The conclusion reveals a great deal about the nature of Weil's quest. Underlying it is the presupposition that life contained a spiritual core. Weil arrived at this conviction after having grappled with and rejected the immanent philosophies of her time. Her disillusionment with these right and left (immanent) philosophies caused her eventual alienation from associated political and labour groups. Weil realized at an early stage of her quest that a more comprehensive solution was required. Our purpose in this study is to follow Weil's quest for transcendence as it is expressed in her life and thought. These two aspects, her biography and her ideas, must be considered together in order to prevent presenting a dichotomy which did not exist. Thus, to be more specific, we will examine Weil's quest for a transcendent reality through her rejection of the immanent philosophies of the right and the left which dominated European thought and practice in the inter-war years. This quest was focused on Weil's life-long search for a spiritual view of labour which required precisely this rejection of immanent ideologies and acceptance of transcendental reality.

Our study will consequently be focused on those elements
of Weil's biography and writings which most clearly reflect her thinking about the spiritual view of labour as a tool to clarify the tensions of immanent and transcendent realities. It is not possible to examine Weil's thoughts on labour without examining the biographical data of her life. Thus, as introduction to this work, a biographical summary will be presented. This summary will be expanded as we proceed.¹

It will become evident that labour was not only a central theoretical concern for Weil; rather, her life demonstrated a practical fascination with the reality of existence for the ordinary labourer, whether in industry, agriculture, or any other forms of work. Our entire study, in a sense, is therefore an examination not only of Weil's quest for transcendence in theoretical work, but also an illustration of the intensity of this quest as it relates to the harmony between her life and her development as a thinker. We cannot separate the conclusions concerning the spirituality of labour from the illustration of Weil's personal experience of labour. The relationship between these two aspects comprises what we have described as her "quest." Our understanding of this quest is a key to a grasp of the predicament of twentieth-century thought.²

Weil was born in 1909 in Paris to liberal Jewish parents. Her father was a doctor. The two children, André and Simone, were raised in a rich cultural environment which did not
contain a specific religious orientation. Both parents nurtured the apparent academic potential of the two children.

During her formal education at the Lycee Henri IV, Weil was strongly influenced by a teacher, Emile Auguste Chartier, often referred to as Alain. At the Ecole Normale she continued to study with Alain. His teaching influenced her until the end of her life. Her writing at this stage dealt with Descartes, Plato, Kant and Spinoza.

Weil demonstrated an early interest in the theme of labour. While at the Ecole Normale, she wrote her first published piece on the nature of manual labour. She sought practical contact with the problem and became involved in a school for railway workers. Among her colleagues at the Ecole Weil was known as the "Red Virgin" for her outspoken support of left-wing and pacifist movements.3

Eager for practical experiences of labour, Weil spent the summer of 1929 digging potatoes in Normandy. She received her diploma from the Ecole in 1931. Although she qualified to teach, Weil was more interested in working in a factory. The economic crisis caused the postponement of this plan. She received a teaching post in Le Puy, a small industrial town. The Minister of Education wanted Weil as far away as possible from Paris. After receiving her diploma she travelled to Normandy to observe the work of fishermen. Weil persuaded one group of fishermen to allow her to accompany them. The night
fishing trips scandalized the local villagers.

Weil used her spare time to become involved in labour union activities. Her involvement included teaching workers at the labour exchange (Bourse de travail), attending meetings, and writing. This involvement was carried out in a manner which would become characteristic, namely with all her resources and with little concern for personal welfare. Her involvement led to her occupying a central position in the struggles related to trade union unification.

In the summer of 1932 Weil travelled to Germany in an attempt to understand Nazism. Weil observed the situation of workers and unions there. She noted the sectarian struggles between the German Socialists and German Communists. At the end of the summer she worked on a critique of Lenin. His admiration of Taylorism made her sharply critical of his ideas.4

She resumed teaching in Auxerre. Her other activities such as writing articles and teaching workers continued. Throughout this teaching post and the following one in Roanne, Weil's relationship to the labour unions gradually changed. An increased sense of political pessimism undermined Weil's "syndicalist" hopes for a worker-inspired revolution. She saw her own role in labour issues as shifting from practical questions to theoretical problems. However, Weil continued to seek an opportunity to follow through on her plan to work in a
factory. Her ability to theorize accurately on labour depended on personal experience of existing conditions.

Weil spent approximately nine months working in three different factories. *La Condition Ouvrière*, especially the "Factory Journal," documents her experience during that period of manual work, illness, and suffering. She felt radically transformed into a slave. Her life was never the same after the experience (Petrement, 215).

During a trip to Portugal in 1935 Weil experienced the first of three major events which led to her conversion to Christianity. Her self-perception transformed into that of a slave caused her to sense communion with Portuguese fishermen who were also slaves. The revelation that Christianity was the religion of the slaves connected her personal experience of work to the universal experience of work. This opened up the possibility for theoretical study of the relationship between belief in a transcendent reality and the daily experience of work.

Weil continued to write and reflect on society, force and limit. Her commitment to pacifism led her to obtain journalist's credentials to travel as an observer to the Spanish Civil War. An accident prematurely ended her stay in Spain. A trip to Italy in 1937 provided the opportunity for her second event prior to her conversion. In a chapel where Saint Francis had often prayed, Weil was brought to her knees
by something stronger (Petrement, 307).

Saint-Quentin, close to Paris, was Weil's last teaching post. She spent her free time in a study-discussion group related to labour. Her health continued to deteriorate and she was forced to request a medical leave in January 1938. During a visit to Solesmes in 1938 Weil experienced the final occurrence prior to her conversion. Her reading interests broadened to include ancient history and the history of religions.

In 1940 Paris was declared an open city. The Weil family fled to Marseille. Unable to obtain a teaching post due to restrictions on Jews imposed by the Vichy government, Weil obtained work as a farmhand. The family found passage on a ship and left for New York in May, 1942.

In New York, Weil felt exiled from the war effort. She desperately tried to convince people of her plan for Front-Line nurses. She sought for a way to return to England to join the Resistance. Eventually she was employed in England as an editor. During this employment Weil wrote The Need for Roots. In April 1943 Weil became ill, possibly due to a combination of overwork, malnutrition, and despair. She was hospitalized, transferred to a sanitorium, and died on August 24, 1943. She hid the fact of her hospitalization from her parents. The coroner ruled that she had committed suicide by starving herself "while the balance of her mind was disturbed."
The biographical data would lack a vital dimension if the context of Weil's life and work were not mentioned. Weil was academically formed in a tradition of philosophical training at the Sorbonne. She is described as "the most striking representative of that great student proletariat which grew up in Europe between the two wars, and for which Paris was, and still remains, as much the alma mater as in the time of Abelard."\(^5\) This environment shaped the context and the method of study. The French method, *explication de texte*, opened up layers of meaning to one willing to focus attentively on the text.\(^6\) Weil managed to understand diverse and complex texts in her studies in the following years.

Weil would have preferred to de-emphasize her relationship to an intellectual elite. Intellectuals of this era often viewed themselves as self-appointed social critics. Armed with philosophical training and blessed with tremendous mobility, these "intellectuals" travelled to various corners of the world. Their experiences abroad and at home were translated into poems, novels, plays and political rhetoric which produced the characteristic "literature of engagement."

Events in domestic and foreign policy heightened the sense of crisis. The two world wars acted like bookends within which all other events were shelved. Traditional beliefs were challenged and weakened by external events. Catholicism was gradually secularized, humanism was in crisis
and pacifist beliefs were tested. All levels of French society were affected. French intellectuals were not alone in struggling with these questions. However, their attempts to deal with the situation were often the most dramatic and memorable.

The interwar years were marked by turmoil both within and outside France. The Spanish Civil War, the economic crisis, Hitler's rise to power, and the lack of strong political leadership within France undermined the false sense of security many had enjoyed during the twenties. Challenges to traditional ways of thinking were posed by diverse sources. Many sought to give allegiance to either left or right. The extremes on this continuum included Communism on the left and Fascism on the right, with various combinations in between. As the crisis in France unfolded from within and without, individuals were left grasping for solutions and for a framework to understand overwhelming problems.

In relation to the context of modern France in crisis, the importance of Simone Weil's work becomes evident. Weil's thought represents an attempt to break through the constraints of the immanent horizon imposed by the left-right polarity. Weil sought an alternative to a tradition in modern philosophy which supported the belief that "matter is a machine for manufacturing good, or in other words that man is self-sufficient and has created his own values ex nihilo." Weil
experienced the crisis of the inter-war years in France and was not constrained by contemporary solutions to the problems. Her personal pilgrimage, illustrated by the biographical details of her life and by her writings, demonstrates the seriousness with which she pursued this problem and attempted to construct a new model.

The focus of this study is on Weil's search for transcendence as it relates to her writings on labour. As noted above, Weil concluded that labour should form the spiritual core of civilization. The steps in her own development of faith contributed to her utopian vision. The subject of labour had interested Weil early in her academic life. Throughout her life she experienced labour as a labour union activist, a factory labourer, an agricultural labourer, and an innovative writer on the theory of labour. Thus, the focus on labour provides a key to understanding both Weil's personal experience and her thought.

The focus on the theme of labour as an illustration of Weil's search for transcendence determines the emphasis of this study. The first chapter examines the immanent horizons to clarify the general climate of the thirties interwar years. The second chapter examines Weil's early theoretical explorations after exploring the biographical data for the early thirties. The main text for this chapter is "Reflections Concerning the Causes of Liberty and Oppression." In 1934-35
Weil worked for approximately nine months in several different factories. Chapter three will explore the "Factory Journal" within which Weil recorded the experience in detail. In chapter four the two realities -- one immanent, the other transcendent -- which emerged in Weil's belief and in her writing will be explored and the final stage of Weil's life (1940-43) and theology will be discussed. Chapter five outlines the spirituality of labour as described in several of Weil's late writings.

Weil's final writings from New York and London clearly link the existence of two distinct realities to the daily exercise of labour by each individual. She gradually developed this theme, namely, the spirituality of labour, throughout her writings in the thirties. Various changes of focus affected the direction of her writing. Shortly before her death in 1942, Weil had constructed a proposal for humanity. The changes and ultimate development of her thought are traced in chapters two through five. The study concludes in chapter six with a brief assessment of Weil's contribution to the theory of labour in the light of the immanent horizons which formed the context for her writing.
Notes


2 Weil's importance as a thinker has been recognized by a number of sources. For example, Richard Rees wrote: "The whole effort of all the most valuable thinkers of the twentieth century has been against the stream of modern thought, which has been flooded for two centuries or more by a spate of humanistic and evolutionary philosophies. These philosophies have always propagated in one form or another the belief that matter is a machine for manufacturing good, or in other words that man is self-sufficient and has created his own values ex nihilo. It would be difficult to name any thinker of this century who has exposed this fallacy more convincingly or analyzed its consequences more penetratingly than Simone Weil had done" (R. Rees, Simone Weil: A Sketch for a Portrait (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966), p. 107).

Furthermore, her importance was recognized by Albert Camus who edited some of her works in the Collection Espoir Gallimard series after her death. Camus described Weil as "the only great political thinker of our time" (in L'Express, February 11, 1961; cited in Roy Pierce, Contemporary French Political Thought (London, 1966), p. 121). Pierce included Weil in his analysis of six French political thinkers such as Aron, Camus, Mounier, Sartre and de Jouvenel.


CHAPTER I
IMMANENT HORIZONS:
THE CLIMATE OF THE THIRTIES

Introduction

Events in the thirties combined in a particular way which was gradually perceived by the people of France as threatening. The crises affected every aspect of French life. In each sphere, such as politics, labour and social thought, individuals sought immanent, this-worldly solutions to the concrete problems that faced them. This immanence was reflected in a right-left split which dominated each aspect. Old transcendental beliefs had gradually been discarded and the new ideologies were inadequate to deal with problems of such depth.

In politics, various coalitions, short-term governments, and public lack of confidence in leadership marked the decade before the war. Serious challenges from domestic and foreign policy were directed towards the ruling parties and the French people. The various failures which resulted reflected the division of opinion as individuals and groups sought their definition in right or left ideologies.

In labour, immanent solutions proved ineffective to deal with the complexity of the situation. The intricacy of labour in the thirties was partly due to the historical development
of French labour from its pre-revolutionary origins. A long history of violent clashes between labour and the state, marked by privileges given and later rescinded, created a bitter memory for the French workers. Tension between the workers and the state was not the only arena for conflict. Conflict between the workers and management also erupted in the 1930s, as illustrated by the general strike of 1936. Reforms for the workers were long overdue but management conceded only reluctantly, while feeling threatened by the growing radicalism of the workers. Labour, however, was divided from within as workers struggled to find answers on the right or left of the union movement. The division into two major unions, namely the Confédération Generale du Travail (C.G.T.) and the Confédération Generale du Travail Unitaire (C.G.T.U.), split the workers. A struggle for control ensued within the unions by various groups such as the syndicalists, anarchists, or communists. Their limited vision, restricted to immanent solutions, prevented the formation of a unified labour force and undermined the effectiveness of its ability to formulate effective solutions.

The social thought of this period reflected the same immanence which dominated labour and politics, namely, a concentration on right-left polarities. This concern with immanent solutions was a result of a gradual rejection of "transcendental" beliefs. A growing secularization of the
French people had caused a decline in the power of Catholicism. Even the ideal of humanism firmly established by the French Revolution was in crisis. Traditional belief systems had collapsed and individuals sought new ideologies to take their place. However, as in the political and labour spheres, this search for new ideologies was largely limited to immanent solutions. The transcendent was no longer viewed as relevant. Instead, individuals experimented with ideologies of the right and left.

In this chapter, the rejection of the old transcendent beliefs and the predominance of immanent solutions, namely, a right-left polarity, will be examined as it relates to the spheres of politics, labour and social thought. It was in this climate of labour, politics, and thought that Weil tested the immanent solutions and found them wanting. In the following chapters we will see how Weil's quest led her to new transcendent solutions.

**Political Climate**

The years from 1920 to 1930 are often described as interwar years. There was a strange calm evident which contrasted sharply with the storms of the two world wars. The events of World War I were interpreted in both a positive and a negative way by the French people. The reintegration of Alsace-Lorraine into French territory caused a degree of
elation. However, the price of this victory was paid in the sacrifice of a generation of French men. The death toll was enormous; 1,320,000 military men and 250,000 civilians were lost. The birth rate remained low in France and thus the number of available men of military age was much lower than in Germany. The industrial northland of France had also been devastated by the German retreat of 1918.\(^1\)

A gradual transition was reflected in the victory of the right in 1919 to the gradual success of the left under Herriot in 1925. The failure of the reparation strategy which had resulted in an invasion of the Ruhr under Poincaré was a factor in this transition. The full impact of the effects of World War I were not felt until the depression. The combined effect of these events caused a change in attitude from a spirit of peace to a more ruthless power-seeking mentality.\(^2\)

The economic basis was shifting at a time when the economy was also in crisis. A shift from agriculture to industry and a trend towards industrial concentration marked the interwar years. The labour force became a voice to be reckoned with. The French bourgeoisie were threatened by labour demands. The perception of the bourgeoisie was influenced by the shadow of the Russian revolution and the loss of Russian investments.\(^3\)

In the thirties the economic situation in France rapidly deteriorated. Many had regarded the market with a false sense
of security, since it appeared to resist the crash that had affected the United States and British markets. However, the effect had merely been delayed and in 1932 the full effects of depression were felt.

Unemployment followed a pattern different from other countries. The harshness of the blow was partially diffused by shifts in labour patterns. Foreign workers who returned to their country of origin and urban workers who returned to family farms compensated somewhat for lack of employment. However, in 1935 there were still half a million unemployed.\(^4\)

The government did not react aggressively to the economic crisis. Its hesitation to initiate strong measures was largely motivated by a fear of the electorate. The French franc was not devaluated like the American and German currency. Consequently an export advantage was gained by countries outside of France and French goods suffered on the market because they were too expensive to be competitive.\(^5\) A decline in export profit aggravated the situation. Further damage to the economy was effected by a shift in currency abroad by individuals who feared devaluation. Lack of investment in France reinforced the negative trend.

A complete change in political leadership from the older heroes such as Poincaré and Briand to newer leaders such as Edouard Herriot and Edouard Daladier did not inspire public confidence. The Stavisky affair brought to the fore the
underlying tensions of the period. The conflict between right and left which had been submerged since the aftermath of the First World War resurfaced in a vigorous way. The conflict grew into a confrontation between democratic and republican institutions which reflected the extent of the threat the French bourgeoisie perceived in the strength of big business and labour. A new government headed by Gaston Domergue emerged from the conflict. Domergue's attempts to pull together French political life were interpreted by the people as too authoritarian and "fascist." When the Domergue government fell, the following governments were largely ineffective until the Popular Front won in 1936.6

The election of 1936 demonstrated the polarity of right and left which had emerged. The left in this election organized a popular front consisting of Communists, Socialists, and the middle-class Radical Socialists. The Socialists entered as a party with Leon Blum as prime minister.

Labour unrest increased during this period. In 1936, sit-down strikes occurred in the factories. Concessions had to be made by the government, which were formalized in the Matignon agreements.7 The concessions sparked the attack of industrialists and undermined the confidence of the middle-class Radical Socialists. By 1938 the government was headed by a Radical-Socialist, Daladier, who had turned to the right. The opposition was composed of Communists and Socialists.
A fragment of the right wanted to see Fascism in France. However, a larger portion of the Right hoped that France could stay neutral and thus not obstruct Germany's ambitions in the East. The rightist government tended to "minimize French commitments rather than to reinforce them." Thus, alliances in Eastern Europe were in a tenuous situation if they required protection from France. France's foreign policy from 1915 to 1945 has been described as "a vast retreat, slow at first, then gathering speed, and finally culminating in an unprecedented collapse." Symbolic of this retreat was the building of the Maginot Line, begun in 1929.

The gradual deterioration of peace prior to the Second World War was foreshadowed by events such as Hitler's rise to power (January 1933), Italy's attack on Abyssinia (September 1935), remilitarization of the Rhineland (March 1936), and the invasion of Austria by German troops (March 1938).

The Spanish Civil War played an important role in the development of conflict prior to the Second World War. The Spanish war tested the willingness of the democracies to resist. It presented a powerful challenge to the French government at a time when increasing factionalism was already undermining its strength. Both sides of the Spanish conflict appealed to other countries for help. The military turned to Italy and Germany and the republicans to France and Russia. In France opinion was divided whether help should be given.
The Radicals were opposed to intervention, whereas the Communists demanded immediate support by means of arms and equipment.

The Spanish Civil War had two important effects on France. Lack of agreement over the provision of assistance to the republicans widened the rift between French Communists and the Right. Disagreement also contributed to the disintegration of the French Popular Front. Blum was restrained from giving assistance by his concern to maintain the Anglo-French understanding. Socialists and Communists attacked Blum for the policy of non-intervention but France relied too strongly on its alliance with Britain to threaten it. The Blum government fell and France was left without leadership as the Nazis moved into Austria in 1938.

Weil was but one of many intellectuals who travelled to Spain. Her stay was cut short by an injury. However, she saw enough of the fighting to return critical of Blum's policy as not sufficiently pacifist. The defeat of the Republican cause was simultaneously the defeat of the ideals of many intellectuals. The experience in Spain shook their faith in all political ideology. This had an important effect on how many intellectuals responded to World War II. The reluctance of the French government to arm itself against the growing threat of Nazism, combined with this atmosphere of disillusionment and pacifism, helped create France's vulnerability on the eve
One feature of the interwar years was the development of the French Communist Party. Because of its importance as an immanent solution which offered itself to the people during this period, its development will be briefly examined. The role of the French Communist Party reveals a great deal concerning political events of the time and the involvement of French intellectuals in those events. For many, the French Communist Party (F.C.P.) exerted a strong attraction, which resulted in attachment to the cause occasionally resulting in later disillusionment.¹¹

The membership of the party fluctuated during its first years. The Party was originally founded at the Tours Congress of the Socialist party in 1920 under the leadership of M. Thorez. The Party took over publishing L'humanité. The first generation of intellectuals who were members of the party largely left due to disagreements. The second generation involved with the F.C.P. was described as "a more romantic and less-disciplined generation of quasi-Marxist intellectuals."¹²

Simone Weil was strongly attracted to the F.C.P. for a time, without actually becoming a member. Her position was not always clear to her contemporaries. Some thought she was a Trotskyist, and others viewed her as a dissident Communist (Petrement, 47).

The F.C.P. was built on traditions which had long been
part of French cultural history, such as anarcho-syndicalism and social democracy. In its early years, there was little agreement on what the doctrines of the party actually were. For many intellectuals, their interest in the party was motivated by an unarticulated ideal. The ideal was in many cases disappointing. The second generation of Party members studied its doctrines more seriously. However, the Communists prior to 1939 have been accused of ignorance of actual party beliefs.

The way in which many blindly grasped faith in the Communist Party and in the hopes of the left demonstrated to some extent the anxiety which was experienced. The anxiety was related to the emptiness left by the collapse of traditional belief systems. Humanism was one of those beliefs which was now in crisis. Its inability to provide satisfactory answers to questioning minds left individuals groping for new but still immanent solutions.

Part of the crisis in humanism was attributed to the individual's discovery of his inability to influence history. The humanist sees himself as the measure of all things. The will and the fight against nature are the predominant constituents of humanity. Marx's homo faber is "humanist" because he embodies this fight. However, the feeling that one has lost the power to influence history causes a perception of crisis. The historical unfolding of events such as the
Industrial Revolution and the Commune helped create false hopes out of ideals. Consequently, the individual finds himself alone among the ruins of the two polar ideologies of the century, progressivism and conservatism, humanitarianism and tradition. Man finds himself poorly integrated to the collectivity and as a result his life is devoid of meaning. In this state, man lives in an attitude of rebellion or dissidence.

Political action thus derives from either anarchist or totalitarian tendencies, whether by association with right or left. Totalitarianism is an exaggeration of group spirit, whereas anarchy is an expression of excessive individualism. These tendencies are rooted in spiritual confusion. The political sphere was only one example of the effects of this crisis. The splitting into left and right only forced France into a "sterile opposition" which resulted in the inability to bring France together as a nation before 1939. The underlying crisis in humanism led to a search for a new model. The contribution of Simone Weil to this search was significant because of the crisis of her time. Her early disillusionment with immanent solutions, oppositions of the left or right, tendencies towards totalitarianism or anarchism, motivated her to continue her search. The area of labour provided the medium for her search and eventually became the platform for her proposed solution.
Labour Climate

On February 12, 1934, the first successful general strike was held. The strike reflected a history of labour union development which was rooted in structures dating back to prerevolutionary France. The historical development of the structures evident in the 1930s will be briefly examined, as background for Weil's quest.

The French Revolution had a marked impact on French workers. The Revolution did not emancipate the workers. As a result, the achievement of an effective revolution remained an unrealized ideal. The transition from craft industry to industrial factory was slow. The Industrial Revolution developed much later than in other countries.

During the nineteenth century developments in labour comprise privileges awarded to the workers and then withdrawn. The ambivalence of the state tended to prevent the workers from accumulating too much power. The Revolution of 1848 was an attempt by the workers to establish universal fraternity which ended in a bloody civil war.\textsuperscript{17} Gains that had been acquired, such as free assembly, were withdrawn. The Le Chapelier Law forbade workers to meet to decide common interests. The government used two tactics to control union growth. The first method involved legislation and prosecution; the second attempted to prevent the workers from developing a collective spirit. Napoleon's code made illegal
such collective action as strikes, strike threats, or wage negotiations.

The revolutions of 1830 and 1848 thus brought very little, or short-lived, improvements to the workers. Workers' societies reappeared in 1840 which met either secretly or openly. The prosperous craftsmen were more organized.\textsuperscript{18} In 1864 Napoleon lifted the ban on strikes. These years witnessed a transition in the type of organization preferred by the workers. Modern union organization was preceded by the earlier forms of worker organizations including compagnonages, mutual aid societies and societies of resistance. The compagnonages originated in the fifteenth century. They were organized in three main orders called devoirs which included a number of craft groups. The devoir cared for its members, who were admitted on the basis of skill, and they arranged room and board and work for the young men as they travelled from one city to another learning the trade. In their travels, referred to as the Tour de France, workers met each other and a solidarity resulted which transcended any specific craft or location. The organization was doomed by the arrival of the modern industrialized state. Its status with the government was officially illegal but tolerated.\textsuperscript{19} This form of worker organization is referred to in Weil's work as a model which she would have liked to see reinstated. Mutual aid societies were organized to insure their members against
illness, work accidents or unemployment.\textsuperscript{20} Resistance organizations were illegal organizations which worked secretly to defend the workers against employers and to work to improve labour conditions.

Social changes began to affect labour by 1860. Industrialization was beginning to make changes in structure. The textile industry was one of the first to adopt factory conditions to organize production. Other factors, such as increased urban migration, were also changing the societal structure. Urban restructuring resulted in a sharper division between bourgeois neighbourhoods and worker suburbs. Secularization gradually transferred the allegiance of the workers away from the church. One could speculate that this left the workers more receptive to joining worker organizations.

The first International, the International Workingmen's Association, was created in London. In 1868 workers were given the right to form associations. Local unions were organized in Paris, called \textit{chambres syndicales ouvrières} or \textit{syndicats}. To speak of the worker's condition, however, suggests no unity of doctrine among the trade unionists.

The brief duration of the Commune -- two months -- and its bloody repression are bitter memories in labour history. The first International was destroyed and the working class movement was virtually eliminated.\textsuperscript{21} Various legislative
changes eventually broke through the state repression. The Child Labour Law (1874) was an important step. The Waldeck-Rousseau Law (1884) was pivotal because it gave workers the right to associate. Certain other demands of the workers, such as for free public education, were met. In 1886, the Fédération Nationale des Syndicats et Groups Corporatifs was founded. The Bourse de Travail was an essential structure within the organization of labour. It was first established in Paris in 1886. By 1890 the Bourse had become the centre of union activity. It provided information on labour, education, books, and culture. The first congress of the Fédération des Bourses de Travail met in 1892 and marked the autonomy of the labour movement.\(^\text{22}\)

In 1895 at Limoges, the National Union of Trade Unions was replaced by the Confédération Generale de Travail (C.G.T.). This body was weak until it fused with the Fédération de Bourses de Travail in 1902. The syndicat remained the chief functional unit. In 1889, a second International was founded, which lasted until 1914. At the Amiens Congress of 1906, the CGT adopted its charter.\(^\text{23}\) The charter proclaimed the independence of the trade union movement and its conscious separation from any political party. The decade in CGT history from 1902 to 1909 is often described as "heroic." Industrial strife was increasingly evident with the postal strike of 1909 and the railway strike
of 1910. The government gained victories at the expense of the CGT over these strikes.

In 1920, at Tours, the left wing took over the Socialist Party and transformed it into the Communist Party. The Socialists were forced to reorganize. The subjugation of the unions to a policy dictated by the Comintern was not acceptable to everyone. The conflict was sharpened by the creation of the Red International of Labour Unions (R.I.L.U.) by the Communist International. The opposition was composed of moderate and socialist unions called the International Federation of Trade Unions (I.F.T.U.).

