SIMONE WEIL ON THE NEED FOR LOYALTY

SIMONE WEIL ON THE NEED FOR LOYALTY:

A CONSIDERATION OF THE NEED FOR ROOTS

By

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ABSTRACT

Simone Weil wrote The Need for Roots in 1943 to explain how France could be returned to her people after the war. While this was her immediate interest, the concerns she raises are applicable to modern society in general. Weil suggests that the seeming despair and hopelessness bestowed upon human beings can be attributed to a condition that she describes as "uprootedness". Owing largely to industrialization, money, and the rise of the nation-state, individuals are no longer connected in time and space to anything. They are beings without a history, driven by blind ambition and egoism, and hence no understanding of who and what they are.

The problem revealed in The Need for Roots is that modern society leaves no room for an authentic expression of loyalty. The tragic outcome, however, is that individuals come to love the state because there is nothing else to love. Individuals find themselves living in "democracies" in which everything connected with public life is despised. They are cut off from all environments that might otherwise enable them some control over their lives and a point of reference for determining who and what they are.

This thesis examines what Weil means by "loyalty", why it might be important, and how it can occupy a place in modern society. Weil suggests

that a life devoid of loyalty is a life devoid of meaning and hope and yet this is the condition in which modern society finds itself.

In the past 50 years, the main focus of study on Weil has been her religious writings. This thesis attempts to examine her political ideas as they come to bear in The Need for Roots. The intention of the thesis is not to pass judgement on Weil's ideas, which are often other-worldly and some would argue idealistic, but to give serious consideration to her civic mindedness.

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I wish to acknowledge my husband, Jim Blair, who throughout the past few years has not only read my drafts but has engaged many of Weil's writings directly in an effort to share in my interests and concerns. Considerable thanks also go to my father, Stephen Threlkeld, for his intellectual, emotional and seemingly endless financial support. Finally, I wish also to acknowledge my mother, Margaret, and brother, Simon, as well as my friends who seemed to know even when I did not that I would bring this thesis to an end.

PREFACE

Until two or three years ago, I had not heard of Simone Weil. I came across her quite by accident and after reading her briefly felt that she responded to the concerns and interests that I had. As an undergraduate I was most interested and inspired by the thoughts of both Plato and Marx, and in fact did an undergraduate thesis on Plato. Simone Weil, I was intrigued to discover, not unlike myself was also attracted to the thoughts of both Plato and Marx. This, then, was the initial reason that Weil provoked my interest. (Admittedly, and for what it's worth, I was also excited by the fact that I could embark upon a study that offered a feminine perspective. To this point, my studies were occupied solely by a masculine viewpoint.)

I found in both Plato and Marx considerations that in short were not tied to a liberal understanding of the world. At the same time, however, I remained a bit confused about my interests in these two thinkers and two areas of thought because they seemed to me somewhat opposed and unrelated. Yet while there are obvious differences in the two, I also recognized that each was concerned with something that was at the same time both greater than the individual and also attentive to the individual. Weil, I think, responded to these two thinkers for similar reasons.

The question I had in mind was how is it that this society seems to foster feelings of despair, misery, and hopelessness? It seemed to me that owing to an excessive emphasis on individualism and hence ambition, what was lacking was a connectedness or sense of community. I wondered what might be meant by a notion of community in the broadest sense and why this might resolve the tensions of the modern age. Weil addressed these concerns and offered as a solution a need for loyalty. I would like to point out that I was also attracted to the contemporary consideration that Weil was able to apply to Platonic ideas.

While Weil's later writings from 1938 onwards are tied mainly to Plato and Christianity, her earlier writings were aligned with Marxian ideas. The point to be made here, however, is that while the means by which Weil addressed her concerns changed, her fundamental concerns did not. That is to say, she was always concerned about oppression and the plight of the modern worker and the poor and the misery and despair that seemed to be bestowed upon them. She wanted to think about how human beings might life as citizens of a community. Louis Patsouras, who wrote Simone Weil and the Socialist Tradition, suggests that when Weil "lost hope of changing the world through a secular socialism, her mysticism reinforced her love for Greek Civilization."

Weil's ideas remain difficult, if not impossible, to categorize. Her ideas have been received by both the left and the right, if I may put it in those terms, and she herself declares that the society she aspires to in The Need for

Roots is neither socialist nor capitalist. Eric Tomlin appropriately suggests that taking sides would be the wrong attitude for one who distrusted collectivities: Weil argues that the danger in collectivities, whether they be churches, trade unions, or political parties, is that they try to impose their views on members and therefore serve to stifle any independent thought.

Whether or not Weil offers us a theory is also in doubt. Clearly she does not provide a consistent, coherent or systematic account of her ideas and it is at times difficult to determine what it is she is trying to say and also how one aspect of her thought connects with another. Such a task, however, is precisely the point of this thesis. It is my intention in the thesis to give serious consideration to what Weil is saying. My focus is on loyalty because I think this is a central concept in her political analysis, and moreover one that has not been given very much consideration. Most of Weil's writings have been published posthumously and since her death in 1943 attention has focused mainly on her religious writings and to some extent the connections between her political thought and Marx. I wanted to consider her political thought as it comes to bear in The Need for Roots, her final and lengthiest work, and also the only work she was actually asked to write. While The Need for Roots is certainly the focus of this thesis, consideration is also given to her essay "On Human Personality", written in late 1942, and which many consider to be a preface for The Need for Roots.

As noted above, Weil has been received in different ways. Some have

considered her mad, de Gaulle for instance, who I might add seemingly never finished reading anything she wrote, and others have considered her a saint. T.S. Eliot suggests that she has the "genius of a saint" and I believe George Grant considered her in the same vein, if not more so. Weil herself, however, would be unconcerned about how people chose to describe her person. Her biographer, Simone Petrement, comments that Weil is "well aware that some people consider her slightly touched in the head", but again this would be of no concern to Weil. Her concern was always that her writings be given serious attention and more to the point she put to those reading her writings the question: "Is what I say true?"

While Weil wrote The Need for Roots as a serious political doctrine, she was not under any illusion that its ideas would be translated into action. In a letter to her parents she seems to recognize that she was given the task of writing what would become The Need for Roots because they didn't know what else to do with her. She also comments, "I don't expect it to have much effect."

In another letter she wrote to her parents about a month before she died, Weil expressed concern that no one anymore seemed to give their attention to anything. She worried that her writings would be read with the same hurried attention that is given to everything and the readers quickly deciding what they agree with and what they don't. Petrement observes that people praise Weil's intelligence rather than take a real interest in what she is saying. Indeed, Robert Coles suggests that what Weil wants is a "serious, thoughtful audience; people

who share her concerns and are willing to pay attention." In this thesis I have attempted to be such an audience. My concern is not to pass judgement on Weil's ideas but simply to understand what it is she is trying to say. The concept of attention, I might add, is central to Weil's thought and by her definition means that one consider and contemplate rather than set out to solve a problem. This in fact is the form she thinks education should take.

I think that this thesis reveals some important aspects of Weil's thought concerning loyalty and the nature of a society in which people can act as citizens of a community and not as isolated individuals making claims against one another. I should point out that much of what Weil says in

The Need for Roots concerns how it is that human beings and more to the point the French, have become uprooted, and how the growing of roots ought to begin. She doesn't so much offer a blueprint of a transformed society, but rather reveals what is problematic about the society in which she lives and points to a direction for change.

TO BE ROOTS

To be roots. In that deepest earth where no ray
climbs down. Where light does not look in.
A treetop without birds. A leafless branch.
But the deepest spring strings out its capillary hairs
and must not break. The dirty work of roots
without respite. (Even winter's sleep is only seeming.)
Hoarding. Feeding. Giving drink. To be silent bond
tying life to bitter depravation. To give the joy of sun,
pronounce the strength of beauty through your
crippled unseen being to a white blossom.

To be roots. And not to envy blossoms.

- Vizma Belsevica

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout her life, Simone Weil concerned herself with the plight of modern man in the wake of technology, industrialization and the nation-state. In her earlier years she focused largely on the oppression of factory workers and on the poor. In addition to scholarly study and writing, in 1932 and 1933, for instance, she had engaged in demonstrations for unemployed and striking workers, and in 1934 she forewent her teaching duties at the girls' lycee in Roanne to engage directly in manual labour, which included a stint at a Renault factory. Weil would maintain a deep concern for the oppression of workers throughout her life, and in The Need for Roots she postulates that the workers' distress cannot be resolved on a legal place in the form of fewer working hours and a higher wage. Rather, in short, what the workers need is poetry, not bread, that is to say, well-being is not so much dependent on wealth or material satisfactions as it is on faithfulness.

Weil seems to have arrived at this conclusion as a result of her spiritual experiences and meditation sparked initially by a visit to Portugal in 1935. Robert Coles writes:

> I believe it was then, in the Autumn of 1935, that she began to look upward, so to speak. Her gaze heretofore, had been directed laterally at her fellow intellectuals and downward at the poor, the oppressed. ...In Portugal, after watching a procession of fishermen at the festival of their patron saint, she began to think about the role of Christianity in

the lives of the poor, and in her own.[1]

While Weil pursued an intense inquiry into Christianity in the later 1930s and early 1940s, some comment is necessary regarding her particular religious affiliation. Although her family was of Jewish descent, Weil did not consider herself a "Jew" and while in her later years she gave much attention to Christianity and more specifically Catholicism, in 1940 she professed that she had never had any particular religious affiliation.[2] It remains, however, as Coles describes, that Weil did "look upwards", and indeed her thought from 1935 onward seems to have been dominated by other-worldly considerations. This area of her thought would be further emphasized after 1938 when she claimed to have had a mystical experience while visiting Italy. From 1936 to 1942, her writings offer penetrating religious inquiries and expositions. While this is so it need also be recognized that Weil did not relinquish her initial concerns regarding the oppression of workers and the poor. Rather, Weil's consideration of matters of faith can be seen as a means by which she was able to understand and respond to oppression and anguish.

In 1943, Simone Weil was to address the crisis of France as it had revealed itself during defeat and the German occupation. In The Need for Roots, Weil suggests that the situation in which the French found themselves can

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[1]Robert Coles, Simone Weil: A Modern Pilgrimage, (Don Mills, Ontario: Addison-Wesley Publishing Ltd., 1987), pp.10-11.

[2]See Simone Weil, "What Is A Jew?" in George A. Panichas, ed., The Simone Weil Reader, (New York: Moyer Bell Ltd., 1977), pp.79-81.

best be attributed to a condition of "deracinement" or "uprootedness". The crisis of France was not so much that it was invaded by Germany, but that the French people, according to Weil, allowed this to happen. Weil's concern was that the French had stopped caring about their country, but more to the point, there existed a very real reason as to why this lack of interest or caring emerged. Weil suggests that it was because the French had become an entirely "uprooted" people. Further, she would consider Germany a nation of uprooted peoples, even more so than France, and she notes that whoever is uprooted themselves, uproots others.

Human beings need to have roots, or bonds of attachment, in order that they may develop feelings of loyalty to all natural environments or communities, such as, for example, family, home, village, and country. While the concept of roots remains difficult to define, Weil stresses that it is a most important need in the life of a human being. Uprootedness is a condition that permeates modern civilization largely as a result of industrialization and the rise of the nation-state. In France, as in the modern Western world, "money and the state", Weil argues, have come to replace all other bonds of attachment. She suggests that human beings need a community, a network of inter-relations into which people are born and bound. However, the problem with modernity is that roots in collectivities have been destroyed. Uprootedness, for Weil, means estrangement from one's community, or a displacement of individuals from family, home, and

country. Since money and the state have come to replace all other bonds of attachment, smaller collectivities, such as the family and the village, have been overcome by a sense of nationhood. The state, then, exists as the only thing that maintains some semblance of a collectivity and moreover the only thing to which people may exercise bonds of attachment. The problem with this, however, is that the state has come to be held as an object of derision, disdain and hatred. For Weil, this means that the nation is the only locus of membership while at the same time being the deepest source of rootlessness.

> The state is a cold concern which cannot inspire love. It suppresses everything that might be loved; so one is forced to love it, because there is nothing else. That is the moral torment to which all of us today are exposed.[3]

Owing to the absence of collectivities to which people really feel they belong, all that remains are human beings without a home and without any reference concerning who and what they are. In the wake of such a reality individuals find themselves compelled to love the state, but such sentiment remains vastly unauthentic. It is not capable of conjuring up feelings of loyalty, gratitude or affection since the state is grossly incapable of inspiring such sentiments. Moreover, the rise of the state kills everything that might be loved so that in the end public life becomes null and void. Weil, however, finds it impossible to conceive of a human existence in which loyalty remains absent. Indeed, a genuine

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[3]Simone Weil, The Need for Roots, trans. A.F. Wills, (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul Inc., 1978), p.109.

expression of loyalty constitutes the essence of what human life is. As social and political animals, human beings need to recognize a connection to the communities in which they live, both past and present. Weil maintains that there is "something hideous about a life devoid of loyalty," and it is to this central dilemma of the modern age that Weil turns in The Need for Roots.

It is with the conditions of the Twentieth Century in mind, then, that Weil goes on to argue that what is necessary is a "refashioning of the soul of a country." In short, this is the solution that Weil offers, yet despite her analysis and criticism of the state, as alluded to above, she looks mainly to the state as the single agent that can bring about this change. She believes that the state alone is capable of breathing, what she terms, "a new inspiration" into the people.

Weil's argument is not to be taken as a mere philosophical commentary. Her discussion, particularly in The Need for Roots, her final and lengthiest work, is one of serious political intent. The subject matter of The Need for Roots and the solution it upholds indicate that in applying her other-worldly understandings to social and political matters, Weil was able to provide a more satisfying and completed vision of how to resolve the central dilemmas of modernity. In short, the human being and the universe are both constituted in such a way that a response to what might be considered the malaise of modernity cannot be found in the material or earthly world alone. In some ways, Weil's solutions are spiritual, yet at the same time they are by no means devoid of the

need for political and social change. Weil suggests that what is required to cure the ills of modernity is a spiritual solution, but such a solution can only be attained by addressing secular matters, or what she would describe as man's earthly needs. For Weil, the tensions of the modern age can be resolved only through a type of spiritual rejuvenation. The solution lies here for Weil since from her standpoint it is this aspect of human life that has gone ignored thus in effect rendering such a life incomplete and at best subject to a vegetative existence. Weil reaches this conclusion in The Need for Roots.

This thesis will focus on Weil's later writings, most specifically, The Need for Roots, in an effort to ascertain what she means by the term "loyalty" as this concept plays a central role in her prescriptions for the transformation of society. Weil develops this idea after first having described what she perceives as the crisis of France. She suggests that in order to cure France of its ills, of the conditions that allowed it to plunge, there must be a refashioning of the soul of the country. It is within this context that she explains that the French must be encouraged to develop new feelings towards their country. In a sense, then, Weil is calling for a development of patriotism but, and this is crucial to her argument, it is a form of patriotism that is significantly opposed to the familiar brand that has emerged in nation-states. In short, Weil conceives of a patriotism that is directed toward country rather than toward the state. Central to this new form of patriotism is loyalty, a concept that constitutes genuine feelings of compassion and

responsibility, and is to be distinguished from pride, or what Weil would further describe as idolatry.

In Chapter One, consideration will be given to what I take as the premise of Weil's ideas, namely that the world is composed of two dimensions, a physical and a spiritual, or an earthly world and a realm "situated above this world". Weil suggests that the modern world has tumbled into an era of social and political confusion as a result of the men of 1789 who failed to recognize that the world is composed of two realms. Where Weil is concerned the men of 1789 only recognized the earthly realm. Following in the thought of Plato, whom Weil greatly admired, she argues that a consideration of physical needs alone denies the essence of what it means to be a human being. In this regard, she believes that a society must cater to both physical needs as well as to what she describes as the needs of souls, one's spiritual or moral needs. Weil's terminology is perhaps other-worldly, but the underlying intent of her analysis is to conceive of an earthly world that responds to all human needs. She terms such things the needs of souls and to some extent, then, her resolution does maintain a spiritual flavour but clearly the implications of this idea reveal Weil's civic mindedness and hence political vision. Chapter one, then, will attempt to elucidate Weil's conception of the world and the role and place of the human being in such a world.

Chapter Two will consider the problems with modernity as revealed by Weil primarily in The Need for Roots. Indeed, Weil identifies "uprootedness" as the

central problem facing France, and more generally Western Civilization. In this chapter, attention will also be given to what Weil considers as the existing obstacles that stand to prevent the development of a society that would cater to the needs of souls. Central to Weil's prescriptions for change is the need for an authentic expression of "fidelite", or loyalty as described in the English translation.[4] As alluded to above, money, the rise of the state, and the modern notion of patriotism subvert such an expression. While Weil's criticisms are implicitly directed against liberalism, she argues that many of the "monstrous conditions" of the modern age can be attributed to the Romans.

Chapter Three will give consideration to the nature of a society that would cater to the needs of souls. More specifically, this chapter will address the form of patriotism that Weil deems appropriate for France, namely a patriotism based on compassion. This chapter will also include a consideration of the role of labour in such a society and offer an exposition on the specific changes that Weil has in mind.

In the fourth chapter, attention will be given to how Weil envisioned her ideas to be translated into action. In short, Weil is calling for a political agenda in which the political order can occupy its proper place in the natural order of the

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[4]In the English translation, Simone Weil, The Need for Roots, op.cit., "loyalty" is the term used for the French "fidelite". Fidelity implores faithfulness and devotion to duties and obligations rather than allegiance to a constituted authority as the term loyalty tends to denote. See Simone Weil, L'enracinement, (France: Editions Gallimard, 1949)

universe. Once again, for Weil, politics must respond to the two realms which serve to determine human life. It is apparent that Weil believes her ideas to be representative of truth and largely on this basis this chapter will further address how we are to understand truth.

