SIMONE WEIL AND THE INDIAN RELIGIOUS TRADITION

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By

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This work is concerned to explicate and analyze the writings of Simone Weil on the Indian religious tradition. It examines initially the extent and nature of her interest in India. It then outlines exactly what she said about Indian religious writings, in particular, the Bhagavad Gītā and Upaniṣads. The bulk of the study is an analysis of these interpretations as well as a study of her total religious vision in relation to Indian spirituality.

Dedicated to the memory of Mrs. Alice Hendricks

(1887-1971) and to three of the many she loved

David, Paul and Jonathan

PREFACE

When I have had occasion to discuss with scholars the topic of this dissertation, I have sometimes met with considerable scepticism and doubt about its worth as a scholarly endeavour. It is thus, perhaps, appropriate that I should reveal to the reader my reasons for choosing and writing upon it.

The questioning usually takes one or both of two forms. If, it is asked, you are interested in Indian religion why not choose a subject totally within the tradition - the editing and exegesis of a text for example, or the analysis of an Indian philosophic school. Why drag a Western thinker into it? If, on the other hand, you are primarily interested in Simone Weil, why not choose some aspect of her thought which is of greater importance in her writings -- her interpretation of Marx or Plato, for example, or her understanding of Christianity. Her writings on these subjects are of much greater quantity and she spoke with much greater authority on things within her own tradition, that of the West. Her writings on India, by contrast, are not much measured quantitatively, and in quality remain essentially the work of an amateur. Such arguments have some force and therefore must be answered at the outset.

The criteria for choosing a dissertation topic as a worthy subject are, of course, somewhat different from the criteria by which one judges the worth of the dissertation once it has been finished. There is an element of speculation and gambling in the

former which is not present in the latter. The scholar who chooses, researches and writes is operating, at least to some degree, on hunches and suspicions. The scholar who reads and judges has only to confront what lies before him. Nevertheless it is perhaps appropriate that I indicate to the reader those hunches and reasons which lay behind the writing of this thesis. In so doing the reader may become aware of the criteria which the writer has set for his own work, even though he may question and disagree with those criteria. They at least may be clearer to him and shed some light on the work as a whole.

The intuition of the author whether right or wrong was essentially this proposition: that Simone Weil was one of the most profound and original religious thinkers of the modern West and that this was not generally acknowledged only because she was not read more widely and thoroughly; that her writings on India were the writings of someone who knew Sanskrit reasonably well and who had meditated on Indian religious texts over three years of her very short life; and that the brilliance of her writings on the West both rendered the dichotomy amateur -- professional somewhat irrelevant and at the same time led one to suspect that an examination of her writings on India would open one to the deepest questions about Indian spirituality and about the relation of that spirituality to the spirituality of the West.

The reader of course is not asked to accept the assumptions of this argument, although he is asked to see its logic. If he

balks at the initial assumption, i.e. of the importance of Simone Weil as a thinker and asserts to the contrary that her thought is essentially mediocre in nature I can only beg to differ and hope that this thesis will not confirm his judgement but serve to give him second thoughts.

Simone Weil's writings on India are the writings of a supremely seriously western thinker who has addressed herself to the problem of seeing some sort of unity between the spirituality of the West and that of the East and of seeing this unity while not betraying the particular and unique genius of the western tradition to which she belonged and which she represented so eloquently in her person and thought.

The objection of the scholar who associates this type of project with attempts in the past which have only proved disastrous by virtue of the polemical purpose which lay behind them and the gross distortions in the interpretation of religious traditions which resulted from them bears some weight. I am not about to argue that Simone Weil has avoided the tendency of taking the religious phenomena of India and fitting them into an alien mould. She has done this at times as is clear from what follows. But there are moulds and there are moulds and I am not so terribly sure hers are any worse than others, including those of scholars who strive for some ideal given the name of "objectivity".

What I would attempt to make a case for is the project of unity itself. Scholars who disassociate themselves from this

project are within their rights to do so but they must acknowledge that in so doing they of necessity sever thought from its grounding in life. For ultimately life demands consistency of us for we must act according to some conception of what is true about things. Whether we represent these conceptions to ourselves clearly or not, they are nevertheless there and they are the basis of how we live.