The formation of the Confédération Générale du Travail Unitaire (C.G.T.U.) composed of communists, anarchists, and syndicalists, further divided the union movement. There was a struggle within the CGTU between the communists and anarcho-syndicalists for control. A further split occurred in 1924 when a syndicalist group formed the C.G.T. Syndicaliste Révolutionnaire. The CGTU became communist under the control of the RILU and the Comintern. The CGTU suffered a decline in membership as a result of internal problems and a decline in membership of the French Communist Party. Some of the politically active dissidents formed the Socialist-Communist Party in 1923.24

The end of the twenties and the beginning of the thirties marked a transition into a completely new era of labour union
politics. The labour union movement was shaped by such political forces, which have been mentioned previously, as the depression and the rise of fascism. The Stavisky scandal sparked riots which included the fascists and communists. The CGT and the Socialists responded.

On February 12, 1934, the first successful general strike was held. The unity of approach reflected in the cooperation of the CGT and the CGTU led to a further unity of purpose in party politics and trade union action. The Popular Front was an example of one alliance created between the Socialists, Communists, Radical-Socialists, the CGT and other organizations.

Membership in the CGT grew rapidly with labourers who had little union experience. The Communist Party was much better prepared to take leadership of this mass of new recruits. Strikes, internal divisions and lack of cohesion among groups made this period very fragmented. Weil hoped for unification but eventually became pessimistic because she did not believe the groups could ever truly cohere. France entered the war with a divided labour movement and a disorganized political situation. Had various interest groups perceived the threat which faced the country, it is unlikely that they could have managed to work together to change or to resist the events to come.

The war disrupted the workings of the CGT. The Nazi-
Soviet Pact exploded the factional hatreds within the CGT. Communists were expelled from organizations and the government dissolved the Communist Party. The government excluded the CGT from participation in policy-making. The effectiveness of the CGT declined, as did its membership. The defeat of France and the establishment of the Vichy Regime was of no benefit to the unions. Vichy dissolved the national labour confederations. Resistance to this gradually led to a new post-war chapter in labour history.

The evolution of working-class associations was characterized by a plurality of forms. Some of these represented different religious orientation, such as the Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiennes (CFTC), while others reflected different political orientation -- for example, the RILU. Some of these organizations were useful for a period of time, when they joined up with others or otherwise disappeared. The early separations into craft industries were later partially overcome by grouping various crafts together into unions. However, this spirit of separatism tended to dominate the union movement throughout its history. This spirit was a factor in Weil's eventual disillusionment with syndicalism.

Certain factors of change were external to the worker's control. The powerful forces of urbanization and industrialization caused irreversible changes to the
labourer's situation. The uncertain relationship between the state and the unions led to times of extreme repression which were improved by conceding to the legislative reform at other times.

Although the individual worker's contact with syndicalism might be restricted to contact with his cell, or his syndicat or the Bourse de Travail, changes in the international labour scene had their effects as well. This is well illustrated by the orientation of the FCP to the Comintern rather than the French people, which resulted in the Communist left being shattered by the Nazi-Soviet Pact in 1939.28

In summary, in both politics and labour in France, tensions and problems with the governments, parties, unions and intellectuals can be examined from within the immanent horizons of humanism. These immanent horizons were comprised of right or left or combinations of the above. Weil's quest must be seen as an effort to transcend these polarities.
Notes


2 Ibid., p. 261.

3 Ibid., p. 310.


5 Ibid., p. 272.

6 Gilbert, p. 312.


8 Gilbert, p. 315.


10 Gilbert, p. 316.

11 See, for example, D. Caute, Communism and the French Intellectuals (London: Andre Deutsch, 1964).

12 Ibid., p. 89.


15 See H. Dooyeweerd, Roots of Western Culture (Toronto: Wedge, 1979), especially Classical Humanism, pp. 148-74. According to his analysis, the crisis in humanism resulted from the tension contained in the dialectical relationship between the science motive and the freedom motive. Together these two motives comprise humanism but individually each seeks to dominate the other. The personality ideal based on human freedom inevitably conflicted with the goals of the science ideal. A human being reduced to cause and effect
loses his or her basis for spontaneous function.

16 See also R. Rees, A Sketch for a Portrait, p. 107. Rees wrote as follows: "Ever since the eighteenth century, if not earlier, humanists have attempted to believe, first, that force rules supreme over all natural phenomena, and, second, that men can and ought to base their mutual relations upon justice, recognized as such through the application of reason" (p. 144).


19 Ibid., pp. 5-6.


22 Ridley, pp. 30-31.

23 See also J. Ellis, The French Socialists and the Problem of Peace (Chicago: Loyola, 1967).

24 Lorwin, p. 61.


26 Lorwin, pp. 67-84.

27 For additional information concerning the CFTC, see Lorwin, pp. 76, 91-95, 169-71.

In the early thirties Weil developed a rudimentary theoretical framework which conditioned the direction of her later work on labour. Throughout this period, Weil made radical changes in her political beliefs. In 1931 one could describe Weil as "revolutionary syndicalist" whereas in 1934 she rejected the ideals of revolution and syndicalism. Her intense involvement in various aspects of the trade union movement gradually, by 1934, led to a decision to withdraw from political or social activities in order to focus on theoretical work. The major document to emerge from this period was her "Reflections on the Causes of Liberty and Social Oppression" (1934). Although the essay was not published until after her death, it is evident that Weil and others realized the importance of what she smilingly called her "Testament." Her teacher Alain approved it; Petrement said she realized Weil's genius after reading it. Thus, in this chapter I intend to examine the content of this essay and the theoretical framework proposed in it.

It will become evident that in this phase of Weil's development, she became disillusioned with the status of politics and unions. The biographical data trace the steps in
this disillusionment which, in fact, was a withdrawal from the predominant immanent polarities of her time. Further, the exploration of her article "Reflections" as a major text of this phase serves as an important example of her thought at this stage. More specifically, "Reflections" demonstrates how Weil began to seriously direct her focus towards labour. This concentration by Weil is important to our understanding of Weil's later conclusions concerning the spirituality of labour as the core of a reordered social life.

**Biographical Background, 1931-1934**

After graduation from the Ecole Normale, Weil began teaching at Le Puy. She had attended the congress of the CGT (General Confederation of Labour) in 1931. At this time there were two main bodies, the CGT and the CGTU (United General Confederation of Labour). A third group called the FA (Independent Federation of Functionaries) also existed. Unity was the main issue of labour union politics at this time. The existing organizations were splitting the workers and dividing the movement.

In 1931 Weil still believed in the activity of unions as opposed to political parties. She considered revolution a worthy goal, with the condition that it would be prepared and executed by the trade unions. She believed that workers needed to unite "not through the imaginary ties created by the
community of opinion but through the real ties created by the
community of their productive function."¹ Weil became deeply
involved in union activities in the Loire and Haute-Loire
regions, working primarily with inter-union groups for unity.

A second characteristic which emerged during this time
was Weil's belief that a real revolution would require the
appropriation of knowledge by the workers. She believed that
the proletariat should appropriate knowledge to abolish what
Marx described as the division of labour into intellectual and
manual work (Petrement, 88).

Weil's activities on behalf of the unemployed at Le Puy
drew a great deal of criticism from the school administration.
Early in the Le Puy period, she considered joining a political
party in addition to the membership she already had in the
National Teachers' Union (CGT). However, after December 1931
it is evident that Weil had only contempt for political
parties (Petrement, 119).

Her visit to a mine marked a new interest in and emphasis
on technology. She believed that a technical revolution was
necessary to reestablish the workers' control over their
conditions of work. Weil believed that political changes only
replaced one repressive regime by another. Technology
functioned as an oppressive feature of capitalism and
therefore required theoretical attention.

In the summer before her next teaching post at Auxerre,
Weil travelled to Germany in an attempt to study Nazism. The experience was crucial in her movement away from syndicalism. She returned feeling that revolutionary syndicalism had no international significance (Petrement, 136). Her observations of Germany also caused her to lose confidence in the Communist Party. The articles she wrote after her visit were often harshly criticized for their pessimism, even though they accurately predicted how events would unfold in Germany. Her skepticism was also directed to events in France. She doubted whether the proposed reform to shorten the work-week to forty hours would actually solve anything.

Part of Weil's ability to see through the established polarities was a result of her skeptical approach to all dogma. This skepticism was applied, for example, to Marx's work. Weil was not dissatisfied with Marx's analysis based on class struggle; however, she still felt it should be applied to the current situation. According to Weil, the power of capital had been replaced by the power of bureaucracy (OL 43). She wrote as follows: "Is it possible to organize the workers in a given country without this organization secreting, as it were, a bureaucracy that immediately subordinates it to the rule of the state apparatus?" (OL 43). Weil realized the fact of the victory of fascism long before many of her colleagues were willing to acknowledge the possibility. She spoke to a splinter group of the Communist Party, describing
the victory of fascism in Germany as demonstration of the failure of "the historic mission of the proletariat." The historic mission she described as a Marxist fiction. Weil saw through the ineffectiveness of such dogma and she was not afraid to expose the inconsistencies that she saw. However, this trait tended to shock and anger many of her colleagues who were much slower to critically examine what they considered to be sacred dogma.

Her contacts with other groups during her time in Auxerre included teaching a course on Marxism for the communist cell. Weil was friendly with local farmers and worked in the grape harvests. However, her teaching was assessed negatively by the administration. The head mistress of the lycee manoeuvred a method to get rid of Weil by abolishing philosophy classes. Weil was forced to request a new post (Petrement, 170).

The question of bureaucracy remained a problem for Weil. During summer holidays in Spain, she made the acquaintance of a longshoreman's union in Valencia which offered a range of services. This union was administered by the workers. Weil recognized this situation as close to her ideal, namely, unionism without a bureaucracy.

While she was on vacation, her article "Prospects" was published in Revolution prolétarienne. The article publicly demonstrated Weil's disillusionment with several causes including the Russian Revolution, the defeat of the German
working-class movement, and her experiences with the working-class movement in France. The article presented a method of analysis which Weil would continue to develop in "Reflections Concerning the Causes of Liberty and Social Oppression." Her analysis penetrated far beyond that of her contemporaries. Few recognized that fact. The majority, including Trotsky, were angered by her pessimism.

Weil began teaching in Roanne in 1933. She experienced good relations with the school administration. In her free time, Weil travelled to Saint-Étienne to give courses at the Labour Exchange.

In the fall, Weil wrote an article on war in which she claimed that there could not be a revolutionary war since the means set into motion by the war would not accomplish revolution. A later article by Weil on the subject of the U.S.S.R. rejected the permissibility of sacrificing the individual to the collectivity. Weil merged the differences between the Fascists and Stalinists. She believed that the capitalist system also worked for the collectivity. In the latter situation, the work of the worker was used to develop the productive apparatus, which never ended due to competition. However, Weil stated that Russia was caught in the same competition, the only difference being that it could by force constrain its labourers from selling their labour elsewhere. Thus, Weil rejected war as a means to an end and
as a tool for the revolution. Secondly, by using the concept of bureaucratic oppression, Weil collapsed some of the differences between Russia and the capitalist system. Once again, Weil was not restrained by the accepted polarities of her time. She rejected oppositions between fascists and Stalinists, and between capitalists and communists, and attempted to rise above these accepted polarities.

During her courses at the Labour Exchange, Weil had the opportunity to organize her thoughts for the article she would write, "Reflections Concerning the Causes of Liberty and Social Oppression." Weil traced two parallel developments historically, the effort to develop science and the struggle against oppression, in order to demonstrate that these two separate trends had been united in Marxism (Petrement, 187).

While recovering in Paris from an illness during March and April of 1934, Weil wrote Petrement about her decision to withdraw from any political activity, with the exception of theoretical work. Her withdrawal from direct political action was underlined by definite pessimism. Weil believed that they were "beaten in advance" and she wanted no responsibility because the outcome would result in certain bloodshed (Petrement, 198). Thus, at a time when there was tremendous organization and unrest of anti-fascist forces, Weil chose to withdraw. Her analysis of the problems had alienated her from supporting the popular causes. She demanded a far more deeply
reaching analysis and struggle with the problems of oppression.

In a letter to a former student, Weil wrote that the Communist Party was controlled by Moscow and the Socialist Party was bourgeoisified. Obviously, Weil could place no hope in the workings of either group. In the late spring Weil started writing her article "Reflections." The writing took much longer than she had anticipated, since it continued through the fall and absorbed all of her attention. Weil described herself as "obsessed with this article" (Petrement, 204).

In June 1934 Weil requested a leave to complete a study of the relationship of modern technique to social organization and culture. Weil strongly desired to carry out her plan of working in a factory. She needed the experience of practical work to overcome an impasse in her theoretical thought. The question which was most acute was how to coordinate factory work without oppressing the workers. Weil believed that direct contact with this problem and immersion in factory life might help her to find a solution.

In a letter to a student, Weil wrote that she believed they were entering the most oppressive and centralized period. Her hope was that "one fine day...everything will collapse in anarchy" (Petrement, 212), at which time a newer, more humane and decentralized order could be erected. This was the spirit with which Weil entered into the factory work period.
Summary

The years 1931-1934 were important years in Weil's development. At the beginning she was a syndicalist with revolutionary objectives. Developments in Germany and France led to eventual disillusionment with political parties, unions, revolutionary syndicalists. Weil was not held captive by immanent polarities of left and right, fascist or democratic, Stalinist or capitalist. She was no less critical of the developments in the United States than she was of those in Russia. Weil sought to transcend the oppositions of left versus right and party politics. She realised that neither the problems nor the solutions could be encompassed by such a narrow perspective. Where then did Weil see the problems?

Weil was influenced by Marx but felt that his analysis had to be applied to current problems. She felt that capitalist oppression was not a final form of oppression. A greater, more oppressive force had developed in society, namely, bureaucratic oppression.

Bureaucratic oppression was a result of industrial development. Closely related to its development were developments in science and specialization. A class which managed, which had a monopoly on the knowledge of overall process, had the power to destroy the culture and creativity of those who worked under their managing.
Weil also believed during these years that technology played a central role in the oppression of the workers. She realized that the workers needed to reestablish control over their conditions of work, including the technology they worked with. Thus, she felt that the role of technology was another problem that required study.

Although some people, such as her friends Souveraine and Petrement, realized the depth of Weil's genius, Weil alienated many of her other colleagues. Weil was collapsing assumed distinctions between parties and countries in order to demonstrate what she felt were priorities. Many were not ready to hear of the failures which she pointed out bluntly, nor were they prepared to accept her proposed collapse of distinctions. Weil was not impressed by labour reforms in France. The woman who had once shouted slogans at meetings and carried a red flag in a parade withdrew to develop her theoretical perspective. Combined with her outspoken pessimism, that withdrawal must have seemed to many like a betrayal. However, the work she had set for herself was anything but a withdrawal. Weil sought to explore the problems which contributed to industrial oppression by means of a total immersion of herself inspired by a vision which would transcend the immanent polarities evident in modern France. Thus, in this time period, Weil began to isolate labour as a focus. She believed that oppression occurred in
the workplace and she theoretically isolated technique and bureaucracy as probable causes of oppression. These were important steps in the direction of her attention to labour as a core of experience which needed study and also in her quest for transcendence.

"Prospects," 1933

In her article "Prospects" (1933), Weil demonstrates the type of political analysis which would continue in "Reflections" (1934). By comparing developments in Russia, Germany, France, and America, Weil concluded that capitalism had reached its limits of expansion but the world was no closer to socialism (OL 1). Weil reminded her readers that the individual worker, as opposed to the collectivity, should be the supreme value. Weil believed the goal should be to support the value of the worker by opposing specialization, and by giving manual labour dignity through helping the worker understand his work. Neither right nor left had properly addressed the issue, according to Weil. Weil summarized the task of her generation as follows:

We want to get back to man, that is to say to the individual, the power which it is his proper function to exercise over nature, over tools, over society itself; to re-establish the importance of the workers as compared with material conditions of work; and instead of doing away with private property, "to turn individual property into something real, by transforming the means of production...which at present serve above all to
enslave and exploit labour, into mere instruments of labour freely and co-operatively performed."
(OL 19)

Weil expressed her dissatisfaction with current developments in this article. This criticism placed her outside of the various ideologies and movements of her time. Both her reliance on Marx and her criticism of Marx, which was becoming clearer in "Reflections," placed her outside of the mainstream. The analysis offered here established her reputation as a social thinker among her contemporaries, although others were disgusted by her pessimism (Petrement, 176). This analysis, focusing on labour particularly from the viewpoint of the individual worker, was continued in "Reflections."

"Reflections," 1934

As mentioned above, the themes of "Prospects" continued in "Reflections" and comprised a fundamental turning-point in the development of Weil's political thought. In "Reflections" Weil continued her critique of all current developments. Her criticism extended to intellectuals, labour unionists, Marxists, Stalinists, capitalists and fascists. In fact, her position left no one untouched and reinforced her alienation from contemporary thought and politics. This development we have characterized as her "rejection of immanence."

Furthermore, the article "Reflections" is important because
Weil continues to wrestle with Marx's thought. It was already evident in "Prospects," but even more clearly in "Reflections," that Weil was strongly influenced by Marx. Despite the influence, Weil critiqued Marx at fundamental points. The critique of Marx in 1933-34 made possible her later quest for transcendence beyond Marx. In addition, this critique of Marx established her reputation as an original thinker among her contemporaries and in the years to follow.

Most relevant to this study is the theme begun in "Prospects" but further developed in "Reflections" of work as the core of society and workers as supreme value. The main function of her writing in "Reflections" is to remind her readers that this should be the focus of social reform. Her writings can thus be interpreted from this perspective. It becomes evident that Weil criticizes everything that takes away from the individual worker as supreme value. Therefore, her criticism includes revolution, specialization, and bureaucracy.

A final comment on the relevance of "Reflections" to this study is in order. In this article, Weil explores the concept of necessity. She contrasts necessity in a primitive economy as evident in the conflict of man against nature. By contrast, in higher forms of economy, man continues to be subject to necessity in the form of other men. This concept is essential to Weil's view of labour, and to her later
transcendent vision of labour's place in civilization. We will see that Weil does not presume that necessity can or should be eliminated. Further, she does not equate necessity with oppression. This idea confirms Weil's position as a unique thinker.

Weil's "Testament" is divided into four parts, entitled "Critique of Marxism," "Analysis of oppression," "Theoretical picture of a free society," and "Sketch of contemporary social life." The first two parts focus on critique and analysis, whereas in the last two parts Weil develops an ideal against which she compares the state of contemporary social life.

Critique of Marxism

Weil felt that Marx had made a "leap of faith" in order to balance his "idealistic aspirations and his materialistic view of history":

In his view, modern techniques, once freed from capitalist forms of economy, can give men, here and now, sufficient leisure to enable them to develop their faculties harmoniously, and consequently bring about the disappearance, to a certain extent, of the degrading specialization created by capitalism; and above all the further development of technique must lighten more and more, day by day, the burden of material necessity, and as an immediate consequence that of social constraint, until humanity reaches at last a truly paradisal state in which the most abundant production would be at the cost of a trifling expenditure of effort and the ancient curse of work would be lifted; in short, in which the happiness of Adam and Eve before the fall would be regained. (OL 43)
The danger of this type of faith was exemplified by the Bolsheviks who believed that temporary oppression was an acceptable means to the end. The presupposition of increase in productive forces was unquestioned by Marx. Weil criticized Marx for falling into a religious belief in the power of matter to aspire to what is best. Thus, she wrote: "The term religion may seem surprising in connection with Marx; but to believe that our will coincides with a mysterious will which is at work in the universe and helps us to conquer is to think religiously, to believe in Providence" (OL 44). The effect of this religious belief in the productive forces is to provide a tool for employers to crush labourers, but also for socialists to oppress workers by making them subject to historical progress.

In contrast with Weil's criticism of this idea of Marx, she strongly supports his conception of material transformations as a method of understanding and of action. According to Marx, human society and nature are acted upon by material transformations (OL 45). Thus, in society man is subject to material necessities otherwise known as material production. To make any change or improvement in social organization, one should study the method of production. One should ascertain the actual and potential output of the production mode, the forms of social and cultural life
compatible with it, and the potential transformations of the production mode. Weil was convinced of the importance of the materialist method. She wrote: "The only really valuable idea to be found in Marx's writings is also the only one that has been completely neglected" (OL 46).

Weil examined the belief that modern technique could provide equally to everyone welfare and leisure in order that the individual would not suffer under modern working conditions. She concluded that eliminating private property would never in itself provide the solution since "the abolition of private property would be far from sufficient in itself to prevent work in the mines and in the factories from continuing to weigh as a servitude on those who are subjected to it" (OL 46-7).

Having dispelled hopes in the modern state of technique as a solution for the situation of the workers, Weil examined the presumption of unlimited future development of technique. The presupposition underlying such development was the potential for an unlimited increase in productivity. The fact that Weil recognized and critiqued the presupposition of unlimited growth distinguishes her from her contemporaries. The notion of limits to growth did not appear until much later in modern thought. This analysis further clarified Weil's separation from the thought of her contemporaries. Weil noted that the assumption of unlimited growth was shared by both
capitalists and socialists. On this issue, Weil again collapsed the differences between them and thus placed herself outside the immanent polarities of her time. Weil blamed "our so-called scientific culture" for establishing a habit of generalizing rather than examining carefully, thereby allowing the notion of unlimited growth to be generally acceptable.

Weil proceeded to apply this unused method "of studying the conditions of a given phenomenon and the limits implied by them" to the notion of technical progress. What is technical progress, what factors play a part in it and how can these factors be studied separately?

The first factor underlying technical progress, which had promised to produce more with less effort, was the utilization of natural sources of energy. Weil stated that one could not assume unlimited sources of energy. The energy had to be wrestled from nature and transformed through labour. She predicted the end of nonrenewable resources and characterized as "daydreaming" the idea that a source of energy would be found which would be immediately utilizable, without requiring human labour to transform it (OL 47-48).

Another factor associated with technical progress which intended to decrease human effort was the rationalization of human labour. Labour can be organized by a relationship between simultaneous efforts and a relationship between successive efforts. In both these modes, progress is derived
through increasing productivity by the manner in which both efforts were combined. It would seem that Weil refers here to the organization of work to maximize production whether it involves a sequence of repeated operations or a process of production. Weil questioned whether this type of progress is unlimited and "if not, whether we are still a long way from the limit" (OL 49).

The third factor which had promised to produce more with less effort was described by Weil as the rationalization of labour in space. This factor included the concentration, division, and coordination of labour. Concentration of labour concerned the reduction of overhead. The coordination of labour involved making possible efforts beyond the scope of a single person, thus increasing the speed of production. This is possible because one person assumes the work of coordination on behalf of others. This "division and coordination of effort makes possible gigantic works which would be infinitely beyond the scope of a single man" (OL 49). She concluded that even these labour-saving devices contain a limit, beyond which they form factors of expenditure. This limit had been reached and overstepped, according to Weil.

The fourth factor to be analyzed was the coordination of labour in time. This factor Weil considered the most important and hardest to analyze. The analysis of this factor required a confrontation with a notion prevalent since Marx
that human labour could eventually be replaced by inanimate labour. By doing so, Weil continues the attack on what she had labelled above as "our so-called scientific culture." The notion that inanimate labour would replace human effort is "a dangerously vague formula in the sense that it conjures up the picture of a continuous evolution towards a stage of technique where, if one may so express it, all the jobs to be done would be done already" (OL 50). In contrast to all the hopes for infinite development of automation, of which the robot was the ultimate symbol, Weil wrote: "no technique will ever relieve men of the necessity of continually adapting, by the sweat of their brow, the mechanical equipment they use" (OL 52).

Weil applied her critique of progress to her contemporaries. She described how various industries had refused to welcome technical innovations. In the following statement, Weil illustrates her isolation from their point of view:

The socialist and communist press takes advantage of this fact to pour out eloquent diatribes against capitalism, but it omits to explain by what miracle innovations that are at present costly would become economically paying under a socialist system or one so-called. (OL 53)

Thus, Weil has developed a critique which, although influenced by Marx, is clearly different from his as well. It is an analysis of social conditions based on the myth of unlimited production and progress which reveals that Weil has taken a
vantage point separate from that of the right or the left, separate from capitalist or socialist polarities. We will continue the examination of Weil's "Reflections" to observe her critique of Marx's utopian vision.

Weil cautioned that oppression had to be distinguished from the suppression of personal whims to a social order. The constraint which society imposes on individuals should not be confused with oppression unless it would result in a division of those who exercise it and those who are subject to it, giving those in command the power to crush those who obey. Having made this distinction, Weil cautioned against the assumption a priori that the abolition of oppression would be possible. Marx demonstrated that big industry reduced the worker to an instrument in the hands of the employers. Thus, Weil concluded that it was useless to hope that technical progress would alleviate the double burden imposed by man and society.

Weil concluded this part of her article by asking whether a system of production could be conceived which would allow the necessities imposed by nature and social constraint to be exercised without grinding down souls and bodies under oppression.
"Analysis of Oppression"

In the second part of "Reflections," entitled "Analysis of Oppression," Weil explains her method of studying social oppression which she had introduced in the previous part. Marx observed that oppression was linked to the material conditions of the social system. He developed a theory of oppression wherein oppression was interpreted as the organ of a social function of developing productive forces. Marx and Engels' theory of oppression was linked to an advanced division of labour, sufficiently complex to contain separate functions of exchange, military command, and government. Furthermore, Marx held that oppression stimulates the further development of the productive forces, transforms itself when production demands it, and eventually disappears when it is no longer needed (OL 57).

Weil remained dissatisfied with Marx's theory of oppression. Her criticisms were as follows:

It only partially describes its origins; for why should the division of labour necessarily turn into oppression? It by no means entitles us to a reasonable explanation of its ending; for if Marx believed himself to have shown how the capitalist system finally hinders production, he did not even attempt to prove that, in our day, any other productive system would hinder it in like manner. Furthermore, one fails to understand why oppression should not manage to continue, even after it has become a factor of economic regression. Above all, Marx omits to explain why oppression is invincible as long as it is useful, why the oppressed in revolt have never succeeded in founding a non-oppressive society, whether on
the basis of the productive forces of their time, or even at the cost of an economic regression which could hardly increase their misery; and lastly, he leaves completely in the dark the general principles of the mechanism by which a given form of oppression is replaced by another. (OL 58)

The Marxian explanation relies on a Lamarckian principle of development wherein the function creates the organ. Marxists assumed that social oppression corresponds to a function in the struggle against nature. By contrast, Weil proposes a method based on the conditions of existence.

In her proposal, based on Darwin, the function does not create the organ but the function is the result of the organ. Weil wrote that nonviable structures would be eliminated and therefore: "Adaptation is henceforth conceived as an exterior and no longer as an interior necessity" (OL 59). Weil thus places Marx's method in a Lamarckian framework, whereas she feels the theory requires a Darwinian improvement. Marx's theory of innovation in the course of social evolution would theoretically give rise to an infinite number of forms of social organization. Conditions of existence limit the infinite variations. A type of natural selection among human efforts eliminates all human innovations which are incompatible.⁵

Conditions of existence are determined by the natural environment, by the existence, activity, and competition of other social groups, and finally by the organization of the
natural environment, capital equipment, armaments, and methods of work and warfare. The last condition -- namely, the organization of the natural environment, equipment, armaments, and methods of work and warfare -- is the only one over which society can exert some control (OL 59-60).

Weil recommended the definition of the objective conditions permitting a social organization free of oppression by means of an ideal limit. The actual conditions would have to be transformed to bring them closer to the ideal. Subsequently, the least oppressive form of social organization for a specific set of social conditions would need to be discovered. Within this design, individual actions and responsibilities would need to be defined (OL 60).