From the outset it is essential to note that Weil challenges us to think through a society in terms that are not compatible with a liberal understanding of the world. Indeed, Weil's analysis is often difficult to fully discern since her argument is based on a point of reference which remains intangible and to some extent even impenetrable. Nonetheless, The Need for Roots is a serious political inquiry and it was not Weil's intention that it be left for mere theoretical discussion and speculation. While living in London in 1942, Weil was commissioned by the Free French forces there to write what would become The Need for Roots, an explanation of what France should do in its efforts towards recovery after the war. While this was to be her immediate concern, her efforts point to problems inherent in modern Western Civilization generally. Indeed, in The Need for Roots, Weil opines that France has a responsibility to indicate to other nations suffering similar ills what needs to be done. The Need for Roots, subtitled Prelude to a Declaration of Duties Towards Mankind, which no doubt was intended as a contrast to the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man, was finished shortly before she died at age 34 on August, 24, 1943. The Need for Roots, then, was written in response to an immediate and serious crisis and Weil would have wished that at least some

attempt be made to implement her prescriptions and policies. Following the war, however, her ideas for the transformation of France were evidently not translated into action. In an introduction to the English translation, published in 1952, T.S. Eliot comments:

> This book belongs in that category of prolegomena to politics which politicians seldom read, and which most of them would be unlikely to understand or to know how to apply. Such books do not influence the contemporary conduct of affairs: for the men and women already engaged in this career and committed to the jargon of the market-place, they always come too late.[5]

In a Platonic vein, however, Weil adamantly maintains that a government, or a society, that does not address the needs of souls remains diseased and the life of human beings deeply tarnished with misery, despair and hopelessness.

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[5]T.S. Eliot, Preface to The Need for Roots, A.F. Wills, trans. (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul Inc., 1978: v-xii), p.xii.

CHAPTER I

A HIGHER REALM AND AN EARTHLY REALM

A society that caters to the needs of souls means a society that views human beings as being concerned with more than the satisfaction of physical or material desires. It means considering the individual as something other than, or greater than, a legal entity, which is but a thing that possesses rights and makes claims against others. In conceiving of the world as having two realms, Weil suggests that it follows from this that the individual also has two dimensions, namely a physical and a spiritual. The men of 1789, according to Weil, recognized only the earthly realm and for this reason directed their sole attention to a notion of rights-based doctrine.

For Weil, however, there is also a higher realm that bears down upon the earthly world and cannot go ignored. In this realm, there are no such things as rights. Rights, which are a modern invention, are things of the earthly world since they are derived from conventions and based on certain conditions. Weil notes that the Greeks had no concept of rights, but they did however have a concept of justice.[1] In making a distinction between the two, Weil suggests that

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[1]Simone Weil, "On Human Personality," in George A. Panichas, ed., The Simone Weil Reader, (New York: Moyer Bell Ltd., 1977, pp. 313-339) p.324.

"Why am I being hurt?" signifies a cry of justice. On the other hand, rights can be seen to elicit a response, such as: "Why has somebody else got more than I have?"[2] Rights, according to Weil, were bequeathed to us from the Romans who had developed a notion of property rights central to which was the fact that what "the property owner had the right to use or abuse at will were for the most part human beings."[3] Amongst those things that occupy the higher realm, there are no rights, but there is justice, and more to the point there are what Weil describes as obligations. Obligations correspond to the higher realm in that they are eternal, universal, and unconditional, whereas the human realm is conditioned by facts, and rights are facts dependent upon human conditions and conventions. It would not make sense to suggest that an isolated individual has rights, but it would make sense to recognize that such an individual has obligations, obligations to himself.[4] Weil also points out that the possession of a right implies that one may make either a good or bad use of it whereas an obligation is always, and unconditionally, a good from every point of view.[5] The same can be said for justice. A society in which individuals are seen solely as rights-bearers leaves no room for any notion

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[2]Ibid., p.334.

[3]Ibid., p.324.

[4]Simone Weil, The Need for Roots, trans. A.F. Wills, (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul Inc., 1978), p.3.

[5]Ibid., p.265.

of obligations, or charity or goodwill, and in this sense fundamentally rejects the existence of a higher realm and hence a notion of obligations as distinct from rights.

Weil does not advocate that rights ought to be eliminated and replaced with something else, but rather suggests that rights alone are inadequate and insufficient. She argues that in order for rights to be effective, they must be defined in accordance with a notion of obligations. Where Weil is concerned, rights are subordinate and relative to obligations, and thus outside of this context are essentially meaningless. She explains:

> A right is not effectual by itself, but only in relation to the obligation to which it corresponds, the effective exercise of a right springing not from the individual who possesses it, but from other men who consider themselves as being under a certain obligation towards him. Recognition of an obligation makes it effectual.[6]

While one may claim a particular right, then, Weil argues that if it is not recognized by others, it is not worth very much, and in fact in some cases is not worth anything.[7] It is only as a result of others acknowledging a right by assuming certain obligations based on the recognition of the right that the right comes to have any force or claim. In this way, Weil shows that although rights are based on the claims of individuals, they are in effect dependent upon what others are willing to allow by assuming obligations.

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[6]Ibid., p.3.

[7]See Weil, "On Human Personality," op.cit., p.322 and p.325.

But as alluded to above, there is more to Weil's argument. Obligations occupy the higher realm while rights can only be a subject of the earthly or human realm. That is to say, obligations exist independent of social conditions, whereas rights exist only in relation to others.

> A man considered in isolation, only has duties, amongst which are certain duties towards him-self. Other men, seen from his point of view, only have rights. He, in his turn, has rights, when seen from the point of view of other men, who recognize that they have obligations towards him. A man left alone in the universe would have no rights whatever, but he would have obligations.[8]

Weil's point, then, is that while human beings can create and defend a doctrine of rights, there is another realm which concerns obligations that exists owing to the nature of the universe and is not within the capabilities of human creation. "[O]bligations belong to a realm situated above all conditions, because it is [a realm] situated above this world."[9] In her essay "On Human Personality", Weil points out that the notion of rights is reflective of a society based on commodity exchange. She notes that "rights" are linked with a notion of sharing out and exchange, and moreover, that they are evocative of legal claims and arguments. "Rights," Weil suggests, are always asserted in a tone of contention, and they must be backed by force if they are to be effective.[10] Weil allows that rights may be

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[8]Weil, The Need for Roots, op.cit., p.3.

[9]Ibid., p.4.

[10]Weil, "On Human Personality," op.cit., p.323.

effective in market relations but commercial exchange and consumerism constitute only one aspect of human affairs and thus rights are accorded certain limitations.

> If someone tries to brow-beat a farmer to sell his eggs at a moderate price, the farmer can say: 'I have the right to keep my eggs if I don't get a good enough price.' But if a young girl is being forced into a brothel she will not talk about her rights. In such a situation the word would sound ludicrously inadequate.[11]

Weil explains that there exists an obligation towards every human being for the sole reason that he or she is a human being. The single obligation imposed upon human beings is respect, or duty toward the human being. For Weil, the human being as such occupies the higher realm, or the realm of the sacred. "There is something sacred in every man, but it is not his person ... It is this man; no more and no less."[12] Weil contends that rights serve to define individuals as legal entities, as "persons", assuming a particular role or status. Slaves, for instance, have no legal personality because they are without rights.[13] In her essay, "On Human Personality", Weil makes a distinction between "persons" and human beings. A person is one's legal role or status whereas a human being constitutes much more than one's particular role. Edward Andrew notes, "Rights-claims express the noisy and superficial level of the human being (the self or person); not what is deep, sacred and inviolable in humanity (the heart or soul of

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[11]Ibid., p.325.

[12]Ibid., p.314.

[13]Weil, The Need for Roots, op.cit., p.62.

the individual).[14]

The notion of person is an abstraction since persons are the possessors of rights, and one's person is one's social or legal role or status.[15] What is sacred about the human being is not that which is one's person or role, but "the whole of him. The arms, the eyes, the thoughts, everything."[16] An individual, however, is not sacred from every point of view. For Weil, what makes the human being sacred is the fact that "if someone were to put out his eyes, his soul would be lacerated by the thought that harm was being done to him."[17] This is so since, according to Weil, from the earliest infancy a human being expects that good and not evil will be done to him. She suggests that "[t]he good is the only source of the sacred. There is nothing sacred except the good and what pertains to it."[18] For Weil, justice consists in seeing that no harm is done to human beings.

In a society based on rights and in which individuals are but rights-bearers and property-owners there can exist no propensity for compassion or

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[14]Ibid., p.64.

[15]See Edward Andrew, "Simone Weil on the Injustice of Rights-Based Doctrines," in The Review of Politics, Vol. 48, 1, pp.60-91), p.64.

[16]Weil, "On Human Personality," op.cit., p.314.

[17]Ibid., p.315.

[18]Ibid.

goodwill. Rights are seen by Weil as personal possessions which, rather than serving the needs of individuals, build barricades of power and privilege. Weil's philosophy is based on a respect for human beings rather than a respect for persons, that is, one's legal role or status. The latter is appropriate for a system of rights, but cannot lend itself to that which recognizes needs and obligations. Underlying Weil's argument is her conception that the world consists of two realms: an earthly realm and a spiritual. Central to her argument is that rights are subordinate to obligations because obligations occupy the spiritual, or higher, realm whereas rights occupy the lower, or earthly realm. That obligations occupy the higher realm means, for Weil, that they exist independent of social conditions or conventions, including rights. Obligations exist in isolation, whereas rights exist only in relation to others and under certain conditions.

For Weil, duty, or respect, is not dependent on any conditions, and therefore exists in all places and at all times.[19] That such an obligation exists is based on an awareness or recognition of such as opposed to a description boasting tangible evidence. Obligations occupy the higher realm to which Weil refers and to this extent are aligned with such terms as good, justice, love, truth, and beauty which Weil frequently interjects into her writings. What precisely any or all of these terms mean remain by Weil's admission beyond definition. She suggests that "to use them legitimately one must avoid referring them to anything

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[19]Weil, The Need for Roots, op.cit., see p.6.

humanly conceivable..."[20] Like obligation, or respect, they occupy the higher realm and therefore cannot be reduced to an empirical definition.

> If it is founded on something, that something, whatever it is, does not form part of our world. In our world, it is not founded on anything at all. It is the one and only obligation in connexion with human affairs that is not subject to any condition. This obligation has no foundation, but only a verification in the common consent accorded by the universal conscience.[21]

Weil is suggesting, then, that because the world is composed of two realms, there are some things which cannot be penetrated and nor can we ever know completely the reason for their existence. We can, however, recognize that they nonetheless do exist. In a sense, then, Weil challenges us to accept the mysteries of the universe, which owing largely to the development of modern science have to a considerable extent been denied.

While the foundation for a notion of obligation remains other-worldly, the implications of such concern the earthly world and the inner well-being of human beings. Weil argues that the obligation imposed on human beings, namely respect, must be expressed in a real, not a fictitious way, and this can only be done through man's earthly needs, which compose a physical as well as a moral or spiritual dimension.[22] Weil criticizes the "men of 1789", stating that they

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[20]Weil, "On Human Personality," op.cit., p.337.

[21]Weil, The Need for Roots, op.cit., p.5.

[22]Ibid., p.5.

did not recognize the existence of a higher realm, but rather only recognized the existence of the one on the human plane. At the same time, she suggests, they wanted to advocate absolute principles[23] and it is largely as a result of this lack of awareness that the present linguistic and political and social confusion has emerged.[24] Weil believes that human life must respond to the two realms to which it is exposed, namely the earthly world, and the spiritual or other-worldly. If the latter is not taken into account, Weil would argue that the essence of human life will remain unfulfilled, and the human being will be denied the full expression of what it means to be a human being. Weil, then, wants to conceive of a society that she believes will respond to all human needs: both the needs of the body (physical) and the needs of the soul (moral). Her vision of the world as having two realms corresponds to her conception of the human being as having two types of needs.

Weil notes that "the needs of souls" is an aspect of human life that has not been granted consideration in modern times, yet where Weil is concerned it is pertinent if one is to both understand and respond to the needs of the human

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[23]See, for example, Simone Weil, "The Power of Words", in George Panichas, ed., The Simone Weil Reader, (New York: Moyer Bell Ltd., 1977, pp. 268-285.) Weil writes: "...our political universe is peopled exclusively by myths and monsters; all it contains is absolute and abstract entities...illustrated by words in our social and political vocabulary." (p.242.) For Weil, words such as "democracy", "nation", and "capitalism" represent absolute realities. She points out that "democracy" is never used in the context: "There is democracy to the extent that..." (p.242).

[24]Weil, The Need for Roots, op.cit. p.4.

being. While "the needs of souls" alludes to something based on spiritual prescriptions, Weil reveals that the needs of souls can only be satisfied by a political and social agenda. In The Need for Roots, Weil distinguishes fifteen different needs of the soul, the most important of which, she argues, is rootedness.

THE NEEDS OF SOULS

Weil's premise, then, is based on an allowance that the world has two realms and that the needs of human beings concern both the body and the soul. Her argument is not a scientific or systematic account and to this extent does not lend itself to formal proof.[25] It is perhaps for this reason that in the past 50 years more consideration has been given to Weil as a religious thinker than as a political thinker, that is to say, personal rather than public. However, in order to ascertain the full force of her argument, her civic mindedness as it comes to bear in The Need for Roots is indeed significant. For Weil, the needs of souls is not something to be cast off for religious contemplation in churches or private life. Rather the needs of souls ought to occupy the forefront of the political agenda. She contends that the proper role of government must include a consideration of the needs of souls. "The lack of any such investigation forces governments, even when their intentions are honest, to act sporadically and at random."[26] Once

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[25]See also Weil, The Need for Roots, op.cit., p.151.

[26]Ibid., p.10.

again, the needs of souls must be furnished by a response that can be made evident in the earthly world. That is to say, the needs of souls can only be satisfied by conditions made apparent in the daily lives of human beings.

Weil acknowledges that physical needs, such as hunger, protection against violence, housing and clothing are "fairly easy to enumerate", but she suggests that the soul's needs are more difficult to recognize and thus are granted less attention. However, she adds that where these needs are not recognized human beings "fall into a state more or less resembling death, more or less akin to a purely vegetative existence."[27] For Weil, contemporary "man" has assumed a vegetative existence. Not only is he cut off from the communities in which he lives, but he subsequently does not know who he is or what he is, and moreover, cannot determine himself with reference to anything. Loyalty, as will be made clearer below, is an essential component in providing the human being with what he or she requires for the satisfaction of needs. Weil explains that in general the satisfaction of the soul's needs can best be understood by way of analogy. Just as one has an obligation to provide food to the hungry, he or she owes respect to those things that provide nourishment to human souls. For example, Weil suggests that human beings owe respect to collectivities, such as family, village, or country, because they provide food for a certain number of individual souls in that they furnish Man's need to be bound to something, and something

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[27]Ibid., p.7.

very real besides. By way of explanation, then, it becomes clear that the soul's needs are both necessary and vital to the life of the human being.

Weil suggests that it is the responsibility of government to investigate and determine those things that can be seen to provide nourishment for souls. In this regard, Weil's analysis is not unlike Plato's in the Republic in so far as he too was concerned to identify a political system that would cater to the needs of souls.

As noted previously it is perhaps difficult to ascertain, much less accept, a political agenda that would cater to the needs of souls. Indeed, in 1952, shortly after The Need for Roots was published in English, Dwight MacDonald wrote in a review that that portion of her work dealing with the needs of souls "should be read at the end, if at all."[28] He adds that her argument is based on two assumptions: "that God exists and that the author knows what He wants."[29] McDonald, then, suggests that Weil's argument is less than credible and is largely a waste of time. While in this age it is difficult to fathom concepts such as the needs of souls, Weil introduces it in such a way that it should perhaps not be so readily dismissed. That is to say, Weil makes clear that when she talks about the needs of souls, her concern is for those human needs, which extend beyond

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[28]Dwight MacDonald, "A Formula to Give a War-Torn Society Fresh Roots," in New York Times Book Review, July 6, 1952, p.6.

[29]Ibid.

physical needs. In short, while animals may only have physical needs, Weil tends to suggest that there is something more complex about the nature of human beings that demands a consideration of moral, spiritual, or inner, needs. As noted above, she suggests if these needs are not met, human life becomes at best less than human.

While McDonald opts to reject the introductory section of The Need for Roots, it in fact provides the foundation and gives credibility to the nature of the political structure of which Weil conceives. McDonald dismisses this section, it seems, as a result of its dependency on a religious or spiritual argument. However, as will be made clearer below, while Weil utilizes these concepts she is not under any illusion that religion can play an all-encompassing role in modern society. Rather her application of these principles can be understood as a means by which she can address those needs of the human being that are not limited to physical or material satisfaction.

In determining just what in fact are the needs of souls, Weil suggests that the list she develops serves only as "a few indications" of what can be regarded as those things able to provide nourishment to souls. She comprises a list of the soul's needs which are arranged in antithetical pairs in support of her argument that this is necessary in order to ensue a balance. For example, she suggests that while liberty, which constitutes the ability to choose, is a need of the soul, so too is obedience, which for Weil means consent to established rules and

leaders. Equality is also a need of the soul which for Weil means that "the same amount of respect and consideration is due to every human being because this respect is due to the human being as such and is not a matter of degree."[30] At the same time, hierarchism is a need of the soul. Weil describes hierarchism as a "devotion towards superiors considered not as individuals, nor in relation to the powers they exercise, but as symbols."[31] More to the point, however, Weil asserts that "The effect of true hierarchism is to bring each one to fit himself morally into the place he occupies."[32] This point reflects a central component of Weil's thought since one of her fundamental criticisms of modern society is that human beings have come to be driven by a blind ambition, the effect of which is that people cease to know who and what they are. For Weil, such a condition is evidence that the social system is sick.

> There is something woefully wrong with the health of a social system, when a peasant tills the soil with the feeling that, if he is a peasant, it is because he wasn't intelligent enough to become a schoolteacher.[33]

More generally, it is Weil's contention that a social order which does not acknowledge and address the soul's needs, which also includes risk and security, private property and collective property, honour and punishment, freedom of

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[30]Weil, The Need for Roots, op.cit., p.15.

[31]Ibid., p.18.

[32]Ibid.

[33]Ibid., p.44.

opinion, truth, and rootedness, is sick. "Every social organism...which does not provide its members with these satisfactions, is diseased and must be restored to health."[34]

As Weil allows her list of the soul's needs is seemingly incomplete, but her intention here is to reveal two things: one, a suggestion and explanation of those components that she considers would provide nourishment for souls; and two, an awareness that the needs of souls should be the subject of continual thought and investigation. Weil would consider the latter to be the only appropriate course in the sphere of political action.

THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE COLLECTIVE

Rootedness, Weil tells us, is the most important need of the soul. She acknowledges that it is a difficult term to define, but suggests it should be understood as that which enables an individual to express a bond of attachment to the multiple environments that make up human life. Where this need is not being met, individuals assume a vegetative existence: they cease to know who they are or what they are. John Dunaway attempts to explain the depth of what Weil has in mind when she discusses the need for rootedness.

> To feel that one is at home, to feel that one belongs, that one has inherited one's own distinctive traditions, memories and beliefs can be of crucial importance in the search for identity. We are what we are

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[34]Ibid., p.15.

> thanks to the cultural, religious, and social character of our ancestors, as well as the influences of our present milieu.[35]

As noted above, Weil considers human beings to have an "eternal destiny" and it is this connection with the past that shapes and forms who we are both as individuals and as a species that she has in mind when she makes reference to such a concept. That is to say, it is not the future eternal destiny of the soul with which she is concerned, but the everlasting reality of the past that stands to determine the present. Dunaway further comments that once cut off from our cultural heritage, individuals become "traumatized by feelings of loneliness, meaninglessness, and anxiety."[36] One does not merrily maintain his or her cultural heritage by entertaining thoughts about the past, but rather must be permitted to express such heritage in the social groups to which he or she belongs, such as country, village, or family.

Rootedness, then, has to do with a connection to shared memories and traditions of the past as well as to the active participation in multiple environments existing in the present. Since individuals have a need to be engaged in a variety of environments, in The Need for Roots, Weil argues that collectivities are essential. Where collectivities are destroyed, individuals are denied such an expression and where Weil is concerned are an uprooted people.

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[35]John Dunaway, Simone Weil, David O'Connell, ed., (Boston, Massachusetts: G.K. Hall & Company, 1984) p.52.

[36]Ibid., p.53.

Weil's position on collectivities in The Need for Roots takes a turn from her earlier thought. Indeed, previously Weil was highly critical of collectivities, particularly big industry, bureaucracy and the State. In her essay, "On Human Personality", for instance, she argues that collectivities are dangerous largely because they impose themselves on individuals and deny individuals independent thought. A collective is not capable of thought: only the mind or the individual is capable of thought. For example, a collective is not capable of working out a mathematical sum such as 2+2=4. Such a problem can only be solved by an individual,[37] which furthermore is evidence that the individual is superior to the collective. Collectives, then, do not think, yet they impose "their" ideas on the individuals who compose them. It is largely for this reason that Weil denounced political parties, and more specifically their dependency on ideology. A political party upholds a set of principles and/or ideas and these are then imposed upon its members. The party's concern is not the same as the concerns of the individual members who belong to it. Indeed, the party's concern is the maintenance of power and not its ability to respond to the needs, or the real concerns, of its members.[38] She adds:

> The same is true to a lesser degree of organizations contaminated by party influences; in other words, when public life is dominated by a party system, it is true of all organizations, including, for example, trade

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[37]See Weil, "On Human Personality", op.cit., p.319.

[38]Ibid., pp.316-317.

unions and even churches.[39]

In all collectivities, Weil points out that the individual is always subordinate and, moreover, that the collective "opinion" acts much like a dictatorship.[40]

Precisely what Weil means by "collectivity" is not entirely clear. Certainly she uses the term in reference to big industry, bureaucracy and the State itself, but the term tends to imply much more. Mary Dietz suggests that Weil's concept of "collectivity" is more than simply a materialist analysis of social organizations since it remains incomprehensible and cannot be located in space.

> The collectivity must be something else, a kind of mental vacuum, perhaps, a concept that signifies the inability of the individual to 'come to grips' with the world, a loss of control by the mind, leading to the triumph of 'opinion' and 'blind agitation' over ideas and action which, for Weil, have everything to do with 'being' in the world.[41]

Dietz further suggests that the collectivity for Weil seems to be that which overpowers the individual to the extent that the individual becomes subsumed by it and cannot even position him or herself in reference to it in anyway. "The collective mentality," writes Dietz, "is the imprisoned mind, unable to achieve a vantage point from whence it can begin to gain a perspective on and act in the

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[39]Ibid., p.316.

[40]Ibid., p.319.

[41]Mary Dietz, Between the Human and the Divine: The Political Thought of Simone Weil, (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Littlefield, 1988), p.52.

world."[42]

In The Need for Roots, however, Weil no longer casts the collectivity entirely in this light. That is to say, she accepts that collectivities are essential to human life and thus hastens to explore how collectivities might exist as less oppressive forces. While in her earlier writings, her concern was the individual and the oppressive nature of the collective as alluded to above, she now argues that collectivities are essential towards meeting the needs of the soul since they alone provide for souls a unique form of nourishment. Individuals need to be able to express loyalty, or bonds of attachment, to their social and natural environments, or to the collectivities that serve to constitute human life.

The problem revealed by Weil, and indeed the problem of modern Western society, is that roots in all collectivities have been destroyed. Weil attributes this factor to money and the rise of the State. However, despite Weil's criticism of the State, in the end she seems forced to recognize that the State is the only thing that remains that has some semblance of a collectivity. All other collectivities, such as family, village and country, have been destroyed, and the State now presents itself as the only thing to which loyalty might cling.

Weil's criticism of the State and later dependency on the State tends to suggest a paradox in her thought. Throughout her writings, she criticizes the State's abuse of power, but in The Need for Roots it becomes apparent that all

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[42]Ibid., p.53.

possibilities of reform at least stem from the capabilities of the State. The argument underlying Weil's criticism of collectivities[43], including the state, is based on her other-worldly considerations, or again, that there exists both a human plane as well as a spiritual. As is the case in her discussion concerning why a human being is owed respect, namely because he or she is composed of something sacred,[44] once again Weil returns to this concept in her criticism of collectivities. Throughout her writings Weil combines the concrete with the abstract and arguments assuming the latter perspective are necessarily more difficult to grasp. What she seems to be suggesting here is that collectivities, which are human inventions, are removed from the realm of the sacred and for this reason serve as barriers to individual expression. Weil's argument concerning why collectivities are not in the realm of the sacred is based on what she describes as the personal and the impersonal. The impersonal, which occupies the higher realm or the realm of the sacred, aligns with perfection and also anonymity while the personal is representative of the earthly realm or error and sin. In this way, the impersonal is

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[43]What Weil means by "collectivities" is not entirely clear. Mary Dietz provides a thoughtful explanation in her book, Between the Human and the Divine, op.cit. Dietz points out that in its most concrete usage, Weil uses "collectivity" to refer to giant industry, centralized bureaucracy, and the State itself. More abstractly, the "collectivity" tends to be seen by Weil as that which opposes the individual and threatens his or her capacity for independent thought. Weil's "collectivity", suggests Dietz, is more than simply a materialist analysis of social organizations. See pp. 50-53.

[44]See Weil, "On Human Personality", op.cit., p.317. Here, Weil points out that that which is sacred in a human being is the impersonal.

equated with such concepts as good, truth and beauty, and for Weil a higher realm; whereas the personal has to do with the earthly realm, or human conventions and opinions. For example: "If a child is doing a sum and does it wrong, the mistake bears the stamp of his personality. If he does the sum exactly right, his personality does not enter into it at all.[45] Weil's point in this discussion is that the collective is not capable of the impersonal: of that realm in which perfection, truth, beauty and the good prevail. She suggests that the individual is capable of reaching the impersonal, but such is very rare and can only be achieved in physical and mental solitude. Impersonality cannot be achieved by an individual who thinks of him or herself as part of something which ways "We"[46], nor by one who clings to a notion of respect for person, that is, the development of personality, the self, the ego. The existence of collectivities, Weil would argue, stands to prevent one from reaching this realm primarily because it stifles independent thought. Moreover, because a collective cannot think it can only be concerned with opinions and therefore denies any access to truth. The existence of collectivities stands to prevent one from reaching the higher realm, or the realm of the sacred. The collectivity is not capable of occupying the realm of the sacred, but, Weil suggests, it deludes us with a false imitation of it.

Idolatry is the name of the error which attributes a sacred character to

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[45]Ibid., p.318.

[46]Weil, "On Human Personality," op.cit., p.318.

> the collectivity; and it is the commonest of all crimes, at all times, at all places. The man for whom the development of personality is all that counts has totally lost all sense of the sacred...[47]

Weil regarded idolatry, a concept which will be given greater consideration in chapter two, as the outcome and monstrous crime of the rise of the state.

While in her earlier writings, Weil was highly critical of collectivities and their implications for the individual, she later offers a different perspective on how collectivities ought to be regarded. In "On Human Personality", for instance, she wonders how it might be possible for the individual to be released from the harnesses of the collective and reach that realm of the impersonal in which lies truth, beauty and the good.[48] She points out that those who have reached the level of the impersonal are endowed with a responsibility to the rest of humankind. However, with this said, it seems clear that Weil did not advocate that one, and it could be anyone, who had reached this level could impose his or her views on others. Her thought on this subject is reminiscent of Plato's myth of the cave. She writes:

> A truth can only present itself to the mind of a particular human being. How is he going to communicate it? If he tries to expound it, he won't be listened to; for other people have never heard of that particular truth, won't recognize it as such; they won't realize that what he is saying is true; they won't pay enough attention to enable them to see that it is so; for they won't have received any inducement to make the

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[47]Ibid., p.319.

[48]Ibid., see p.320.

necessary effort of concentration.[49]

One is under an illusion if he or she claims to have touched this realm, and moreover, is under a double illusion if he or she thinks such things can be communicated to others.[50] In this regard, then, Weil's understanding of truth is something to be attained by the individual, and is something that one individual cannot force upon another.[51]

Weil's concern is to conceive of a society in which the individual can be permitted the freedom to reach this realm. In view of the political implications of Weil's argument, this line of thought calls for efforts to be made in which the individual can be freed from the oppressive nature of the collective. Weil concludes her essay "On Human Personality" by asserting the need for institutions that would promote a social organization in which the individual would be freed from the "lies and ugliness" inherent in the institutions that are now in place, such as rights doctrine, political parties and what generally goes by the name of democracy.

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[49]Weil, The Need for Roots, op.cit., p.198.

[50]Weil, "On Human Personality." op.cit., p.321.

[51]Weil's notion here would seem to have a Platonic foundation. See, for instance, Plato, Phaedrus, in Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, eds, The Collected Dialogues of Plato (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985, pp.475-525.) It is revealed that knowledge is something that comes from within, or that is "written in the soul of the learner" and the best one can do is lead another toward it but not impose it upon or dictate it to another.

In "On Human Personality", she explains:

> Relations between the collectivity and the person should be arranged with the sole purpose of removing whatever is detrimental to the growth and mysterious germination of the impersonal element in the soul. This means, on the one hand, that for every person there should be enough room, enough freedom to plan the use of one's time, the opportunity to reach ever higher levels of attention, some solitude, some silence. At the same time the person needs warmth, lest it be driven by distress to submerge itself in the collective.[52]

To this comment, she adds that if what she has said here is representative of "the good", then modern democratic and industrial societies "seem to go about as far as it is possible to go in the direction of evil."[53] In this regard, she refers specifically to the modern factory, of which she says:

> ...a modern factory reaches perhaps almost the limit of horror. Everybody in it is constantly harassed and kept on edge by the interference of extraneous wills while the soul is left in cold and desolate misery. What man needs is silence and warmth; what he is given is an icy pandemonium.[54]

Weil's concern is not so much that physical labour is degrading, but rather, like science and art, provides for the individual contact with reality, a concept that she equates with truth. However, in the modern factory, workers become victims of machines and other people's wills. The difficulty the modern factory presents to the worker is one concerned with wages when in fact, argues

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[52]Weil, "On Human Personality", op.cit., p. 321.

[53]Ibid.

[54]Ibid., pp.321-322.

Weil, the devastation of the workers cannot be resolved on a legal plane or through economic means. She points out that what workers are made to sell is not so much their labour, but their soul. The workers, however, find themselves believing that wages are the issue largely because contemporary language lends itself to the expression of such. Words to express what Weil would call affliction, or the infliction of evil on the soul, which is the real torment being suffered by the oppressed, do not exist in modern discourse. Instead, terms such as rights, political parties, and democracy prevail, which are based on conventions and hence fall within the realm of opinion. To this end, they stand to obscure the truth, or what Weil would consider reality. That is to say, they are not capable of responding to the depth of the suffering to which human beings are exposed yet, and this is the critical problem, they pretend to have such a capacity. The result is a blind agitation in which individuals are left in darkness. In the absence of the much needed silence and warmth, individuals are tormented by such things as propaganda, political parties and power struggles. In contrast to what she reveals about the society in which she lives, Weil invites, or perhaps challenges, us to think through what it would mean to live in a society in which justice is the capacity to hear and respond to the cries of the unfortunate.

Despite her criticism of collectivities, however, in The Needs for Roots Weil reveals a new perspective on how they ought to be regarded. She suggests that since they provide the first form of nourishment for human souls, they are

owed a "very high" degree of respect and should be preserved. She explains:

> We owe a cornfield respect, not because of itself, but because it is food for mankind. In the same way, we owe our respect to a collectivity, of whatever kind -- country, family, or any other -- not for itself, but because it is food for a certain number of individual souls.[55]

She gives three reasons why collectivities are necessary and these reasons clearly posit the collectivity as an indispensable source of food for human souls. First, a collectivity once destroyed cannot be replaced and the food that it provides has no equivalent in the entire universe; secondly, a collectivity is defined in part by its continuity in time in that it moves into the future, and in this way provides food for living souls and souls yet unborn; and thirdly, also owing to its continuity, it has roots in the past, which allows it to preserve the "spiritual treasures" of the dead, and act as an agency by which the dead can speak to the living.[56] Rather than viewing the collective as detrimental to human lives, then, in The Need for Roots, Weil argues that the collective is perhaps the most essential component in providing nourishment for souls.

The problem with regard to collectivities, however, and as alluded to above, is that it often happens that they are diseased and instead of serving as food, they devour souls. Weil considers her contemporary France a diseased social body which has ceased to be a form of nourishment for souls. In such a

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[55]Weil, The Need for Roots, op.cit., p.7.

[56]Ibid., p.8.

situation, the first duty she says is to attempt a cure - "sometimes by surgical methods". If, however, it is evident that the collectivity is dead, and it is not just a "temporary lethargy", then it should be destroyed. In The Need for Roots, Weil attempts to formulate a cure for France's ills. She contemplates the means by which France can be recovered after the war and what she reveals is a society that she would consider capable of serving the needs of souls.

CHAPTER II

THE SEEDS OF UPROOTEDNESS

Weil attempts to project a resolution for the crisis of 1940s France and more generally, though perhaps not so urgently, to the crisis of the modern Western World. In a word, Weil terms the malaise affecting France as "uprootedness", which she argues is a disease produced largely as a result of the rise of the nation-state. The term "uprootedness" denotes a seemingly complex web of conditions and situations that affect both the individual and the society in which he or she lives. Weil declares that the French had become an uprooted people and the German invasion was but the fallout of such a reality.

> The French people, in June and July 1940, were not a people waylaid by a band of ruffians, whose country was suddenly snatched from them. They are a people who opened their hands and allowed their country to fall to the ground. Later on -- but only after a long interval -- they spent themselves in ever more desperate efforts to pick it up again; but someone had placed his foot on it.[1]

The French, then, being an uprooted people, had lost control both of their lives and of their country. Weil's concern in The Need for Roots is on the one hand to reveal to the French the conditions underlying the fall of their country and,

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[1]Simone Weil, The Need for Roots, A.F. Wills, trans. (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul Inc., 1978), p.96.

on the other, to offer a guide as to how their country can be recovered. In this pursuit her attention focuses on uprootedness since, she argues, it is precisely this ailment which is to blame for the confusion and discontentment of the modern age.

Uprootedness remains a difficult concept to define, and indeed Weil herself is not entirely clear or consistent on what she means by the term largely because it encompasses so much.[2] With this said, however, uprootedness, perhaps in its simplest form, can be understood as a condition in which a people no longer feels at home or in any way connected to those natural environments which distinguish human life. For Weil, people have come to live in a society which is virtually absent of any means by which they may express bonds of attachment to one another and to the various collectivities that serve to define their lives, such as family, village, factory, land, or country. Roots, for Weil, are spatial, territorial and multiple. They tie human beings to their home and neighbourhood and also provide a connectedness to village, city, factory, land and country. At the same time, roots are historical in that the collectivities to which people are bound serve to expound a continuity in time.[3] Uprootedness "involves discontinuity, estrangement from one's natural birthplace or chosen habitat, from community,

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[2]See Mary Dietz, Between the Human and the Divine: The Political Thought of Simone Weil, (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Littlefield, 1988), pp.152-154. Dietz suggests that Weil understands "rootedness" to be spatial, territorial, political, and historical.

[3]Ibid. Dietz addresses the multiple notion of rootedness as developed by Weil.

profession, land, and past."[4]

Weil attributes the fall of France to the fact that the French had stopped caring about their country and merely allowed it to fall. She suggests that it was because the French had become entirely uprooted that there was nothing left to which they could express loyalty or exercise bonds of attachment. France had lost all meaning for the French largely because it was no longer a reality: no longer a life-giving agent capable of inspiring love and affection. Weil argues that individuals need to have roots, or bonds of attachment, so that they may develop genuine feelings of loyalty to all natural environments, including collectivities. Uprootedness can occur as a result of a military conquest, but Weil also points out that "money-power and economic domination can so impose a foreign influence as actually to provoke this disease."[5] While France did suffer a military conquest, Weil points out that it was a nation of uprooted peoples long before the German invasion. "The sudden collapse of France in June, 1940...simply showed to what extent the country was uprooted. A tree whose roots are almost entirely eaten away falls at the first blow..."[6]

Weil identifies what she terms "two poisons" responsible for the spread of uprootedness, or the disease of the modern age. These toxins are money and

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[4]Ibid., p.152.

[5]Weil, The Need for Roots, op.cit., p.42.

[6]Ibid., p.46.

education, or modern culture. Weil argues that money destroys human roots since desire for gain presents itself as the sole motive in people's lives.[7] Education, for Weil, is defined in a broad sense and is perhaps better understood as culture. She suggests that the Renaissance brought about a break between the people of culture and the mass of the population and eventually this led to a break with national traditions. Weil suggests that the culture of the modern era has been severed from the world.