If we demand from ourselves, as did Simone Weil, a rigorous consistency between life and thought, and if we add to this the project of a serious contemplation of an alternative religious tradition we are forced by the nature of thought to the search for unity. Thought is never satisfied with fragments. If we refuse the project of unity we either foresake the nature of thought itself or deny the consistency between life and thought.

The Western scholar who writes of the East without entering into the dialogue of East and West may be more "correct" in his reading of texts by virtue of "bracketing" his own concerns, but his writings will lack ultimate seriousness by virtue of a divorce between intellect and soul. He may argue that he is as serious a person but he is unwilling to write on the question of unity for he is not able to see it with any degree of clarity. This, of course, is rational and justified.

What must be kept in mind, however, is that Simone Weil's writings are those of a unified soul and intellect and that her writings are those of a soul's dialogue as much as of an intellect's

curiosity. By virtue of the extraordinary nature of the soul and intellect involved they are of unique value among writings of the West on India and worthy of investigation and thought.

I mentioned earlier that my expectation from the dissertation was that it would "open one to the deepest questions about Indian spirituality and about the relation of that spirituality to that of the West". In other words I expected from it profound questions rather than answers. It has always seemed to me that thought is led into its deepest essence more by virtue of learning something about questions rather than answers. My personal expectation has been fulfilled in the writing of what follows. I would propose to the reader that he give some consideration to judging the value of this thesis in terms of the clarity and depth of the questions raised than the more superficial level at which answers are offered.

The ultimate tribute to Simone Weil's greatness as a thinker is that once one has shown her wrong about some aspect of a tradition upon which she writes, one is, for the moment, often tempted to ask who is the worse for it. The question of the truth of her assertion still hangs in mid-air despite its often erroneous superimposition on a text. It is this lingering questioning which all of those who devote themselves to her writings experience in

one form or another that leads one to suspect her greatness in the history of human thought. Fortunately it is a question which, at this point at least, need not be answered. It need only be contemplated as a question - a question that leads one into thinking.

The research and writing of this dissertation seem to have been plagued by good fortune. Good fortune usually takes the form of a chance encounter with exceptional people. It is necessary and fitting that I should acknowledge who these people were in the case of this thesis. If the list is more extensive than is usually the case, it is only because my indebtedness is greater than most.

I am indebted initially to my teachers who supervised not only the writing of this thesis but also my studies throughout graduate school. Dr. G.P. Grant has allowed me to see what philosophy is for a philosopher. He seduced not only myself but most of my colleagues as well to being attentive to the wisdom of the ages and gave us some inkling of what was at stake in the modern disregard of this wisdom. At a practical level he gave me encouragement in pursuing the study of Simone Weil whom he understands much better than I. Dr. J.G. Arapura introduced me to the thought of India as perhaps only someone who comes out of that tradition is able to do. During his classes I came to feel that there was a possibility of dialogue between East and West which could command respect from scholars and thinkers of depth. Dr. P. Younger taught me that it was possible for a western man to come to understand and to love India. His concern over both my studies and this dissertation have been well beyond the call of duty. Whatever merits this thesis may have owes an incalculable amount to these three; its inadequacies, of course, are my own.

In addition, a number of other scholars at McMaster University took the trouble to read this thesis and to offer helpful criticism. My thanks go to Dr. A.W. Brink, Dr. D.R. Kinsley, Dr. E.J. Thomas, Dr. J.C. Robertson, Dr. L. Greenspan and Dr. T.R.V. Murti for their interest. I must single out the latter two in this respect for Dr. Greenspan had taught me much about modern religious thought at an earlier stage in my career, and Dr. Murti taught me Vedanta and Madhyamika. The influence of both is to be found in what follows.

On a more impersonal note I extend my gratitude to the Ontario government who financed my graduate studies and to the Canada Council who financed a research year in India and Paris as well as the year in which the writing of this work took place here in Canada. Banaras Hindu University very kindly opened the resources of its Institute for the Advanced Study of Philosophy for my use while I was in India.