To analyze further the nature of social oppression, Weil traced its origins historically to various forms of social organization. The few forms of social organization which are free of oppression correspond to a low level of production in a subsistence economy. The energy required for subsistence rules out oppression or warfare for conquest. Weil suggested that since oppression always accompanied higher forms of production, there is a difference of degree and of kind between a primitive and a developed economy.

Production is thus transformed in the transition from primitive to developed economy. It would appear that a primitive economy is completely subject to nature, whereas a
more developed economy is less immediately subject to nature, due partly to the accumulation of surplus. This development occurs in stages wherein the primitive man deifies nature until "divinity more and more takes on human shape" (OL 63). However, Weil states that this appearance of increasing freedom from nature is not present in reality. In a more complex economy "human action continues, as a whole, to be nothing but pure obedience to the brutal spur of immediate necessity; only, instead of being harried by nature, man is henceforth harried by man" (OL 63). Thus, nature indirectly exerts pressure on man through oppression in the form of force. The connection between force and nature is that force originates in nature.

The notion of force is important to Weil's study of oppression. The point she stresses here is that the very nature of force, as opposed to how it is used, determines whether it is oppressive. Weil states that Marx understood this in relation to the power of the state to grind down individuals. However, Weil makes a broader application of the notion of force.

What are the objective conditions which give rise to oppression? The first condition is the existence of privileges. In the process of social evolution, certain stages encourage forces to come between man and the conditions of existence. Equality is destroyed in the process. Weil
uses the example of priests in a primitive society who acquire specialized knowledge of religious rites and who claim to have power over nature. Her example can also be applied to a more complex society. Weil wrote: "Nothing essential is changed when this monopoly is no longer made up of rites but of scientific processes, and when those in possession of it are called scientists and technicians instead of priests" (OL 64).

The preceding statement illustrates an essential difference between Weil and Marx. Weil compared the modern form of science to a new form of religion. Her objection was not against science but against its use by individuals to develop a monopoly of knowledge. Weil felt that Marx's critique of religion needed to be applied to science. She wrote that "Marx's excellent observation about the criticism of religion, as being the condition of all criticism, must be extended also to include modern science. Socialism will not even be conceivable as long as science has not been stripped of its mystery" (OL 35).

Weil used Descartes as a model for the development of science without mystery. The key in this science was that everyone would be able to understand all the aspects of method and discovery. By establishing a school for artisans wherein each artist could understand the theoretical basis of his craft, Descartes was more socialist in relation to culture "than all of Marx's disciples have been" (OL 36). In Weil's
objection to the religious mystification of scientific knowledge and the lack of critique of this mystery of science, Weil again revealed her departure from the polarities of her time. This becomes clear in the following:

But the theorists of the socialist movement, when they leave the sphere of practical action or that useless commotion amidst rival tendencies, groups and sub-groups which gives them the illusion of action, never think at all of undermining the principles of the intellectual caste -- far from it; instead they elaborate a complicated and mysterious doctrine which serves to maintain bureaucratic oppression at the heart of the working-class movement. (OL 36)

In Weil’s discussion of the objective conditions which give rise to privilege, the second factor is the existence of arms. When arms require special knowledge to handle them or when they eliminate the possibility that unarmed men can defend themselves, privilege has been established. A similar development of privilege arises whenever the struggle against men or nature requires the coordination of effort. Complex coordination results in leaders who demand obedience.

Privileges alone, however, are not sufficient to cause oppression. The struggle for power is the factor which produces this "harsher form of necessity" known as oppression. Marx understood, in his analysis of capitalism, that power "contains a sort of fatality which weighs as pitilessly on those who command as on those who obey; nay, more, it is in so
far as it enslaves the former that, through their agency, it
presses down upon the latter" (OL 65).

To illustrate the discussion of power as it relates to
oppression, Weil contrasts power in the struggle of man
against nature to the struggle of man against man. When man
struggles against nature the fight is limited by certain
limiting necessities. By contrast, no limits exist in the
struggle of man against man since "the preservation of power
is a vital necessity for the powerful" (OL 65). Those who
have power constantly fight against their rivals and their
subjects. The two ways to break this circle are to abolish
inequality or to set up a stable power wherein a balance is
obtained between those who command and those who obey.

Weil associates the second option, namely the
establishment of a stable power, with the Right. Her
evaluation of this option was that "this stability of power --
objective of those who call themselves realists -- shows
itself to be a chimera...on the same grounds as the
anarchists' utopia" (OL 66). This option, evident in history
from Roman times until modern France, was not a real solution,
according to Weil. The failure of this option lies in the
nature of power. Power contains a contradiction that prevents
it from ever existing. Those who rule are always trying to
establish a dominion impossible to attain. "It would be
otherwise," Weil charged, "if one man could possess in himself
a force superior to that of many other men put together; but such is never the case; the instruments of power -- arms, gold, machines, magical or technical secrets -- always exist independently of him who disposes of them, and can be taken up by others" (OL 67). Thus, Weil concludes that all power is unstable.

In social relationships, the methods of labour and warfare produce inequality. The race for power consequently enslaves everyone including the strong and the weak. However, the truth of this principle extends beyond the capitalist system. In any race for power, the methods to obtain power subject men by becoming absolute ends. Weil concludes that the race for power reveals human history as "the history of the servitude which makes men -- oppressors and oppressed alike -- the plaything of the instruments of domination they themselves have manufactured, and thus reduces living humanity to being the chattel of inanimate chattels" (OL 69).

Thus, Weil suggests, it is actually things which prescribe the limits in the race for power. The actions of the oppressed are futile, even though they occasionally succeed in driving out one set of oppressors for another, or changing the form of oppression. Oppression itself could not be abolished as long as the sources of it were not abolished. Even if the sources of oppression were abolished by a social group, they would be enslaved by another group which had not
experienced the same process. They would also have no chance to survive due to the fact that they would not be capable of primitive production and contact with nature (OL 70). Therefore, to abolish oppression one would need to abolish the sources of oppression which are found in "all the monopolies, the magical and technical secrets that give a hold over nature, armaments, money, co-ordination of labour" (OL 70).

In an attempt to make an abstract preliminary description of the interplay between power and methods of production, Weil lists the necessities which limit all species of power (OL 71-2). First, a power relies upon instruments which have a given scope in each situation. Second, power runs up against the limits of the controlling faculty since all the power a human possesses extends only to what is under his control. Third, the exercise of any form of power is subject to the existence of a surplus in the production of commodities, a surplus large enough that everyone engaged in the struggle for power, whether master or slave, can exist. These three factors enable one to conceive of power as analogous to measurable force. Weil adds the comment that the use of power is cemented by a religion of power. Thus, kings or military leaders believe they rule by divine right and those who are under them feel crushed by a supernatural power. The religion of power thereby falsifies social relations by enabling the powerful to command over and above what they can impose.
Weil's analysis of the nature of power sets her apart from her contemporaries. The analysis went beyond Marx, who had analysed class conflict from the aspect of "mere material subsistence." Oppression would not end when it became detrimental to production. The idea of the revolt of the productive forces described by Trotsky as a factor in history is dismissed as "pure fiction" (OL 70). Oppression would also not disappear when the productive forces had evolved to the point of providing welfare and leisure for all. When society is divided into those who command and those who execute, social life is governed by the struggle for power. In this society, the struggle for subsistence is only one factor in the struggle for power. This analysis reveals how Weil uses Marx's analysis but moves beyond it to formulate her own understanding of oppression. This is further confirmed in the following: "The marxist view, according to which social existence is determined by the relations between man and nature established by production, certainly remains the only sound basis for any historical investigation; only these relations must be considered first of all in terms of the problem of power, the means of subsistence forming simply one of the data of the problem" (OL 71).

Another aspect of Weil's analysis of the struggle for power demonstrates her uniqueness in relation to her contemporaries. Weil contradicts the idea of infinite
development and extension of power. If power extends infinitely its means of control and its resources, human history would be returning towards paradise (OL 75). If power could also extend the range of its instruments -- for example, arms, technical secrets -- it would eventually transform the relation between master and slave to one of mutual dependence. However, Weil argues that power is subject to limits. Competition forces power beyond these natural limits. When power extends beyond these limits, it surpasses what it can control, commands over what it can impose, and spends beyond its resources. Every oppressive system contains within it that contradiction comprised of "the opposition between the necessarily limited character of the material bases of power and the necessarily unlimited character of the race for power considered as a relationship between men" (OL 76).

A decadent system does not necessarily disappear. Sometimes it becomes even more oppressive. Even when there is a change of régime, oppression does not disappear because it is based on patterns which had gradually replaced those of the declining régime. Weil illustrates this by the Russian Revolution which only reinforced the power of "big industry, the police, the army, the bureaucracy" (OL 78). Weil concludes that revolution is not a primary factor of change in history. History consists of "slow transformations of régimes" which involve "a dreary play of blind forces that
What causes social oppression and progress to be united in the relations between man and nature? Primitive man is subject to nature. Modern man, viewed from the collectivity, appears to have subjected nature through work. However, the mastery of the collective is transformed into servitude when one examines the situation from the perspective of the individual. The modern worker is as constrained by circumstances as the primitive hunter is subject to hunger. Throughout history man has been "goaded to work by some outside force" (OL 80). The sequence of work movements is also imposed from outside. The imposition of work methods is a mystery over which the worker has no control. This mystery is more brutal than that facing primitive man, because the latter still had the option to innovate. This liberty to innovate is denied to assembly-line workers. Furthermore, modern collectivities which appear to have the power to subject nature only contain members which are subject to the race for power.

In the previous paragraph, the connection between Weil's social analysis and the central theme of work becomes evident. Man's subjection of natural necessity through work is an illusion. From the perspective of the worker, a much harsher
necessity constrains his actions. This necessity, in the form of oppression, is imposed by man on man through the instrument of force contained within collectivities which organize work. Weil's social analysis is based on the conditions of existence which include the organization of work. The methods of labour produce inequality. The race for power based on the assumption of unlimited progress enslaves everyone including those who command and those who obey.

Weil concludes that progress has not changed man's servility to "blind forces in the universe" but merely "the power which keeps him on his knees has been transferred from inert matter to the human society of which he is a member" (OL 80).

Weil asserts that the conditions and cost of progress should be evaluated. In a modern society, humans spend their time accumulating surplus and luxury goods. These labours result in an organization of nature favourable to human existence. The efficacy is indirect and separated by many intermediaries so that it is a long-term efficacy. Thus the benefits of labours may only be visible to future generations, whereas the pain accompanying the labour is perceived in the immediate.

The coordination of labour in modern society combines the efforts of one to the efforts of all the rest. Primitive tribes can not solve the problems of privation, incentive to
effort, or coordination of labour. However, social oppression does have a solution by creating two categories, those who command and those who obey. Those who command are not influenced by limits of fatigue or what is necessary. Man is thus subject to the struggle for power.

When the stage of development is sufficiently complex to gain mastery over the forces of nature, the cooperation required is so vast that leaders find it extends beyond what they can control. In this manner, humanity is the plaything of the forces of nature in their "guise" of technical progress. Thus there is little change from primitive times to modern times in relation to man's subjection by the forces of nature.

"Theoretical Picture of a Free Society"

Weil suggests that although man seems born for servitude, his ability to think allows him to retain the idea of liberty. The dream of absolute liberty was provided in Weil's time by Marx's Communism. However, the dream has remained vain and any consolation it provides "has only been in the form of an opium; the time has come to give up dreaming of liberty, and to make up one's mind to conceive it" (OL 83-4). In this part of "Reflections" Weil begins to formulate her ideas beyond Marx, or the right or any other contemporary notions. The formulation of this new vision completes Weil's rejection of
immanent conceptions at this stage of her development.

An ideal picture of liberty must be visualized in order to attain a liberty which is more perfect than the present. Weil emphasizes that the ideal is unattainable but useful in that it enables one to evaluate one's situation (OL 84). Perfect liberty is not the abolition of necessity because "the pressure exerted by necessity will never be relaxed for one single moment" (OL 84). Weil connects here the presence of necessity in this world and the need to work. A world wherein one did not work would only result in man being "delivered over to the play of passions and perhaps to madness" (OL 84). Self-mastery results from discipline and the only source of discipline is the "effort demanded in overcoming external obstacles" (OL 84). It is not enough to overcome obstacles in art, science or games. The value of these activities is derived from their imitation of work. Even if man were removed from necessity in the form of nature or fellow-man, he would become subject to the emotions in his own soul from which no regular occupation would protect him. Therefore, perfect liberty does not involve the abolition of necessity in the form of work. Work and necessity are a permanent and useful part of human reality. Weil's definition of true liberty is a relationship between thought and action. A free person would act according to the ends he sets for himself and the means judged to be suitable to attain it. Thus, necessity
is a fact of life. One can choose to submit blindly to necessity, which Weil would describe as servitude, or one could adapt himself to the inner representation of it that he forms in his own mind. The latter would be the definition of liberty.

These two oppositions are ideal limits between which a human moves all his life. A slave would be someone whose movements were completely motivated by a source outside his own mind. Weil equates a primitive man or a manual worker on an assembly line with the condition of slavery. Complete liberty is illustrated by a model of a mathematical problem containing all the elements of a solution. Man uses his mind to put together these elements into a solution. Man would forge the conditions of his own existence by an act of mind. Weil describes as a noble destiny the confrontation with necessity leading to no expectations other than that derived from his own exertion. Man cannot, like God, be the direct author of his existence. However, man can possess the human equivalent of that power if the material conditions of his existence are the work of his own mind (OL 87). Man's destiny brings him in direct contact with necessity and requires his exertions, "and such that his life is a continual creation of himself by himself" (OL 87).

What factors keep us from this ideal of liberty? First, the complexity and size of the world are greater than one
person's mind can handle. The results of our actions are outside our control, but our actions themselves must be under control of the mind. A person should conceive of intermediaries linking the movements he is capable of to the results he wishes to obtain. The plan sketched out by intelligence gives chance a limited role. Although chance cannot be completely eliminated, its role can be limited.

One source of chance that cannot be eliminated is the body. The connection between our thoughts and our movements remains a mystery. This reflects a certain duality of "soul," open to freedom, and body, subject to necessity. Necessity cannot be conceived of because the intermediate links cannot be determined. The human body is gradually and increasingly reduced to a docile intermediary role between mind and instrument, through technical advances (OL 91). The separation between method and action in the work process provided an important tool for analysis of production methods. Weil proposed as an ideal "conscious work," which would attempt to overcome the separation between method and action.

The individual mind forms the basis for a free society. In this utopian vision, individuals would exercise thought and control in the work process. Manual labour would emerge as the basis for the most fully human civilization.

The value of human labour was one value which had been developed after Greek civilization. Although labour consisted
of an act of conscious submission to necessity, this submission could contain creative joy, provided that the work process allowed the worker to come to grips with nature. This relationship to nature was seen as an improvement on the view of Genesis which described work as a prison and proof of man's enslavement. The experience in the factory eventually transformed this idea of work as only imprisonment.

Weil then examines the method of production to ascertain which obstacles limit man's freedom in work. One obstacle to liberty is derived from the difference separating theoretical speculation from action. Many problems in the completion of a task require the solution of a theoretical problem before the action may be completed. Method does not need to be applied at the moment of carrying out a task. Weil makes an important point here, which her factory experience would later underline. A worker's attention cannot simultaneously execute an act and concentrate on the steps on which the execution depends. She observes, "Thus, for a single flash of thought there are an unlimited number of blind actions" (OL 92). The paradox in the work situation is that since the entire process of the work is divided into portions repeated continually by each worker, there is an overall method in the work, but not in the minds of the workers. When production becomes automated, the method is contained in the machinery and not in the mind of the worker (OL 92).
The division between application and understanding is applied to pure theory. The increasing complexity of theory makes it impossible to embrace all the signs necessary for the mind to comprehend the entire operation. The application of the formulas and the understanding of them are separate. In this case, the execution and the elaboration of the method of work occur outside the mind's control.

In opposition to a civilization wherein everyone rigidly follows details of work without anyone understanding what he or she is doing, Weil proposes another method of production, in which methodical thought would be in operation throughout the course of work. The worker would need to be aware of guiding principles behind the work to be able to apply the principle in relation to different circumstances. Although this ideal is not fully realizable, the sphere of conscious work can gradually be widened.

Another factor resulting in servitude is other humans. Only humans can enslave other humans. According to Weil, nature can break man but not humiliate him. If one's life is subject to another person's will, the control has passed outside of his intelligence. This dependence characterizes both the oppressed and the oppressors. In an oppressive society, every man is dependent on the blind play of collective life (OL 96). Collective strength is always greater than individual strength, except in the sphere of the
mind. The mind is the only thing truly individual about a person. Thinking is the only function which cannot be compelled by force.

Weil's model for a free society would hold as a central value the free use of the individual mind. The collective life would be subject to men as individuals. Material efforts would require the intelligence to be applied to the work done and the coordination of this work with all other members of the collective. The technique of work would require continual use of methodical thought in such a manner that each worker would understand all of the specialized procedures. Each worker would have to understand the coordination of work, thereby keeping the collective under control by individuals. By using reason, each individual would be able to verify the activities of all the rest. The condition of material existence would be based on the goal that each person should use his reason. The motivation to perform creative work would be derived from an inward constraint, thus, "the sight of an unfinished task attracts the free man as powerfully as the overseer's whip stimulates the slave" (OL 99).

The function of this model would be to serve as an ideal to use as a standard for evaluation of other social patterns. This new social method is similar to Marx in that it starts with the relationships of production; the difference is that Marx wanted to classify the modes of production in terms of
output, whereas Weil analyzed them in terms of the relationship between thought and action. To effectively study the past, the idea of progress must be discarded. Instead, it must be replaced by "a scale of values conceived outside time" (OL 100). Thus, for Weil, the least evil society would be one wherein persons are most often obliged to think while acting, have the most opportunities to exercise control over collective life, and have the greatest amount of independence.

Weil suggests that if her analysis of the problem is correct, the most fully human civilization would have manual labour as its pivot. The value of manual labour should be placed on the person who produces it, not in the object produced. Manual labour should ideally provide an individual with a feeling of worth.

The model for the organization of labour is also applied to social relations. Working collectives governed by cooperation would form the ideal. The relations between humans would be characterized by "that manly and brotherly feeling which forms the bond between workmates" (OL 106).

Weil illustrates this discussion of work with a comparison of a fisherman and a production-line worker. The fisherman battling the elements "has a more enviable lot" than the factory worker. Her ideal of work was personified by the craftsman of the Middle Ages or the fully skilled workers of modern industry. In collective work Weil advocated the model
of workmen sharing the problem-solving as opposed to workers subject to the orders of a foreman.

The ideal of labour as a human value is the one spiritual conquest which Weil believes has been achieved after Greek civilization. Bacon was the first to change the traditional attitude towards nature. The traditional view, shaped by Genesis, saw the world as a prison and labour as a sign of man's slavery. Bacon changed this by stating that nature cannot be commanded except by obeying her. Weil believed that this statement defined true labour, particularly in its act of submission to necessity. After Descartes, scientists considered science as an end in itself. However, writers after Descartes began to consider labour as an end in itself. Weil traces this ideal of the value of physical labour through writers such as Goethe, Rousseau, Shelley, and Tolstoy. Finally Proudhon, Marx, and the revolutionary syndicalists continued to develop this line of thought. Weil concludes this section by expressing pride in belonging to a civilization which has developed this new ideal of the value of physical labour.

"Sketch of Contemporary Social Life"

In evaluating the social reality of her time, Weil used the example of the individual to illustrate what had occurred in society as a whole. In its state of disequilibrium,
individual thought and action had become the prerogative of a collective apparatus. Similarly, society had become subject to totalitarianism. The state had become sovereign in all spheres. In a later essay (1939), Weil wrote concerning the state:

Every new development for the last three centuries has brought men closer to a state of affairs in which absolutely nothing would be recognized in the whole world as possessing a claim to obedience except the authority of the state. [9]

The state's power was not limited because it was not subject to any higher authority other than the sovereign nature of other states which would be imposed by war or threat of war (OL 116).

The power of an inhuman society was contained in its ability to shape everyone according to its image. The solution for the totalitarianism of the state was in a massive decentralization. Similarly for the social system and organization of work, a decentralized system would allow the workers to be liberated.

In contrast to the ideal portrayed in the previous section, Weil described her evaluation of contemporary civilization. She stated that all distinctions such as oppressors and oppressed had been collapsed under the crushing effects of the social machine. Disequilibrium characterized the present order. Methodical thought had disappeared. The
collectivity had taken over the individual's role. Manual workers had been reduced by technical progress and mass production to a passive role (OL 108-9).

The individual had been replaced in his coordinating function by a collective and anonymous apparatus. Machines had taken over essential functions. In this complex social structure, "thought, the prerogative of the individual, is subordinated to vast mechanisms which crystallize collective life" to the extent that the concept of real thought is lost (OL 111). The inversion between means and ends is complete. For example, machines do not exist for men to live but men are fed so they can serve the machines.

In the economic sphere, conquest is the goal of economic struggle. Thus, contemporary humanity tends toward a totalitarian form of social organization, where the state has power in all spheres, especially thought. The only possible end to this situation is the stage when chaos reaches the limit and all civilization perishes. Weil cautions against false expectations of change through reform or revolution. Slaves are not capable of overthrowing regimes because slavery degrades them to the extent of making them love it (OL 117).

An inhuman system such as the current social system models everyone to its image. Labour becomes servitude, machines crush workers, and there is no chance to produce free workers. The only hope for change would lie in a cooperative
effort to decentralize social life. However, Weil assumed that the centralization of the current social system destroyed all possibilities for developing alternatives and would continue to develop to the extreme limit of possibility. Weil wrote, "it seems reasonable that the generations which have yet to face the difficulties brought about by the collapse of the present system have yet to be born" (OL 111).

Weil concluded that the inhumanity of life will decrease as the individual ability to think increases. Civilization contains the ability to crush man, but it has also the germ to liberate him. A model for the liberation of man is exemplified by skilled labourers. If the centralized, oppressive organization of factory life and machinery is replaced by small undertakings, workers have a greater opportunity to exercise ingenuity.

Summary

In "Reflections" Weil provides both a model for society and an assessment of reality. Her model of society is open to change. Man can change social structures in the same way that the conditions of existence are subject to change and selection. One area within which society can exert control is the organization of work and warfare. Because social organization has a primary influence on the degree of oppression in a society, it is important to study and to
correct this organization when it is oppressive. The central actor within this social structure is a conscious, reasoning individual who functions as an instrument of change.

Weil rejects a passive explanation of the forces of society, which ascribe the causes of a situation to magic or to nature. To change this passive acceptance of the status quo, one must use the method which Weil suggests, in order to establish the locus of oppression. This method involves determining the ideal limit, and determining how the conditions of existence could be changed to approach this ideal. The emphasis is on man's role, as a rational individual, consciously selecting out from the conditions he is presented with. The tool which is used to decide which conditions should be eliminated is the principle of lesser evil.

One of the elements of the social and material world is force. Social force weighs more heavily on man because it is unlimited, as opposed to the limits inherent in the forces of nature. In its self-seeking method, social force destroys all that is necessary for an individual to be human. The only power which can exceed the strength of social force is that of a mind freely exercised.

Within the organization of labour in modern industry, there is no consideration of the ideas of force and limit. An increase in productivity is the goal, and specialization and
efficiency are the means. Individual man is oppressed by the force of this social organization which far exceeds natural limits. The complexity of the resulting bureaucracy grows beyond an individual's capacity to understand. Work then separates man's activities from his mind and, consequently, work becomes a form of slavery. Competition and the race for power become the sole goals of monopoly of bureaucrats, often causing a blending of the industrial, military, and state spheres. Individual workers provide the fuel to keep this machine functioning. These bureaucrats, who form a minority, are no less oppressed than those whom they oppress. The oppression can even be effected unconsciously. Nevertheless, the struggle for power, with its inherent instability, enslaves everyone.

What then would constitute an ideal society? Weil frequently returns to the idea of equilibrium to elucidate the ideal limit. Balance is achieved when constraint is exercised and when limits are acknowledged. Her ideal does not imply the elimination of necessity; on the contrary, Weil finds labour an opportunity to develop self-discipline. Thus liberty is not obtaining pleasure without effort, but is a relationship between thought and action.

Weil does not suggest that the advances in science and technology should be abolished. She cautions against the transferral of mind from humans to matter. Yet she grants a
place to the development of technology under the conscious control of man. Society, technology, the organization of work and the development of knowledge must remain within the experience and intelligence of the individual. Monopoly of any of these leads to the oppression of many by the few. The exercise of manual labour, using the strength of the body and the mind in a task, brings man to the point of being most fully human.

Thus, "Reflections" presents us with an important development in Weil's political thought. In the article Weil continued the critique of current social developments which had actually been initiated in "Prospects." The criticism of current social developments contained within both articles illustrated Weil's growing alienation from her contemporaries in trade unions or political action.

Marx provided Weil with a basic tool with which to analyse society. Although she displayed originality in criticizing Marx, she also credited him with providing the basis for her ideas. Weil believed that science had developed into a magic due to a culture of specialists. She felt that Marx's critique of religion needed to be applied to modern scientific developments. Weil supported the materialist method but criticized the myth of infinite progress and the myth of revolution. Her critique was based on an acceptance of necessity as part of human reality. Work as a daily
experience of necessity needed to be reformed, not eliminated.

Weil's proposals for reform were based on an examination of the conditions of existence. Any change required an understanding of the nature of true liberty and oppression in order that individuals could consciously select for the least oppressive systems of, for example, the organization of labour. In the following chapter, we will see how the experience of factory life affected this theoretical base which Weil had developed in "Reflections."
Notes

1 Quoted by Petrement, p. 77. Originally published as "Après la mort du Comité des 22" (After the Death of the Committee of Twenty-Two"), L'Effort, January 2, 1932.

2 The article was reprinted in Oppression and Liberty, pp. 1-24.

3 The article, called "Reflections on War," was originally published in La critique sociale, November 1933, and later reprinted in Ecrits historiques et politiques, p. 233.

4 Weil preceded work by others such as Ellul who also felt that this was the core of the problem. See, for example, J. Ellul, The Technological Society (New York: Random House, 1964).


8 Pierce, p. 112.

CHAPTER III
THE FACTORY EXPERIENCE, 1934-35

Biographical Background

Weil obtained her job through a friend who asked Auguste Detoeuf, director of the Alsthom Company, to employ her. Detoeuf was also interested in reorganizing industry and was sympathetic to Weil's desire to experience factory life. Weil rented a room near the factory and began work as a power-press operator on December 4, 1934. Fatigue, hunger, and inability to meet quotas plagued Weil during these months, from December 1934 to August 1935.

After a week in the factory, Weil wrote to a friend that "the liberation (relative) of the workers must be brought about before all else in the workshop and it seems to me that I will manage to perceive something of what that depends on" (Petrement, 277). Weil was determined to develop the theoretical framework she had started in her "Reflections" on the basis of the practical experience in the factory. Although the experience gave her practical exposure, it was also to change her in fundamental ways. The degree of this change was reflected in a meeting with Simone Petrement on December 20 when Weil admitted that if she could not stand up to the work, she would kill herself (Petrement, 228).

She was laid off from Christmas Day until January second,
and returned to work weakened by a cold and headaches. By January 15, Weil was so exhausted that she nearly gave in to the temptation not to think any more. A case of otitis caused her to return home for a month.