> [It] has developed in a very restricted medium, removed from the world, in a stove-pipe atmosphere -- a culture very strongly directed towards and influenced by technical science, very strongly tinged with pragmatism, extremely broken up by specialization, entirely deprived both of contact with this world and, at the same time, of any window opening on to the world beyond.[8]

She adds:

> What is called today educating the masses, is taking this modern culture, evolved in such a closed unwholesome atmosphere, and one so indifferent to the truth, removing whatever it may still contain of intrinsic merit -- an operation known as popularization -- and shovelling the residue as it stands into the minds of the unfortunate individuals desirous of learning, in the same way as you feed birds with a stick.[9]

Any desire to learn for the sake of learning, and desire for the truth have become very rare. Education, then, in the form of culture, has in the first instance become

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[7]Ibid, p.42.

[8]Ibid., p.43.

[9]Ibid., p.44.

detached from the society of which it ought to be a part, and moreover has become largely void of any concern for learning or truth. In this way, Weil is arguing that people have become uprooted as a result of a culture that has very little to do with the reality of their lives. While Weil does not suggest that the system of money can be directly altered, her prescriptions hold promise for the plausibility of change in the cultural realm, or in education, which in turn would serve to place a different emphasis on the role of money. Indeed, the role of culture is a crucial component included in Weil's consideration of reform strategies, particularly with regard to labour and the labourer.

In The Need for Roots, Weil considers how this malady of the modern age, namely uprootedness, has come to effect people of the town, the country, and the nation overall. For Weil, the term uprootedness describes a host of implications for the individual and the society in which he or she lives. With regard to labourers, for instance, the term does not simply refer to immigrant workers or a people that has been geographically uprooted. Weil uses the term to suggest that human beings have been morally uprooted largely as a result of industrialization and the rise of the nation-state. People may continue to live in their homeland, or country of birth, but owing to conditions imposed on them by modern society, such as for instance the modern factory, their environment seems to them completely foreign. Also, it is the priorities suggested to them, such as wages, for example, that further promote in them a feeling of uprootedness. But

even more uprooted than wage-labourers are the unemployed. Weil asserts that unemployment is uprootedness raised to the "second power". Presumably this is so since based on Weil's argument the unemployed are cut off from an essential human environment. Moreover, labour harbours a special place in Weil's theory since like science and art it aligns with the good since it allows the individual direct contact with reality, or with the necessity that the order of the universe imposes.

Although those living in the country are not compelled to face the mechanical controls of the factory, they too are victims of uprootedness. The nature of the uprootedness affecting the peasants is perhaps not as obvious as that suffered by the townspeople largely as a result of the conditions in which they toil. In short, the land as such does not present itself as a foreign environment. However, while the uprootedness of the peasants is less far advanced, it is even more shocking since "it is contrary to nature that the land should be cultivated by uprooted individuals."[10] As well, the peasants are met with a feeling that priority is given to the townspeople, who at least from their point of view are rendered superior. The implication of this fact is that the peasants feels less significant and, as Weil says, "out of it". The peasants too, then, are an uprooted people since they experience feelings of inferiority and a detachment from the remaining populace, from their country. Weil points out that a country must respond to the needs of all people and cannot harbour the interests of some under the pretence

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[10]Ibid., p.75.

that it is appealing to all.[11] She indicates that in modern times this has too often been the case.

On a grander scale, and seemingly of more interest to Weil since most of The Need for Roots is taken up with this concern, is the implication of uprootedness for an entire nation or country. An uprooted individual is not just an individual who is suffering, but an individual who is branded by affliction. Weil suggests affliction is to suffering what truth is to opinion. It is a condition that individuals will not have the means by which to express it. As alluded to in chapter one above, affliction cannot be expressed in words. Weil suggests it is a silent cry from the depths of the human heart. The afflicted soul is unable to cry out and the result is a "dumb and ceaseless lamentation". In her essay, "The Love of God and Affliction", Weil explains: "Affliction is an uprooting of life, a more or less attenuated equivalent of death, made irresistibly present to the soul by the attack or immediate apprehension of physical pain."[12] While affliction cannot be characterized by physical pain, Weil points out that it is a condition that must be accompanied by physical pain, or the fear of physical pain.[13] She further explains:

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[11]Ibid., see discussion on pp.76-77.

[12]Simone Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction", in Science, Necessity and the Love of God, Richard Rees, ed. and trans. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968), p.171.

[13]Ibid., p.170.

> There is no real affliction unless the event which has gripped and uprooted a life attacks it, directly or indirectly, in all its parts, social, psychological, and physical. The social factor is essential. There is not really affliction where there is not social degradation or the fear of it in some form or another.[14]

While affliction cannot be explained in words, any more than the idea of a sound can be related to the deaf and dumb[15], Weil hastens to explain the nature of affliction. She suggests that it is a "metallic chill" which freezes down to the depth of the soul. The afflicted "will never find warmth again. They will never again believe that they are anyone."[16] For the afflicted, there is no hope, and no notion of effecting control over one's destiny. Weil further explains:

> Affliction causes God to be absent for a time... A kind of horror submerges the whole soul. During this time there is nothing to love. What is terrible is that if in this darkness where there is nothing to love, the soul ceases to love, God's absence becomes final. The soul has to go on loving in the void, or at least to go on wanting to love... Then, one day, God will come to show himself to this soul and to reveal the beauty of the world to it, as in the case of Job. But if the soul stops loving it falls, even in this life, into something which is almost equivalent to hell.[17]

While in "The Love of God and Affliction" Weil's concern rests with individual souls, Mary Dietz suggests that in The Need for Roots uprootedness

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[14]Ibid., p.171.

[15]Ibid., p.172.

[16]Ibid., p.175.

[17]Ibid., pp.172-173.

ought to be understood as affliction, rendered collective and political.[18] She further suggests that here Weil offers a political vision of rootlessness.

> Rootlessness involves the breakdown of an ethos, the corruption of public spirit and the shared understandings that lend a people or a 'collectivity' its identity and meaning.
> ...
> If **enracinement** involves 'real active participation in the life of a community', then **deracinement** is the corruption of democracy, citizenship, and politics itself.[19]

The problem revealed by Weil in The Need for Roots is that the state destroys any means by which individuals may exercise bonds of attachment or express loyalty to those environments that distinguish human life. In describing the metaphor, the need for roots, Eric Springsted suggests:

> Just as plants that are uprooted cannot take in nourishment from the ground in which they originally spouted, people who are uprooted cannot take nourishment from the society, culture, or religion into which they were first born.[20]

He adds that unlike plants that die quickly when uprooted, human beings continue to exist, and moreover, do not even recognize their condition or that of their society. It means that "people who are uprooted cannot find any connection between what they are and do, and some ultimate purpose."[21]

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[18]Dietz, Between the Human and the Divine, op.cit., p.152.

[19]Ibid., p.154.

[20]Eric Springsted, Simone Weil & The Suffering of Love, (Cambridge, MA.: Cowley Publications, 1986), p.107.

[21]Ibid., p.108.

> The truly unfortunate aspect of this uprootedness is that the longer we live in this condition, the less we understand of purposes or goals beyond the immediate, short-sighted ones of the society around us.[22]

As Springsted notes, human beings are left with no idea about who they are, where they are, or where they might belong in the world or in their own culture.[23]

MODERN PATRIOTISM AND THE SUBVERSION OF LOYALTY

Weil argues that the uprootedness of 1940s France can be attributed to money and the rise of the State. That is to say, these two factors, or conditions, serve to destroy any means by which people would be able to express loyalty and exercise bonds of attachments to their natural environments. While this is so, however, it remains, as Weil tells us, that a life devoid of loyalty is "hideous" and in a sense not even realizable.[24] When bonds of attachment to a multiple of natural environments have been destroyed, a sense of loyalty does remain yet it is forced to be directed toward the State and as such is a vacuous and unauthentic expression, incapable of fostering any meaning, much less any semblance of love or affection.

> The State is a cold concern which cannot inspire love, but itself kills, suppresses everything that might be loved; so one is forced to love it, because there is nothing else. That is the moral torment to which all

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[22]Ibid.

[23]Ibid., p.109.

[24]See Weil The Need for Roots, op.cit., p.121.

of us today are exposed.[25]

Weil goes on to reveal, however, that ultimately it is not so much that the State itself is loved, but rather that the personality it portrays is loved. She terms this the "phenomenon of the leader" which means that a man comes to be paraded as the personal magnet for all loyalties. Weil explains that since individuals are compelled to embrace the "cold, metallic surface of the State", they long for something to love which is made of flesh and blood. This gives way to idolatry and what Weil describes as "false greatness" since it adopts "the art of Hollywood" in which human material is manufactured to present a person for the adoration of the masses.[26] In Germany, which was suffering a more advanced and aggressive form of uprootedness than France whose condition amounted to stupor and inertia[27], Hitler was to prevail as the epitome of this condition.[28] The Nation and

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[25]Ibid., p.109.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Ibid., p.46.

[28]It is noteworthy that Weil does not blame Hitler so much for his atrocities as she blames modern society, which celebrates false greatness, and thus encourages the development of such character. See Weil, The Need for Roots, op.cit., pp.215-217. She suggests in some respects that Hitler is a "better man than any of us" since he recognized greatness and seized it. She questions: "Was it his fault if he was unable to perceive any form of greatness except the criminal form?"

Weil also notes: "Our conception of greatness is the very one which has inspired Hitler's whole life. When we denounce it without the remotest recognition of its application to ourselves, the angels must either cry or laugh, if there happen to be angels who interest themselves in our propaganda." (Weil, The Need for

the State, Weil points out, are one and the same since there is no other way of defining nation than as "a territorial aggregate whose various parts recognize the authority of the same State".[29] Weil's point, however, is that the nation is a recent innovation and prior to the rise of the State, loyalty and patriotism did exist though it was not the same as it is nowadays.

> Patriotism was something diffuse, nomadic, which expanded or contracted according to degrees of similarity or common danger. It was mixed up with different kinds of loyalty -- loyalty to other men, a lord, a king, or a city. The whole formed something very complicated, but also very human. To express the sense of obligation everyone feels toward his country, people would usually talk about 'the public' or 'the public good', an expression which can serve equally well to indicate a village, town, province, France, Christendom, or Mankind.[30]

Weil's point, then, is that loyalty once denoted a type of patriotism which consisted of many collectivities to which people felt bound. She argues that human beings need a community, a network of inter-relations into which people are born and bound, and the value accredited to both money and the state destroy such locales. Since money and the State have come to replace all other bonds of attachment, smaller collectivities such as the family, the neighbourhood, or the village have been overcome by a sense of nationhood. Moreover, as a result of the rise of the State all collectivities, including those larger than the State,

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Roots, op.cit., p.210.)

[29]Weil, The Need for Roots, op.cit., p.95.

[30]Ibid., p.99.

have ceased to exist as environments capable of laying claim to loyalty. Sir Richard Rees comments: "...it is the aim of her attack on the State to aerate, refresh, and enlarge the human environment; and she would do this by reviving loyalty to other environments, both larger and smaller than the State."[31]
As an example of a collectivity or human environment that exceeds the boundaries of a single nation, Weil cites the Celtic community common to people in Brittany, Cornwall, Wales, and Ireland.

Weil's concern is that human life is lacking where collectivities are incapable of claiming loyalty and respect. Collectivities are owed respect because they can provide a form of nourishment that "has no equivalent in the entire universe". A collectivity is owed respect because it is unique and once destroyed cannot be regained. More importantly, however, as a source of nourishment, a collectivity maintains continuity in time and provides a link to the past while at the same time moving forward into the future. As a result of the rise of the State, however, collectivities have ceased to exist in the sense that none of them is able to serve as a medium for expounding a peoples' continuity in time. That the State is the only semblance of a collectivity that remains is problematic in part due to the fact that as a result of the events of 1789, the State represents not a love of the

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[31]Richard Rees, Simone Weil: A Sketch for a Portrait, (Chicago: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966), p.116.

past, but a violent break with the past.[32]

Weil believes that patriotism is necessarily distorted if it fails to assume an awareness and consideration of history. She suggests that the United States is representative of a "people deprived of the time-dimension" and considers the British to be "closer to the past than people in other countries."[33] Weil's concern with history, however, is that it be representative of truth and she suggests that what is handed down as history is to a large extent edited and inaccurate. More specifically, history, as well as art and science, are riddled with examples of false greatness and idolatry, which serve only to perpetuate the present discontent. She queries, for example:

> How should a child who sees cruelty and ambition glorified in his history lessons; egoism, pride, vanity, passion for self-advertisement glorified in his literature lessons; all the discoveries that have unsettled the lives of men glorified in his science lessons, without any account being taken of either the method of discovery or the effect of the unsettlement produced -- how should he be expected to learn to admire the good? ...in an atmosphere of false greatness it is useless to try to restore the true variety. False greatness must first be despised.[34]

A right understanding of history, then, is essential to patriotism and for Weil this means that it be put into perspective and considered relative to good and evil.[35]

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[32]Weil, The Need for Roots, op.cit., p.105.

[33]Ibid., see p.221 and p.223.

[34]Ibid., pp.223-224.

[35]Ibid., p.222.

Weil argues that the false conception of greatness that permeates modern society is of all defects, the most serious, and moreover, the one that people are less conscious about.[36]

The modern form of patriotism, then, is fragile largely because it is based on what Weil would describe as "false greatness", which can perhaps command pride but not loyalty. Weil argues that the brand of patriotism that has been handed down to the modern world and which is responsible for the uprootedness of the modern era, comes straight from the Romans.

> It is a pagan virtue, if these two words are compatible... The Romans really were an atheistic and idolatrous people; not idolatrous with regard to images made of stone or bronze, but idolatrous with regard to themselves. It is this idolatry of self that they have bequeathed to us in the form of patriotism.[37]

Any devotion existing in the modern era, then, is at best devotion to self, but as Weil reveals it is in fact not devotion but blind ambition sparked by false greatness. The individual ceases to recognize a connection much less a responsibility or obligation to others.

Money comes to prevail as a force so strong that it "destroys human roots wherever it is able to penetrate, by turning desire for gain into the soul motive."[38] Loyalty has become unimportant in modern society largely owing to

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[36]Ibid., see pp.209-210. See also footnote no.28, Chapter Two.

[37]Ibid., pp.134-135.

[38]Ibid., p.42.

conditions of exchange relations and consumerism. A commercially-driven society does not lend itself to loyalty, gratitude, or affection. Weil suggests that "the more questions of money dominate, the quicker the spirit of loyalty disappears."[39] In the modern era loyalty has become defined as "commercial honesty" and she notes that a very wide gap separates the two.

Weil's main point, however, is that outside of the state there exists nothing to which loyalty can cling. Weil considers areas in the public domain that might lay claim to loyalty, but her search is in vain. For instance, she queries at the prospect of loyalty being found in religion, but argues that this is no longer possible because like so many things religion has been denounced as a private affair. She suggests that religion has become "a matter of choice, opinion, taste, almost of caprice, something like the choice of a political party, or even that of a tie..."[40] Since it is out of the public realm, religion can no longer lay claim to loyalty unchallenged. The State, then, is the only thing to which loyalty might attach itself.

The modern form of patriotism rests on the absolute value of the State as such and to this extent has little, if anything, to do with the country as distinct from the State. The State exists as an absolute value because it does not allow for any admission of wrong. Weil quotes the saying "Right or wrong, my country,"

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[39]Ibid., p.119.

[40]Ibid., pp. 120-121.

to make this point, and adds that when a State presents itself as an absolute value the result is that people "refuse to admit that their country can ever be wrong." For Weil, it's a blind patriotism that celebrates "false greatness".

> ...we have witnessed this strange spectacle -- a State, the object of hatred, repugnance, derision, disdain and fear, which under the name of **patrie**, demanded absolute loyalty... It set itself up as an absolute value in this world, that is, an object of idolatry; and it was accepted and served as such.[41]

At the time of the French Revolution, Weil suggests that it was believed nation meant a sovereign people, but she adds its meaning has since changed. Instead, the term denotes:

> ...the sum total of peoples recognizing the authority of the same State; it is the political structure created by a State and the country under its control. When one talks about national sovereignty nowadays, all it really means is the sovereignty of the State.[42]

Patriotism, then, is fuelled by pride, pomp, and glory, commanded and directed by the State, which demands absolute loyalty and yet remains far removed from anything resembling love for one's country. Indeed, as Weil stresses, people come to love the State only because there is nothing else to love when in fact the State is held as an object of hatred. Even more to the point is the "strange paradox" that emerges, namely, "a democracy in which all public institutions, and all things connected with them, [are] openly hated and despised by the entire

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[41]Ibid., p.122.

[42]Ibid.

population."[43] The rise of the State has destroyed all avenues for expressions of true loyalty and all environments that would permit bonds of attachment. What remains in the State's wake is a loveless idolatry, which Weil equates with "false greatness", and a public life in which everything is hated and despised.

The central problem with patriotism is that it poses a contradiction. On the one hand, it demands much from its citizens, but on the other, citizens feel no, or little, obligation to the State. As noted above, Weil argues that France was not snatched away from the French in 1940, but rather the French allowed their nation to fall. Although the French were for a time capable of some expression of loyalty toward the State, it was not a genuine expression and ultimately the allegiance claimed by the State held little significance. Weil writes:

> ...the development of the State exhausts a country. The State eats away its moral substance, lives on it, fattens on it, until the day comes when no more nourishment can be drawn from it, and famine reduces it to a condition of lethargy.[44]

Since loyalty to the State was not founded on the right reasons and hence could not sustain a genuine expression, it became essentially meaningless when the sovereignty of the nation was threatened.

Weil's conception of loyalty involves, generally speaking, a form of patriotism, but more specifically it is something akin to community and

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[43]Ibid., p.115.

[44]Ibid., p.114.

compassion. As will be addressed in chapter three, patriotism for Weil ought not to be based on pride as is the case with the modern notion of patriotism. In short, Weil finds a patriotism of this nature to be at the same time both meaningless and destructive. Rather what people need, she would argue, is a genuine feeling of love for their country. Weil distinguishes between the State and country[45], noting that it is country that must be loved, which is not the same as the State even though citizens owe their respect and obedience to the State.[46]

Weil's notion of patriotism is concerned with the fact that individuals need to have multiple roots in that they need to be connected to a number of environments. Thus in order for a people to feel love for their country, they need to be able to feel a sense of rootedness in the environments or communities in which they live. Put succinctly, they must be made to both feel and be at home. The problem, however, is that the masses are a displaced people suffering from uprootedness or homelessness. They are beings who have no conception of themselves in time or space.