The hospitality extended to myself and to my family while abroad made the researching of this dissertation somewhat of a treat. Bodhi, Gita and Abdul Raheem made our stay in Banaras a most rewarding personal experience. The generosity of Mrs. Robert Ferrie allowed us to experience the serenity and grandeur of the Himalayas. In Paris, the hours spent with Soulange Pinton, Robert Jaulin and Monique Gutkowski have left my wife and myself with almost dreamlike memories of that hauntingly beautiful city.

Professor André Weil and Mlle. Simone Pétrement conversed with me at length about their personal memories of Simone Weil and their reflections on her thought. They provided me with insights which it is almost a privilege to have.

On returning to Canada, I found myself indebted to Mr. & Mrs. L. Weldon who, out of friendship for my parents, lent me their quiet cottage in the Haliburton Highlands where the bulk of what follows was written. Mrs. M. Belec and Mrs. R. Spencer are responsible for the typing of the manuscript.

I beg leave finally to acknowledge my personal debt to my family. The writing of any work of complexity takes its toll in personal sacrifice more from those who live with the author in their midst than from the author himself. I am indebted to my parents and to those of my wife both for their tolerance and understanding and for their encouragement. My children who share the dedication of this work trooped around the world with me and inspired me to write something worthy of them. Of my wife, Bernadine, what can one say - in this as in all things, without her there would be nothing.

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PRELUDE

Long ago in a far place there lay a small village nestled in a valley beside a mountain. At times things were pleasant in the village but at other times there was violence and resentment not to mention the plague which swept through the village from time to time. A feeling that all was not right in the village lay under the surface in the minds of most villagers. Many thought that things were better on the other side of the mountain but no one was sure for the mountain was high and steep and most thought it impossible to climb.

One day a man left the valley and was seen to be heading in the direction of the mountain. He was gone for a number of years and most had given him up for lost. But one day he returned and claimed to have gone to the top of the mountain and to have seen the other side. He described the vision in terms of extraordinary bliss and said that from the top of the mountain he saw none of the suffering that afflicted the village. When pressed to describe the bliss he would sometimes attempt to answer in terms the villagers could understand from their lives but finally he would give up and say it was like nothing that the villagers had experienced in the village. At other times he remained silent about the vision and would speak only of the path that led from the valley to the horizon from which he had experienced the vision.

The man taught for many years and had followers who learned from him in the hope someday of treading the path that he had trod. He died an old man from an ailment but those who were present at his death said that his dying had an air of unreality about it and that he had died only when he wanted to.

Some time passed before a second man from another part of the village left the valley and he also returned a number of years later to teach. He did not speak of the vision of which the first had spoken although he seemed to hint at it at times. Many villagers thought he must have seen from the horizon or he would not have been able to say the things he did. He spoke for the most part of the village, of how it was run and how it ought to run. He entered into discussion with the villagers in a way the first had not and because he spoke on a subject about which the villagers themselves had had experience and felt themselves to know something there was some antagonism to his teaching. He was clever enough not to offend his critics too much but toward the end of his life an incident arose and many of the villagers claimed his teachings threatened the order of the village and he was put to death. Those present at his execution said that he died serenely, confident that he had lived as a man should.

It was some years later before a third man entered the village claiming to have come from the top of the mountain. He spoke, however, not of the vision nor of the village very much. His attention seemed to be caught by a villager who was laying sick on the side of the road. Those who were near him at the time claimed that they had overheard him asking himself why this man should suffer and not he. Most thought him mentally unbalanced for he exhausted himself over concern for people such as these. Indeed it got him no thanks for his troubles but only brought him into conflict with the authorities who finally executed him in a most violent way. He died in agony and he died young.