Weil's experience in the factory confirmed her political pessimism and withdrawal. She wrote, "Only when I think that the great Bolshevik leaders proposed to create a free working class and that doubtless none of them -- certainly not Trotsky, and I don't think Lenin either -- had ever set foot inside a factory, so that they hadn't the faintest idea of the real conditions that make for servitude or freedom for the workers -- well, politics appears to me a sinister farce" (Petrement, 232).

After a rest in Montana, Switzerland, with her parents, Weil returned to work on February 25. She was laid off again for two weeks on March 2. In a letter to a friend written during this time, Weil wrote that she had observed many things, but yet only a glimpse of that which truly interested her, namely, the factory's organization. She also communicated her difficulty in reaching quotas, partly due to the need to observe and think, rather than the absence of thought required by workers in a factory (Petrement, 235).

Weil returned to work from March 18 till April 5 before being laid off again. Her next job was at the J.J. Carnaud et Forges de Basse-Indre factory at Boulogne-Billancourt, which
commenced April 11. Weil described the factory as a jail. She experienced difficulty meeting quotas and was fired May 7.

After several weeks of being unemployed and of searching for a job, Weil found a job at the Renault factory. In a letter she described her goals of studying the relationship of labour to man and to human thought. Work had to liberate man, and to do this work must contain the opportunity for thought and judgement. She realized that new machines would probably be required but that study should be made of the machine's effect on the worker (Petrement, 245). She finished work in mid-August, 1935.

The primary effect of Weil's experience in the factory was her perception of suffering. Unlike the other workers, Weil's experience involved humiliation which was in effect a martyrdom. Her own perception of slavery coincided with the realization that slavery was connected to the material conditions and machinery of work. She remained convinced that certain problems needed to be studied, but she did not emerge with ready answers.

Weil's conclusions based on her experience in the factory will be discussed in the following section, which examines her "Factory Journal." However, it must be noted here that the experience confirmed some of the theoretical aspects she had developed. Even though she was unable to find answers to the problems of oppression and work, Weil confirmed the areas
which she felt needed further study, such as the organization of work. The experience also reinforced the political direction Weil had already taken in 1934, namely of political pessimism. Weil no longer believed in either revolution or reform.

The factory experience marked the first of two turning points in Weil's evolution (the second was in 1938). After the factory work, Weil clearly moved away from political solutions offered by either right or left. Her original leftist orientation was gradually undermined by her theoretical explorations (for example, "Critique of Marxism") and her experience in the factory which caused her to see politics as a "sinister farce."

The transformation of Weil evident in 1934-35 was also characterized by a second variable, namely, her move away from pure theoretical speculation. Weil had been motivated by a desire to experience what the workers experienced. To this end she rented a small room and struggled to live from her piecework earnings. The lesson she learned confirmed not only her theory on oppression, but caused her to experience and be forever marked by the humiliation, docility and slavery which the factory had produced in her. Thus, the factory experience introduced the motif of suffering into Weil's life.
"Factory Journal"

The "Factory Journal" forms a major portion of La condition ouvrière. The journal consists of detailed notes and observations made by Weil during the working experience. The purpose of examining this journal is to establish how the experience in a factory was important in Weil's quest for the transcendent. The factory work provided a final step in Weil's rejection of immanent solutions. It provided her with the experience of suffering which eventually led to her transition towards Christianity. Thus, the factory experience balanced the theoretical orientation and experientially introduced Weil to the motif of suffering.

In the "Factory Journal" Weil noted the effects of necessity. The workers tolerated the abuses of factory work because they had to earn a living (CO 38-9). However, her object was more than observation of necessity. Weil experienced this necessity by the pressure exerted by piecework and her unsuccessful attempts to feed herself from her earnings. Weil became one of the workers, deprived of the right to object or refuse orders. Her manual clumsiness and frequent headaches did not make her task easier. The organization of work created a great deal of tension. Mistakes or problems with the machines decreased the total production which was deducted from her wages (CO 39).

During the third week in the factory, Weil recorded a
feeling of servility and slavery (CO 40). When she reached the seventh week, the exhaustion made her forget her reasons for staying at the factory. Weil found it virtually impossible to keep thinking because she found that the absence of thought was the only means to prevent suffering. She wrote the same thoughts to Albertine Thevenon in January 1935:

> It is only on Saturday afternoon and Sunday that I can breathe, and find myself again, and recover the ability to turn over a few thoughts in my head. In a general way, the temptation to give up thinking altogether is the most difficult one to resist in a life like this: one feels so clearly that it is the only way to stop suffering. 

In the fourteenth week of factory work, Weil was overcome by her fatigue and headaches. Her struggle to avoid making mistakes intensified. Weil constantly repeated the sequence of necessary operations to avoid mistakes and thought. However, the absence of thought was also accompanied by a feeling of humiliation. Her increase in productivity was accompanied by a bitterness of the heart.3

From April 11 to May 7, Weil worked at a factory in Boulogne-Billancourt. At this job she was forced to work even harder than at Alsthom. The foreman threatened her with the loss of her job unless she produced more per hour. She reacted to these threats with anger in her heart. She failed to meet the quota he had set and asked whether she should return for work. He replied that she should return but work
harder. On her way out of the factory, Weil was amazed to see the others talking, without appearing to have the same rage in their hearts. She left the factory and sat near the Seine. She questioned whether she could continue this lifestyle without eventually throwing herself in the Seine.4

Weil described how the foreman ordered her to stop working. She stopped, and remained seated waiting to hear what he wanted. She realized that this was a mistake, because a foreman who ordered a worker to stop also expected the worker to stand and obey his new orders. Weil saw evidence of this type of servility all around her. The sight of workers lined up in front of a door waiting for a bell amazed Weil. The lack of protest or reaction by the workers was incomprehensible to her. This incident left a great impression on Weil, because she recalled it frequently in her writing to illustrate the injustice of the factory bureaucracy which would require its workers to wait to enter their workplace and to demonstrate the docility of the workers in the face of such a bureaucracy. Weil was laid off or fired from this job and began to search for a new job. There were few jobs available. During her third week of unemployment she decided to restrict herself to spending three francs and fifty centimes per day, including transportation. Hunger became a permanent feeling. She questioned whether hunger was more or less painful than working and eating. She decided that hunger
was more painful (CO 86).

Weil borrowed some makeup from Petrement and returned to the Renault factory for an interview. She had heard that the person who hired preferred attractive women. She was hired without difficulty (Petrement, 240). She travelled to work overcome with fear. Her memories of other workshops, the rough foremen, cut fingers, heat and headaches added to her fear (CO 86). She worked on a milling machine and managed well enough to pass her month's probation. In her journal, Weil continued to record her exhaustion and headaches.

On June 19 Weil recorded her feelings on the way to work as follows: "I go to the shop with an excessively painful feeling: each step costs me (morally, on the way home it is physically). I am in a state of semi-bewilderment in which I am the designated victim for any sort of hard blow..." (Petrement, 241). While trying to meet her quotas, Weil suffered an accident and cut off a piece of her thumb. After being treated in the infirmary, she returned to work. The next day she worked with pain which in this case was more physical than moral.

Weil was forced to spend time looking for boxes in which to put the pieces. There were not enough, and the workers occasionally stole them from each other. This added to the worry, because an hour spent looking for boxes resulted in a diminished output and a lower wage.
On June 27 Weil noted a strange reaction while taking a bus to the dentist. She wrote the following:

How is it that I, a slave, can get on this bus, use it by paying twelve sous in the same way as anyone? What an extraordinary favour! If they had brutally forced me to get off it would have seemed completely natural to me. Slavery has made me completely lose the feeling of having rights. It seems to me a favour to have moments when I have nothing to bear in terms of human brutality. These moments are like smiles from heaven, a chance gift. Let us hope that I keep this state of mind, which is so reasonable. (Petrement, 242)

Weil continued her work, suffering another injury -- driving a metal shaving into her hand. Headaches and fatigue continued to plague her. Machine breakdowns brought the anger of the foreman upon her. She complained of pains in the legs and wrote, "I'm fed up, fed up..." (CO 102). Nevertheless, she obeyed his orders without saying anything.

Weil feared the jamming of the machine. This fear combined with the feeling of being crushed: bitterness, disgust dominated her work. After jamming the machine, Weil managed to change the cutter by herself. This achievement was a rare victory for her, but the remainder of the work was frustrating and exhausting. Eventually it ended as she finished work at Renault in the middle of August.

Her summary of the experience as described in her journal was as follows:

What did I gain from this experience? The feeling that I do not possess any right, whatever it might
be, to anything whatever... The ability to be morally self-sufficient, to live, without feeling inwardly humiliated in my own eyes, in a state of latent and perpetual humiliation; to taste each moment of freedom and comradeship to the full... A direct contact with life....

I could have been shattered. I nearly was...
I arose each morning with anguish, I went to the factory with dread; I worked like a slave; the noonday interruption was like a laceration; then went home at a quarter to six, worried about getting enough sleep (which I never did), getting up early enough. Time was an intolerable burden. The fear -- the dread -- of what was to come never ceased oppressing me until Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning. And the object of this fear was the orders. (Petrement, 243-4)

Weil stated that the feeling of personal dignity obtained from society was shattered by the experience. Weil recognized that there was a class of people who did not count and no matter what happened never would count. This confirmed the political pessimism Weil had already expressed prior to the factory experience. Weil suffered greatly from the humiliation during work. Her work was subject to the orders of others and she was required to blindly follow those orders without exercising any thought herself. To Weil, this state of subjection was a form of slavery.

Thus, Weil discovered that oppression would not lead to revolt but to submission (CO 107). Her own experience in response to oppression showed that at the Alsthom plant she only revolted on Sundays. However, at the Renault plant, Weil stated that she became more stoic. She substituted acceptance for submission (CO 107). It is evident that the experience
was a very personal confrontation with the nature of oppression and submission. Through the experience Weil evolved from almost complete submission to an attitude of acceptance. This attitude of acceptance of suffering in the factory would become transformed into a spiritual exercise in the latter phase of her thought. Even though this motif would be transformed, the experience of suffering left an indelible mark. The personal experience of suffering prepared Weil for the experience of being "between two realities."

After the factory experience, Weil was exhausted. She left for a holiday in Spain and travelled with her parents to Portugal. In a village in Portugal Weil had the first mystical experience on her path to Christianity. The village was celebrating a festival of its patron saint. Weil suddenly realized "that Christianity is pre-eminently the religion of slaves, that slaves cannot help belonging to it, and I among others" (Petrement, 249; WG 66-7).

Weil returned to Paris and left again to take up her appointment in a lycee in Bourges. She experienced good relations with her colleagues and students in this post. Petrement describes the content of her teaching as philosophical analysis mixed with her memories of the factory work. Thus, in Weil's concentration on social issues there was evidence of a "restrained sob" in place of the indignation Weil had previously shown (Petrement, 250).
Reflections on the Factory Experience

The question of work conditions among the oppressed continued to challenge Weil after her factory experience. In a letter to Albertine Thevenon, written in 1935, Weil expressed some of her thoughts on the experience. Her ideal of a factory was as follows: "a place where one makes a hard and painful, but nevertheless joyful, contact with real life. Not the gloomy place it is, where people only obey orders, and have their humanity broken down, and become degraded lower than machines" (SL 20).

In the same letter Weil recounted one occasion when she felt a sense of fraternity. She had to put bobbins for trams in a huge furnace and remove them. The heat from the furnace was so intense that she received burns on her arms. Whenever the heat would strike her face, Weil winced and a nearby worker gave her a smile of sympathy. Once, overcome by the heat, Weil was unable to close the shutter and a copper worker jumped up to do it for her. However, this experience of fraternity was rare for Weil.

More representative of her factory experience was the feeling of docility, of being a beast of burden. Weil wrote Thevenon that she felt "born to wait for, and receive, and carry out orders -- that I had never done and never would do anything else" (CO 20-21). Only during sick leave did Weil
realize her "degradation" and she swore she would endure until she could pull herself together in spite of it. This she managed as she described:

Slowly and painfully, in and through slavery, I reconquered a sense of my human dignity -- a sense which relied, this time, upon nothing outside myself and was accompanied always by the knowledge that I possessed no right to anything, that any moment free from humiliation and suffering should be accepted as a favour, as merely a lucky chance. (SL 22)

The two factors which dictated a worker's life of slavery were the necessity for speed and obedience to orders. The demand for speed required that a worker annihilate his soul and thought. The submission to orders required that a person be always prepared to follow any order without any protest. The combination of these two factors created a situation wherein "thought shrivels up and withdraws, as the flesh flinches from a lancet. One cannot be 'conscious'" (SL 22).

In this letter Weil revealed how the transition from factory to school affected her. She wrote, "I feel that the change from that hard life to my present one is corrupting me.... But I try to resist. If I let myself go I should forget it all and settle down to the privileges without wishing to think of them as such. But don't worry, I'm not letting myself go. Moreover, I said farewell to gaiety in that life; it has left an indelible bitterness in my heart."
Yet all the same I am glad to have experienced it" (SL 23).

Weil visited the Rosières foundries. She eagerly examined everything and questioned everyone. She made contact with M. Bernard, the technical manager of the factory, and asked his permission to write an article in his journal for workers, called *Entre Nous*. Weil wrote the article in December, entitled "An Appeal to the Workers at Rosières" (SL 26-30). She appealed to the workers to counter the oppression which they experienced in their work, whether they perceived it or not. Weil wrote, "But aren't there also some days when you find it oppressive never to be able to say what you feel but always to keep it to yourself?" (SL 26). Weil wanted the workers to write down in their own words their feelings towards their work so that the managers would read what the workers wrote and perhaps understand them better. She added, "you are the ones who suffer the burden of this industrial regime, but it is not you who can solve or even state the problems of organization" (SL 29). If the workers communicated their experience to the management, the managers could understand the conditions of the workers. Their chief concern should not be to increase profits but to create the most humane work conditions possible compatible with the profits required for the factory's existence. Although Weil realized that complete understanding between workers and managers was an ideal, she believed that it would be useful to
attempt to move towards it.

M. Bernard refused to publish the letter. Weil argued that to raise the workers required a change in the humiliating conditions of their lives and stated that she wanted to help them recover their sense of dignity.

Weil had stayed away from the factory while she waited to hear if the management would consent to hire her. However, when that did not seem likely, she attempted to arrange a visit. She wrote to Bernard that "It is very difficult to judge from above and it is very difficult to act from below." She considered this to be a general cause of human misery, which is why she wanted to go to the bottom and collaborate from there with management.

Several methods could be utilized to make the workers feel that they would count. The discussion between managers and slaves required an equal sharing of opinion. Suffering would be less likely to degrade a person if one understood the necessities which caused it. Also, she felt the workers needed intellectual stimulation.

In another letter she explained that she had no intention of stirring up revolt because of her concern for the moral interests of the oppressed. She explained as follows: "I know too well that those who are in the toils of their too harsh necessity, if they rebel at one moment, will fall on their knees the moment after" (SL 41). The way to preserve dignity
is to accept suffering. Weil wanted to encourage full
collaboration between workers and management. The type of
collaboration she envisaged required the workers to transform
from a state of blind obedience. Weil defined a good social
organization as one which tended to lessen natural
inequalities by levelling them upwards. Weil began working on
a project which she had been interested in for a long time,
namely rewriting Greek poetry to make it accessible to
ordinary people. She started with Antigone and sent it to M.
Bernard. She believed that Greek poetry would be closer to
the people than French literature. The article was printed in
Entre Nous. She continued to work on the theme of Greek
poetry. Another theme that interested her was the creation of
modern science by the Greeks.

The sit-in strikes in Paris caused her to delay a visit
to the factory in Rosières. She chose to go to Paris instead
of Rosières and explained to M. Bernard that it would be
better that she go, "because if I found myself among your
workers at this moment I could not resist offering them warm
congratulations." Her excitement about the strikes is evident
in the following:

You will realize, I think, what feelings of
unspeakable joy and relief this splendid strike
movement has given me. The consequences will be
what they will. But nothing can destroy the value
of these lovely days of joy and fraternity, nor
the relief the workers have felt at being for once
given way to by those who dominate them. (SL 54)
This letter signalled the end of the discussions between Weil and Bernard. He wrote back a severe but courteous letter. Weil wrote one final letter defending herself. She argued that she felt joy for the workers because they had asserted themselves for a few days and joy for the bosses that they had had to endure humiliation for once. In a postscript, she requested that M. Bernard return her letters because she had plans to write something about industrial labour and needed the ideas contained in the letters.

The strikes had begun in May 1936 and had spread from the provinces to Paris. They involved a "sit-down" takeover of the factory. The atmosphere was joyous and fraternal. Weil visited several factories, including the Renault factory where she had worked.

Weil rejoiced at the nature of the strikes and their resulting fraternity among the workers. However, she did not expect many changes as a result of the strikes. She wrote to M. Bernard, "I never at any time had any illusion about the possible results of the strikes...." After visiting the plants she concluded, "of course, this life that is so hard will start all over again in a few days. But nobody thinks about it, everyone behaves like soldiers on leave during the war. And besides, whatever may happen later on, one will still have had this experience" (Petrement, 266).
Weil met with Auguste Detoeuf, the manager of electrical companies, who had arranged for Weil to be hired at Alsthom in December 1934. In a letter to Detoeuf written in 1936, Weil attempted to clarify her position. Weil wanted Detoeuf to understand her because she had a plan to work in a factory and cooperate with him in implementing reforms.

Detoeuf had expressed doubt concerning the value of his experience because he thought Weil disliked manual labour and discipline. In this letter Weil defended her appreciation of both. Her definition of humane discipline was that type addressed to the "goodwill and energy and intelligence of the subordinate" (SL 55). Weil described the obedience required in the factory as affecting the time dimension. Normally, the body lives in the present while the mind surveys and directs the flow of time. However, in the factory, Weil's attention was largely limited to the movement performed. The result of this waiting for a future over which one had no control was the death of courage. Second, the type of obedience required involved one's whole existence. Since an order could be given at a moment of complete exhaustion, it contained the potential to force one beyond exhaustion to desperation. Weil's third objection to factory discipline rested upon the poor incentives which the discipline relied on, namely monetary gain and fear. The only method to avoid suffering was unconsciousness.
Concerning the strikes Weil wrote: "The present wave of strikes is based on despair. That is why it cannot be reasonable." She felt that some good could be derived from the situation: "...if the workers return to work fairly soon and with the feeling of having won a victory, the situation will be favourable in a little time for attempting some reforms in the factories" (SL 56-7).

Weil slipped into the Renault plant on June 19, 1936, to assess the situation. She wrote Detoeuf to describe the suspicion of the workers towards the management. She advocated workers' control, wherein both workers and managers would share responsibility. Weil realized her idea as possibly utopian, but as the only alternative to a totalitarian state. She wrote: "If the working class imposes its power with such crude force it must assume the corresponding responsibilities" (SL 60). Any situation wherein one class imposed its wishes by force was inadmissible. Only joint responsibility would remove that possibility.

Weil was so involved in events in Paris that she found it extremely "trying and nerve-wracking" to be in the provinces. Her headmistress in Bourges demanded that Weil return for the distribution of prizes. Her evaluation for the year was fairly good, although several supported the idea that Weil should be transferred to a northern industrial town.
"Factory Work"

In 1941 Weil wrote an article entitled "Factory Work" based on her experience of factory life during 1934-35. The article was shaped by the vantage point of seven years' reflection on the subject. It is evident that the memory of factory life had not faded in the intervening years. The article also reflects Weil's use of a changed vocabulary. In contrast to the mathematician's precision of recounting details of work in the factory journal, her article seven years later reflects a new element. The article indicates Weil's transition to her spiritual phase.

The new element in Weil's thinking was derived from a shift in her beliefs. Weil had begun to analyze social reality in the light of her personal belief in two distinct realities. No longer trapped within the immanence of present reality, Weil struggled to relate the existing world to a transcendent vision.

The article is directed towards the worker's experience of counting for nothing. This feeling of insignificance had left a permanent impression on Weil during her work in the factory. Weil believed that her own perception of this as a worker reflected the universal experience of all labourers. Workers were exiles and were not free to participate in the joys of free men.
What caused the suffering of the workers? The workers' subjection to time and to orders were two main causes of their plight. Orders had to be blindly obeyed since they were delivered in the form of a command. The future was not under the worker's control and as a consequence he withdrew into a stupor. The anxiety of not working fast enough reinforced the feeling of counting for nothing. The offenses against the worker were aggravated by the fact that one could not entirely withdraw from the situation, or "check in his soul upon entering the plant." Rather, one's soul was forced to participate in the ordeal of the factory.

The worker's situation was aggravated by the indifference and lack of comradeship between workers. This indifference was a result of a reversal of the focus of interest, which lay in the products rather than in the workers. This inversion of the relationship was for Weil "the root of evil." She wrote, "Things play the role of men, men the role of things" (FW 60). This need to reverse this relationship Weil had already perceived prior to her factory experience. In 1934 she had written: "It is not in relation to what it produces that manual labour must become the highest value, but in relation to the man who performs it..." (OL 104). Manual labour had to provide for a human "what he is most essentially in need of if his life is to take on of itself a meaning and a value in his own eyes" (OL 104). The difference in her later writings
would expand the purpose of labour to not just be of value in one's own eyes but also as a spiritual exercise.

Weil proposed an ideal solution in this article. She wrote as follows: "The perfect social organization would be one which, by that and other means, would give a proprietary feeling to all men" (FW 62). Elsewhere she wrote: "The factory ought to be a place where, for all the inevitability of physical and spiritual travail, working people can taste joy and nourish themselves on it" (FW 66).

To help the workers gain a proprietary feeling, Weil suggested that the workers be allowed to feel more at home in the factories. This would involve their active participation in the organization of work and their understanding of the production process. In 1934, Weil had defined liberty as the relationship between thought and action. She still believed that the workers were not allowed to exercise thought and that they consequently withdrew into a stupor. Weil suggested that it should be possible for a worker to show his family where he worked. Both in the process of production and in the finished product, the worker should feel that he has a part.

The second statement is equally interesting because of several assumptions contained within. Weil assumed that physical and spiritual travail were inevitable. In 1934, Weil had already written that liberty did not mean the absence of necessity, since as long as man existed he had to expect that
"the pressure exerted by necessity will never be relaxed for one single moment" (OL 84). At that time, Weil felt that the main function of labour was to help man exercise self-discipline and self-conquest.

In 1941, Weil continued to believe that labour was inevitable. However, the purpose of that labour would change as a result of the acceptance of two distinct realities, namely an earthly reality and a transcendent reality. Work would allow the worker the opportunity to taste joy and to nourish himself. Thus, work was not only an inevitable aspect of necessity, but it allowed the worker to experience joy and nourishment in a spiritual and essential way.

The types of reforms Weil suggested included the reduction of everything which caused disgust in work, the transformation of the relation of worker to factory, and of worker to the machine, and a changed awareness of time during work (FW 66). The question of time and rhythm was considered crucial to the problem. Weil was not opposed to monotony and tedium. She believed that humans had been "thrown out of eternity", and the passage through time was part of the human journey. She wrote: "This travail is our lot, and the monotony of work is but one of the forms that it assumes" (FW 69). Yet she also believed that man's vocation called him to master time. The order of the seasons in their variety within a set uniformity provided the model for man's nature,
both in its misery and its grandeur. Although the peasant's work more closely approximates the natural rhythm, Weil felt that the factory labour could be made to simulate this rhythm.

The change in factory time could be made by transforming the machine and by opening up the future for the worker. This would require the reorganization of factory life to allow for autonomy of each workshop and of each worker in relation to his shop.

Weil felt that the proposed reforms would affect all of society. If the workers did not loathe their work, they would be less likely to find their solace in "a spirit of working-class imperialism, nurtured by the propaganda issuing from marxism" (FW 72). In the realm of private life, the family would benefit from the reforms. The workers, according to Weil, tried to fill the void left by their work by violent gratifications, which corrupted the relations within families. Her inclusion of the family in reform was a unique perspective on social reform.

The factory work experience was the most poignant period of Weil's life. The personal knowledge of suffering marked Weil and remained with her for the remainder of her life. Through this time Weil experienced the suffering of workers and experienced the affliction of factory work. It was important in her quest because it prepared her to move away from rejecting the immanent towards a more positive
formulation of belief. The experience of slavery and of affliction was crucial to the step of her quest which we will follow in the next chapter, namely, of metaxu, between two realities.
Notes


2 *Seventy Letters*, pp. 15-16.

3 Weil wrote: "Sens profondément l'humiliation de ce vide impose à la pensée. J'arrive enfin à aller un peu vite...mais l'amertume au coeur" (CO 66).

4 Weil wrote: "...la je m'assieds au bord, sur un pierre, morne, épuisée et le coeur serré par la rage impuissante, me sentent vidée de toute ma substance vitale, je me demands si, au cas où je serais condamnée à cette vie, j'arriverais à traverser tous les jours la Seine sans me jeter une fois dedans" (CO, 81-82).

Biographical Background 1936-1943

Weil travelled to the Spanish Civil War with journalist's credentials. An unfortunate accident prematurely ended her stay and prevented her from returning to the front again. During 1936-37, Weil requested leave from teaching due to a general deterioration of her health. This allowed her to redirect her attention to the workers.

The issues which Weil supported in her various articles included the need for workers' control, the responsibility of the worker to the trade union (CO 175-9), and the responsibility of the unions in relation to strikes (CO 197-205). Another article written during the period was titled "Principles for a New Inner Regime in Industrial Enterprises" (CO 207-13). In this article Weil called for an equilibrium between the rights of the workers and the material interests of production.

Her concern with balancing workers' rights and employers' needs led to a study of the Taylor system and industrial rationalization. She described the ideal factory organization as one wherein "the raw materials that it utilizes in products that are neither too rare, nor too costly and
defective, and at the same time that the men who enter it in
the morning do not come out diminished either physically or
morally in the evening, nor at the end of a day, or year, or
twenty years" (Petrement, 292).

Weil travelled to Italy where she delighted in art and
music, but also spent hours in the working-class districts of
Milan. At the Chapel of Santa Maria degli Angeli, Weil
experienced the second mystical event which led her towards
Christianity. She wrote about it in 1942 to Father Perrin and
stated that "something stronger than I compelled me for the
first time to go down on my knees" (Petrement, 310).

Weil continued to write articles, for example, on the
nature of power in "Meditation on Obedience and Liberty"
(1937; OL 140-146). This article clearly shows the transition
of her thought from the factory period to later writings. The
nature of the transition is evident in the analogy which Weil
uses to explain the relation between suffering and dignity.
She now refers to Christ's suffering as a model for human
suffering. She wrote: "It is impossible for the most
heroically staunch mind to preserve the consciousness of
inward value when there is no external fact on which this
consciousness can be based. Christ himself, when he found
himself abandoned by everybody, mocked, despised, his life
counting for nothing, lost for a moment the feeling of his
mission.... It seems to those who obey that some mysterious
inferiority has predestined them to obey for all eternity...." (OL 145).

Weil's spiritual experiences did not make her a mystic. The subject matter of her articles during this time reveals her continuing concern with political and social issues, although with a growing pessimism about the proposed immanent solutions. For example, during the end of 1937 or the beginning of 1938, Weil wrote two important essays reprinted in Oppression and Liberty, "On the contradictions of Marxism" and "Critical Examinations of the ideas of Revolution and Progress" (OL 141-47 and 134-140). These articles were important because they continued the critical analysis begun in "Prospects" and "Reflections." This critical perspective was important in Weil's rejection of immanent polarities, of which Marxism was one.