In The Need for Roots, Weil wanted to think about how people might live as citizens of a country; as members of a community.[47] As Robert Coles

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[45]Ibid., see p.169.

[46]Ibid., see pp.173-174.

[47]Robert Coles, Simone Weil: A Modern Pilgrimage, (Don Mills, Ontario: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1987), p.83.

suggests, Weil saw "politics as a vocation, as a means for individuals to go beyond their self-centredness, to engage one another in the public arena, and for high social stakes."[48] Politics as Weil saw it, however, and as it continues to exist half a century later, was something that on the one hand had been removed from the people and on the other was scorned by the people. "'Oh, he's a politician,' 'all that, that's just politics'," writes Weil, noting the commonality of such phrases, which signify a "final and complete condemnation" of politics. She adds that such an attitude towards politics is in fact "incredible in a democracy". Coles comments that Weil "saw most of us more alone and cut off than we care to realize, no longer connected in time and space to a coherent cultural and political tradition."[49] Even more to the point, however, Mary Dietz writes:

> It is not just that citizens of a nation lose sight of what unifies and distinguishes them; it is also that they cease to act as political beings and acquiesce to rule by politicians, charlatans, and most tragically, dictatorial men.[50]

In order for a peoples' roots to be restored, then, Weil contends that people must be permitted real, active participation in the life of the community. The tragic outcome as a result of the rise of the State is not so much that individuals cease to exercise feelings of love and loyalty, but that they come to

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[48]Ibid., p.86.

[49]Ibid., p.73.

[50]Dietz, Between the Human and the Divine, op.cit., p.154.

"love the State because there's nothing else to love." Weil's concern is that this cannot be a sincere or genuine expression of loyalty, much less love, and thus cannot breed feelings of caring and affection. The implication, then, is that the State destroys all locales in which genuine feelings of loyalty, gratitude, and affection might be exercised and the result is an uprooted people: a people governed by a State but without a country, without a home.

Weil wants to conceive of a means by which love for country can be restored and in her analysis this means that a people has to have roots.

> A human being has roots by virtue of his real, active, and natural participation in the life of a community which preserves in living shape certain particular treasures of the past and certain particular expectations for the future. The participation is a natural one, in the sense that it is automatically brought about by place, conditions of birth, profession, and social surroundings. Every human being needs to have multiple roots. It is necessary for him to draw wellnigh the whole of his moral, intellectual and spiritual life by way of the environment of which he forms a natural part.[51]

Only when a people is rooted in the way that Weil describes here can they then be free to exercise bonds of attachment and express loyalty to one another and to the many environments that serve to constitute human life.

While Weil's attack on modern patriotism reveals a vacuous and misguided notion of loyalty, it is the reasons underlying this predicament that are utmost in Weil's thought. That is to say, the condition of uprootedness of homelessness has resulted owing to the subversion of loyalty and Weil's concern

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[51]Weil, The Need for Roots, op.cit., p.41.

is how and why it occurred and how it can be rectified; how a country can be returned to its people. A country defined as a nation-state and surviving under the sole authority of the State ceases to have any real life-giving agents and thus people are overcome by a sense of "ennui", or boredom, weariness, and misery. Such was the situation in France and Weil suggests its effect is much the same as that felt by a people who are made to suffer from starvation and massacre.[52] As a result of public affairs having been taken over by the State, people lost control over their lives and this meant they had become disconnected from their natural environments, and hence uprooted. Moreover, this void in public life has left individuals with no point of reference for determining who and what they are. The idolization of money, false greatness, and blind ambition occupy the void.

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[52]Ibid., p.117.

CHAPTER III

LOYALTY OR COMPASSION AS PATRIOTISM

In order for France to be returned to her people, for her once again to become a home to her people, she has to become a root-fixing ground. Weil suggests that what this means is that there must be a refashioning of the soul of the country, that a new inspiration must be breathed into the people. Such a task is dependent upon political action, or in Weil's terms action on a "multiple plane", which means that above all a new form of patriotism must be developed.

> The State's duty is to make the country, in the highest possible degree, a reality. The country was not a reality for very many Frenchmen in 1939. It has again become one as a result of deprivation. It must be made to remain so in possession, and for that to happen it must really become, in fact, a life-giving agent, really be turned into root fixing ground. It must also be made a favourable setting for participation in and loyal attachment to all other sorts of environmental expression.[1]

The form of patriotism that Weil has in mind is one that she says will be subordinated to the cause of justice and will rest on feelings of compassion. Weil argues that for patriotism to have any significance and meaning, it must be founded on compassion or loyalty. Unlike patriotism founded on pride, which holds the State as an absolute value necessarily devoid of any wrongs or

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[1]Simone Weil, The Need for Roots, trans. A.F. Wills, (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul Inc., 1978), pp. 157-158.

injustices, Weil suggests that a notion of compassion conjures up different feelings towards country. In short, one can have feelings of compassion towards one's country while maintaining an awareness that the country is composed of right and wrong, good and bad.[2] Her point is that compassion can permit an expression even in times of misfortune and even amongst the suffering and unfortunate peoples. Conversely, she argues that "Nothing which resembles pride can be suitable for those in misfortune."[3]

Weil's adherence to a notion of compassion has much to do with how people feel toward their country. A patriotism founded on pride promotes both national and individual egoism which is fuelled by a blind ambition. Such a form of patriotism is incapable of conjuring up genuine feelings of loyalty and compassion. Rather it remains meaningless and where Weil is concerned also destructive for both the individual and for the nation. Compassion, Weil suggests, signifies a "poignantly tender feeling for some beautiful, precious, fragile and perishable object," and as such has "a warmth about it which the sentiment of national grandeur altogether lacks."[4] It is precisely this sort of feeling, then, that Weil suggests ought to replace the present notion of pride. Moreover, she points out that a country needs to be regarded as something precious and perishable

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[2]Ibid., see p.165.

[3]Ibid., p.166.

[4]Ibid., p.164.

since in fact that is what a country is. It is precious primarily because it provides food for human souls, yet at the same time it is perishable because it is a collectivity and collectivities, being earthly creations, are not eternal and are vulnerable to destruction.

Weil describes compassion as something which is fuelled by a "vital current" which, she adds, is "perfectly pure". In an effort to demonstrate her full meaning of this concept, she offers an analogy.

> Isn't a man easily capable of acts of heroism to protect his children, or his aged parents? And yet no vestige of grandeur is attached to these. A perfectly pure love for one's country bears a close resemblance to the feelings which his young children, his aged parents, or a beloved wife can inspire in a man.[5]

Weil's notion of compassion is based on a feeling that stems deeply from within and more to the point is not dependent on conditions or rewards. It is not a contrived sentiment, but a sincere and genuine expression of, in a sense, neighbourly love. Dietz suggests it is a passion that is not unlike Toqueville's idea of "instinctive patriotism" that "'does not reason, but believes, feels, and acts.'"[6]

Weil, then, considers two types of feelings that a people might have for their country: one based on pride, which she suggests is subject to conditions, and another based on compassion, which is to be conceived as universal and not

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[5]Ibid.

[6]Mary Dietz, Between the Human and the Divine: The Political Thought of Simone Weil, (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Littlefield, 1988), p.155.

dependent on conditions. In this way, compassion can be seen as that which occupies the higher realm that Weil introduces in connection with her discussion on rights and obligations. Obligations exist on a higher plane, and are above the earthly world because they are eternal and thus not dependent on conditions and conventions. Largely owing to its universal applicability, as will be made clearer below, compassion also occupies the higher realm. Weil notes that "Whereas pride in national glory is by its nature exclusive, non-transferable, compassion is by its nature universal..."[7]

In accordance with her understanding that the world consists of a higher realm, Weil goes on to point out that compassion is a type of love that "is alone legitimate for a Christian." In making this connection, Weil is able to explain that compassion suggests a type of love that is unconditional in that it is expressed in times of happiness and unhappiness, in times of fortune and misfortune. It is a Christian concept of compassion: love prevails despite crimes and injustices, but at the same time it exists to discern the good. Weil explains:

> Mankind's crimes didn't diminish Christ's compassion. Thus compassion keeps both eyes open on both the good and the bad and finds in each sufficient reasons for loving. It is the only love on this earth which is true and righteous.[8]

Compassion is an appropriate form of patriotism because it can allow one to love

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[7]Weil, The Need for Roots, op.cit., p.166.

[8]Ibid., p.165.

one's country while still recognizing its wrongs, its crimes and its injustices rather than denying that these things exist as a patriotism founded on pride wants to do. Weil suggests that a patriotism driven by pride constitutes a false expression because sufferings and crimes are things of the earthly world, even necessary things, and thus cannot nor should not be denied. She writes: "Happiness is as much an object for compassion as unhappiness, because it belongs to this earth" and she adds that there is always a "certain amount of unhappiness in the life of any country."[9]

Weil suggests that owing to the false premises of pride, it follows that pride is not suitable for those experiencing misfortune. Simply, it does not allow itself to respond to such feelings and, Weil would argue, needs. Pride celebrates national grandeur, the glory of the past, and of the future. Weil's hope that France can develop a new form of patriotism rests on the fact that she believes the French have been awakened to the reality of France as a result of being deprived of her, as a result of the war. She writes, "The only thing which seems to offer any hope is this: that suffering will have to a certain extent restored to life memories which were lately almost dead..."[10] That memories can be rekindled is crucial to Weil's idea of what patriotism ought to consist. Weil believes that there can be no true patriotism without an awareness and consideration of history. It is for this reason

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[9]Ibid., p.165.

[10]Ibid., p.47.

that Weil offers compassion as a replacement for pride. Compassion allows one to love his or her country regardless of conditions since where Weil is concerned it is a love based on truth and not on falsehood and lies.

However, while it may be as a result of its association with truth that Weil finds compassion appropriate, she also believes that it is the only suitable expression for human beings because it alone finds a place in daily life. Weil believes that compassion is able to correspond to the daily lives of a country's peoples whereas national pride remains far removed from the affairs of daily life. She explains, for example, that in 1940 France, national pride could only find expression through the resistance and the problem with that was that many, herself included it might be noted, did not have "the opportunity to take any effective part in the resistance..." Compassion, however, can be expressed in daily life, according to Weil, in so far as it can be realized in and amongst the people. Weil's distinction is based on the concept of fraternity, which she suggests compassion allows for and national pride does not. Pride incites egoism on a national scale and on an individual level sparks competition and rivalry. It is, to this extent, a sentiment consistent with a doctrine of rights.

As noted above, Weil contends that a patriotism founded on pride is based on national glory. However, the problem with this is that national glory can only act as a stimulant when the "lower orders of society" look forward to their country's glory as a result of the expectation that they too will be able to claim a

share in this glory. In order to emphasize this point, Weil offers an explanation that alludes to what in more recent times would be considered the "American Dream".

> Any little French lad, no matter where he hailed from, could legitimately carry in his heart any sort of dreams as to the future; no ambition could be regarded as great enough to be absurd. Every one knew that all ambitions would not be realized, but each one in particular had a chance of being, and many of them could be partially so.[11]

Weil stresses that a society catering to ambition, and what amounts to false promises, is the "result of a disturbed social condition". Such a stimulant is an unhealthy one both for the individual and for the country as a whole. Those who by ambition and an occupation for the cultivation of personality are driven to emerge from the mass of the people, separate themselves from the anonymity, which characterizes the mass of humanity. Weil argues that ambition stands opposed to social stability since it sees in social stability an obstacle.[12] When patriotism is founded on "pomp and glory", the people cannot feel at home since they strive to emerge from the mass that in effect constitutes their country. Those who strive to capitalize on ambition necessarily come out of the people, but once this has happened they have ceased to be a part of the people. Such an emergence from the mass is not at all to be equated with what Weil has in mind when she describes the impersonal. The impersonal is reached through mental solitude, not through the cultivation of personality or ambition. The impersonal is

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[11]Ibid., p.167.

[12]Ibid., p.168.

anonymous in the sense that it glimpses truth, and truth bears no connection to personality.

Pride, coupled with the promotion of ambition, further acts as a stimulant in that it directs attention away from the past and into the future. For Weil, the past and the present, or a people's continuity in time constitutes a unique form of nourishment for souls, and it is this notion of historicity that pride and national grandeur at best wish to distort. Moreover, a sentiment of pride, or as Weil would declare lies and falsehoods, can only be sustained when directed toward a mass. That is, it is a sentiment appropriate for the blind collectivity. Tomlin suggests:

> The future...is the artificial bait which an unscrupulous leader dangles before a dissatisfied people. The food which he promises them is liberty: but he can promise it for the future only be depriving them of it in the present, except in name. Such trickery can be practised only upon the Collective, which cannot know that it is a victim of deception for 'a crowd cannot add things together'. If the same knavery is practiced upon an individual, the result will be to make him conscious of his servitude. That is because he preserves at least the memory of past freedom. The Collective only has 'memory' of the future. A mob has no past. That is why a rabble can assemble day after day to listen, bemused and even exultant, to the same catalogue of unfulfilled promises.[13]

When pride and glory, then, act as the stimulant, individuals are compelled to aspire to ambition which serves to separate them from the masses. In this way, anonymity can no longer exist and it is anonymity that Weil argues

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[13]E.W.F. Tomlin, Simone Weil, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), pp.56-57.

reflects social stability and a people at home in their country. When ambition fails these people, they blame their misfortunes on the country to the extent that they believe their country has committed a crime against them. On the other hand, Weil suggests that if a country is presented to its people as something beautiful and precious, but also as something imperfect and liable to suffer misfortune, the ills suffered by their country will be suffered in and through themselves. Misfortune is not to be understood as something that a country commits against its people, but as something that has to be experienced through the people. It is precisely in activating this change that Weil turns to government and offers a discussion concerning the means by which it can breed a new inspiration into the souls of the people.

It is the duty of the State to make the country a reality and thus to ensure that the people are provided with a country to which they really feel they belong. Weil points out that in order for the State to do this, the people have a duty to give their obedience to the State since obedience is necessary to ensure public order and the "country's preservation and tranquillity". Obedience, which is a need of the soul, is to be considered a "sacred obligation". Weil explains:

> This doesn't mean an idolizing of the State in association with patriotism in the Roman style. It is the exact opposite of this. The State is sacred, not in the way an idol is scared, but in the way common objects serving a religious purpose, like the altar, the baptismal water or anything else of the kind are sacred. Everybody knows they are only material objects; but material objects regarded as sacred because they serve a sacred purpose. This is the sort of

majesty appropriate for the State.[14]

The prospect of regaining a country, then, cannot be left to the people. Uprootedness is a condition such that for the most part the people will not even be able to recognize the nature of the problem to which they are exposed. However, Weil does indicate that as a result of the German occupation the French feel deprived of France and this is a significant sentiment in which feelings of compassion can be bred and the growing of roots begun.

If how a people feels toward their country is to change, Weil believes that such change must be affected through man's earthly needs. Even though her conception of patriotism calls for a spiritual rejuvenation, it is clear from her writings that this can only come to pass if changes are made in the conditions in which people live, and even more importantly, the conditions in which they labour.

THE ROLE OF LABOUR

Weil argues that if the problem of patriotism fails to be remedied, the situation that occurred in 1940 France will happen again. She suggests that the only solution lies in giving the French something that they can love.[15] It is in connection with this idea that Weil's earlier writings can be seen to relate to her concerns in The Need for Roots. Central to the discussions of both phases of her

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[14]Weil, The Need for Roots, op.cit., pp.173-174.

[15]Ibid., see p.150.

thought is the role and nature of work in industrial society. In her earlier writings Weil's focus can be seen to be on the rationality of work while in The Need for Roots, this focus is readjusted to encompass the spirituality of work.[16] It is concern for the worker, however, that is at the heart of Weil's initial inquiries and in the end, in The Need for Roots, she returns to the worker, once again acknowledging that if change is to be forthcoming it must occur in this realm. While the nature of her discussion is somewhat different, it remains that the object of her inquiry is the same, namely the worker.

In The Need for Roots, Weil explains how it is that France can be given to the French as something to love. Peoples of the modern industrial state have fallen victim to uprootedness and Weil contends that where this is the case, it is impossible for a people to love their country. Weil addresses the problem of uprootedness as it affects both the town and the country, and while the causes of uprootedness necessarily differ somewhat, the result of the problem is the same. As noted above, both industrial and agricultural workers feel a displacement from their community. In short, since the worker constitutes the cell of the social organism, first and foremost, the worker must be able to love his or her work. If an expression of love cannot be reconciled at this level, it remains that the prospect of inspiring in a people a love for their country is a futile pursuit.

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[16]For a discussion on the two distinct phases of Weil's thought, see Roy Pierce, "Simone Weil: Sociology, Utopia and Faith," in Contemporary French Political Thought, (London: Oxford University Press, 1966: 89-121.), pp.89-91.

It is important to note that while Weil was an intellectual, consumed by an on-going study of political, philosophical, and religious considerations, she was not just an intellectual. That is to say, Weil evidently believed it important to experience for herself those things that interested her most. Because the worker was one of her foremost concerns in her efforts to understand the nature of misfortune and suffering particularly in the modern state, in the 1930s she forewent her formal studies in order to engage in factory work on a daily basis. Thus while her writings are premised on intellectual insights, they are also based on her personal experience.

In describing the plight of the industrial worker, Weil captivates the loss of human essence that such a life transcribes. Like Marx, she suggests that the worker is a cog in a machine, less than a thing, and the only thing that anyone cares about is that he or she obeys. As a result, workmen find themselves no longer existing. While Weil credits Marx's Capital for uncovering the nature of this nullifying existence, she argues that he did not address the problem on the right plane.[17] Weil writes:

> We shall never put an end to the proletarian lot by passing laws, whether these be concerned with the nationalization of key industries, the abolition of private property, powers granted to the trade-unions to negotiate collective agreements, representation by factory delegates or the control of engagement. All the measures that are proposed, be they given a revolutionary or a reformist label, are purely legal, and it is not on a legal plane that working-class distress is situated, nor the

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[17]Weil, The Need for Roots, op.cit., p. 150.

remedy for this distress.[18]

Weil's point is that the demands of the working-class, such as for example, higher wages and shorter working days, are not genuine expressions of their sufferings, but rather serve only as representations of far deeper misfortunes which penetrate the human soul. Should workers think themselves concerned with such things as control of engagement and nationalization, it is only because they fear what she calls total uprootedness, namely unemployment.[19] Weil believes, however, that what the workers need is some sort of spiritual rejuvenation which, where she is concerned, can only be attained through a provision of earthly needs. Indeed, when Weil asserts that "workers need poetry as much as bread", her twofold conception of these earthly needs is readily apparent.