INTRODUCTION

PROBLEMS CONCERNING SIMONE WEIL'S INTEREST IN AND FAMILIARITY WITH INDIAN RELIGIOUS LITERATURE

Among the many subjects touched by the lucid and penetrating mind of Simone Weil are a number of references to India and Indian religious texts. Although primarily concerned with the politics of France and Europe in her youth and later with thoughts about Christian and Greek spirituality during the years of her stay in Marseilles, New York and London (1940-1943); she does seem during the latter period to have become interested in traditions which were not those of the Occident. Among these her writings reveal interest in elements of the Indian, Chinese, Japanese and Tibetan traditions as well as much of the world's folklore.

Simone Weil seems to have been concerned primarily with mysticism in her interest in the East.[1] She was, for example, more interested in Taoism than in Confucianism in the Chinese tradition. Insofar as Japan is concerned she was almost solely interested in Zen Buddhism. She was fascinated by the Tibetan mystic Milarepa but in little else of Tibet. The one notable exception to this is her writings on the Bhagavad Gītā which combine a concern with mysticism with a concern for the social and ethical questions to which it addresses itself.

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[1]I mean by "mysticism" that form of spirituality among men which is oriented to an immediate experience of the Absolute.

Her references to world folklore range wide geographically. They include elements from African, Eskimo, Irish, Scandinavian, Welsh, American Indian, Australian and Indian legends among others. Here again the emphasis is on mysticism for the stories are interpreted as mystic allegories of man and God and there is little or no interest in the particular historic or social milieu out of which they arose.

Insofar as Simone Weil was concerned with non-western spiritual and intellectual life, her interest in India seems to be of greatest depth. This is testified to by a number of obvious criteria. The number of references to Indian religious texts exceeds those of other oriental classics. More important, perhaps, is the fact that she took pains during the last three years of her life to learn Sanskrit, and, as her translations from the Bhagavad Gītā and Upaniṣads reveal, achieved a basic understanding of the principles of the language even if it was not the expertise she had accomplished in Greek. That her interest was not solely academic is revealed by a detail from her personal life. Her way of indicating to her mother and her friend Simone Petrement that she was about to die was the phrase "Pense à Kṛṣṇa" which she included in her last letters.[1] It was to say "think on God". The Bhagavad Gītā and the figure of Kṛṣṇa, in particular, seem to have been very close to her heart.

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[1]See the letters to her mother of April 17 and June 9, 1943 reprinted in Ecrits de Londres et derniers lettres (p. 235, 242). Simone Pétrement's letter has not been published but she told me personally of this expression occurring in Simone Weil's last letter to her before she died.

The place that India had in her life and thought can be outlined with reasonable accuracy. Her general life is well known from the testimony of people who knew her and from the biography of Cabaud. Born of sophisticated and highly intelligent liberal Jewish parents, Simone Weil was brought up in a milieu which represented the best of that historical and spiritual phenomena which stemmed from the French "enlightenment". Her childhood and student friends and acquaintances now comprise much of the present political and intellectual elite of France; her brother one of the world's most brilliant mathematicians.

Considered a prodigiously brilliant scholar as a youth, she, like most of her peers at Lycée Henri IV and the Ecole Normale Supérieure, fell under the influence of Alain (Emile Chartier) under whom she studied philosophy. There was no oriental philosophy taught at either of these schools at this time and it is impossible to find any evidence of interest in the East on the part of Simone Weil dating from this period.

Following her graduation she taught school in the early thirties although her interest seems to have centred primarily around European politics and the working class movement. This is testified to by her writings and activities during this period. Her brother André Weil was in India for two years in the early thirties but she does not seem to have become interested at that time.

The earliest reference to any interest in India is in a letter to Father Perrin in 1942. She wrote:

> Au printemps 1940 j'ai lu la Bhagavad Gītā. Chose singulière, c'est en lisant ces paroles merveilleuses et d'un son tellement chrétien, mises dans la bouche d'une incarnation de Dieu, que j'ai senti avec force que nous devons à la vérité religieuse bien autre chose que l'adhésion accordée à un beau poème une espèce d'adhésion bien autrement catégorique.[1]

There is clearly a connection between her interest in the Bhagavad Gītā in 1940 and her rejection of pacifism following Hitler's invasion of Praque. Her earlier connection with pacifist groups she severed during this period. It is difficult to say for certain whether an earlier reading of this text influenced or brought about her decision, or whether, on the other hand, she had made her decision independent of any consideration of the Gītā and used it later in thinking through the consequences and justification of her rejection of non-violence and her support for de Gaulle. The latter seems more probable by virtue of the fact that her mention of the influence of the Bhagavad Gītā on her life she dates as 1940. She would have dated it earlier if it had been so.