In this time period, Weil's writing reflected her rejection of immanent polarities in other ways as well. By 1938 Weil was thoroughly disappointed in the union movement. She disapproved of the tendency to establish a single obligatory union. The weakness of the working class and the ineffectiveness of the trade union movement caused Weil to lose interest in their concerns. By 1938, therefore, we see a shift in focus in Weil's writing reflecting her dissociation from immanent thinking. The themes of her writing at this time concerned colonial peoples and pacifism.
The change of focus was also reflected in a growing interest in spiritual experience reflected in art, music and literature. The link between her factory experience of suffering and her continued suffering in headaches and physical weakness was perceived during the chants at Solesmes. Despite the fact that each sound hurt her, she was able to rise above this through concentration. The experience helped her to perceive a connection between love and affliction: "This experience enabled me by analogy to get a better understanding of the possibility of divine love in the midst of affliction. It goes without saying that in the course of these services the thought of the Passion of Christ entered into my being once and for all" (WG 68).

The personal experience of divine love through affliction was accompanied by an introduction to the supernatural power of the sacraments (Petrement, 329). While observing a young Englishman receiving communion, Weil noted an angelic radiance on his face. This same Englishman also introduced her to the seventeenth-century metaphysical poets. Weil's reading was marked by these experiences. The theme of affliction drew her to such works as King Lear.

Weil believed that the affliction expressed in King Lear and in Sophocles served as models for the present epoch, which contained real affliction. Here Weil began to make connections between her own experience of affliction in the
world and the existence of the possibility of divine joy penetrating that affliction. Weil saw that affliction could enter the soul through physical sufferings and humiliation. Weil used the example of Christ's affliction to demonstrate how Christ's suffering became acute through the blows and mockery until He cried, "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Weil found the greatness in Lear's suffering to be the fact that he was not crushed, only broken, by the external world.

This experience of being broken but not crushed by the external world directly echoed Weil's own experience in the last factory where she had worked. Weil substituted acceptance for submission in the Renault plant. Submission implied a passivity in the face of meaningless suffering, whereas acceptance implied a potential purpose in suffering. The greatness which she now perceived in literature and poetry represented an affliction which cried out in every word in the same way as Christ's words cried out. Similarly, the greatness of the suffering of the literary figures was attributed to the fact that they were not crushed by their suffering.

Weil travelled to Italy with her parents on a vacation which lasted from May until August 1938. She felt pessimistic with the threat of war looming over Europe. She suffered greatly from her headaches. She often recited the poem "Love" by George Herbert, using it as a focus for all her attention.
She wrote that the poem was like a prayer and once when she recited it she had the feeling that Christ was present. She later described the experience as "a sudden possession of me by Christ... [wherein she felt] in the midst of my suffering the presence of love..." (WG, 76-7).

Weil slowly altered her pacifist stand in the face of developments in Germany. Once she realized that it would be necessary to fight Hitler, she began to formulate plans involving herself in the front lines. Weil wrote a great deal during this time while struggling to come to terms with nationalism. She believed the key to history was the reality of force, not of class, as Marx would describe it. Weil continued to study the history of religions, teaching herself Babylonian. She read the Bhagavad-Gita and felt enormously sympathetic to this work. She wrote about mathematics, because she believed that the Greeks used mathematics to obtain the purity of soul to imitate God. Many changes were taking place in Weil's thought. However, few of her friends realized to what extent Weil had changed. Petrement stated that she did not realize until much later how deeply Weil had become involved in religious thought (Petrement, 373).

Weil was determined not to leave Paris even though bombs were already exploding. She did not want to flee and she hoped that Paris would be defended. Finally, when the Weil family saw announcements that Paris was an open city, they
left without packing a suitcase. The family reached Vichy in July. Weil was still determined to go to England to join the resistance. She requested a teaching post abroad or in the colonies.

The Weil family travelled from Toulouse to Marseille, the port from which many attempted to leave France. They moved into an apartment in Marseille in October, 1940. Weil wrote to Paris for her manuscripts. She began publishing in a literary magazine called *Cahiers du sud*. Weil confided to a friend that she perceived the presence of God in everything beautiful. Her goal at this time was to work at some manual labour. To another friend, Weil stated that, "I am as close to Catholicism as is possible to be without however being a Catholic" (Petrement, 394).

She tried to help refugees living in camps in the area. She made contact with a Resistance network and was questioned several times in 1941 by the police in regard to her activities. She had formulated a "Project for Front-Line Nurses" which she tried to send to various heads of governments.

Weil continued to pursue her goal of experiencing an agricultural labourer's life. Her friend Father Perrin put her in contact with Gustav Thibon. While waiting to start a job, Weil wrote "Experience of Factory Life" (CO 241-259).

Weil worked as a picker in the grape harvest. She wrote to a friend, "Sometimes I am crushed by a great fatigue, but I
find in it a kind of purification" (Petrement, 441). Weil
worked in the harvest from September 22 until October 22,
1941. Weil had to give up her plan of working as a farmhand
during the winter because the farmer involved had decided to
hire workers from his own village. Weil returned to Mar­
seilles, where she wrote the major portion of her Marseilles
notebooks. She also wrote numerous essays and articles.

Part of her correspondence at this time included her
letters to Father Perrin concerning her belief that she could
not be baptized. Weil objected to the church as a social
structure which in its composition as "social" became the
domain of the devil. Weil had decided to leave France, partly
for the safety of her parents but also, more significantly,
for her wish to be involved in the war effort. On May 14, the
Weil family sailed from Marseilles to Casablanca. In a camp
in Casablanca, Weil wrote continuously. Weil decided that she
would have to remain outside the church so that she could
serve God and Christian faith in the realm of intelligence
(Petrement, 471).

Weil and her parents sailed on June 7, 1942, arriving in
New York a month later. Weil wrote letters trying to convince
people of her plan for front-line nurses. She wrote Jacques
Maritain, Admiral Leahy, and Maurice Schumann. She
desperately wanted to reach England, or to take part in a
dangerous mission in France. The major part of her New York
Notebooks was written during October 1942. She sailed to England in November, 1942.

Weil was given a job as editor and a small office in London. She had to examine projects outlined by Resistance committees for the rebuilding of France. She wrote a tremendous amount during this time, including many essays and The Need for Roots. Weil found a room in a poor section with a widow who had two children. She was very discouraged that she could neither activate her plan nor go to France on an active mission. Her headaches started again and she ate less. She did not want to be privileged or to eat more than civilians in France.

Weil became ill and was hospitalized on April 15, 1943. She was diagnosed as having tuberculosis. Weil did not improve under treatment. She was transferred to a sanitorium. She fell into a coma and died on Tuesday, August 24, 1943.

Theology

As Weil struggled to understand the universe in terms of two distinct realities, certain aspects of her theology reached a more definitive shape. We have seen how, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, she broke with immanentism, which confined human reflection to an earthly reality and its history. Instead, she argued for the existence of two realities -- an earthly and a transcendent reality. We have
noted that certain key concepts -- such as affliction and necessity -- are present in both of the major phases of her development, and that these continued to influence her ideas on labour. In this section we will explore the contours of her "final" stage, with reference not only to affliction and necessity, but also to creation and love -- concepts which occupy a crucial place in the final phase of her writings.

Both Weil's work in the factory in 1934-35 and her later work in 1941 as an agricultural labourer contained the experience of overwhelming fatigue and suffering. However, her changed perception of the spiritual potential inherent in that suffering affected her expectations of what work would accomplish. She wrote in anticipation of her agricultural experience: "I also expect to witness the extinction of my intellect owing to fatigue. Nonetheless, I regard physical work as a purification -- but a purification in the order of suffering and humiliation. One can find...instants of profound, nourishing joy that cannot be equalled elsewhere" (Petrement, 423).

Despite the joy and purification which Weil noted as part of this work experience, she never lost sight of the affliction which also characterized the human experience. In order to understand the idea of joy in the midst of affliction, it will be necessary to examine the development of Weil's theology.

As an introduction to this discussion of Weil's final
phrase, it will be useful to briefly examine two documents which are Weil's clearest expression of her spiritual journey, in the "Spiritual Autobiography,"¹ and of her belief in "Profession of Faith."² In the former, her letter to Father Perrin, Weil describes how through the experience of life in the factory "the affliction of others entered my soul" (Reader, 14). As mentioned earlier, during her work in the factory Weil became convinced that she was a slave. This perception of slavery became linked in Portugal to the notion that Christianity was the religion of slaves, "that slaves cannot help belonging to it, and I among others" (Reader, 15). In the chapel where St. Francis prayed in Italy, Weil was brought to her knees by "something stronger." In Solesmes through the transcendence of suffering through the practice of concentration on the beauty of liturgical chants Weil experienced "perfect joy" (Reader, 15). The experience opened up by analogy the possibility of loving divine love in the midst of affliction. At this point, "the thought of the Passion of Christ entered into my being once and for all" (Reader, 15). While reciting a poem called "Love," Weil overcame the pain of her headaches by a supreme act of concentration, and during one of the recitations "Christ himself came down and took possession of me" (Reader, 16). She later recited the Lord's Prayer in Greek while attempting to exercise pure attention.
She described the effect of this exercise of attention in the recitation of the Lord's Prayer:

At times, the very first words tear the thoughts from my body and transport it to a place outside space where there is neither perspective nor point of view. The infinity of the ordinary expanses of perception is replaced by an infinity to the second or sometimes to the third degree. At the same time, filling every part of this infinity of infinity there is a silence, a silence which is not an absence of sound but which is the object of a positive sensation, more positive than that of sound. (Reader, 18)

Throughout her spiritual autobiography, Weil still resisted. She confessed: "Yet I still half refused, not my love but my intelligence" (Reader, 18). However, she did not see a contradiction between faith and truth because "Christ likes us to prefer truth to him because, before being Christ, he is truth. If one turns aside from him to go toward the truth, one will not go far before falling into his arms" (Reader, 16). One concept which provided a link between the exercise of intelligence and truth was the notion of attention. This concept will be examined in Chapter Five.

Weil's experience of God and acceptance of a spiritual dimension affected her view of reality. She wrote to Maurice Schumann (1943?) that she felt "an ever increasing sense of devastation, both in my intellect and in the centre of my heart, at my inability to think with truth at the same time about the affliction of men, the perfection of God, and the
link between the two" (SL, 178).

The attempt to link the earthly reality with a transcendent vision "required an understanding of the relationship between man's affliction and God's perfection." In "Draft for a Statement of Human Obligations" Weil attempts to clarify this relationship. In this "Draft" Weil posits another reality outside of space, time and human faculties (SE, 219). Although this reality is inaccessible to man's mental faculties, there is "corresponding to this reality, at the centre of the human heart...the longing for an absolute good..." (SE, 219).

This other reality is the source of all good and therefore also of all beauty, truth, justice. Only a mind whose attention and love are turned towards the other reality can function as an intermediary for the descent of good among men. What links man to this other reality? The longing for good is an identical desire in all men and thus forms the basis for equality (SE, 220).

Yet Weil recognized that man lives in this world and is subject to necessity. Man cannot directly express his respect to the reality of the other world since it is not accessible to human faculties. However, man can indirectly express respect by turning this respect to "that part of man which exists in the reality of this world" (SE, 221). By respecting the need of the human body and soul in this world, one
respects the reality of this world which is shaped by necessity. A person who suffers injury to body or soul through the negligence of another person is no longer able to aspire towards the good. This constitutes "a sacrilege towards that which is sacred in him" (SE, 221). The obligations derived from this indirect expression of respect will be examined in Chapter Five. However, here it must be emphasized that Weil has broken with immanent thought as she now speaks of two distinct realities. Furthermore, Weil's quest does not end in the mere acceptance of two realities, because she actively attempts to understand the links between the two. This requires an examination of affliction, necessity and love. In order to follow her ideas on the nature of the two realities, we will first examine Weil's view of creation, the absence of God and the presence of metaxu.

Weil described creation in terms which included a game, abandonment, separation, and crime. She wrote, "The Creation is an abandonment. In creating what is other than Himself, God necessarily abandoned it" (FLN, 103). Weil described God's force of creating power as an act not of self-expansion but of restraint and renunciation ("Forms of the Implicit Love of God," WG, 87). God did not reveal His greatness through creation, but He consented to be less than creation. God permitted things less than Himself and separate from Himself to exist. This act was a creative act of self-denial. His
act of self-denial makes possible our own self-denial (WG, 87). Furthermore, this self-denial, which one can either refuse or accept, "is the only possible justification for the folly of the creative act" (WG, 87). Creation is an act of God which requires a response by man to justify it.

Weil's interpretation of creation is a crucial point for understanding her ontology. This will become evident as the connection between creation and evil is explored. Weil wrote: "Creation and original sin are only two aspects, which are different for us, of a single act of abdication by God" (FLN, 140). Creation, thus, contains both good and evil. God is the only source of the good. Weil wrote that "creation being both God and other than God is essentially good and evil" (N2, 414). God and creation are both one and infinitely distant from each other.

Weil described evil as the mechanism that governs matter, through necessity. Necessity can be transposed onto matter, animals, nations and souls (WG, 72). Necessity viewed from a human perspective appears blind. However, necessity when viewed from a transcendent perspective is obedience. Matter, in its perfect obedience to God's will, provides a perfect model for human behaviour. Time is also part of the created order. Time, space and necessity comprise the distance between God and God (WG, 71). Time derives from sin. "For time proceeded out of the sin and did not precede it" (FLN,
Thus, God is the infinity, unmarked by time, whereas the present earth is subject to time in the same manner as it is subject to necessity.

Weil described evil as travelling from one person to another until it finds a pure being who suffers it in completeness and destroys it (FLN, 153). Every offence committed against God falls back upon the offender as a curse. The offender then passes on evil to others. God, states Weil, cannot destroy evil but He can send it back as a curse. Only God, in this world, by becoming a victim (Christ) can destroy evil by suffering it. Humans are required to obey necessity. Obedience is a fact of human life because man is subject to mechanical necessity. Man can become subject to supernatural necessity if desired, wherein certain actions become impossible and other actions are done "sometimes almost in spite of himself" (WG, 73).

Sin is the turning of the gaze in the wrong direction. Affliction occurs when men are struck and find themselves at the foot of the cross, which Weil called the greatest possible distance from God. Sin is not a greater distance than affliction; rather, it is a misdirected gaze. In the beginning, man walked as far away as possible from God in the garden of Eden. In opposition to this original walk away from God, man is now nailed to the spot and his only free choice is in the way he looks. Thus, necessity nails humanity down and
man's freedom of choice is in the direction of his gaze. Weil associates sin with the desire to want to be and it is therefore related to the "I". Because the "I" is what separates us from God, sin is related to our existence in this world. Evil, thus, is the result of the suffering that is caused by our not renouncing this being or existence.4

The realm of necessity as experienced in the human person contains aspects of power, personality, and force. In contrast to this, the part of the human which aspires to the good is that which is decreated. In the impersonal, where the "I" has been renounced, the good can work. Man can desire the good but he cannot move towards the heavens. God must cross the universe and come to us. This descent of God to us is grace. Our role in that descent of grace is either to consent or to refuse. Affliction is the experience of necessity which allows the individual to decreate and to consent to divine love (WG, 77).

Weil continually cautioned against man's active search to be like God, to take on suffering willingly, or to imagine oneself at the centre of the universe. Weil wrote:

Adam and Eve sought for divinity in vital energy...a tree, a fruit. But it is prepared for us on dead wood, geometrically squared, where a corpse is hanging. We must look for the secret of our kinship with God in our mortality. (GG, 80)

Christ's model does not suggest that one should aspire to the
cross as well. One cannot seek the cross. True affliction must be suffered unwillingly. However, one can always love the possibility of affliction.

Weil believed that Christ's sacrifice was necessary in order that God would be greater than man. Christ's sacrifice provided for us the model of perfect obedience. His cry of dereliction, "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?", is an essential and recurrent theme in Weil's writing. God doesn't answer Christ nor Himself; therefore he is absent from Christ and from himself. The absence of God from Christ and thus God from Himself depends on a unity between God and Christ. The absence of God from God is the key to creation as evidence of withdrawal from creation by God. Christ was subject to necessity on the cross and God did not intervene; thus God allows necessity to rule. The fundamental basis for the existence of creation depends on the withdrawal of God. If God was not absent, creation would not exist.⁵

In a world which Weil sees as determined, it would appear that human suffering is meaningless. However, Christ's cry on the cross leads Weil to conceive of God as present in extreme evil. Every human who suffers affliction participates in the cross of Christ. Affliction is the absence of God and the absence of God reveals His perfection; thus all who suffer affliction have the clue to God's perfection.

To bear one's cross is to develop awareness that all is
subject to blind necessity. However, there remains a part of
the soul (external part) which is equal to Christ which can
continue to love even in affliction. Affliction which is like
Christ's suffering on the cross requires the element of
humiliation. For Weil, Christ's cry of "why," which is
repeated by every afflicted soul, and God's silence are
perfect mediation. There are two methods to perceive God's
silence, namely, through the perception of beauty or the
experience of affliction (Reader, 454-455).

Necessity remains the key theme in Weil's thought. Necessity
rules all for even Christ was subject to it. However, necessity
rules through God's providence, because God allows it to rule. Providence is eternal wisdom. Brute force is not sovereign because limit is always present. Necessity must obey eternal wisdom (providence). Force is sovereign but it is also limited. Force degrades those who come into contact with it. Only the eternal point in the soul can not be destroyed by force.

Weil uses various words interchangeably to mean neces-
sity, such as fate, power, fortune or chance. Those who
suffer affliction know that necessity is a limit. In the face
of affliction, one only realizes constraint as opposed to
liberty. Necessity, to those who suffer affliction, appears
unlimited from the perspective of here below. However, there
is another side to affliction which reveals its limited
Those who consent to necessity do so through supernatural love, which is the work of grace. Necessity functions as an intermediary between God and matter, because all matter is subject to necessity and necessity is obedient to God. However, Christ on the cross acts as an intermediary between creatures and creation. On the one side of necessity man is subject to the entire weight of the universe. On the other side, the world acts as a counterweight. Christ is the key to the relationship.

Time is another way of looking at necessity and, like necessity, it has two sides. On the one side we are subject to time. Time separates us from what we want to be. However, time is also beyond time and is therefore subject to limit.

Evil is also linked to necessity. It appears blind and unlimited to us. It can reduce us to affliction. However, it has another side which is revealed to us through extreme affliction. Evil is limited by the good, for when evil encounters good it disappears.

Revelation for Weil is the "individual apprehension of the absolute good through desire, thought, and mystical experience." Weil found that certain parts of the Bible, such as the Psalms, Job, and Isaiah, contained expressions of the beauty of the world. However, during her later years she granted an equal importance to such documents as the
Thus, a person's life can reflect the presence of God. The presence is not witnessed by words or actions. Weil found greater value in a person willing to die for an unknown convict that in one willing to die for God. The love of God is an intermediary between natural and supernatural love of creatures. God is present when men act toward each other with supernatural virtue. Thus, there is a connection between spiritual life and one's life on earth.

Weil compared man's life on earth to an apprenticeship wherein he has to learn to perceive in everything obedience to God. He learns a method of reading events not without pain, as reflections of the divinity. The love of the order and beauty of this world is a complement of the love of neighbour. Both loves are derived from a renunciation which is modelled after God's renunciation of this world. God left the forces of blind necessity and the autonomy of thinking persons. In this manner, Weil allowed for a degree of freedom. However, freedom is actually the realization that necessity is sovereign and thus to be free is to realize that one is not free. Thus, we are subject to necessity but on the other hand we have the freedom to contemplate necessity.

According to Weil, the cross and the Trinity form two poles of Christianity. The cross represents perfect afflic-
tion and the trinity represents perfect joy. One must under­
stand both poles and their "mysterious unity." However, the
conditions of life in this world place one at an infinite
distance from the trinity, but at the foot of the cross.

The call of the afflicted to know "why" has no answer on
this earth because it is ruled by blind necessity, not
purpose. This world does not offer final causes. They can
only be sought in the other world, which is also the source of
the good. Only in a properly decreated soul can the principle
of grace descend to inhabit that soul. This grace operates
individually and can only penetrate the soul which has
consented to it.

We have seen that the absence of God in this world and
the notion that God rules the world in His absence through
blind necessity are key ideas in Weil's theology. The absence
of God was demonstrated in Christ's cry on the cross, which
showed not only God's absence from us but also His absence
from Himself.

If God were totally other or totally transcendent,
suffering would have no purpose in Weil's theology. However,
the absence of God is the perfect statement of his secret
presence in this world. He is secretly present in the
suffering of Christ and in the souls of every afflicted person
who consents to decreation and love. This act of love which
takes place in the eternal part of the soul is not something
one can will. Weil cautions that one can only love the possibility of affliction. Rather, only God can love and what He loves is Himself in us. This love reflects the union of divine spirit and matter and recreates the identity of the individual "I". The "I" which we are originally given stands as a screen between God and God in us. Therefore, the "I" must be decreated through affliction. Creation itself stands as a screen between God and Himself. However, His absence allows creation to exist. The new identity which we attain after decreation is an incarnation.

To reflect on Creation is to think about the Incarnation. Thus we must think of the absence of God (Creation) in terms of the presence of God (Incarnation). Christ's cry on the cross leads Weil to conceive of God as being present in extreme evil through redemptive suffering. The notion of suffering is very important in realizing the absence of God, and recognizing His perfection in that absence.

Because the experience of suffering is important in Weil's theology, particularly because it links the experience in this world to the other reality, we will briefly examine the nature of suffering she describes. The connection between the affliction of man and the perfection of God becomes evident in the suffering experienced in daily life in the form of labour. This connection will be explored in Chapter 5.

Weil describes three types of suffering. These include
"degrading," "expiatory," and "redemptive" suffering. All suffering is caused by brute necessity. Since God's Providence rules the world by necessity, all suffering comes from God. However, expiatory suffering is the only type in which man can participate through his own efforts.\textsuperscript{12}

All forms of suffering to some extent cause the destruction of the "I". The difference between types of suffering is determined by "the extent to which the 'I' has been destroyed, the extent to which the destruction of the 'I' has been consented to, and the extent to which the soul of the person being destroyed is innocent."\textsuperscript{13} Weil differentiates between the three types of suffering on this basis.\textsuperscript{14} The external destruction of the "I" is infernal suffering. The exterior destruction, wherein a soul consents through love to the destruction, comprises expiatory suffering. Through expiatory suffering one "brings about" the absence of God.\textsuperscript{15} Redemptive suffering occurs when the absence of God is a reality.

The process of decreation takes place during expiatory suffering. As mentioned previously, decreation results in the death of the "I". This destruction of the ego roots one in death. After one has been rooted in death, the suffering of affliction can be felt in its fullness because it penetrates an innocent soul. Affliction then touches the eternal part of the soul (Christ) and then the fullness of the absence of God
from God can be felt. Thus expiatory suffering consists of learning to die.

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

The notion of expiatory suffering relies on the belief in Creation and Incarnation or the absence of God and the presence of God. To think about Creation is to think about the Cross: "The Cross of Christ, as the perfect model of death, death in itself in Plato's sense, has redeemed us all" (NYN, 212). The "I" and all parts of the human personality connected with the ego must be destroyed. "Our sin consists in wanting to be, and our punishment is that we believe we possess being. Expiation consists in desiring to cease to be; and salvation consists for us in perceiving that we are not" (NYN, 218). Thus, expiatory suffering brings absence through the death of the "I" and is a necessary step in salvation. If the "I" is destroyed by external circumstances before the "I" was able to consent to affliction, then that individual has not attained to innocence and therefore is still attached to this world. Those who do not attain to innocence through extreme affliction end up in something like hell: "One must
imagine something equivalent to the idea of purgatory, reincarnation, etc." (NYN, 224).

The intelligence and the will must be used up in the process of expiatory suffering. The intelligence and the will act as mediators "between this world and the fullness of God's grace." The intelligence can be used up in the contemplation of contradiction. Thought is evoked through contradiction and is carried above and beyond the intelligence. When the intelligence is forced to conceive of a relation between two contradictions the soul is drawn upwards. Contemplation of the contradiction brings one into contact with God who is above intelligence and will exhaust the latter by using it up.

The will can also be destroyed in a similar way by the completion of impossible tasks. The will is fed by energy. Weil distinguishes between supplementary and vegetative energy. Supplementary energy is on the level of time; it sustains desire and the will. "It allows us to say, this will not last for more than an hour" (NYN, 220). Vegetative energy, however, is below time and functions to maintain chemical and biological mechanisms which sustain life. When supplementary energy is used up and vegetative energy is required for anything other than the biological functions it was intended for, then a quarter of an hour seems like an endless amount of time. Because the supplementary energy is
already used up, the soul can no longer say, "This will not last for more than an hour." Weil wrote, "Then it is that the cry Enough! invades the soul, and the soul is split in two if it does not endorse that cry" (NYN, 220). When consent is given, the soul is split in two and "man becomes dead wood while still alive" (NYN, 220).

The will must be exhausted by seeking after things beyond its reach. When the supplementary energy is exhausted and the vegetative energy is exposed, the soul chooses between heaven and hell. It does not even know it is choosing. Perhaps it is remaking a choice present since the beginning of the world. If the soul cleaves to the idea of pure good it begs never again to have a choice (NYN, 222).

The soul divides in two wherein one part is innocent and another guilty, and the innocent part suffers for the guilty and justifies it. One part of the soul suffers below time wherein each moment feels like it will continue forever. The other part suffers above time and sees perpetuity as finite.

The soul is divided in two, and between the two parts is the whole of time. It is time that cuts the soul in two. Then a new creation occurs which the soul accepts. The purpose of the new creation is existence for the love of creatures in the same way that God consents to create. Christ enters into a soul and substitutes himself for it. (NYN, 220)

This process Weil describes as being born from on high by the water and the spirit (NYN, 224).
Thus, expiatory suffering is a method for man to bring about the destruction of the "I". In order to bring about the decreation, the will and the intelligence must be used up in impossible tasks and contemplation of contradictions. The supplementary energy must be used up, the ego must be destroyed, and the soul must be split in two. Expiatory suffering roots one in death and is therefore equivalent to bringing about the absence of God. The consent to death and to the absence of God must be rendered by an innocent soul in the state of extreme affliction. This innocent and redemptive suffering is modeled after Christ's death and cry upon the cross. 20

The bond between the afflictions of men and the perfection of God can be sought in the union of divine spirit with matter. A mediator is required that is subject to all of necessity in this world but is simultaneously the source of all justice, truth and good which can exist. The mediator would stand between this world and the world beyond and would thereby be both human and divine. This person would reflect the unity of divine spirit with matter or the unity of the necessary and the good. 21

Redemptive suffering clarifies the link between the affliction of men and the perfection of God. Extreme affliction causes the innocent soul to question "why?" which leads to a feeling of the absence of God. However, the
suffering becomes redemptive only in an innocent soul. An innocent being can submit to evil and thereby brings about the abolition of evil.