For Weil, then, the sufferings faced by the modern worker cannot be addressed merely in terms of legalities. Rather, it is the very conditions of work and moreover, the worker's feeling toward his or her work that must be changed. In an effort to explain why it is not the legalities of the worker's situation that can change the role of work, Weil points out, for example, that it is not the ownership of a factory that will diminish the workers' sufferings, but rather the type of machines that they are forced to use. She writes:

What is the use of workmen obtaining as a result of their struggles an

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[18]Ibid., p.50.

[19]Ibid., p.51.

> increase in wages and a relaxation of discipline, if meanwhile engineers in a few research departments invent, without the slightest evil intent, machines which reduce their souls and bodies to a state of exhaustion, or aggravate their economic difficulties? What use can the partial or total nationalization of economic production be to them, if the spirit of these research departments hasn't changed? ...Even Soviet propaganda has never claimed that Russia had discovered a radically new type of machine, worthy of being handled by an all-powerful proletariat.[20]

Weil's point is that the real needs of workers cannot be met by legal changes, but rather something has to change in the nature of work itself, and moreover that society as a whole has a responsibility to engage in this pursuit. It is for this reason that in The Need for Roots she offers a new work environment that concerns itself with the needs of individual human beings as opposed to the needs of profits and increased production. It is in this way that Weil sees herself addressing the spiritual or moral needs of the human being. That is to say, Weil wants workers to be able to develop new feelings toward their work yet for this to be realized the actual nature and conditions of work must be changed to suit the needs of human beings. For Weil, these needs are both physical **and** spiritual, and Man's earthly needs cannot be met without a consideration of both. High profits and maximized production might serve to meet Man's physical needs, but when these factors are the primary and sole consideration, they necessarily fail to acknowledge the spiritual needs of the human being. When this is the case, it remains that Man's earthly needs are not being met and therefore the life of a

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[20]Ibid., p.54.

human being is diminished to that of an animal and probably worse than that.

Weil argues, for instance, that machines could quite easily be made to accommodate the needs of workers, but the problem is that this is a concern that has not been considered by the technicians. She suggests that "up to now" technicians have only had to be concerned about the needs of manufacture, but if they had to be concerned about the needs of those who do the manufacturing, "the whole technique of production would be slowly transformed."[21] Returning to her original consideration of obligations as opposed to rights, Weil argues that technicians ought to be made to adopt this sort of consideration as "part of the sense of professional obligation" and "the sense of professional honour." Furthermore, she advocates that trade-unions should take responsibility for ensuring that such a conception "sink deep into the universal consciousness".[22] In this way, it becomes clear that while Weil suggests the manner in which machines must be changed, she further believes that once established a consideration such as this will seem relatively effortless. As it is, however, a machine that would address the needs of a human being seems almost a radical conception.

In The Need for Roots, she notes that what is critical to the worker is that he be afforded dignity in his work. This is a concept that Weil explores more

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[21]Ibid., see p.56.

[22]Ibid., see pp.56-57.

fully, but in a slightly different scope, in her earlier works, namely "Reflections Concerning the Causes of Liberty and Social Oppression". In that work, Weil argues that where one is oppressed, dignity in work remains absent. Weil would consider one to be oppressed if he or she was not permitted to exercise both thought and action in the direction of his or her work. It is the unity of thought and action that Weil further suggests is representative of freedom.

> True liberty is not defined by a relationship between desire and its satisfaction, but by a relationship between thought and action; the absolutely free man would be he whose every action proceeded from a preliminary judgement concerning the end which he set himself and the sequence of means suitable for attaining this end.[23]

The primary goal of Weil's conception as it concerns the worker is that he be able to assume dignity in his work and for Weil, thought is man's "supreme dignity".[24] In The Need for Roots, she suggests that the ultimate goal of the society she has in mind:

> would be, not, according to the expression now inclined to become popular, the interest of the consumer -- such an interest can only be a grossly material one, but Man's dignity in his work, which is a value of a spiritual order.[25]

Although in her earlier works Weil advocated the importance of dignity in work, in The Need for Roots she maintains the same concern, but her reasoning is now

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[23]Simone Weil, Oppression and Liberty, A.F. Wills and John Petrie, trans. (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1973), p.85.

[24]Ibid., p.105.

[25]Weil, The Need for Roots, op.cit., p.74.

concerned with the spiritual order, which is something she had not spoken about previously. In The Need for Roots, she suggests that the sickness of modern civilization, which as noted above is in its entirety a condition of uprootedness, is brought about by the fact that it does not know "exactly what place to give to physical labour and to those engaged in physical labour."[26] She later comments and in fact concludes The Need for Roots with the following: "It is not difficult to define the place that physical labour should occupy in a well-ordered social life. It should be its spiritual core."[27] The significance of the spirituality of labour in Weil's political vision overall will be considered below. For now, suffice it to say that for Weil labour holds an affinity with science and art since like these disciplines it allows the individual to engage the world and to this extent is the means by which one can experience the reality, or the truth, of the world.

Aside from changing the inhuman demanding force of machinery, however, Weil's conception of a new order involves fostering an entirely new work environment or community. She considers the need for such changes as they would affect first the workers, but the entire community besides. In discussing the role of labour and its relation to the community, Weil's prescriptions for change become very specific. For instance, she calls for the elimination of large factories, which would be replaced with small workshops dispersed throughout the country,

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[26]Ibid., p.285.

[27]Ibid., p.288.

each employing a few workmen. She suggests that though there would continue to exist a central assembly shop, it would not be manned by specialists but would rely on the labour of these same workmen who would take turns working at the central shop. Furthermore, Weil suggests that when workers attend to production at the central shop, there "ought to be a holiday atmosphere about such occasions."[28] In this way, Weil is attempting to create a feeling of goodwill and contentment in the work environment. It is only in this type of a setting that Weil seems to believe that an expression of loyalty can be inspired in the people. She suggests that at the central shop workers should only work half of the day, the remainder being taken up with such things that would encourage "the development of feelings of loyalty to the concern".[29] More specifically, workers would attend demonstrations in which they would be shown the function of the part that they make, and geography lectures showing where their products go to and who uses them. General cultural information would be included in these lectures and Weil goes so far as to suggest that a workmen's university would be established in each of the central assembly shops.

Each workman would own the tools of his trade and the smaller workshops would belong to the workers who use them. Weil adds: "Every

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[28]Ibid., p.70.

[29]Ibid.

workman would, besides, own a house and a bit of land."[30] Weil, then, wishes to grant every workman a triple proprietorship consisting of tools and/or machine, house and land.[31] These things would be provided to workmen as a gift from the State on the condition of their marriage, and on the condition that he satisfactorily pass a technical examination and a test "to check the level of his intelligence, and general culture."[32] She adds that all would be entitled to write this test as often and whenever they chose. Those who could not meet the test requirements would work as wage-earners either as assistants to those who run a small shop or as hands in the larger central assembly shops. Wages, however, must be guarded against being too low since when wages are a concern for the worker they absorb his attention "and prevent his attachment to the concern."[33]

As noted above, Weil's conception of the significance of work is apparent as a result of the attention she gives to how work is, or at least ought to be, connected to the entire community and not just to the individual workers. Her concern is to find the means by which workers and non-workers can think about labour differently, and more to the point, Weil offers a vision of how work ought to

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[30]Ibid., p.71.

[31]Weil assumes that such trades will be assumed by men, and the ownership of tools, house and land would be granted to males based on certain conditions imposed by the State. See Weil, The Need for Roots, op.cit., p.71.

[32]Ibid.

[33]Ibid., p.73.

be an all-encompassing thread that to some extent binds everyone. As it is, work prevails as a loathsome activity from which, in addition to the workers themselves, all peoples are necessarily detached. For instance, when children are taken out of school and put to work in a factory, Weil suggests this it is a shock to which they can never adequately adjust. Largely for this reason, she believes that children ought to be at least introduced to places of work, such as their father's, prior to an age when they are forced to work. If factories and workplaces were more accessible, a worker would be permitted the flexibility to show his family where it is that he labours and what sort of work he does. She notes that during the strikes of 1936 many workers took advantage of the occasion to bring their families into the factory and show them what it was that they did everyday. In allowing such access, the nature of work would become less mysterious to those who do not engage in it directly, and further it would allow a place of work to become at least somewhat familiar to those living in the community. Weil believes that if children could gain some exposure to a work place it would serve to better their interest in work in the long term. She suggests that for children work "is by far the most exciting of all games" and it "would be lit up by poetry for the rest of their lives by these wonders experienced in infancy."[34] Weil's concern for the exposure of children to the workplace is foremost in her thought since she acknowledges that if there is to be change it can only come about in succeeding

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[34]Ibid., p.58.

generations and over time.

The above factors highlight some of the conditions that Weil would wish to introduce and maintain. She acknowledges, however, that it would take considerable time for such an environment to be realized. While some, perhaps even all, of these ideas undoubtedly sound utopian, Weil believes that given the appropriate attention, they are within grasp. It might be argued, and as would be consistent with criticisms against utopian visions, that Weil's ideas are more oppressive than they are favourable. It might be suggested, for instance, that this sort of system would grant the State considerable power in determining who could and could not function as a workman in his own shop, who could and could not own a house and a bit of land. Moreover, it may also result that rather than lessening the gap between classes, Weil's system would only serve to create two working-classes: one that maintained some ownership over the means of production and one that did not. While such criticisms may hold validity, it remains that central to Weil's concern is that workers be made to feel at home in their work, and she believes that the factors listed above would serve as a means to this end. Rather than having a people unattached to their country and barely concerned about its fate, Weil wants to re-establishment bonds of attachment in order to foster feelings of rootedness, which implies loyalty, caring, and responsibility to others and to country.

In an effort to inspire feelings of loyalty in and amongst the people, Weil

focuses on that which is central to the lives of everyone, namely work. In the modern industrial state, she sees the factory worker as the most uprooted owing to the conditions of production, which are concerned with profit rather than with human needs. As noted previously, Weil is not a revolutionary and therefore her ideas concerning change are intended to coincide with conditions that are already in place. However, Weil points out that the system she conceives of would be neither capitalist nor socialist.[35] Why she would not advocate a capitalist system is apparent based on her criticism of the superiority of profit over human needs. Of socialism, she says, it fails to put an end to the proletariat condition and instead forces everyone into that condition. In a sense, then, Weil's system fits somewhere into the middle. It would seemingly still be based on a free-market, for she does not say that it would not, yet it would permit many, probably most, to own at least some property in the means of production. While property would be given to workers as a gift from the State, which is not significantly removed from socialist ideas, these things during the life of the worker would be solely his or her possession. Indeed, and as has been noted, this would grant the State considerable power, but where Weil is concerned and despite her criticisms of the State, it is the only social entity remaining that can take charge in enacting a new order. Unlike Marx, Weil did not believe that oppression could be overcome. Rather, she argues that oppression has and always will be a part of the human

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[35]Ibid., p.74.

condition and the best that can be hoped for is that human beings devise means by which oppression can be lessened. It is perhaps largely for this reason that Weil did not aspire to revolutionary measures since where she is concerned, this would only serve to replace one form of oppression with another. In this context, Weil's conservative leanings are evident. She is adamant that the worse tragedy that can befall a people is a break with the past.

LABOUR AND CULTURE

Weil's concept of a new work environment for both workers and peasants involves more than professional training. Weil advocates that the education of the workers must include a participation in intellectual culture. As Weil says, "They must be made to feel a home, too, in the world of thought."[36] Weil's concern is that it is not sufficient for culture to be absorbed by only part of the population and thus she argues that it must be transmitted to all peoples. The difficulty in transmitting culture is not that it is too high, for in fact Weil argues it is too low. Culture remains removed from the working-class partly because the people may lack the time and energy that culture demands and also, culture is created by one group of people for another, yet it does not speak to the latter since it is based on terms familiar only to the creators. Weil argues, then, that this fosters a problem of translation, but she adds that this need not be a problem.

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[36]Ibid., p.62.

Since culture takes as its object truth, Weil contends that these truths need not be mutilated and destroyed in order to be apparent to the working-class, but need to be presented in such a way that the truth has relevancy to their lives. For Weil, then, it is merely a problem of translation and she adds that a truth that cannot be transposed, is not a truth.[37]

Another obstacle preventing the transmission of culture to the working-class involves what Weil describes as the slavery of thought. She points out that a mind is only free and sovereign when it is really and truly exercised. She writes:

> To be free and sovereign, as a thinking being, for one hour or two, and a slave for the rest of the day, is such an agonizing spiritual quartering that it is almost impossible not to renounce, so as to escape it, the highest forms of thought.[38]

Workers have to be afforded the ability for thought in their daily lives in order that this human capacity and need can be shared and nurtured by all peoples. Weil contends that reforms can be enacted to allow the worker more freedom of thought and control over his or her work, thus also serving to enhance the worker's capacity for free thought overall.

Weil explains that a culture for the working-class has to be established through a mingling of the workers with the intellectuals. As a result of the war, Weil notes, many intellectuals have been forced to take on factory-work and this

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[37]Ibid., pp.64-65.

[38]Ibid., p.67-68.

she thinks could prove beneficial in the long term. Such a work experience amongst intellectuals will provide them with some insight into the sufferings of the working-class. She cautions, however, that because it is human nature to wish to forget humiliation and misfortune, it remains that these experiences could prove unprofitable. At the same time Weil is cautiously optimistic that these turn of events could give culture a new direction, and more to the point, one that would aspire to the interests of the working-class.

For Weil, then, a new environment for the industrial working-class is crucial in the struggle to overcome uprootedness. That is to say, it is the working conditions and the place of the worker in modern society that are largely to blame for the uprootedness that has resulted. She believes, however, that peoples can be returned to their roots and central to the attainment of this need is that they be made to feel at home in their work. This can be achieved, Weil argues, through the creation of industrial production and culture of the mind as they address the needs of the working-class.[39]

Weil stresses that in addition to responding to the working-class, culture must also play a significant role in the lives of the peasants. She suggests that just as the workers need to be provided with a culture suitable to them, so too do the peasants, and she adds that it cannot be the same for both. Once again, culture for Weil is closely affiliated with education and thus if it is to have any

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[39]Ibid., see p.69.

meaning in people's lives it must respond to those things that concern them or seem real to them. Weil suggests that from the point of view of the peasants, everything connected with thought is the exclusive property of the towns. Weil becomes somewhat specific in her analysis suggesting that it is for this reason that the re-rooting of the peasantry is dependent first of all on maintaining rural schoolteachers, who she suggests are distinct and specific from the schoolteachers in the towns. In this way, the education of children, then, will correspond to the interests of the communities in which they live. Just as the working-class must be made to feel at home in the world of thought, Weil argues that precisely the same must hold true for the peasantry. She notes, however, that the focus of culture, or education, will necessarily be different owing to the different conditions in which these people live. Since both groups are vital to the realization of a country, one should not be considered nor treated as more important than the other.

The role of education, or the transmitting of culture, harbours a significant and crucial role in Weil's ideas concerning how to inspire in a people a love for their country. In order for their country to be loved, it must seem to them something very real, and in order for it to be real, it must allow them to be comfortable and at home both in their labour and at the same time in the world of thought. For Weil, labour and thought assume an affiliation that when disengaged denies for the individual the reality of the human condition. It is for this reason that

her consideration of labour calls into attention a concern for culture, education, or thought.

CHAPTER IV

EDUCATION AND PUBLIC ACTION

Weil suggests that the prospect of changing a people's attitude toward their country is dependent upon "breathing an inspiration" into the people. However, with this said, Weil was not under any illusion that developing a new way for the people to think about their country was something that could be merely suggested to them. Rather, she emphasizes that if a change is to result, there must be action. That is to say, there must be real changes within a people's day-to-day living conditions. Only on this basis can the prospect of "breathing an inspiration" into the people be realized.

The term action, for Weil, translates into something akin to education. It should be noted that Weil acknowledges that calling for the breathing of an inspiration into the people might be considered a prescription for propaganda. She argues, however, that the two should not be equated and rather propaganda would only serve to negate the type of reform that she has in mind. She writes: "Propaganda is not directed towards creating an inspiration,: it closes, seals up all the openings through which an inspiration might pass; it fills the whole spirit with

fanaticism..."[1] Propaganda tells a people how to think whereas Weil's concern is to allow people to think. For Weil, it is the power of the mind that the individual's superiority over the collective lies.[2] J.P. Little points out that the nature of a collectivity that Weil finds acceptable is one in which "each individual is exercising his mind and will in an effort which transcends the individual, and to which he has consented."[3] It is true that Weil has in mind a certain way for people to about their country, but at the same time this expression has to be forthcoming from the people. The social and political conditions in which they live, then, have to be such that this is a genuine and not a contrived expression.

While Weil's call for the breathing of an inspiration into the people is in many ways the call for a spiritual rejuvenation, it is not something which can be understood as that which can come from faith or a belief in God. Weil points out, for instance, that the inspiration to which she appeals cannot be left to God.[4] If it were something to be left to God, she suggests, it would remain a mystery in that a methodology by which to attain such a goal would not be evident. On the contrary, Weil believes that a methodology does exist, and she adds that there is

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[1]Simone Weil, The Need for Roots, trans. A.F. Wills, (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul Inc., 1978), pp.179-180.

[2]J.P. Little, Simone Weil: Waiting on Truth, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), p.76.

[3]Ibid., p.113.

[4]Ibid., p.180.

a methodology in "everything connected with the soul's welfare". For Weil, then, needs of souls are not to be considered arbitrary, but rather prevail as very definite needs which can be responded to by means of a methodology. However, while Weil believes that a methodology does exist, she points out that it has never before been considered, at least not seriously enough. It is precisely the nature of this methodology that Weil outlines in an effort to explain how to respond to the needs of souls, and moreover, how to encourage in a people a sense of loyalty and restore them to their roots.