All that can be said for certain is that the early references to India in her notebooks which date from 1940 centre initially on the Bhagavad Gītā and in particular on the moral

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[1]Simone Weil, Attente de Dieu, p. 46.

problems presented by participation in warfare. Her interests, of course, soon broadened to other philosophical and religious questions more removed from the political actualities of Europe. This interest occurred at the same time as her ever-deepening interest in the roots of Western spirituality -- the Greeks and Christianity in particular.

It is during this period that we have her efforts to learn Sanskrit in Marseilles and her translation of texts from the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gītā. She never gave this up entirely for she returned to Sanskrit translation during the last year of her life while in London. How she found time for this when one takes account of the enormous output of her writings during this year as well as her increasingly grave illness is almost beyond comprehension. This return to "la langue de Kṛṣṇa" which, she wrote to her mother in the last months of her life, gave her so much joy, seems to the present author inexplicable on any other hypothesis than that the depths of her soul longed for something which turned her away from the West and to the East. It turned her not only to Athens and Jerusalem but, one is tempted to say, beyond to the Himalayas and to the Ganges. But more of this later.

Simone Weil's writings on the religious experience of India, in spite of the fact that it is more extensive than her writings on the other oriental traditions, is nevertheless fragmentary. She wrote neither books nor essays on any subject primarily concerned with the Indian tradition. Her writings are, for the most part,

concise and unelaborated jottings put down in her Cahiers. The longest of them comprise only a few paragraphs; the shortest only a passing reference. It is not their quantity which would make one feel that they are worthy of close study but rather their quality.

They must be read not as if they were the work of a scholar whose full-time occupation over a long life was that of Indologist. Rather they must be treated as what they are -- the grappling of one of the most extraordinary Western figures of this century with the spirituality of the East. They are the work of a woman whose life was no less remarkable than the fifteen volumes which comprise her writings. A woman who was dead at thirty-four.

Nevertheless legitimate questions do arise as to the extent of her knowledge of the religious and philosophical literature of India and of her competence to make pronouncements upon the meaning of the texts she read. There is the initial question of which texts she read, of her competence in Sanskrit, of her awareness of traditional Indian commentaries on these texts and of what modern scholarship was saying in the areas with which she was concerned.

Connected with these questions is the matter of how and why she read certain texts -- of her intellectual "technique", if one may use the term. Here it is a question of why she read certain texts and not others, of how her mind operated in the reading of a text, of what concerns and questions she brought to these readings.

To deal with the latter question first, it would be proper to describe Simone Weil's intellectual method as selective rather than comprehensive. She seems to have had an intuitive sense for what was important and central in any field of study. She tended to zero in on this core material and to ignore in many cases, almost totally, what she considered to be peripheral. This technique can be seen at work in any number of areas.

In the field of science, for example, she seems to have read the works of Archimedes, Descartes, Galileo, Vieta, Newton and some of the popular works of Planck. All of her writings on science revolve essentially around these points. In a field of study such as English literature she reveals some acquaintance with Dickens' and Blake but primarily she read Lear and Hamlet by Shakespeare and some of the poetry of the metaphysical poets.[1] There is little mention of anything else. Her knowledge of the Greeks was extensive and yet her writings on Plato, for example, constantly return to a few passages which she develops in the manner of thematic development in a symphony. Much of the power and order of her writings stem from an almost rhythmic return to certain nuclear texts and ideas.