God sins in separating Himself from Himself in Creation and similarly man sins by accepting the Creation he has been given. Christ showed us that we are non-beings and God made Himself a non-being (NYN, 218). Christ thus decreates. When we suffer extreme affliction and give our consent to it at the moment when God is absent to our perception, our consent gives suffering a redemptive quality.\(^{22}\) Through the suffering we will contact the essence of God common to joy and sorrow which is the love of God.\(^{23}\) Through redemption one comes into contact with the good (God). Extreme affliction allows a person to realize that evil (experienced in affliction as the absence of God) becomes the good (the plenitude of the absence of God) when the absence of good is consented to in all its fullness. Evil disappears then by becoming "transformed into pure suffering, the suffering that results from God's separation from Himself (the Creation), from God's absence from Himself (Christ's cry of dereliction on the Cross), the divine suffering which is the presence of good, of God, in this world."\(^{24}\)

Christ is the model of innocent suffering. Evil is purified through contact with an innocent being. The cross reveals why a God who loves man and a man who loves God have
to suffer (Cahiers II, 124). Evil and redemption are tied together on the cross. The Redemption works eternally in the form of everyone who imitates Christ. The Redemption is therefore available to all across time. Christ is available to the afflicted in the form of anyone who imitates him as well. By means of grace, anyone can become an incarnation of God. Thus, through redemptive suffering an innocent being comes into contact with God (the experience of the fullness of the absence of God). Through this suffering, the human is born from on high and this rebirth manifests the incarnation on earth of God who is absent from this earth.

Weil made several recommendations concerning how an individual should live within this created world. As mentioned above, the experience of affliction was a necessary step, like a baptism. However, affliction is mediated by the beauty of the world which contains a "redemptive incarnational capacity" (Reader, 404). Beauty has the power to turn one's eyes towards the eternal. Similar to affliction, it causes one to question "why?" Because it is an intermediary, beauty can never provide the answer in itself but it can direct the attention towards the good. The love of the beauty of the world was an element Weil believed lost by Christianity but present in ancient times.

The other important principle guiding earthly behaviour is love of one's neighbour. This love imitates the divine
love which created us. The type of interaction required by someone who sees an afflicted person overcomes any distance between them. One who has known affliction projects all his being into the afflicted one and cannot help but assist him.

Metaxu

Weil defines metaxu as "home, country, traditions, culture" which are important to a person's life and to the life of his soul (GG 200-203). Weil uses the analogy of the bridge to refer to the metaxu. The bridges were built by the Greeks but we no longer know how to use them. Created things should be regarded as means towards God, as intermediaries or bridges towards Him.

Weil describes two prisoners with a wall between them who communicate by knocking on the wall. The wall simultaneously separates them and unites them by allowing communication. By analogy, God and man are separated from each other, but every separation also forms a link. The structure of this world must be viewed in the context of the other world, the spiritual. The things of this world gain their meaning from this link to the other world. Temporal structures are separated from the spiritual but they are meaningful as a result of this separation.

The concept of metaxu is important in Weil's thought because it reveals that she thinks in terms of two realities.
and because she believes that there are links between the two realities. Our life in this world must therefore be linked to the other world. Weil's understanding of God influences the daily experience of human reality.

The universe is based on contradictions. One of these contradictions is the affliction of man as opposed to the perfection of God. However, there is a harmony between these contradictions (Cahiers II, 303). Weil's assumption that suffering has significance is the basis for her ideas on the spirituality of labour which we will examine in the following chapter. Secondly, the union of divine spirit and matter which results from the process of decreation implies the sanctity of matter. Thus, Weil views the things of this world in relation to the Divine. The way Weil does this, particularly in relation to labour, forms the final stage of Weil's quest for transcendence.
Notes

1 "Spiritual Autobiography," Reader, pp. 10-26. This was a letter written to Father J.M. Perrin in 1942. It was originally published in L'Attente de Dieu (Paris: La Columbe, 1950) and then in English as Waiting for God (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1951), pp. 61-83. It was reprinted in the Reader.


3 See also R. Rees, A Sketch for a Portrait, Part II, 93-182, and S. Petrement, p. 493. Petrement explains that although Weil does not name God in her profession, she means God. Her purpose in avoiding mention of God was to appeal to as many people as possible, including atheists, to support Christian aspirations (p. 493).


5 Ibid., pp. 13-78.

6 Ibid., p. 51.


8 Cameron, in Simone Weil: Interpretations of a Life, p. 44.

9 It must be emphasized that the theme of Christ's cry of dereliction is one of the most important aspects of Weil's thought. W. Sheppard has provided the most complete and thorough analysis of the theme in "The Ideas of the Absence of God in Simone Weil." Another important work is M. Vetö, La metaphysique religieuse de Simone Weil (Paris: Sorbonne, 1971).

10 Sheppard, p. 19.

11 "Il y a trois espèces de douleur. La douleur inutile (dégradante). La douleur expiatrice. La douleur rédemptrice (celle-ci est la privilège des innocents). Nous constatons
que Dieu inflige toutes trois" (Cahiers II, 110).

12 Sheppard, p. 81.

13 Sheppard, p. 82.

14 "La destruction purement extérieure du je est douleur quasi infernale. La destruction extérieure à laquelle l'âme s'associe par amour est douleur expiatrice. La production d'absence de Dieu est douleur redemptrice" (Cahiers II, 251-252).

15 Sheppard, p. 83.

16 Ibid., p. 83.

17 Ibid., p. 93.

18 Ibid., p. 100.

19 Ibid., p. 101.

20 Ibid., p. 112.

21 Ibid., p. 124.

22 "La douleur redemptrice est ce par quoi le mal a réellement la plénitude de l'être, dans toute la mesure où il peut la recevoir. Par la douleur rédemptrice Dieu est présent dans le mal extrême. Car l'absence de Dieu est le mode de présence divine qui correspond au mal -- l'absence ressentie" (Cahiers II, 252).

23 Sheppard, p. 133.

24 Ibid., pp. 149-150.

25 "...mais le rédemption se prolonge dans la personne de tous ceux qui avant ou après sa naissance ont imité le Christ" (Cahiers II, 300-301).

26 Sheppard, p. 153.

27 Weil wrote, "L'extreme grandeur du christianisme vient de ce qu'il ne cherche pas un remède surnaturel contre la souffrance, mais un usage surnaturel de la souffrance" (Cahiers II, 304).

28 Sheppard, p. 170.
CHAPTER V
THE SPIRITUALITY OF LABOUR

The New Context

We have seen Weil's final stage, in which she accepted an earthly and a transcendent reality. This reality is ruled by blind necessity which is evidence of the absence of God. God wills the rule of necessity in this world. We are subject to necessity in daily life. The "ego" and all idols which we make for ourselves in this world separate us from God and thereby separate God from Himself. Only by decreating the "ego" can we root ourselves in death. By consenting to suffering, one "brings about the absence of God" (expiatory suffering). The bringing about of the fullness of the absence of God (redemptive suffering) occurs when an innocent soul suffers affliction and submits to it. The consent allows the incarnation of God in the eternal part of the soul to occur.

Our existence here below is of vital importance in the salvific process. A daily characteristic of our existence is that we labour. In Weil's final stage, she connects the daily experience of labour with the possibility of redemption. The reality of this world, that is, its subjection to a harsh, indifferent necessity, offers the key to the absence of good (God) and the potential for the perception of the plenitude of
the absence of God. The poor, the factory workers, the farmers and fishermen were privileged in their contact with the reality of the universe. However, obstacles obscured the nature of necessity, the purpose of affliction and the nature of good. One obstacle was the lack of a workers' culture. Weil advocated a restructuring of the culture of the workers, which in fact would reorganize the entire factory organization.

Weil had accepted a transcendent theology. Although her path to that theology was marked by mystical experiences, Weil did not change her early concerns with the worker and oppression. Her frequent references in her writings from 1940 to 1943 to the farmers and industrial workers reflect this concern. The focus of Chapter Five is on examining how Weil deals with earlier themes in the new framework.

The spiritual potential available to both the factory and peasant labourer through their work became a theme in her later writings. It was a result of Weil's perception that the dignity of work depends on a spiritual root. Therefore, the value of labour belongs to a supernatural order. This placement of work in a supernatural order reflected Weil's evolution as a thinker. From her early days of rejecting immanent solutions and disillusionment with revolution and reform, Weil gradually acknowledged two realities and thought in those terms. Thus, her later writings reflected a concern
with the relationship between the two realities, and her thoughts on how to live in the present world with the transcendent order clearly in view. This vision emerges in Need for Roots in her view of loving and preserving the beauty of this world.

The change in her views of labour over the years reflected a change of belief in the origin of labour. The idea of work as cruel slavery, and work as an accursed result of the fall, were gradually transformed throughout Weil's writing. In her vision, work itself was not redeemed through a redeeming Saviour, but work allowed the operation of grace through affliction. The final explanation and rationale for labour is explored in The Need for Roots.

Throughout Weil's last writings, the relevance of symbols was an important theme. Thus, in her suggestions for reforming a workers' culture, symbols play a central role. Weil wrote a staggering amount in her last years. Although The Need for Roots was the major work of that period, her notebooks, articles and letters provide excellent sources for her thought. Thus, in exploring her final thoughts on the spirituality of labour, sources include several essays.

The restructuring of society and of a workers' culture was based on a particular view of reality. The source of the sacred in present reality also reflected what was sacred in a human being. Weil rejected the personalist emphasis on the
personality. Her arguments against personalism formed the basis of her essay, "Human Personality,"¹ which provides an excellent source for her understanding of the value of the individual and her notion of justice.

Weil rejected the use of the notion of human personality as the basis for public morality. Human personality defies definition and thus its use as a human standard invites tyranny (HP, 10). The corresponding notion of human rights, introduced in 1789, was also inadequate.

According to Weil, the good is the only source of the sacred. The expectation of good, in spite of evil and suffering experienced, is evidence of the sacred in a human. The expectation of good is not the impulse which motivates a child to cry when he perceives that his brother has received a greater portion: this type of agitation she associated with rights. By contrast, justice refers to a "profound and childlike and unchanging expectation of good in the heart..." (HP, 10).

The evidence of injustice is found in a cry of "Why am I being hurt?" Eventually a person who has suffered too many blows becomes unable to cry out. Those who suffer do not have the necessary education to express what they experience. In order that their cries are effective, education must be provided and the regime must develop the ability to hear these cries. This is but one example of Weil's suggestion for
reform which attempted to address the total problem. Weil had long before lost faith in educating workers for the sole purpose of being able to cry out more articulately. Weil realized that a renewed commitment to listen on the part of those in command was also required. She realized that if those in control were solely concerned with maintaining control, they would never develop the necessary listening ability. She included trade unions and churches in this reservation.

The source of the sacred in man is the impersonal. God acts through His providence which is non-intervention. Thus, He does not intervene in a personal sphere. The source of good (God) is located outside of creation and thus belongs to the realm of the impersonal. The personality, with its emphasis on the "I", belongs to error and sin. Anonymity represents perfection which is the highest stage of achievement. The realm of the impersonal contains truth, beauty, and the sacred. A mathematical problem completed incorrectly reflects the personality of the child, who made the error. The same problem when solved correctly reaches a level of perfection which is anonymous. This level of perfection relates to accomplishments in science, art and literature as well. Truth and beauty inhabit this realm of the sacred which is impersonal (HP, 14).

The impersonal is achieved through attention, which is
developed in physical and mental solitude. This solitude must be penetrated by the individual, not the collective. A collective can only convey a false sense of the sacred, better known as idolatry. An individual requires silence, solitude and warmth to reach the necessary type of attention. Weil differentiated between the attention available to students and to workers. Attention is the substance of love of God and love of neighbour. Students can develop attention through their studies. However, the experience does not make them nearer to God than the workers. The workers experience a nearness to goodness (God) based on their poverty and endurance of sufferings (Reader, 51).

Weil's suggestions for reform are based on her understanding of justice. Justice is a posture in relation to other humans. Since love of neighbour is equivalent to love of God, justice concerns the supernatural as well. Truth can be entered into by means of one's own annihilation. Affliction, like truth, can only be understood in a state of non-being (decreation). This extreme humiliation (affliction) must be passed over to achieve understanding. Attention is necessary because affliction and truth require the same attention to be heard. The spirit of truth and of justice are one because they are composed of a form of attention which is pure love. The role of beauty requires that a person ruled by the spirit of justice and truth produces things which have the
radiance of beauty. Beauty attracts attention and illuminates affliction with the spirit of justice and of love, which is the only approach human thought can make towards affliction (HP, 28-9).

The cry of an afflicted person asking "Why am I being hurt?" requires the spirit of justice, truth and love. The cry to be delivered from evil is incessant. God has the power to deliver only the eternal part of the soul, which is that part which consents to love in the absence of God, of those who have made direct contact with him. The remainder of the soul is at the mercy of other men and circumstances. Humans are obliged to preserve others from harm.

"Draft for a Statement of Human Obligations"

In 1943, Weil formulated a profession of faith, entitled "Draft for a Statement of Human Obligations." It provides an excellent example of the expression of her new vision in her final phase in a manner which she hoped would be acceptable to the largest number possible. It further elaborates her idea of the value of the individual and the responsibilities of individuals to each other. The type of work situation or state would require changes to uphold the value of the individual. Thus, the essay represents a further elaboration of the idea of renewing a workers' culture and establishing justice in the workplace. Reform is based on her notion of
human obligations, tied to human needs and recognized in all individual and collective bodies, including the workplace.

According to Weil, humanity could be defined as a centre made up of an unquenchable desire for good surrounded by psychical and bodily matter. In order to develop this central part of a human being, it is necessary that an individual direct his attention beyond this world. Human nature, to be truly human, requires this contact with the other reality. Accordingly, any definitions of humanity or any discussion of relations between humans could only be accurate if they were formulated in the light of the other reality.

Earthly reality is composed of necessity. Man's connection to earth is shaped by necessity and "the misery of need" (SE, 221). As mentioned in Chapter Four, Weil stated that man's needs offered the basis for an indirect expression of respect for the human being. Man's needs included the needs of the soul and of the body in this world. Weil based this on the connection in human nature between a desire for the good and an individual's sensibility. A person whose life was destroyed or damaged by a bodily wound due to another person's action or negligence experiences, as a consequence, the destruction of both his sensibility and his aspiration towards the good. Weil called this a sacrilege to the sacred in a person.

Thus, the basis of obligation allows for the indirect
expression of human respect. Obligation relates to the needs of human bodies and souls in this world. Each need has a corresponding obligation. No other obligation exists (SE, 222). This forms the basis for a public and private morality. Each individual is obliged to remedy, as much as is within his power, everything which could destroy soul and body of any human. Power should be in the hands of people who recognize this obligation. Weil included in this the state, legal system, government or any collective life. Thus, if any individuals or collectives wilfully refuse to recognize human obligations they are guilty of a crime.

The obligations correspond to earthly needs of body and soul. The needs of the body include food, warmth, sleep, health, rest, exercise, fresh air. The needs of the soul arranged in pairs of balanced opposites include equality and hierarchy, consented obedience and liberty, truth and freedom of expression, solitude and privacy, personal and collective property, punishment and honour, security and risk, and a need to be rooted in several natural environments. The uprooting of an individual or the prevention of someone else being rooted is criminal, according to Weil.

How did Weil suggest that such a platform be adopted by a country? Weil stated that a country should adopt these principles with the intention of being inspired by them. Secondly, Weil recommended that anyone in power should have to
pledge to follow this code. The violation of the code would be punishable.

The theme is elaborated in The Need for Roots. However, the "Draft" clarifies certain aspects of Weil's thought. The relevance of this "Draft" to her thoughts on labour becomes evident. Weil has described two realities. The transcendent reality is based on the good. Earthly reality is shaped by necessity. Man's role on this earth is directed towards the good. However, the choices made on earth and the morality displayed in these choices is crucial. Each individual can direct himself towards the good unless he is robbed of the experience by those who would destroy the sacred in him. In the workplace, but also in the state and legal machinery, humans have the option to respect human needs or to wilfully ignore them. Respect for human needs allows other individuals to consent to the good. Respect for human needs is evidence of love of neighbour which is also love of God. Thus, in reforming the workers' culture, the obligation to respect human needs of the body and soul are of central importance.

The Need for Roots

Work, as treated in The Need for Roots, does not lock up a person in this world; rather, it becomes a point of contact between this world and the world beyond. Thus, in its function as an intermediary between this world and the other,
the source of the spirituality of labour becomes clear. In order to obtain the benefit of this supernatural contact, the culture of the workers requires a restructuring. Both the industrial and the peasant worker have this common spiritual framework. The dignity of their work depends on its spiritual root and its value belongs to a supernatural order. Weil wrote in *The Need for Roots*, "Consequently labour and death, if man undergoes them in a spirit of willingness, constitute a transference back into the current of the supreme good, which is obedience to God" (NR, 300). In her final stage, Weil brings together theology and her life-long concern with the theme of labour. Weil concluded in *The Need for Roots* as follows: "It is not difficult to define the place that physical labour should occupy in a well-ordered life. It should be its spiritual core" (NR, 302).

*The Need for Roots* begins with a rejection of rights as an ordering principle for human conduct and the alternate proposal of obligations. Weil rejected rights because they are a product of immanent thinking, whereas obligations are based on a transcendent order. Thus, obligations reflect Weil's theology. Obligations correspond to earthly needs of the body and soul. Rights are relative to conditions of existence. Obligations, by contrast, are not conditional because they find their point of reference in a realm above this world.
A human can suffer when physical needs are not satisfied. However, suffering also results from lack of fulfillment of moral needs. This type of suffering consists of cruelty to the soul. Weil connects the physical and moral by an analogy. She wrote that a cornfield deserved respect because it provided food for a certain number of human bodies. Similarly, a collectivity deserves respect because it provides food for human souls (NR, 7).

Physical needs include the need for housing, clothing, and protection from violence. Moral needs essential to the soul stem from vital human needs. The needs of the soul include order, liberty, obedience, responsibility, hierarchism, honour, punishment, freedom of opinion, security, risk, private property, collective property, truth, and the need to be rooted.

All of this must now be understood in the important context of the relation between earthly reality and transcendent reality. This importance was based on Weil's idea of the transcendence and immanence of God. God is both totally absent from creation and secretly present in the form of Christ and of every being that consents to love in affliction. This theology gives life on earth a seriousness which affects how every moment of the day is spent. This allows Weil to accurately analyze the rootlessness of the modern industrialized proletariat. She wrote: "To be rooted
is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul" (NR, 43). The concept of uprootedness and the need to be rooted will be examined because of the importance Weil granted them and because they are directly related to the theme of labour. To this end, we will examine the nature of rootedness, the causes of uprootedness, and the solutions to counter uprootedness. The discussion of uprootedness will reveal how Weil's final stage has affected her view of how life on this earth should be lived and, secondly, will reveal that spiritual labour is the core of her new vision.

A human has roots through his "real, active and natural participation in the life of a community" (NR, 43). The participation of an individual "preserves in living shape certain particular treasures of the past and certain particular expectations of the future" (NR, 43). The participation of an individual is automatically derived from "place, conditions of birth, profession, and social surroundings." A person needs multiple roots. The vital importance of these roots is found in the fact that an individual "draws the whole of his moral, intellectual, and spiritual life by way of the environment of which he forms a natural part" (NR, 43). The need to be rooted reflects the importance and relevance of individual life in this reality.

What causes uprootedness? Military conquest, money, power, and economic domination. Money destroys roots by
making the sole object of endeavour the desired-for gain. Unemployment is a further cause of uprootedness. An important cause of uprootedness is contemporary education. Weil criticized the development of modern culture in which scientific culture, specialization and pragmatism had replaced any contact with the Greek tradition. This scientific culture, which Weil had already criticized strongly in 1934 ("Reflections"), was a direct threat to the rootedness of an individual. In 1934, Weil was concerned that this scientific specialization could lead to bureaucratic oppression and needed to be eliminated so that "new paths of study, new foci of reflection, could be brought forward to relieve the oppression which seemed so rooted in modern life." However, in 1943 Weil criticized this modern culture which had "developed in a restricted medium, removed from the world... entirely deprived both of contact with this world and, at the same time, of any window opening onto the world beyond" (NR, 45).

Weil believed that modern culture had removed itself from this reality and from "the world beyond." The main cause of this irreality and the cause of its uprootedness is the fact that modern culture is indifferent to the truth. Learning has taken the form of popularization of culture. Few are willing to pursue truth for its own sake. This distortion of reality is practiced as much by students obsessed by examinations as
by workers obsessed by piecework and paychecks. Marxism, as it has developed, emptied of any of the truth contained in Marx's work, contributes to working-class uprootedness. Thus, Weil sees modern culture as divorced from reality to the extent that there is little desire left to search for truth.

A translation of truths, as opposed to a dilution of truths, was required for the working class (NR, 66-68). Weil had contributed to this translation process by working on classical themes (such as Antigone in 1936) for a workers' magazine. She had hoped her efforts would make Greek culture accessible to all. She also hoped that the workers could enter into the poetry without feeling that any condescension had taken place (SL, 49). Weil expected that the theme of misfortune in Greek poetry would speak to the worker's experience of everyday reality and lead to "an intensity of understanding" springing up from this contact.

Weil's analysis of specific workers' problems and her suggested reforms reveal this underlying concern for the search for truth and its connection to a transcendent reality. Weil believed that the current work situation could mark a person. The worker on entering the factory finds himself "less than a thing" and he experiences "the sensation of no longer existing. This first shock, received at so early an age, often leaves an indelible mark. It can rule out all love of work once and for all" (NR, 54).
To eliminate this trauma experienced by young workers, Weil advocated a greater exposure to work through apprenticeship programs, decentralization of the factory and reinstitution of the Tour de France. Weil suggested a transformation of technology which would make a priority of the worker's moral well-being. Weil's discussion of these reforms is marked by terms such as spirit, happiness, and poetry. These terms she used in direct opposition to the description of the current situation — "prison," "submissiveness," and "monotony."

Weil wants to make the workers feel at home and participate not only in the workplace but also in the intellectual culture. In fact, a working-class culture would ideally facilitate both conditions. Weil did not feel that a worker's access to culture was an impossible goal. A worker was impeded by lack of time and energy, by slavery of mind and social conditions. The material obstacles to culture were not crucial because, Weil believed, the purity of the truth attained by an individual was the most important criterion. Thus, "a little pure truth is worth as much as a lot of pure truth" (NR, 66-67). The obstacle to culture provided by social conditions imposed on the working class could be overcome by translating truth to "make it perceptible to the heart" (NR, 68). The "art of transposing truths" requires one "to have placed oneself at the centre of a truth and possessed
it in all its nakedness, behind the particular form in which it happens to have found expression" (NR, 68). Thus, what was required in the transposition of truth was not dilution of ideas by intellectuals for workers but a personal experience of truth through decreation and transposition of that other reality in terms perceptible to the workers.

We will briefly describe Weil's proposals for reestablishing the working class by the roots, in order to see how concretely she discusses labour in her final phase. She advocates the abolition of large factories in favour of a central assembly shop connected to a number of smaller workshops. The workmen would take turns working in the central assembly shop. The working environment would be characterized by a "holiday atmosphere" (NR, 74). The worker would only work one half of a day; the other half would be taken up by "hobnobbing with others" and receiving an education about the entire process and products of his industry. The machines would be owned by the workers. In addition to the ownership of the machines, the worker would own a house and some land. The funding of this ownership would be derived from taxes and would be given to the workers as a wedding gift. The resulting system would be neither capitalist nor socialist. The renewed system would have as its goal "man's dignity in his work, which is a value of a spiritual order" (NR, 78).
Weil did not attempt to analyse the actual possibilities of her proposals. They remained suggested proposals, based on her belief that the dignity of work derived from a supernatural source which needed to be restored to the workplace. She did not question whether a state could afford to make gifts out of tax revenue to such workers, nor how one would transfer ownership of the means of production to the workers, nor what would happen to the workers who stay single. However, it is important to note here that Weil does not intend to solve all the problems related to her proposals. In a characteristically intellectual manner, Weil has analyzed the social conditions and provides proposals for change. The importance of her proposals lies more in the method Weil has applied. Weil believes that the truth, that is, that God is the only source of good and that He is located outside this reality, is the only standard for daily reality.

It is thus, in relation to this reality, or rather, commencing with this reality, that Weil shapes her proposals for reversing the uprootedness of the worker. To restore dignity to work, Weil suggests that the entire work process, including the environment in which one works, the tools one utilizes and the end products, should all be related to the transcendent which gives spirituality to work. The conditions which rob man of dignity are those which reduce him to a servile, non-thinking thing. To restore dignity and create a
workers' culture requires that the workers feel at home in the workplace. However, this should be more than an emotion, for Weil recommends that it is based on individual or collective ownership in the productive machinery, in addition to ownership of land and technical knowledge related to the entire work process. The purpose of this ownership combined with the education process, referred to as "translation of truths," is not merely to root the worker to this reality and to feel more at home on this earth. Rather, the purpose is to restore the worker's dignity and rootedness in order that the worker is able to contemplate the supernatural, decreate, and consent to the destruction of self and the incarnation of Christ. This can only happen in a situation wherein the worker has glimpses of the truth through the intermediaries of, for example, work, and whose mind has the freedom to develop the attention for the descent of grace.

The experience of work, if it is carried out in an atmosphere of joy and freedom, allows the mind to develop higher forms of thought which reveal truth. An essential part of the experience of work and of any form of learning is the lesson that this world is subject to necessity which is imposed on us by God's withdrawal from creation. Contemplation of necessity through labour, or through mathematics, reveals the notion of God and His love.

Weil constructs various reforms relevant to the
countryside, based on the same principles she applies to the factory workers. The need to feel rooted for the peasants includes the desire to own property and the need to travel. Weil's reforms attempt to keep the peasants on the land and to increase their rights of ownership. The problems of translation are similar to those of the workers. Science should be taught in a way that reflects the cycle of nature. The cycle of sun, seeds and soil transformed into energy for man should be explained in such a way that his labour would be permeated with poetry (NR, 87). The point of education would be to increase the feeling of beauty of the world which is an intermediary between this world and the one beyond.

Once again work forms the focus for reorganizing culture and education. The spiritual life of the soul and the scientific knowledge concerning the material world should converge on the act of work. There is a connection between the pain and fatigue suffered in work and the beauty penetrating the core of the human. The experience of this supernatural root connected with a supernatural order in the act of work is what gives work its dignity (NR, 94). Each act of work should represent the beauty of this world and the world beyond. The two worlds should be associated with each other through work.

Weil believed that the ability to make connections through the beauty of this world and the world beyond through
the act of work required a transformation which could form the mission or vocation of the age. Thus, this age should attempt to create a civilization founded upon the spiritual nature of work (NR, 96). Weil saw this mission as containing the promise of true greatness whereas conquest formed an "ersatz" form of greatness. The resulting state would be the opposite of the present civilization. A civilization based on the spirituality of work would give "to man the very strongest possible roots in the wide universe," as opposed to the current state of almost total uprootedness (NR, 98).

Weil's theology led her to uphold spiritual labour as a foundation upon which to rebuild civilization. Labour was an important value also in her earlier phase. But there is a distinct difference. In "Theoretical Picture of a Free Society," which was a section of her 1934 "Reflections," Weil traced the origin of the idea of labour as "human value." This idea was the one accomplishment which the present age had developed and which the Greeks had neglected. Bacon had proposed the idea, changing the attitude from one of servitude to one of obedience. Weil wrote:

For the ancient and heart-breaking curse contained in Genesis, which made the world appear as a convict prison and labour as a sign of man's servitude and abasement, he [Bacon] substituted in a flash of genius the veritable charter expressing the relations between man and the world: "We cannot command Nature except by obeying her." (OL, 106)
Weil felt that this should form the Bible of the time because it defined true labour, the kind that formed free men and explained how this was an act of conscious submission to necessity. With Descartes, science became an end in itself. However, writers of fiction still perceived the ideal of a life devoted to some form of physical labour. Weil felt that various attempts had been made to support the ideal of the dignity of labour, whether through Proudhon, Marx, the revolutionary syndicalists or the working class movement. The fact that our civilization brought this ideal to the fore was a source of pride. The submission to necessity in work should bring joy to the workers and bring meaning to the individual. A labourer needed to understand and apply science to his labour in order to make labour fully conscious and worth its value (OL 104-5).