As alluded to above, this methodology takes as its starting point education[5]. Education, Weil points out, consists in providing motives[6]. She writes:

> To show what is beneficial, what is obligatory, what is good -- that is the task of education. Education concerns itself with the motives for

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[5]See Simone Weil, "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies," in George Panichas, ed., The Simone Weil Reader, (New York: Moyer Bell Ltd., 1977: 44-52) Weil suggest that education is an exercise of the faculty of attention. She writes: "Attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty, and ready to be penetrated by the object... Above all our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object that is to penetrate it." (p.49)

[6]Weil's conception of education is much the same as that developed by Plato. See Plato, The Republic, G.M. Grube, trans, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, 1974. In Book VII, Socrates affirms: Education "is not the art of putting the capacity for sight into the soul; the soul possesses that already but it is not turned the right way or looking where it should. This is what education has to deal with." (p.171) He further reveals that the young must be taught this in play since nothing worthwhile is learned under compulsion.

> effective action. For no action is ever carried out in the absence of motives capable of supplying the indispensable amount of energy for its execution.[7]

Weil sees her task, then, as offering a means by which certain motives can be realized and from which individuals can be directed toward what she describes as "the good".

Weil considers the different forms that a process of public action can assume. She notes that a system based on fear and hope is most common and is brought about by threats and promises. She also considers what she terms "suggestion", which she says is what Hitler employed and is based on coercion and repetition. Weil rejects these possibilities and instead turns to a means of education for public action that she terms as "expression". She suggests that expression differs from suggestion in that what is expressed is something that has already been considered in the thought of an the individual. In defining the term, Weil does not give specific examples of what would constitute "expression", but seemingly she employs it to suggest that it allows for the affirmation of what one thinks. She points out that the foundations of "expression" are such that they lay in the hidden structure of human nature.[8] She explains:

> It sometimes happens that a thought, either formulated to oneself or not formulated at all, works secretly on the mind and yet has but little direct influence over it. If one hears this thought expressed publicly by

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[7]Simone Weil, The Need for Roots, op.cit., p.182.

[8]Ibid., p.182.

> some other person, and especially by some one whose words are listened to with respect, its force is increased an hundredfold and can sometimes bring about an inner transformation.[9]

Weil considers this notion of "expression", then, as that which serves to connect the public with the private. That is to say, if what Weil describes as "expression" works in this way, and clearly Weil thinks that it does, then there exists an affinity here between the private and the public. In order for it to be effective, it must address and respond to an individual yet it encompasses many individuals all at once. Weil acknowledges that this method of public action is not likely to occur with regard to all public events, but certainly it holds true for some.

The notion of "expression" holds significance with regard to Weil's explanation of public action since it reveals, at least from Weil's viewpoint, that while the carrying out of an action is directed toward a whole people, it remains an individual, not a collective one. The action responds to the thought of an individual and not to the collective, (which is incapable of thought) and thus, as Weil says, it does not stifle "the resources concealed in the depths of each mind."[10]

In her earlier works, as explained above, Weil was deeply troubled by the oppressive nature of the collective and it was for this reason that she initially criticized the collective. In The Need for Roots, however, and again for reasons

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[9]Ibid., p.183.

[10]Ibid., p.184.

explained above, Weil not only expresses favour for collectives, but furthermore argues that they provide essential nutrients for human souls. In advocating "expression" as a form of public action it seems that Weil is able to reconcile the individual with the potentially oppressive force of the collective. It is as though having conceived of a way to free the individual from the collective that Weil is then comfortable in asserting that collectives are indispensable.

It is this method of public action, then, that Weil argues should be adopted. She argues that owing to certain obstacles that stand to obstruct the effectiveness of this form of public action, it is impossible for it to proceed from anywhere other than the State. At the same time, Weil is adamantly opposed to a system based on political parties and notes that a single party state would be the worst of all. For Weil, political parties represent a sick collectivity in that they devour souls. Certainly Weil would not see anything democratic in a system that supports political parties. Weil's criticism of collectives, and why she considers them to be oppressive and evil, is based on the fact that their concern is to impose their views, ideas, on members, thus stifling the ability for independent thought. A healthy collectivity would, then, be defined on the basis that it allows for individual thought. While Weil could not permit a party system, she does believe that there is a place for what she describes as associations, which would be formed on the basis of some common interest or task at hand and would not be permitted to have anything to do with ideas.

However, while this is so, Weil's calling for the breathing of a new inspiration into the people has to be spear-headed from somewhere and generally this ought to be a role assumed by the State. In order for "expression" to prevail as a vibrant method of public action, it must speak to individuals in much the same way as a friend would speak to a friend. Weil believed that for political relations to be successful there must be at least an air of friendship about them.[11] More specifically, she suggests that if the approach she has in mind is to have any influence at all, there has to be a notion of friendship, which as Andreas Teuber explains aligns with equality[12], between those who offer the directives and those who receive them. For Weil, then, it would seem that a feeling of loyalty on the part of citizens is dependent upon amiable and hence equitable relations between the governors and the governed. Similarly, those governing have to exhibit and maintain a genuine sense of loyalty to the cause at hand. However, when the State is held as an object of hatred, as was the case in France, Weil acknowledges that it would be difficult for the State to assume such a voice. At the same time, however, she notes that in order for words to be effective, they must have an

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[11]On the significance of friendship in Weil, see Andreas Teuber, "Simone Weil: Equality as Compassion," in Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, Vol.43, No.2, 1982: pp.221-237. Teuber suggests that for Weil, "a friendly regard for others creates the equality between people." She points out that Weil dismisses Aristotle's notion of friendship and instead opts for Pythagorean's. See pp.224-225.

[12]Ibid.

official character about them. For this reason Weil goes on to argue that the "[t]he leaders of Fighting France", who "constitute something analogous to a government"[13], are the only ones who are in a position to assume this role.

It is perhaps necessary to recall that Weil is writing The Need for Roots for the Free French and it is her task here to offer a means by which France can be returned to her people after the war. On this basis it is understandable why Weil would look to such a movement as that which alone is capable of such an endeavour. But what of other countries in the Western World who suffer from the same ills as does France, namely industrialization and the rise of the nation-state? In short, if a movement such as the Free French does not exist, how then, as Weil terms it, is the soul of a country to be refashioned? As indicated above, Weil believes that France has a responsibility to other nations since she is to blame for the undesirable outcome of the events of 1789. Weil suggests, then, that if France can be returned to its people, such a feat will serve as an inspiration to other nations, and moreover, Weil seems to suggest, France has a duty to offer this inspiration.[14] Weil notes that the French movement in London does not possess any governmental authority and because it is freely consented to, she adds, it has something of a "spiritual power" about it. She writes:

The unswerving loyalty displayed in the darkest hours, the blood split

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[13]Simone Weil, The Need for Roots, op.cit., p.184.

[14]Ibid., see p.186, p.189, and p.190.

> freely everyday in its name, give it the right freely to use the most exalted of words in the language. Its position is exactly as it should be for making known to the world the voice of France; a voice whose authority is not based on physical power, which was destroyed by the defeat, nor on glory, which was wiped out in shame; but, first, on an elevated plane of thought in keeping with the present tragedy, and secondly, on a spiritual tradition graven in the hearts of all peoples.[15]

The mission of the French movement in London, as this passage quoted at length reveals, is of a double nature. Not only is it to respond to the immediate interests of France, namely the enemy, but it also must adopt a spiritual platform.

Weil tends to introduce the spiritual element in an effort to defend her belief that public action, if it is to be beneficial, must aim toward achieving "the good". She asserts quite bluntly that "the good" is to be understood in a spiritual sense, for as explained in chapter one, it is a term that does not lend itself to definition. In this way, Weil returns again to her earlier premise concerning the earthly world and the other-worldly. She believes that above the earthly sphere exists a spiritual sphere and in this latter sphere, she argues, good is only good and produces only good.[16] Public action, or the voice of the French movement in London, must assume its course always keeping as its directive "the good".

Employing terms such as "the good" is undoubtedly problematic since evidently there does not seem to be any method on how it is that one is able to discern "the good", assuming that such a thing even exists. Clearly Weil believes

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[15]Ibid., p.189.

[16]Ibid., p.192.

that it does and, moreover, she does not seem at all baffled as to how it is to be attained. She suggests, quite simply, that the attainment of what is good can be determined owing to the effect that particular words or actions are likely to produce. To this end, careful consideration must be given to all the potential consequences that may result from every decision made. A decision that does not take into account all possible consequences is guilty of negligence and, therefore could not be considered responsible. But even having said this, Weil notes that since the decisions being made are human decisions, mistakes cannot be ruled out. The point remains, however, that unlike the outcome of decisions made by democratic institutions, mistakes would be lessened, or so Weil would argue.[17] She points out, for instance, that "one should always choose methods of action which contain in themselves an impulsion towards the good."[18] Again, this remark is representative of Weil's underlying idea that the destructive elements of modern society, such as oppression for example, cannot be overcome, yet while this may be so, efforts must continually be made to strive toward better conditions. As Weil notes: "Whoever writes verse with the ambition of composing as beautiful lines as those of Racine, will never write a beautiful line; and still less so if he doesn't even harbour that hope."[19]

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[17]Ibid., see p.193 and p.194 and p.208.

[18]Ibid., p.203.

[19]Ibid., p.208.

While the above explanations, as described by Weil, point to how "the good" is to be attained, they fail to adequately account for what precisely it is that should be understood as "the good". Weil offers a fuller understanding of this concept in connection with her idea of what constitutes truth, and, moreover, how such things come to reveal themselves to the individual. It is in offering a unified vision of these concepts, particularly as they relate to the art of politics, that Weil is able to disclose a society that she considers would be capable of responding to the needs of souls.

SCIENCE, RELIGION, AND TRUTH

In many ways, as already alluded to above, Weil finds herself resurrecting the political ideas borne to the Greeks, which for more than two thousand years have been granted little serious attention with regard to civic affairs. She believes, for instance, that politics ought to be regarded as an art of the highest category, and she adds that it has a close affinity to poetry, music, and architecture.[20] However, for a very long time, she notes, politics has never been afforded such recognition. That this is so is because politics has been regarded as a technique for holding and acquiring power. Almost as if having Machiavelli in mind, Weil asserts that power is not an end, but rather is a means towards procuring the art of politics. Just as a composer requires a piano to perform his

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[20]Ibid., p.206.

art, so too does politics require power, Weil suggests. However, "Fools that we are," she adds, "we had confused the manufacture of a piano with the composition of a sonata."[21]

Weil allows, then, that while power serves as a means by which politics can be practised, it should not be considered as an end in itself. Power may be necessary to politics, but when power acts as politics' objective, only destructive and meaningless directives will result. Weil suggests that the object of politics is not power, but justice.[22] Further, Weil equates justice with truth and to this end she argues that politics, then, must maintain truth as its objective. She writes, for instance:

> What is Justice, the same is also Truth. That is why when some one speaks Truth, we say: "He is Just". And when some one speaks Justice, we say: "He is true". It is really because Justice and Truth are the same thing.[23]

The replacement of power with truth means that rather than relying on force and coercion as the maintenance of power would dictate, politics needs to foster a dependency on such things as loyalty and compassion. Truth cannot be approached by means of force, or power, largely because the interests of these two objectives, namely truth and power, are fundamentally opposed. Moreover,

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[21] Ibid., p.209.

[22] Ibid., see p.206, for example.

[23] Ibid., p.273.

power responds to the collective and not to the needs of individuals whereas truth, as will be shown below, maintains an individual yet at the same time a universal applicability.

Truth, for Weil, is something that exists on a spiritual plane, but it is also something very much a part of the earthly world. Weil would argue that power is based on lies and falsehoods and for this reason it stands removed from reality. As a result of its emphasis on power, Weil reveals that modern society is consumed by a politics which knows only lies and falsehoods. What this means is that people are living in a world, which is void of any interest in truth, that seems to them an unreality, or put more precisely, something in which they cannot feel at home nor understand. Truth, however, where Weil is concerned, is to be understood as that which seeks to know reality. Truth is the most sacred of all the souls' needs[24] and like all needs of the soul, it must be able to assume an earthly expression. Such an expression manifests itself when it engages reality. This notion is perhaps better understood with regard to Weil's description of what it means to love truth. She writes:

> Love of truth is not a correct form of expression. Truth is not an object of love. It is not an object at all. What one loves is something which exists, which one thinks on, and which may hence be an occasion for truth or error. A truth is always a truth with reference to something. Truth is the radiant manifestation of reality. Truth is not the object of love but reality. To desire truth is to desire direct contact with a piece

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[24]Ibid., p.35.

of reality.[25]

Truth is not the object of love, but rather Weil conceives of love as a type of energy which fuels a desire for truth, or we might say, a desire to know reality. Truth assumes an active force which cannot admit either falsehood or error.

Weil criticizes modern society on the grounds that it has no, or at best very little, concern for truth and instead derives it motives from things which the human mind cannot love. More specifically, Weil's argument suggests that where there is no concern for good or evil, such as is the case in modern science, for example, any care for truth is rejected outright. Where any notion of truth, "the good" or morality, for instance, are absent, Weil believes such things cannot inspire love since they are mere facts considered singly and isolated, and without reference to anything.[26] Modern science, Weil argues, is not motivated by a search for truth, but rather is prompted by inferior motives such as self-aggrandizement and technical applications.[27] Weil adds that since the spirit of truth cannot be found in the motives of science, nor can it be found in science itself.[28] In short, since science is not motivated by a quest for truth, its conclusions cannot be indicative of truth.

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[25]Ibid., p. 242.

[26]Ibid., p.243.

[27]Ibid., see discussion on pp.243-246.

[28]Ibid., p.248.

Weil would say the same holds true for religion, philosophy and literature as well as for politics. Just as politics is motivated by power rather than justice or truth, it too cannot emit truth. In order to construct a political, or social, order that takes truth, or justice, as its objective, Weil believes that there first must be a reconciliation between science and religion. Modern science has been overcome by technical applications and has a materialist dependency and motivation about it, unlike the science founded by the Greeks which was regarded as a religious subject. Modern science, owing to its technical applications, Weil would argue, has created an "artificial universe".[29]

> The modern phenomenon of irreligion among the population can be explained almost entirely by the incompatibility between science and religion. It developed when the population of the towns began to be installed in an artificial world, the material expression of science. In Russia, the transformation was hastened by means of propaganda which, in order to uproot faith, relied almost exclusively upon the spirit of science and technical progress.[30]

Weil argues that the modern conception of science is largely responsible for the "monstrous conditions under which we live" and thus must sustain a transformation. Weil calls for the reconciliation of science and religion since in her understanding of the world, science and religion are in fact compatible. The true definition of science, according to Weil, is the study of the beauty of the world, the universe in which we live.

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[29]Ibid., see p.234 and p.235.

[30]Ibid., p.236.

In an effort to explain why it is necessary for politics to shoulder truth as its motive, Weil's argument focuses heavily on religion and other-worldly concerns. For this reason, her explanations are somewhat abstract, but her conclusions are tangible. It seems that for Weil nothing can be understood in isolation since all aspects of civilization must assume a certain affiliation. Indeed, the art of politics, she suggests, is "an art governed by composition on a multiple plane."[31] First, however, Weil begins her consideration of how to rejuvenate the modern world by suggesting that there needs to be a reconciliation between science and religion.

Weil suggests that the true definition of science is the study of the beauty of the world, the universe in which we live. Since science must be motivated by an object that it can love, Weil contends that this object is the beauty of the world, and moreover the harmony between one's mind and the universe.

> The savant's true aim is the union of his own mind with the mysterious wisdom eternally inscribed in the universe. That being so, how should there be any opposition or even separation between the spirit of science and that of religion? Scientific investigation is simply a form of religious contemplation.[32]

However, in the modern world, there is a split between science and religion, and moreover science has gained superiority since it is believed that truth lies within its jurisdiction.

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[31]Ibid., p.212.

[32]Ibid., p.250.

> In France, people question everything, respect nothing; some show contempt for religion, others for patriotism, the State, the administration of justice, property, art, in fact everything under the sun; but their contempt stops short of science.[33]

Weil acknowledges that there has been a significant "emptying of the churches" for which she says modern science is largely responsible. Even those who continue to go to church tend to go for the wrong reasons. Such church-goers believe that while science responds to the need for truth, religion -- though they feel a need for it -- is somehow unrelated to truth. Where Weil is concerned, the public is being deceived because modern science is not concerned with the spirit of truth. Weil further argues, however, that the spirit of truth is absent from "the whole of thought".

Science itself is not entirely responsible for this loss of the spirit of truth. The history of religion has also prompted a loss of the spirit of truth[34] since the meaning attached to such a concept has been transformed. Again, as in her explanation of the modern form of patriotism, Weil attributes the problem with Christianity to the Romans. She suggests that the transformation of Christian thought was probably connected with its transition to the rank of the official Roman

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[33]Ibid., p.228.

[34]Weil favours Christianity because she sees it as having occupied a history for France and for Europe. See Simone Weil, The Need for Roots, op.cit., p.88-89. At the same time she suggests that any religion which has universal applicability is "genuine". This definition would exclude Judaism. Weil also adds that individuals should be prepared to abandon their religion if it fails to be anything other than truth. See p.239.

religion. After this transition, Christian thought ceased to admit "any other conception of divine Providence than that of a personal Providence."[35] It is this transformation, which Weil suggests is not inherent in Christianity but rather is a by-product of Rome, that has led to the split between science and religion and degraded the spirit of truth.

> 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. But it is not a manifest incompatibility. It is incompatible with the scientific conception of the world; and in this case the incompatibility is manifest. Christians who, under the influence of education and surroundings, carry within them this conception of Providence, also carry within them the scientific conception of the world, and that divides their minds into two water-tight compartments: one for the scientific conception of the world, the other for the conception of the world as being a field in which God's personal Providence is exercised. This makes it impossible for them really to think either the one or the other.[36]

In place of personal providence, Weil advocates a conception of Divine Providence which embodies the order of the world and God's intention toward it. Weil conceives of Divine Providence as the regulating principle of the universe. "It is eternal wisdom, unique, spread across the whole universe in a sovereign network of relations."[37] The significance of this argument is further borne out by Weil's explanation:

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[35]Simone Weil, The Need for Roots, op.cit., p.251.