After her factory work experience wherein she felt marked as a slave and after her subsequent conversion, Weil changed the basis for her value on labour. Instead of upholding the rational basis for the dignity of labour, Weil substituted a supernatural root related to a supernatural order (NR, 94). Part of this change involved a reexamination of the basis of the origin of labour as explained in Genesis. Weil wrote that "the penal character of labour" had been misunderstood because there was no "just notion regarding punishment." This should not lead to a presumption of a disdain for labour" (NR, 295).
Weil interpreted Genesis in its context "of ancient conceptions" (NR, 299). When a human has committed a crime and placed himself outside the current of the Good, his punishment is to reintegrate him into the Good by means of suffering. Thus, punishment is "marvellous." God chose two means of punishment for man, namely, labour and death. Thus, if one willingly experienced labour and death, it would "constitute a transference back into the current of the supreme Good, which is obedience to God" (NR, 300).

Weil placed this suffering within the model of obedience provided by antiquity. The passivity of inert matter showed perfect obedience to God. The beauty of the world also projected the "radiance of this perfect Obedience." Death meant the transformation of an individual to inert matter. Consenting to death offers man the opportunity to exercise divine obedience. However, death must be immediate to be real and to allow man to exercise this obedience. A more direct and daily opportunity to suffer and to practice obedience is offered in the experience of physical labour. Physical labour is a "daily death," Weil wrote.
Reinterpretation of History

Weil's vision for rebuilding civilization relies on her interpretation of historical events. Her interpretation of history reflects her new ontology in light of two realities. This results in a style which has been described as a "discursive mythologizing," wherein her facts become either "unverifiable or merely fanciful."5

Weil's interpretation of history is determined by two major presuppositions. The first is that "unless supernatural grace intervenes, there is no form of cruelty or depravity of which ordinary, decent people are not capable, once the corresponding psychological mechanisms have been set in motion" (NR, 112). Secondly, the relationship of the Christian to the state is as follows: "That, whereas to the welfare of the soul, or in other words to God, a total, absolute, and unconditional loyalty is owed; the welfare of the State is a cause to which only a limited and conditional loyalty is owed" (NR, 115). The first principle concerns the uprootedness of people and their compulsion to uproot others. The second principle provided the basis for patriotism or, in other words, how to live in this world with a view to the other reality.

Weil's method of interpreting history will be briefly examined in relation to the ideas of collective guilt and patriotism.6 Although these ideas are secondary to the theme
of labour, they do shed light on our topic from different angles and broader contexts. Her ideas of patriotism are based on the same ontology which formed her ideas on work. The discussion will also clarify Weil's ideal of civilization.

Weil believes that the State has an important role to fulfil. Her reconsideration of that role was shaped by the events of World War II. The nation had become the only form of collectivity existing, having replaced the family, professions, guilds, and smaller geographic units. Thus, "Man has placed his most valuable possession in the world of temporal affairs, namely his continuity in time, beyond the limits set by human existence in either direction, entirely in the hands of the State" (NR, 100). The defeat of France required a reconsideration of this ultimate loyalty to the state and an evaluation of the role of patriotism.

Weil reinterpreted the history of France in terms of the uprootedness and its impulse to uproot others. Although patriotism had always existed in the varying forms of loyalty to other men, a lord, or a city, the idea of making the state an object of loyalty originated with Richelieu (NR, 115). Weil believed that a total, absolute, and unconditional loyalty is owed only to the welfare of the soul, that is to God. The State can only demand limited and conditional loyalty (NR, 115). When the state becomes an idol for the people, it demands patriotism as an absolute value. "To posit
one's country as an absolute value that cannot be defiled by evil is manifestly absurd" (NR, 131). Thus, Weil rejects all notions of an "eternal France" as a form of blasphemy.

The modern notion of patriotism was derived from the Romans. For the Romans, patriotism was an expression of idolatry of self wherein they saw themselves as chosen for world domination. Their idolatry was unconnected to the next world (NR, 131). However, no holy nation exists which can claim unconditional obedience. Weil wrote:

For France is not God, not by a long chalk. Christ alone was able to say, "I am the truth." No one else on this earth has the right to say that, whether speaking as an individual or in the name of a collectivity.... For it is possible for a man to attain such a degree of holiness that it is no longer he who lives, but Christ in him. Whereas there is no such thing as a holy nation. (NR, 147)

What was the new patriotism which the world required? France needed a "refashioning of the soul of the country" (NR, 149). One must have compassion for one's country, similar to the compassion Christ had for Jerusalem and Judea (NR, 170). The love for country should be characterized by a compassion based on fragility. One must love France, "as something which, being earthly, can be destroyed, and is all the more precious on that account" (NR, 172). This type of love or compassion for one's country does not exclude warlike energy. The pure love for one's country
bears a close resemblance to the feelings which his young children, his aged parents, or a beloved wife inspire in a man. The thought of weakness can inflame love in just the same way as can the thought of strength, but in the former case the flame is of an altogether different order of purity. (NR, 172)

The same immanent polarities which Weil had rejected in the thirties remained a factor taking French people away from their allegiance to the truth. Weil foresaw the danger among the French in London and in post-war France. Could the Free French prevent the French people from falling into Fascism, Communism, or anarchy, "being all scarcely different, almost equivalent expressions of the self-same evil...?" (NR, 183).

The contradiction inherent in French patriotism was evident in French history. Every achievement in French civilization has an embarrassing side. For example, France's "liberating expeditions became transformed into conquering ones" (NR, 148). France's situation in the war caused it to nearly die from a crisis of patriotism. This crisis was expressed in immanent polarities as a leftist and a rightist crisis. For example, on the leftist side, Marxism offered the working class "the supposedly scientific certainty that they will shortly become the lords and masters of the terrestrial globe" (NR, 152). This notion "created a working-class imperialism very similar to the nationalist imperialisms" (NR, 152).
By contrast, a new patriotism based on a compassion for one's country is required. This compassion allows one to keep one's eyes "open on both the good and the bad and finds in each sufficient reasons for loving. It is the only love on earth which is true and righteous" (NR, 173).

What type of historical interpretation did Weil use to reinforce this notion of a new type of patriotism? As mentioned above, Weil interpreted French history as containing both good and evil. Weil was able to critique French history from a transcendent perspective wherein the source of pure good is located outside this world. Weil's historical method also contains a rejection of the modern idea of progress and a denunciation of the Roman-Hebraic tradition. We will briefly examine these aspects of her historical method to clarify the place of her ontology in this method and its role in her ideal of a rebuilt civilization.

History is an essential method to acquire truth about the human heart (NR, 232). Weil defined history as "a tissue of base and cruel acts in the midst of which a few drops of purity sparkle at long intervals. If such is the case, it is first of all because there is little purity among men; and secondly because the greater part of what little there is remains hidden" (NR, 232). When applied to her own country, Weil felt that in order to love France one must be aware of its past but one "must not love the historical wrapper of that
past" (NR, 232). This allows for a critical perspective which is not possible in pure nationalism. According to Weil, "one must love the past that is inarticulate, anonymous, which has vanished" (NR, 232).

When Weil applies this method, she highlights moments in which these "drops of purity" were present. This results in a denunciation of the Roman and Hebrew tradition which contributed to uprootedness throughout history and which continues to do so through Hitlerism, Fascism and Stalinism. Weil's reading of the Old Testament shaped her aversion to the God of the Hebrews. For Weil, God is the good and thus, "To believe that God can order men to commit atrocious acts of injustice and cruelty is the greatest mistake it is possible to make with regard to Him" (GG, 105). The Hebrews were so mistaken that they had "less of a share in God and in divine truth than several of the surrounding peoples (India, Egypt, Greece, China" (GG, 105). The Hebrews committed idolatry by making an idol out of a race, a nation. Thus, the idea of the "chosen people" made idolatry an integral part of the Hebrew religion (GG, 107).

The Romans displayed an equivalent type of idolatry towards themselves. The combination of the Hebrew and Roman idolatry formed for Weil the essence of the corruption of Christianity (Reader, 83). The Romans tried to make men worship the state. The Romans took the Christian form of the
Jewish religion which was non-national (NYN, FLN, 215). This synthesis formed "the curse of Western history."8 This tradition, with its roots in Roman and Hebrew tradition, continued to influence history through Hitlerism and Stalinism. It is derived from all idolatry of the collective which chains one to earth instead of to God. The Great Beast is a form of idolatry required by man in the cave. "Society is the cave, the way out is solitude" (Reader, 392). In history the Great Beast continues to demand obedience. Thus, "Rome is the Great Beast of atheism and materialism, adoring nothing but itself. Israel is the Great Beast of religion. Neither one nor the other is likable. The Great Beast is always repulsive" (Reader, 393).

In contrast to this strong dislike of the Hebrew and Roman traditions, Weil enthusiastically supported civilizations and individuals which exemplified the "drops of purity." Weil expressed great admiration for the civilization of Languedoc, which was related to her appreciation of the Cathars. The Cathars flourished in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and shared with the Manicheans a belief in two Gods. A good God created the spiritual world and an evil God created the visible material world. The evil God was associated with the God of the Old Testament. The evil God ruled all matter and the body. Christ was sent to show how men could save their souls from entrapment in their human body even after
death. The Cathars accepted the New Testament but rejected the Incarnation and the sacraments, due to their separation of spirit and matter. The only sacrament they allowed was a baptism by laying on of hands. Recipients of this baptism believed that their soul could escape from the material world, that their original sin was removed, and that they could enter the pure world of spirit to be united with the good God.

The practice of the Cathars who had been baptized upheld poverty, asceticism, and the renunciation of marriage. Catharism spread especially in northern Italy and southern France. The French Cathars were called Albigensians. The church felt threatened by the sect and Pope Innocent III started a crusade against it in France. Cathar political power was eventually destroyed by 1250, and the Languedoc civilization was destroyed. The Inquisition of 1231-33 played an important role in the persecution of "heretics."9

Weil greatly admired the potential which had blossomed in this civilization. Her sympathy for the Cathars was mostly based on the fact of their persecution at the hands of the church.10 The persecution demonstrated the evil potential embodied in the church and the need to limit its power. The civilization of Languedoc functioned for Weil as a symbol of Europe's failure to follow its true vocation. Europe chose to follow decadence, which resulted in Hitler, Stalin, and the modern age.11
The method by which Weil discusses the origins of labour provides an illustration of her historical method. Weil recognized that Greek civilization had not developed a positive value for physical labour. She thus sought for "some ancient civilization" as the probable source for honour of physical labour (NR, 295). She does not name this civilization but claims that "there are numerous signs indicating that such a civilization did exist" (NR, 295-6). In this "long-ago" civilization, labour was regarded as a religious activity and as part of the sacred realm.

Weil uses historical symbolism to understand how civilizations viewed labour. Thus, in a pre-Roman religion called "The Mysteries," symbols of agriculture were used to represent salvation of the soul. Weil connected the New Testament symbolism of the parables to this ancient religion. Greek literature mingles with New Testament figures. Thus, Prometheus is called the "nontemporal projection of Christ, a crucified and redemptive God who came down to cast fire on the earth" (NR, 296).

In this context Weil continued to explore the origin of ideas of labour. Her language in discussing the subject reveals a mythologizing tendency; for example, she wrote, "There may perhaps have been a time..." (NR, 296). Symbols, according to her, could have had a unified point of origin wherein the same truth was differentiated into different
symbols. Each symbol referred to physical labour in such a way that labour became an expression of religious faith.

Weil referred to the Old Testament as a source for the differentiation of trades, wherein God instructed man to take up various trades. This origin was accepted by various religious traditions of antiquity. Furthermore, Weil claimed that the majority of these traditions believed that "God became incarnate in order to carry out this pedagogic mission" (NR, 296). Weil suggested that the actual truth was hidden in these "mysterious accounts" and that the belief that God instituted trades referred back to the memory of a time when the exercise of trades was a sacred activity (NR, 296).

The memory of this sacred activity was lost in classical Greece. The classical period already contained the end of a civilization which viewed all other human activities, excluding labour, as sacred. Through what Weil called "an obscure process," two centuries later all human activity had become profane (NR, 297).

Weil blamed the Romans for completing the destruction of all remaining spiritual life and she felt that their adoption of Christianity was accomplished only after they had emptied it of all spiritual context. Under the Romans, all human activity became servile and all humans became slaves. An element of Christianity was retained and eventually became evident in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The countries
south of the Loire River contained both Christian and ancient spirituality, according to Weil. The Languedoc civilization, influenced by Gnostic, Stoic, and Egyptian thought, could have given the necessary honour to the trades if it had been allowed to develop.

However, the church had adopted the Roman conception of enslaving people's minds. As a result, the civilization which showed so much promise, in Weil's estimate, was eliminated by the rise of orthodoxy and the Inquisition. The problem with this orthodoxy was that it separated the sacred domain of souls composed of minds subject to external authority from the profane domain of everyday life and a free intelligence. This separation of sacred and profane inhibited the ideal "penetration of the religious and the profane" which Weil saw as the "essence of a Christian civilization" (NR, 299).

In Weil's historical sketch the thirteenth until the early fifteenth century expressed medieval decadence. However, another moment of purity was found in the fifteenth century, when the first Renaissance briefly brought together two ultimate systems of thought, namely, Greek and Christian thought. This first Renaissance, the Italian Renaissance, was valued by Weil particularly for its revival of Greek language and literature. Plato's writings were translated into Latin and the Platonic Academy was founded in Florence in 1477. The academy housed Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1493) who
represented the spirit of this Renaissance in attempting to harmonize Plato, Aristotle, Christianity and the Cabbala, while upholding the dignity of man in the universe of God.\textsuperscript{12}

The Italian Renaissance was followed by the second Renaissance which demonstrated an opposite tendency. This Renaissance, according to Weil, produced our modern civilization. The second Renaissance did not attempt to link Christianity or Platonism but took the values embodied therein and placed this value on man. This was the root of the immanentism which Weil sought to transcend.

Weil's interpretation of history was also characterized by a rejection of the modern notion of progress. Already in 1934 Weil challenged the myth of progress and unlimited resources. At that time her critique was based on her rejection of the presupposition on rational grounds. She felt there was no basis to presume that matter contained within itself a mechanism to continue to produce more. By 1943, Weil had strengthened the basis for this critique of progress by a careful critique of historical events and by her changed ontology.

The belief in progress was directly related to the Roman tradition in Christianity. This belief motivated the destruction of the "spiritual treasures" of those countries conquered by Rome. The belief in progress is related to "an historical conception concerning the Redemption, making of the latter a
temporal operation instead of an eternal one. Subsequently, the idea of progress became laicized; "it is now the bane of our times" (NR, 229). Progress dishonours goodness by turning it into fashion. Goodness and evil were "perennial qualities" directly tied to Christ's revelation. Weil believed that evidence of the lack of progress could be sought in the lack of increase in goodness of man since the time of Christ (GG, 134) and in the contemporary situation in modern Europe. In rejecting progress as a force in history, Weil rejected Marxist interpretations of history. We will see this further in Weil's "Is there a Marxist doctrine?" (1943).

In summary, Weil's view of history is based on a transcendent perspective. Earthly reality contains evil mixed with "droplets of good." Thus, history can be regarded critically from a transcendent viewpoint as a mixture of evil with some good. History disproves the myth of progress because evil continues to be present in the world. Human behaviour does not give evidence of greater good and cannot be expected to, since God is the only source of the good which is located outside of earthly reality.

Weil's interpretation of history causes her to selectively condemn civilizations such as those of the Hebrews and the Romans, which she felt endorsed an idolatry of things of this earth. In contrast, Weil studied with great care the first Renaissance, Languedoc, the Cathars, Marcion and Plato.
She was interested in other civilizations and religions which embodied the spirituality which she believed was lacking in modern civilization.

The final phase of Weil's ontology clearly underlies this view of history. It allows her a perspective from which to critique modern society. One aspect she criticized, which she believed was directly related to this historical perspective, was the nature of modern patriotism. A deep spiritual poverty left the state as the only object of admiration. However, this idolatry of the state could never lead one out of the cave. One had to individually experience the good in its transcendent form, not as the false god of the collective.

A new patriotism was required. This patriotism would be based on compassion for one's country. One would regard a country as something temporal and limited and recognition of the earthly nature of the country would make it more precious. Once the spiritual root of civilization has been restored, earthly reality becomes meaningful because of its limited nature in respect to the eternal. This aspect of earthly reality contains the potential value of labour which formed the core of a rebuilt spiritual civilization. Labour becomes meaningful in relation to the eternal. When the things of this world which help us to be rooted human beings are read in relation to the other reality, or as intermediaries to that other reality, they take on a fullness of meaning which they
could never achieve in and of themselves. For Weil, any other perspective amounts to nothing but idolatry. With this in mind, we turn to Weil's discussion of symbols as links between the two realities.

**Symbols**

Symbols are intermediaries or bridges which connect earthly reality to the transcendent. One must develop a quality of attention which enables one to read the symbols everywhere present in daily life. We will examine the nature of symbols and attention to clarify their place in Weil's ideal of a spiritual civilization and in the focus of labour as its core. The concept of attention has been recognized as an important part of Weil's thought.

Simone Weil's doctrine of "attention" served as a link between several aspects of her personality and thought: her ascetic intellectualism, her love for mathematics, her concern for the poor and oppressed, her innovatively focussed politics, and her unusually empathic sensitivity.

Prayer consists of attention. The proper use of school studies is one method to develop this type of attention. The nature of attention is described as follows: "Attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty, and ready to be penetrated by the object..." (Reader, 49). The practice of solving geometry problems can lead to attention. Unsuccessful attempts at solving problems can also
help to develop this facility; for "every time that a human being succeeds in making an effort of attention with the sole idea of increasing his grasp of truth, he acquires a greater aptitude for grasping it, even if his efforts produce no visible fruit" (Reader, 46). The anticipated result is that eventually light from eternity will flood the soul. Thus, studies used joyfully to develop attention make them into a spiritual exercise. God comes down to possess a soul but only desire can draw God down (Reader, 48).

The development of attention is not limited to those who are students. Students are "no nearer to goodness than their brothers working in fields and factories" (Reader, 51). The nearness is a qualitative difference. Thus, "peasants and workmen possess a nearness to God of incomparable savor which is focused in the depths of poverty, in the absence of social consideration, and in the endurance of long drawn-out sufferings" (Reader, 51).

How does the development of attention, whether in intellectual or manual work, reflect Weil's theology? God is the only source of purity in this world. Contact with purity causes evil to be transformed. God has left some perfectly pure things in this world as remembrances of Himself. These things, which He has left and in which He continues to be present, are found not only in churches but "in the places where everyday life is lived, and especially in places of
work" (GG, 77).

This is the context of attention and the nature of symbols. Weil writes: "This can only be done through symbols making it possible to read the divine truth in the circumstances of daily life and work in the same way that they are expressed in phrases by written letters. For this purpose the symbols must not be arbitrary but must be found inscribed by a providential arrangement in the nature of things" (GG, 78).

Language thus acts as a bridge crossing over moments in time. Language helps to "recreate the world, making like the gods, but only through the use of symbols" (GG, 78). Thus, symbolic language gives access to the past, present and future, the absent and the present.

This idea becomes clear in Weil's writing and her method of explanation is worth quoting in its entirety.

A farmer or husbandman is like an actor continually playing a role in a sacred drama which represents the relations between God and the creation.

It is not only the source of solar energy that is inaccessible to man, but also the power which transforms this energy into food. Modern science considers this power to reside in the vegetable substance called chlorophyll; antiquity said sap instead of chlorophyll, but it comes to the same thing. Just as the sun is the image of God, so the vegetable sap -- which can use the solar energy, and which makes plants and trees rise up straight in defiance of gravity, and which offers itself to be crushed and destroyed inside us and so to maintain our life -- is the image of the Son, the Mediator. The farmer's whole work consists in serving this image.
Poetry like this should suffuse agricultural labour with a light of eternity. Without it, the work is so monotonous that the workers may easily sink into despairing apathy or seek the grossest relaxations; for their work reveals too obviously the futility which afflicts all human conditions. A man works himself to exhaustion in order to eat, and he eats in order to get strength to work, and after a year of labour everything is exactly as it was at the beginning. He works in a circle. Monotony is only bearable for man if it is lit up by the divine. But for this very reason a monotonous life is much the most propitious for salvation. (GG, 79)

Modern science lost interest in symbols, according to Weil. However, the apprehension of symbols could still be sought in certain branches of mathematics. The symbols available would be full of spiritual meaning. For example, geometry teaches about forces acting on matter and simultaneously teaches about the supernatural relations between God and His creatures. This relationship had been discovered by the Greeks who saw a circle as the image of God. A circle which turns in on itself is unchanging and self-contained. The symbol of the circle expresses the same truth as expressed by Christian dogma of the eternal act based on the relationship of the three persons of the Trinity (NR, 292).

For the Greeks, the mean proportional represented the divine mediation between God and His creatures. The right angle of a triangle is the source of all mean proportionals. Thus, the circle, which is the geometrical image of God, is the source of the geometrical image of divine mediation. In this manner, geometry represents both the forces acting on
matter and the supernatural relations between God and His creatures (NR, 292).

In the work of something small, Weil saw a process which symbolized a supernatural truth. The action of a catalyst can transform an entire chemical reaction; similarly, the action of grace can transform a human being. If symbolic interpretation is returned to its rightful place in science, the perception of the unity of established order in the universe would be appreciated (NR, 293-94). Thus, science as well as mathematics contains a "symbolical mirror of supernatural truths" (NR, 294). Consequently, Weil advocates a restructuring of science which combines rigorous method and religious faith.

Symbols are related to the beauty of the world, since the order which symbols represent is actually beauty. Symbols are thus intermediaries, bridges to the other order. Hence, workers need poetry which has its source in religion (N2, 596). However, the direction of attention towards God requires the action of intermediaries to help sustain it. In work, the exercise of attention needs the action of symbols as intermediaries. The intermediaries do not need to be created or contrived because they form part of the nature of things. Work done without light from eternity is compared to slavery. This light from eternity is "beauty" (CO, 265).

Work is in itself submission to matter. Within the work situation everything is a means. The intermediaries of work
include the material, the tool, the body and the soul. Workers are in a privileged situation because nothing separates them from God except the movement to lift up their heads (CO, 265). The material, the instruments and the actions of their work help to focus their attention and lift their heads. Artists, scholars and contemplatives must admire the world and pierce through the veil of unreality that makes it a dream. The worker, however, carries the reality in his flesh like a thorn. He has only to look and love (Reader, 478). The symbols of work can not be created by imagination. They must be sought in the reflexive property of matter, which is like a mirror clouded by our breath. One only needs to wipe the mirror and read the symbols written there which relate to eternity (CO, 266).

The workers stumble over their feelings of intellectual inferiority. The remedy for this can be sought in the development of attention. Marx had pointed out the separation of manual and intellectual labour but he had not realized the potential for transcendent unity of these two types of work in contemplation. Thus, although manual and intellectual labour differ in kind, each type of labour contains the potential of developing the type of attention which is directed towards God (CO, 271).

A symbol related to labour is the cross. The cross represents Christ's suffering and acts as an intermediary to
the affliction of work. Man can only love God by looking at the symbol of Christ on the cross because only the cross can illumine affliction. The cross is identified with necessity. Those afflicted, for example those who labour, are at the foot of the cross, which is the farthest possible distance from God. The distance represents divine love and for those who love, it is only a separation. Persons can not move vertically but God can cross the universe and infinite space and come to us. The cross also represents the creation and creator and the point of intersection is the two branches of the cross (Reader, 452).

Balance and lever are symbols Weil used to relate to the cross. The balance of the cross represents the ascending and descending movements. God descends and the movement allows earth to be raised to heaven (GG, 84). The only possible balance to the weight of the whole world is the counterbalance provided by God. Evil is indefinite in the form of matter, space and time. The only thing able to overcome the evil type of infinity is true infinity. Thus, on the balance of the cross the body of Christ lifted up the world (GG, 85). In relation to labour, man becomes matter and time enters his body through manual labour. The process of entering matter Weil compared to Christ in the Eucharist. Thus, work is like a death which is passed through in order to reach eternity. Man partakes of the balance of the cross through the death
experienced in complete submission to time and matter in work.

The action of the lever is a symbol which reminds the workers that one must bend down to lift something up. God descended to lift humans. The workers must descend into affliction to be lifted up. The lever is something small which is used to move something much greater. Thus, the cross provided a point of leverage for the whole world. The seed is a frequent symbol for the nourishment of the soul which has experienced affliction. The seed teaches that work is the method to understand the order of the universe. Thus, the parable of the mustard seed represents the growth of a particle of pure good once it has entered the soul (N2, 401). The pomegranate seed represents the soul's consent to pure good.

The blind man's stick helps guide the way to touch God (N1, 252). The universe in relation to man's body should act like the blind man's stick to his hand. The stick helps one to understand the real. The blind man's stick helps him to feel the universe and links his arms to the stars and sun. Similarly, work helps man understand the nature of reality and thus guides him in the way the stick guides a blind man.

The relation of the physical universe to the infinite is metaphorical. Consequently, the universe contains numerous symbols which refer to the transcendent order. Part of the apprehension of these symbols is determined by the reading
(lecteur) of the individual. Reading means emotional interpretation and judgement. The reality of the world is presented in the form of sensations. Sensations cannot be thought, they must be read through and interpreted. Sensations are intermediaries for thought. Each individual is separated from the other by the point of view of reading sensations.

Sensations can be changed through force, such as war. Only force can degrade a person. Reality in perception is provided by necessity and not sensations. Work is necessary to receive and express what is true (GG, 50).

The world we inhabit is made up of dreams. The process of waking up to the real depends on a renunciation of one's position as centre of the universe. This renunciation causes a transformation of one's perception. Sensations are interpreted in a different way. Thus, the stooped man on a road at dusk becomes a tree and whispering voices are perceived as rustling leaves (Reader, 471). The renunciation of the position at the centre is actually consent to the rule of necessity. The consent is love, which can be directed to the beauty of the world, to the neighbour, or towards matter.

The development of the use of the blind man's stick requires an apprenticeship. There is a necessary pause in the rhythm before action is taken. The uninterrupted rhythm of factory work does not allow the worker this necessary pause
which is part of his spiritual journey (Nl, 64). Reading combined with a proper degree of attention reveals reality. Real perception of objects contains three dimensions, whereas imaginary things dispose of the third dimension. Evil eliminates the possibility of multiple readings. A high degree of attention allows one to perceive the action of gravity and to perceive possible systems of equilibrium. A low degree of attention results in a reading which is predominantly formed by gravity. The highest form of virtue is simple because it represents the supreme unity.

Reading defines one's relation to others. One must see other human beings as a prison in which a prisoner dwells, surrounded by the whole universe (GG, 121). Our reading must thus enable us to see our brother in a stranger and God in the whole universe. Thus, in work, the individual reading of reality through a focused attention on symbols can bring an individual close to the reality of this world demonstrated in the action of necessity. To impose a reading on someone else is to enslave him and to use force. Thus, work situations which influence the reading of reality or distort it are evil.

The act of labour reflects the fundamental nature of man. Man recreates his life and the very thing he suffers. In work, man creates his own natural existence. Science consists of the recreation of the universe through symbols (FLN, 44). In art, man recreates the alliance between his body and his
soul. Weil noted that when either one of these creations is separated from the whole it becomes an empty thing. Weil wrote: "The three combined 'worker' culture (you can keep on hoping...)" (FLN, 44).

The restructuring of a workers' culture is to allow the integration of work, science and art to penetrate the act of work. Through the experience of a structured culture, the individual worker would experience a balance in the workplace. The worker, through a properly directed attention, would be able to use the symbols contained in the everyday reality of his work to read the nature of transcendent reality. By submitting in obedience to the rule of necessity, the worker allows the descent of grace. By loving his neighbour and appreciating the beauty of this world, the worker demonstrates love of God. Only in this type of work could the spiritual root of reality be revealed to the individual. Only in a civilization rebuilt on the value of this type of labour could the dignity of work and of the worker be realized.
"Is There a Marxist Doctrine?" (1943)

Among Weil's writings during the last years before she died was an unfinished essay on Marxism, entitled "Is there a Marxist Doctrine?" (1943). We have noted the influence of Marx in her earlier phase (1934) and it is significant that in 1943 she is still working with his ideas. The fact that she regarded these ideas as important does not mean that they were sacred to her. She believed that the same critique the Marxists had made of religion needed to be applied to modern science. She also felt that Marxism needed to be critiqued in order to uncover its fundamental presuppositions and to relate them to modern times.

Several of Weil's criticisms of Marxism remained constant from her "Critique of Marxism" in "Reflections" (1934). However, in contrast to the earlier stage, in 1943 Weil's ontology has developed and the influence of that ontology in her latter critique of Marxism can be clearly traced. Thus, we will examine the essay, "Is there a Marxist Doctrine?" to see how her transcendent perspective influences her critique and changes its substance from that of her critique of 1934.

Weil regrets that Marx abandoned his attempts to develop a philosophy of labour. Unable to work out a doctrine, Marx instead seizes two current notions, the cult of science and utopian socialism, and fused them. The nineteenth-century cult of science consisted of a belief that science could study
and solve all of man's problems. Marx took this notion and extended it thus: "taking society as the fundamental human fact of studying therein, as the physicist does in matter, the relationship of force" (OL, 171). This idea, which Weil described as genius, "was plastered over by the wretched cult of science" (OL, 171). The consequence of this combination was "a system according to which the relationships of force that define the social structure entirely determine both man's destiny and his thoughts" (OL, 171). Weil's objection to this system was that force was supreme and no notion of justice could exist.

The second notion which Marx fused was utopian socialism. The conception of justice during Marx's time was embodied in socialism. Marx adopted this idea because he needed "the hope of an imminent and earthly reign of complete justice" in order to be able to live (OL, 172). Marx added a certitude to the contemporary notion of socialism. Since eighteenth-century philosophy had rendered God out of fashion, matter was taken as a replacement. Man cannot be alone in willing the good. He needs an ally which, once omnipotent spirit has been rejected, is sought in the omnipotence of matter (OL, 173).

The search for certitude in the omnipotence of matter creates the absurdity of materialism for Weil. It would be more consistent to think of a materialist who had set aside any concern for the good. In the following critique we see
the evidence of Weil's final ontological phrase: "The very being of man is nothing else but a perpetual straining after an unknown good" (OL, 173). It is in the fundamental nature of man to seek after good and therefore the materialist "cannot prevent himself from ultimately regarding matter as a machine for manipulating the good" (OL, 173). Thus, Marx did not understand this first principle of reality.

The second principle Marx did not grasp, which is also fundamental to Weil's ontology, is the contradiction of humanity that man, yearning for the good, is simultaneously subject in mind and body to a blind force indifferent to the good. Thus, contradiction is inherent in human thought.

Weil distinguishes between legitimate and illegitimate uses of contradiction. Legitimate contradiction occurs when two incompatible thoughts present themselves to the intellect and exhaust the latter in the attempt to eliminate one of them. If neither can be eliminated, then both must be recognized as fact. This type of contradiction can be used "as a two-limbed tool, like a pair of pincers, so that through it direct contact may be made with the transcendental sphere of truth beyond the range of the human faculties" (OL, 173). The contact is direct even though it is made through an intermediary. It is both supernatural (belonging to the unthinkable) and real.

In comparison, Weil critiqued the same Marxian notion in
1934. She described how Marx had substituted matter for mind as the motive power for history. Marx then by paradox conceived of history as "an unceasing aspiration towards the best" (OL, 44). The basis for her critique of this notion was that it was not rational but "quasi-mystical," as we see in the following:

> the rise of big industry made of productive forces the divinity of a kind of religion, whose influence Marx came under, despite himself, when formulating his conception of history. The term religion may seem surprising in connection with Marx; but to believe that our will coincides with a mysterious will which is at work in the universe and helps us to conquer is to think religiously, to believe in Providence. (OL, 44)

Thus, in 1943, Weil continued the critique of Marxism she had begun in 1934. Elements of the critique remained the same. However, in her later stage her transcendent perspective was clearly the basis for her critique. This led to her criticism of Marx's omission of man's continual search for the good.

The second notion which is basic to Weil's ontology and to her critique of Marxism is the study of contradiction. Weil followed Plato in believing that an infinite distance separates the good from necessity. The good and necessity are totally other, but mysteriously form a secret unity. Thus, "the genuine religious life is the contemplation of this unknown unity" (OL, 174). By contrast, the manufacture of a fictitious equivalent of this unity contrasts the inferior
forms of the religious life. Therefore, on the basis of this criterion, Weil evaluates materialism as an inferior form of religious life, because materialism attributes to matter the automatic manufacture of the good.

Weil criticizes Marxism as a religion, "in the impurest sense of the word" (OL, 174). It shares with other inferior forms of religious life its use as "an opium of the people." The inferior form of religion offered by Marxism prevents man from seeing the truth. For Weil, the truth consists of the transcendental unity of good and necessity. A measure of this transcendental unity is communicated to those who, without understanding it, or without using the will or intelligence, contemplate it with love and desire (OL, 76).

In this essay, Weil briefly grapples with the problem of verification of experience which lies outside human faculties. The first type of verification is comprised by certain consequences following from the experience of the transcendent which are situated in the lower level accessible to our faculties. A second type of verification arises out of universal consent. Despite the varieties of religions available, "a mystic doctrine lies at the core of every religion" (OL, 176). Thirdly, inward experience provides an indirect verification of truth. By applying these methods of verification one can discern the inferior forms of religious life.

Materialism, although it is an inferior form, still
contains some fragments of truth. With the exception of the supernatural, materialism accounts for everything. The truth of it lies in the fact that if the supernatural is left out, the universe is only matter. The falsification arises when the universe is described as a combination of matter and of specifically moral forces belonging to this world on the level of nature (OL, 177).

One aspect of Marx's thought which he neglected to develop but which Weil believed to be valuable was the idea of non-physical matter (OL, 177). Marx was only concerned with social matter, but psychological matter is equally important. Weil felt that a central idea was that under a moral order (either collective or individual) there is something analogous to matter, not, however, matter itself. Thought is subject to a mechanism which is similar to the force of blind necessity ruling matter.

The realization that necessity exists, which is fundamental to the above notion, prevents one from falling into two mistakes. The first mistake is the belief that moral phenomena copy material phenomena, illustrated by the notion that moral well-being automatically results from material well-being. The second error is the belief that moral phenomena are arbitrary and are brought about by an act of the will. On the contrary, all of reality is subject to necessity (OL, 177).
If one does not recognize the rule of necessity, mistakes are made in daily life which cause suffering. Weil illustrates this by referring to industrialists who try to make the workers happy by either raising their wages or by telling them they are happy. Their mistake is in not understanding that a worker's happiness is derived "from a certain attitude of mind towards his work; and that, on the other hand, this attitude of mind can be brought about only if certain objective conditions...have been fulfilled" (OL, 179).

The operation of necessity on man's thought and actions makes the relations between society and the individual very complex. Weil agreed with Marx's starting point of the reality of social matter, or social necessity. However original the idea may have seemed in Marx's time, Weil attributes it to Plato. Plato believed that social matter formed a greater obstacle between the soul and the good than the flesh. For Weil, this is also a Christian conception: "all men are absolutely incapable of having on the subject of good and evil opinions other than those dictated by the reflexes of the beast, except for predestined souls whom a supernatural grace draws towards God" (OL, 180).

Despite the appearance of a great number of differences of opinion in a given period, in reality the differences were minimal. "The most violent struggles often divide people who think exactly, or almost exactly, the same thing" (OL, 181).
The source of commonality underlying the difference of opinion is the opinion of the great beast. For Weil, the European great beast of her time was evident in a pronounced taste for fascism. Individual men are placed in a different relation to the great beast. Some groom it, others take care of its neck or back. One person thinks that the supreme good consists of tickling the beast. In terms of society, groups interlock and social morality varies from group to group. There may be an infinite number of differences between the individuals, but thought in all cases is completely subject to social opinion. Weil states that Marx proposed this very rule, but his difference from Plato (and from Weil) is that Marx was unaware of the possibility of exceptions through the action of supernatural grace (OL, 182).

Marx attempted to understand the mechanism of social opinion. He sought the key in the phenomenon of professional morality. Every professional group manufactures for itself a morality by which the legitimate acts of the profession are outside of evil. When extended to security, the moral atmosphere is composed of a mixture of group moralities the composition of which reflects the amount of power exercised by each group. All aspects of society will be governed by the group morality but no one is conscious of it because they believe that the way of thinking is inherent in human nature.

The second focus of Marx's study was the search for the
mechanism of social power. Weil felt that this aspect of his thought was very feeble. Marx tried to show that the relationships of force depend on the technical conditions of production. A society has the structure which makes the maximum production possible. A society strives to produce more and thereby improve the condition of production. At a certain point, a break in continuity occurs wherein the new conditions necessitate a new structure. A change-over occurs, marked by "more or less violent manifestations" (OL, 184).

Weil believes that this Marxian notion contradicts Marx's political standpoint that a visible revolution only sanctions an invisible revolution already accomplished. A social class noisily seizes power because it has already silently obtained the power (OL, 184-85). This explanation is the logical consequence of a view that regards society as governed by relationships of force.

The consequence of this belief, which neither Marx nor his followers were able to see, according to Weil, is that for a workers' revolution to occur the workers must first silently lay hold of social power. One must either apply these methods if they exist or give up the idea of a workers' revolution if they do not exist. The fact that neither Marx nor his followers applied this theory to reality makes Marxism, as a theory of the workers' revolution, a nullity (OL, 185).

The next portion of the 1943 critique of Marxism contains
ideas already present in 1934. Weil criticized Marx's theory of social transformations. One of the premises on which Marx developed this theory was derived from a Lamarckian principle that the function creates the organ (OL, 185; see also OL, 58–9). Weil states that Darwin solved the problem of adaptation by his "conditions of existence."

Marx tried to apply Lamarck's ideas to society. He added to the theory the idea that the function creates the organ with the highest possible degree of efficiency. In his sociology, Marx assumes that given the technical conditions of production, society possesses the structure capable of using them to the maximum (OL, 186). This idea of maximum efficiency is so vague that it is almost impossible to disprove, according to Weil.

The second of Marx's assumptions is that society continually endeavours to improve production. This effort is assumed to react on the actual conditions of production in a way which improves them. Weil disagrees with the notion of infinite increase of production. Further, Marx states that when the improvement in production has reached a certain phase, the social structure is abandoned in favour of a more efficient one (OL, 187).

Weil's disagreement with Marx's theory of social transformations is based on the observation that men who have taken part in political or social change have done so to consciously
bring about a change in the social structure to allow productivity to achieve its maximum potential. Neither can one prove an automatic mechanism which would result from the laws of social necessity and initiate a transformation whenever the productive capacity is not being utilized. The only other explanation would be to assume a mysterious spirit watching over and directing human history. This idea is flawed because spirit is what tends towards the good and productive interests can never be the good (OL, 187).

Marx, subject to nineteenth-century notions, did not realize that production is not the good. Production is also not the only necessity and therefore production can never be the sole factor in relationships of force. Marx omitted the influence of war on the conditions of production. This omission causes confusion among Marxists when confronting notions of war and class struggle and makes it the sole principle of explaining history.

Marx fuses the development of production and historical development. Because Marx does not explain the basis of this fusion, one can only assume that man's permanent protest against the social hierarchy keeps society in a state of fluidity which allows the productive forces to shape it at will. In this case the class struggle is a negative condition and the active principle is the mysterious spirit ("productive forces") which keeps production at a maximum level (OL, 189).
Marx was correct, according to Weil, in realizing that the love of liberty and the love of domination keep social life in a permanent state of unrest. The concepts of liberty and domination have, however, a wider bearing than of oppressed to oppressor, which is where Marx stopped. Oppressors are often oppressed in other respects, and they often think more of getting even with their equals than of subjecting those under them. This is similar to a complicated tangle of guerrilla forces rather than a battle of two opposing sides. The tangle is governed by laws but they have not yet been discovered by science (OL, 189).

Marx realized that such a science was needed. However, Marx did not attempt to establish it. He took refuge in a dream, "wherein social matter itself takes charge of the two functions that it denies man, namely not only to accomplish justice, but to conceive it" (OL, 190). Marx called his dream "dialectical materialism."

The roots of this idea can be found in Plato. Dialectics, for Plato, was the movement of the soul which, in order to rise, leans for support on the irreducible contradictions of the sphere in which it finds itself. The end of this ascent is contact with absolute good. Marx attributed to social matter the movement to good through contradictions. He was led to this by his acceptance of two false beliefs: the confusion between production and the good, and consequently
between the progress of production and progress towards the good; and secondly, the generalization wherein the progress of production forms the permanent law of human history (OL, 191).

Weil criticized Marx's theory of social transformation on the basis of his conception of justice. The origin of social lies for Marx is found in the group struggling for domination. The disappearance of this social group would abolish lies and bring about justice. If each group gradually attains dominance, eventually there will be no more inferiors and no more oppression. Men will possess justice and they will recognize it. The only way to bring about justice is to "hasten forward the operation of that mechanism, inherent in the structure of social matter, which will automatically bring men justice" (OL, 192).

Marx regarded the proletariat as an instrument. He regarded as just and good everything that would speed the appearance of a society without lies. By doing so, Marx also sanctioned everything effective as just and good relative to the final goal. Marx thereby fell into the group morality, whereby the activity of the social group is placed above good and evil. This inability to recognize the source of the good as something outside the reality in which we live was Marx's greatest failure, according to Weil (OL, 193).

Weil's final criticism of Marx in this essay concerns his idea of force. Marx's idea of revolution depended on the
notion that everything is regulated by force and that a day will arrive when force is on the side of the weak. In that day the "entire mass of the weak, while continuing to be such, will have force on its side" (OL, 193). Weil finds this idea absurd because number is a force only in the hands of whoever disposes of it. The energy of a human mass is a force only for a group outside the mass. The force of the mass will be used for interests exterior to it, like the horse is used in the interest of its rider. If the horse unseats one rider, another will take his place (OL, 194).

Weil states that Marx applied this knowledge to the state, but forgot it in relation to the revolution. The idea of weakness constituting a force is an idea rooted in Christianity and the cross. However, the force referred to is of a supernatural source. The supernatural force operates secretly in the form of the infinitely small. It could affect the masses only by dwelling in certain souls. Marx missed the truth of the contradiction of strength in weakness because he did not accept its supernatural root (OL, 195).

Weil's critique of Marxism in 1943 contained elements already present in 1934. These common features included the critique of progress or infinite increase in production, the doctrine of materialism, and myth of "scientific socialism," the false goal of revolution, and the Lamarckian basis for Marx's analysis. Weil criticized these ideas on the grounds
that they were irrational, unscientific, and built on faulty presuppositions.

The criticism in 1943 contained all these elements but they were focused by the transcendental perspective in her final phase. Marx attempted to explain social reality in terms of matter. He failed to comprehend the fundamental fact of human existence which is that all of matter is subject to necessity which is connected mysteriously to the good. A contemplation of the contradiction of the necessary and the good leads the soul towards the transcendent. Marx, however, was impeded by his immanent perspective. He sought to overcome the inconsistencies and despair produced by his view of reality by a dream of revolution and justice. However, by seeking justice in this reality instead of in an outside reality, he misunderstood the nature of justice.

By means of Weil's critique of Marxism we see how fundamental the notion of necessity and good are to her thought. God for Weil is neither totally transcendent nor totally immanent. Thus, because God is potentially present in the souls of those who consent to Him, our life and labour on this earth have meaning. This is the locus of the vision of spiritual labour in a spiritualized civilization. Through Weil's critique of Marx, similar to her earlier critique but yet radically different, we see the final phase of Weil's transcendental ontology and the place of labour in that framework.
Notes


4 Hellman, p. 23.

5 See also Hellman, pp. 47-73.

6 Ibid.

7 Hellman, p. 72.

8 Hellman, p. 53.


10 Cameron, pp. 44-45.


12 See Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, "Oration on the Dignity of Man" (1486) in Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller and John Herman Randall, Jr., eds., The Renaissance Philosophy of Man (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), pp. 223-254.

13 Hellman, p. 60.


15 Ibid., p. 83.
Weil provided a unique vision for the rebuilding of civilization based on the spirituality of work. Several comments can be made concerning the relationship and effectiveness of this vision for the situation of modern France to which Weil had primarily, although not exclusively, addressed herself.

Weil saw herself as an intermediary between the workers and the organization of industrial bureaucracy which oppressed them. However, she did not idealize her limited contribution to the situation. Her attitude towards the involvement of intellectuals in the problems of workers was harshly critical. Any change would have to originate from the workers. However, change would have to occur in a receptive climate and would thereby require the participation of the management elite. Thus, Weil did not place hope in unilateral change or change within a class of society, but appealed to all spheres of society to rediscover spiritual roots, the dignity of man, and the value of manual labour.

Education, or more specifically translation, for the workers was fundamental to change. Science and literature both offered glimpses of spiritual truths, which once
translated for the workers would help them to perceive the truth of their own situation. She upheld the value of science. Her own competence in mathematics enabled her to understand the value of mathematics in education. Technology was allowed a place in her view of society provided that man was clearly the master of the machine. The ends of production would have to be rejected as an ultimate value, in favour of a serious consideration of the means.

Weil's consistent call to study the means of production and management preceded a later awareness that these areas were problematic. Weil studied the process of rationalization of labour with an examination of Taylor and Taylorization. The lack of measurement for the intensity of labour was exposed as an important omission in the labour developments of the time.

Weil criticized the developments which had resulted from modern industrialization. Although her critique was accurate and exposed some of the critical problems in that method of organization, how practical were her solutions? Weil realized that modern society could not revert to primitive organization. This would be impossible because society was economically dependent on machines and because such a society would be vulnerable to oppression from the outside. Weil hoped for the reduction of oppression rather than its elimination.
Weil sought to encourage the development of the maximum amount of liberty possible for individuals. This "point of equilibrium" was not fixed but required constant adjustment to the conditions of existence. She realized that complete freedom could never be achieved in an industrial society and a competitive world.²

Weil recognized that specialization led to privilege which resulted in monopoly. In an attempt to reduce this monopoly, Weil sought to involve the workers in the work process. Weil suggested that workers be rotated through the process to develop an understanding of their own role in the production of a product. The dignity of the labourer rather than the product needed to become the focus.

Weil suggested several reforms to involve the family in production. She believed that the family should be allowed to visit the workplace to develop early a positive association with work. Weil attempted to overcome the separation of the worker from his family by eliminating the worker's degradation in work. The elimination of degradation would reduce escapist pursuits of pleasure outside the family.

Weil's critique of progress preceded by several decades the general recognition of this theme. She exposed the key heresy of humanist modernity by exploring the notion of limits in nature and society. In the eighteenth century the idea of human progress had become a faith in progress.³ This faith
did not account for depletion of natural resources or any other limits. The faith in progress was connected to the development of capitalism⁴ and foreshadowed the rise of imperialism and the "progressive ideology" of the late nineteenth century.⁵

The recognition of limits was based, for Weil, on the action of competition. Competition forces power beyond limits. Power extends beyond what it can control, commands more than it can impose commands on, and spends more than its resources. The notions of limit led to the conclusion that oppressive systems must eventually collapse. Weil believed that capitalism was passing through a stage wherein nature was punishing excess. When power exceeded nature's limits, parasitism, waste and confusion resulted. This view of capitalism was non-Marxian because Marx, as a modernist, largely rejected the notion of limits. Weil foresaw limits in other areas such as in natural sources of energy. She realized that even the discovery of completely new sources of energy could involve more labour than the human expenditure of energy one would attempt to replace (OL, 48). Weil argued against a notion of progress which held as an ideal the complete abolition of labour. Weil believed that labour was a necessary part of human existence.

The critique of progress was connected with a critique of revolution as the opium of the masses. A historical link
between revolutionary social intervention and permanent human progress was formed by the Enlightenment ideology of revolution. Weil was sharply critical of revolution in French history and in its future. This criticism formed a major part of her criticism of Marx.

Weil stated that the French Revolution had only replaced one form of oppression for another. Weil felt that Marx had not adequately explained why the division of labour should become oppressive, why it could be expected to end eventually, why oppression was invincible as long as it was useful, why the oppressed in revolt never succeeded in forming a non-oppressive society, or what mechanism caused one form of oppression to be replaced by another (OL, 57-58).

Weil's criticism of progress as a goal was based on her rejection of western interpretations of providence. This attitude is shared by George Grant. Both reject the western identification of necessity and goodness within the notion of providence. Weil wrote: "The ridiculous conception of Providence as being a personal and particular intervention on the part of God for certain particular ends is incompatible with true faith" (NR, 282). For both Grant and Weil, the concept of providence (fate) provides a contrast to the modern notion of freedom. The world is subject to necessity. Man's role in this world is obedience and love.

Hannah Arendt saw Weil's contribution to the issue of
labour as a positive one. Arendt felt that *La Condition Ouvrière* had been written "without prejudice and sentimentality." According to Arendt's distinction between work and labour, factory work as Weil experienced it was actually labour. Factory labourers do not make a thing and the product of their work is a function of routine rather than human intent. Factory labour was more than necessity demanded and was therefore oppressive. Weil believed that this type of labour was inhuman slavery rather than the human condition.

Weil wrote as "neither of the left nor of the right." Although Weil began her writing sympathetic to the left, she was gradually disillusioned with all parties and organizations. Her personal experience led to a political stance directed toward the transcendent. Unlike those of her generation who drifted towards socialism, fascism, or other movements, Weil moved in other directions. Tomlin wrote:

...but Simone Weil, the eternal radical, dismissed with contempt the "sophisticated" socialism or communism which for so many of her generation proved compatible with bourgeois and even plutocratic tastes. [11]

Her critique of society was based on the observation that Western culture has lost any sense of spirituality:

Never since the dawn of history, except for a certain period of the Roman empire, has Christ been so absent as today. The separation of religion from the rest of social life, which seems natural even to the majority of Christians
nowadays, would have been judged monstrous by antiquity. (GG, 100)

The cult of science and the appropriation of specialized knowledge by an elite had contributed to the loss of spirituality or the pursuit of truth. For workers, the conditions of work and the lack of a workers' culture formed major obstacles. In academic pursuits, the search for truth had been substituted by an obsession with obtaining grades or prestige. In society, truth was obscured by obstacles presented by the Great Beast. Any unlimited power of the collective over the individual acts as an impediment to truth. Thus, false patriotism, nationalism and historicism needed to be reexamined in the light of the other reality. One could love one's country, one's church, one's history in a limited way, recognizing them as temporal links to eternal truth. However, ultimately the way out of the cave towards truth is an individual path.

Weil's ethical preoccupation demanded that one had to cut across all divisions and even appear to be on two sides simultaneously. The unity of theory and practice reflected the unity which Weil tried to achieve in her life and writing. Weil's "search or quest" was not conventional. She did not expect to be able to "look for something to believe in." The silence and absence of God were proof of His love. Weil wrote that "God can only be present in creation under the form of
Part of Weil's use of the Gospel depended on her rejection of the Old Testament and the God it described. This was motivated by her desire to separate the Jewish past from Christianity and instead connect it to Greek thought.\textsuperscript{14} This attempt resulted in various reinterpretations of history.

Weil saw Jesus as a central figure in her belief. His sacrifice was evidence of perfect obedience and divine love. His death offered the perfect model for human decreation. However, her notebooks revealed that her Christianity became "progressively more disembodied and syncretistic."\textsuperscript{15} Weil read through such diverse sources as the Egyptian Book of the Dead, Gilgamesh, the Bhagavad-Gita, Plato, the Pythagoreans, and the creation myths of Africa. Weil sought to show that "Christ was but one avatar of God, supreme perhaps, yet not unique."\textsuperscript{16} Weil's idea that there might be a unity in such diverse documents has been described as pure fantasy.\textsuperscript{17}

From a hospital bed in London, Weil continued to write her parents as if all were well, as if she were not enduring affliction. She wrote:

The flowers of spring and early summer are all coming out together, and fruit blossom of every kind is full out. On Sundays the whole of London overflows into the parks. The sky is a pale, profound, delicious blue. (Letter #58, \textit{Seventy Letters}, 185)
In fulfilling what she believed to be man's role on this earth, namely obedience, love and love of beauty, Weil directed herself towards affliction. In the absence of God she perceived His love and in affliction she prepared for the descent of grace. In her quest for transcendence, Weil hoped that her life would function as an intermediary between this reality and the other reality; not only for herself, but for all the manual labourers, farm workers, and oppressed individuals she had chosen to love as her neighbours. Her assurance of faith was in the silence:

I have never tried to find it again. I understood that he had come for me by mistake. My place is not in that garret. It can be anywhere in a prison-cell, in one of those middle-class drawing rooms full of knick-knacks and red plush, in the waiting room of a station -- anywhere, except in that garret.

Sometimes I cannot help trying, fearfully and remorsefully, to repeat to myself a part of what he said to me. How am I to know if I remember rightly? He is not there to tell me.

I know well that he does not love me. How could he love me? And yet deep down within me something, a particle of myself, cannot help thinking, with fear and trembling, that perhaps, in spite of all he loves me. (N2, 639)

Thus, Weil rejected the immanent philosophies of her time, in favour of a transcendent vision. Having accepted the transcendent as the source of all justice, beauty, and truth, Weil attempted to link the two realities. Weil recommended a return to a spiritual basis for daily reality. Truth could be
sought by those who consented to affliction and continued to love. Work provides a daily contact with the reality of existence through the experience of necessity. Thus, work, restored to spiritual value, forms the core of a civilization reoriented to truth or to God as the good. This conclusion was based on a practical concern with labour and the oppressed and a theoretical grappling with the immanent philosophies of her time. It is this combination of action and thought which provides a harmony to Weil's life and work and reveals the uniqueness of her quest among other thinkers of the twentieth century.
Notes

1 Pierce, p. 105.
2 Ibid., p. 106.
4 Ibid., p.
6 Goudzwaard, p. 52.
10 Tomlin, p. 13.
11 Ibid., p. 13.
13 Ibid., p. 42.
15 Ibid., p. 60.
16 Ibid., p. 60.
17 J.M. Cameron, "The Life and Death of Simone Weil," in G.A. White, p. 44.
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