[36]Ibid., p.269-270.

[37]Ibid., p.272.

> Brute force is not sovereign in this world. It is by nature blind and indeterminate. What is sovereign in this world is determinateness, limit. Eternal Wisdom imprisons this universe in a network, a web of determinations. The universe accepts passively. The brute force of matter, which appears to us sovereign, is nothing else in reality but perfect obedience.[38]

Weil contends that forces in this world are determined by necessity. The part of the human being that is subjected to force is that which finds itself under the sway of needs. There is a part of the mind, however, that is not subjected to force and this has to do with thoughts. Weil suggests that since man is a thinking being, he is therefore on the same side as that which dominates force. However,

> So long as Man submits to having his soul taken up with his own thoughts, his personal thoughts, he remains entirely subjected, even in his most secret thoughts, to the compulsion exercised by needs and to the mechanical play of forces. If he thinks otherwise, he is mistaken. But everything changes as soon as, by virtue of a positive act of concentration, he empties his soul so as to allow the conceptions of eternal Wisdom to enter into it. He then carries within himself the very conceptions to which force is subjected.[39]

The universe submits to the will of God blindly, but human beings show their submission through intelligence and love in that the order of the world is an object to which they consent. Consent can be made manifest in different ways, but for Weil "Physical labour willingly consented to is, after death willingly consented to, the most perfect form of obedience."[40] As alluded to in Chapter 3 above, it is for

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[38]Ibid., p.272.

[39]Ibid., pp.277-278.

[40]Ibid., p.281.

this reason that in a well-ordered social life, labour ought to assume a society's "spiritual core". Labour, art and science are, for Weil, only different ways of entering into contact with the "divine order of the universe."[41]

Undoubtedly, with regard to political order, it is this aspect of Weil's thought which is both demanding and perhaps the most difficult to accept. Clearly Weil depends entirely on Christian concepts in order to illustrate a relation between the earthly and spiritual worlds. Moreover, she conceives of the world as being subjected to God's will which human beings consent to love and contemplate. It is in making this argument, however, that Weil assumes that religion and science can be reconciled. Such a reconciliation binds together the earthly world with the spiritual, and in this way, as will be made clearer below, Weil offers a form of spiritual politics. The implications of a reconciliation between religion and science allow her to fully develop the nature of the political order that she has in mind.

Religion and science are motivated by the love of the beauty of the world, and since they are both concerned with the contemplation of such beauty, Weil would argue that they are in fact harmonious.[42] Also, however, Weil tells us that the beauty of the world is the same as the order of the world, the only difference being the "type of concentration that is demanded, according to whether

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[41]See Richard Rees, Simone Weil: A Sketch for a Portrait, (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p.106.

[42]Weil, The Need for Roots, op.cit., p.281.

one tries to conceive the necessary relations which go to make it up or to contemplate its splendour."[43] Order and beauty are essentially the same thing: science hastens to explore the order of the world while religion, the beauty, which as noted above, are in fact one and the same. Eric Springsted suggests that Weil sees a reconciliation between science and religion in which the spirit of truth can be re-introduced into both through conceiving the world as obedient to God's will, and to which human beings consent. He adds: "It is a reconciliation which, [Weil] felt, could have the far reaching result of leading us to understand the sort of world in which we live, its relation to Good and how we are consequently to participate in it."[44]

The universe, for Weil, is not governed by brute force, but rather there exists an other-worldly or spiritual dimension which, she would argue, determines the order of the earthly world and thus cannot go ignored. However, it remains that:

> Today, science, history, politics, the organization of labour, religion even, in so far as it is marked by the Roman defilement, offer nothing to men's minds except brute force. Such is our civilization. It is a tree which bears the fruit it deserves.[45]

Weil holds that there is an order of the universe and she conceives of

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[43]Ibid.

[44]Eric Springsted, Christus Mediator: Platonic Mediation in the Thought of Simone Weil, (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1983), p.240.

[45]Weil, The Need for Roots, op.cit., p.281.

politics as that which participates in this order by itself constructing a social order. Politics is to be understood as an art form which responds to the earthly world while at the same time corresponding to the spiritual. In this way, Weil's idea of politics can properly be labelled as a spiritual politics, which strives to address utmost the needs of souls.

THE ART OF POLITICS

Uprootedness, or the disease of modernity, as described by Weil, is a malaise of infinite proportions since it infects an entire culture leaving a people with no sense of belonging, no sense of true loyalty, and no possibility of rejuvenation. The solution to this crisis is complex and multi-faceted since it must respond to all human environments in a consistent fashion. For Weil, the resolution to this plight of Western civilization is dependent upon what she describes as order. In fact, Weil says that the first of the soul's needs and "the one which touches most nearly its eternal destiny, is order."[46] Weil conceives of the world as a united whole, as a cosmos. Within this whole is a human order which Weil says should be the "subject uppermost in our minds".[47] Central to this human order for Weil is the notion that human beings have obligations. She describes order as a "texture of social relationships such that no one is compelled to violate imperative obligations

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[46]Ibid., p.9.

[47]Ibid., p.11.

in order to carry out other ones."[48] She adds that obligations ought to be compatible and when they are not, one is "made to suffer in his love of good". J.P. Little suggests that for Weil: "...it was the duty of every human being to understand the forces at work in the universe, an man's place in it, because a right understanding of that place was the only source of right action.[49]

Although, according to Weil, we aspire to such an order, it is something which we do not understand. She describes this momentum as our love of good and adds that it is the beauty of the world which steers us in this pursuit.

> ...we have everyday before us the example of a universe in which an infinite number of independent mechanical actions concur so as to produce an order that, in the midst of variations, remains fixed. Furthermore, we love the beauty of the world, because we sense behind it the presence of something akin to the wisdom we should like to possess to slake our thirst for good.
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> In a minor degree, really beautiful works of art are example of **ensembles** in which independent factors concur, in a manner impossible to understand, so as to form a unique thing of beauty.[50]

For Weil, the desire for good is "unique and unchanging" in every man and it is for this reason that human beings cannot resign themselves to a situation in which obligations are incompatible. Weil allows, however, that the idea of an order in

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[48]Ibid., p.10.

[49]J.P. Little, Simone Weil: Waiting on Truth, op.cit., p.61.

[50]Weil, The Need for Roots, op.cit., p.10.

which all obligations would be compatible may well indeed be a fiction. But at the same time she believes that human beings need to be guided by such a hope.

> If we keep ever-present in our minds the idea of a veritable human order, ...we shall be in a similar position to that of a man travelling, without a guide, through the night, but continually thinking of the direction he wishes to follow. Such a traveller's way is lit by a great hope.[51]

Weil believes that it is the responsibility of politics to construct a social order which is founded on obligations and would meet the needs of souls. She suggests that this type of a social or political order will correspond to the natural order of the universe, which she conceives of in a spiritual sense, and which encompasses goodness and truth. The political order is not only based on the order of the universe but, moreover, needs to participate in that order.

While The Need for Roots posits a spiritual dimension, Weil's analysis also most certainly reveals a secular intent. Her reliance on religion and spiritual considerations can perhaps be seen as the only means by which she was able to respond to the crisis of modernity, as she conceived it, and offer a resolution. For instance, Mary Dietz suggests that Weil "would have Jesus' compassion serve to exemplify the love of citizens for their earthly country, not for a realm outside the political world."[52] Indeed, Weil's attention throughout The Need for Roots focuses

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[51]Ibid., p.11.

[52]Mary Dietz, Between the Human and the Divine: The Political Thought of Simone Weil, (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Littlefield, 1988), p.176.

on the needs of human beings in this world, which she argues are far from being met, than with the afterworld. Even though ultimately her argument is based on a religious or spiritual conception of the universe, it is clear that when Weil speaks about loyalty, or compassion, she has very definite social relations and the earthly world in mind. She offers a form of what might be considered spiritual politics in so far as it is based on a spiritual conception of the universe and it responds to the needs of souls, that part of the human being which religion holds to be eternal. Weil does not, for instance, expound upon the rewards and punishments that an afterlife might offer, but rather employs a spiritual or other-worldly consciousness in order to make sense of this world, the needs of individuals and the relations they assume.

As explained above, Weil believes that there is a certain truth about the universe, revealed through its order and beauty, to which individuals need be reconciled. She seems to believe that there is an affiliation between the order of the universe, in a spiritual sense, and the souls of individuals. The task of politics is to inspire in a people a love for country which Weil believes it can do through a process of public action, or education, which she terms "expression". As noted previously, the object of politics is justice or truth which at all times should serve as its motive and guide its directions. This process becomes effective as a source of inspiration since it strives to recognize the good, or the truth, of the universe which then necessarily coincides with the good, or truth, that endures in human

souls. When politics assumes "expression" as a form of public action it does not dictate how individuals should think, but rather serves to illuminate that which already prevails in the human soul. It can do this when it maintains as its objective justice or truth, which necessarily assumes an attention toward the good.

A process such as this would seem to require maximum consideration of the implications forthcoming from decisions that are made. Decisions have to be made with the intention that they will produce what is at least considered beneficial or good. It is for this reason that Weil argues that attention must always be turned toward all possible consequences that a given decision might produce. Weil suggests that this method of political action "goes beyond the possibilities of human intelligence, at least as far as those possibilities are known."[53] She adds, however, that "it is precisely that which lends it its value."[54] When, as in modernity, decisions do not reflect a concern for justice or truth, but rather are driven by such things as power and privilege, Weil would argue that the consequences are nearly, if not, always, bad or destructive and cannot help but be otherwise. Having criticized modern politics in this way, Weil acknowledges that the system or process that she prescribes may not always produce good results, but certainly it will serve to adhere more to the good than does the present system. She writes:

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[53]Simone Weil, The Need for Roots, op.cit., p.208.

[54]Ibid.

> It is no use asking ourselves whether we are or are not capable of applying it. The answer would always be no. It is something which must be perfectly clearly conceived in the mind, pondered over long and often, planted permanently in that part of the mind where thoughts take root, and brought up whenever decisions have to be taken. There is then, perhaps, the chance that the decisions, though imperfect, will be good ones.[55]

Once again, here as elsewhere in Weil's thought, her intention is to conceive of an ideal, or perfection, which may serve as an object toward which human efforts should aspire. She never suggests that the ideal can be attained, but she does argue that an ideal is a necessary tool in order to give direction and provide a point of reference. She recognizes that oppression, for instance, cannot be eliminated -- it is part of the human condition -- but she does believe that a process can be set in place whereby such destructive elements are at least lessened. In the same way, she would argue that while the ideal cannot be attained, it is necessary to conceive it in the mind if there is to be any hope of improving the present condition.

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[55]Ibid.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

While the foundation for Weil's political argument is other-worldly, namely that the world is composed of two dimensions, it remains that her concern has everything to do with this world and not the world beyond. Weil's conception of the world is theological, but she does not subscribe to any doctrines, nor suggest that there is a particular church, or even God that individuals ought to acknowledge. From her earlier writings onwards she is left with the realization that there is something problematic or perhaps missing in modern society, and ultimately her search for an understanding of the world leads her to a consideration of the universe, the cosmos, in which a spiritual or other-worldly component necessarily comes into play.

In The Need for Roots, the final and lengthiest work that she wrote, Weil responds to the disconnectedness that would seem to be particularly inherent in the modern era. Since the time of the French Revolution, for instance, and the rise of the nation-state, she argues that the condition of uprootedness has become more and more prominent. What this means for individuals is that they are no longer connected in time or in space to anything beyond themselves, and Weil would likely question if they are in fact even connected to the latter. Uprootedness means that a people can no longer share in and receive nourishment from the

particular culture that has been handed down to them and serves to distinguish who and what they are.

In the wake of modernity we are left with a growing emphasis on individualism yet it is a vacant individualism fuelled by egoism and pride. For Weil, these same characteristics are also indicative of the modern nation-state in so far as it exists to celebrate pride, pomp, and glory, and hence national egoism. As a result of such an emphasis there no longer remains anything smaller than the state and in some cases larger, and more to the point, anything to which human beings can cling. The implication of this for Weil is that individuals cannot determine themselves in reference to anything and hence cease to know who and what they are. What remains is a battle of egos and blind ambition in which anything greater than the individual, save modern science, is denied outright. What has become modern science, or technology, pretends to know truth and provide truth, but again Weil's argument here is that modern science is not unique and like everything else in the modern era is motivated by ego and ambition.

In her earlier writings, which have not been the focus of this thesis, Weil's concern rested with the oppression of workers and more generally, the poor. While she argues that oppression is a part of the human condition and therefore cannot be overcome, she also argues that efforts can be made by which it is at least lessened. If oppression for Weil means that individuals be permitted to exercise both thought and action, then it would follow from this that they also

be permitted to exercise both thought and control over their lives. In her later writings Weil seems to harbour a similar concern yet she introduces the term "affliction" to describe the extent and depth of human suffering. Affliction, which is distinct from mere suffering, is a condition in which the soul or inner being is lacerated and consequently the individual left in an aura of utter hopelessness. This is precisely the condition that stands to confront individuals and modern society overall.

Having examined conditions of the modern age, then, it is Weil's intention in The Need for Roots to offer a means by which both human beings and society can be restored to health. Once again, she certainly does not provide a blueprint for a changed society, but rather points to a direction for change. Central to her prescription for change is the need for loyalty. That is, the need for individuals to go beyond egoism and blind ambition and instead exercise a genuine expression of loyalty to a realm of natural environments that serve to distinguish human life. Where Weil is concerned, a need for loyalty always exists, but the problem with modern society owing largely to the dominance of the nation-state is that it can no longer find an authentic or sincere expression. In order for loyalty to find such an expression, the social structure of society must ensue gradual change. For Weil, such change, however, can only be forthcoming on the basis of a spiritual rejuvenation, or the enlightenment of the soul of an individual and the soul of a nation. In order for this to occur, Weil's initial point of departure

from existing conditions is that individuals have to be given a country; that is, a home to which they really feel they belong. This further means that they have to be permitted to be able to exercise some control over their lives while at the same time recognizing that they share a common history and a common culture which stands to determine who and what they are.

In describing what it means to give individuals a home, Weil seems to return to her earlier premises in that she focuses on the role of labour and work. She explains, for instance, that workers need to exercise both thought and action in the realm of work, and moreover, need to enjoy property rights in the tools of their labour. She suggests also that there be workers' associations that would engage in responding to the needs and concerns of workers. Outside of the realm of work, however, Weil offers very little explanation concerning community or otherwise politically active groups. She is adamant about the danger of political parties and suggests that a one-party state would be worst of all, but her writings remain sparse with regard to what ought to replace these types of systems. At best, she suggests that associations ought to exist in order to respond to particular concerns. She argues that there ought not to be any groups or associations that have anything to do with ideas as this would lead to the same power-seeking bodies that can be equated with pseudo democratic political parties. Utmost in Weil's thought is that individuals be granted the freedom to think and that anything that might threaten this freedom ought not to be permitted.

At the same time, however, and possibly because she was writing in response to a war-torn country, she allows much authority and responsibility to rest with the state. Her intention was to reveal a means by which France could be returned to her people immediately following the war and what she sought most of all to avoid was any force or body that would stifle the thought of individuals. Again, although she calls for a particular form of education, she remains very vague on the details of structural political change.

However, while Weil does not elaborate on what ought to replace political parties, the force of her argument is borne out by her cautionary stance regarding contemporary political structures. She notes that there is something "woefully wrong" with a society that calls itself a democracy and in which all public institutions, including political parties, are hated and despised. When these are the conditions in which a people live, as Weil suggests was true for the French in 1940, they can never be themselves at home.

What can be discerned from The Need for Roots, is that individuals need to be able to exercise an expression of loyalty to all natural environments that serve to constitute human life. Presumably what this has to mean is that they feel a sense of connectedness to such environments and as a result are able to determine the conditions in which they live. It also remains for Weil that her resolution for change is on-going and is not a complete and single package that needs to be put into action. Her concern is that the suffering, or more specifically

the affliction, and hopelessness of individuals be recognized and responded to. Political parties harbour no such concern and instead serve only to perpetuate their own power which then verifies a system of power and a society determined by such. For Weil, a society that cannot respond to nor even hear the cries of its members is sick and needs to be restored to health. Where Weil is concerned, politics is an art that ought to serve the needs of people, not build barricades of power and privilege.

While Weil's argument is not founded on empirical evidence, and moreover rests on a capacity to view the world in a spiritual sense, she at the same time reveals seemingly legitimate concerns about the conditions of contemporary society. While we cannot grasp any concrete evidence to support her claim, it seems a reasonable proposition that human beings do need something to love; that we do have obligations to others; and that we do need a home and roots. In the absence of these components, which Weil suggests constitute human life, we are left only with isolated individuals battling against one another and more tragically, without any meaningful purpose or intent. It's a circus in which the ring-leaders might change from time to time, not that it makes any difference, and in which the rest are blindly compelled to adhere to a circular motion.

Upon reading Weil, and as a result of her quest, we are left querying whether or not what she says is true. Again, her argument is not backed by any,

what in modern times might be considered, legitimate evidence, but does this mean that it has no value? That is to say, ought we to reject it outright on the basis that it does not lend itself to proof? If so, and as is only too likely, then Weil's words are lost. In his preface to The Need for Roots, T.S. Eliot writes:

> This is one of those books that ought to be studied by the young before their leisure has been lost and their capacity for thought destroyed in the life of the hustings and the legislative assembly; books the effect of which, we can only hope, will become apparent in the attitude of mind of another generation.[1]

While for most of the last half century, the focus of study on Weil has been her religious writings, perhaps it is noteworthy that more attention is now being directed toward her political thought. However, while this is so, it is not likely that Weil's prescriptions for change will attract any serious attention in the realm of public affairs. The value of Weil's thought, then, lies in the fact that she allows us to think through a society in terms that exceed the boundaries of liberal thought. Her writings also serve to challenge much of our present understanding of the world, and she invites us to think through the nature of the society in which we live, and in which we might live. Again, at the time of writing The Need for Roots, Weil was not under any illusion that her ideas would be translated into action. Indeed, her hope then as now would be that they be given "attention".

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[1]T.S. Eliot, Preface to The Need for Roots, (New Haven: Routledge & Kegan Paul Inc., 1978, pp.v-xii), p.xii.

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