This method has, of course, advantages and disadvantages. Its advantage is obvious. It allowed her to develop the insights,

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[1]This is, of course, only a deduction made from the references in her writings.

clearly revealed in her writings, which she had into those texts she did study. In addition her method allowed her to cover considerable territory. Her writings range over such diverse fields as Greek literature and philosophy, Christian thought, modern philosophy, classical and modern science, the politics of the thirties, medieval history and oriental religion. Her readings of the Greeks, of Marx, of Christianity, although controversial, rank with the most stimulating and perceptive of modern times.

The disadvantages of the method are somewhat less obvious and take the form of considerable gaps in her knowledge and some surprising omissions in things to which she paid attention. It also led her at times to dismiss summarily certain thinkers whom it might have profited her to consider more seriously. An example is found in her study of modern philosophy. For all of her writings on Marx in her youth, there is very little indication in her writings that she ever read Hegel very carefully. Her remarks on Hegel are very few and singularly unilluminating.

Simone Weil's method seems to have begun with interest in a text which she felt to be important. It consisted, if possible, in reading the text in the original language. It proceeded often by the translation of passages which she particularly wanted to meditate upon. In addition to her extensive reading in Greek which she seems to have read almost as fluently as she read French, she read St. John of the Cross in Spanish, Machiavelli in Italian, Marx and

Goethe in German and Shakespeare and Herbert in English. Cabaud mentions the fact that when Simone Dietz pointed her attention to Milarepa she immediately began the study of Tibetan in order to be able to read him without the hindrance of a translation.[1]

Simone Weil's treatment of India seems to be almost a classic example of her method of work. As we have noted, she was attracted initially to the Bhagavad Gītā in the spring of 1940. During the period from 1940-1942 while in Marseilles she learned Sanskrit, receiving some instruction from René Daumal, a former classmate at the Ecole Normale Supérieure. She seems to have learned the language solely to be able to read this text in the original. She went on, of course, to read and translate passages from the Upanisads as well, but this seems to have been secondary as we shall see upon closer examination of the material.

With the aid of some degree of speculation, it is possible to reconstruct from the manuscripts of Simone Weil something resembling the following picture of the process of her thought.[2] Following her

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[1]It is unclear how far she went in the study of Tibetan. Consideration of time alone would indicate she could not possibly have got very far. She was dead within a year, full of other preoccupations, from the time she began.

[2]This speculation is based partly on a study of the manuscripts and partly on conversations with Simone Pétrement and André Weil, her closest friend and her brother.

initial reading of the Gītā in French there was the determined and successful effort to learn Sanskrit. She then, having obtained the Sanskrit text of the Gītā translated and meditated on those passages which interested her. She wrote down her thoughts, her exegesis of the text, in her Cahiers where most of her thinking took literary form during this period. Her exegesis is to be found in the Cahiers, her translations both in the margins of her French edition of the Gītā and on separate sheets of paper not part of the Cahiers. Her translations of the Upaniṣads are to be found also on such sheets.

Since most of Simone Weil's writings on India are to be found in her notebooks published under the title Cahiers and La Connaissance Surnaturelle it is important to understand the nature of these writings.[1] It is obvious that these were the workshop of Simone Weil's mind and ought not to be judged or assessed in quite the same manner as her essays.

A further question has been raised by some regarding the nature of the writings to be found in her Cahiers. It has been pointed out that Simone Weil was a student of Alain and that Alain

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[1] La Connaissance Surnaturelle is actually the fourth volume of the Cahiers. It comprises those notebooks written in New York and London. For some reason, known only completely to the editor, they have been given a separate title and published by a different publisher. While the documents which comprise the Cahiers were left in the hands of Thibon in Marseilles those which comprise La Connaissance Surnaturelle were published by Simone Weil's family. It is undoubtedly the fact of different literary executors which accounts for these writings, which form an obvious unity, being published separately.

had taught his students to spend two hours at the writing desk each day. The technique to be used was to write out an argument and then to write out the opposing argument. However, there is little intrinsic evidence in the text itself to support the contention that this was Simone Weil's precise technique for there is little evidence that she is arguing against positions she thought to be true. Indeed, there is an amazing consistency in the writings of the Cahiers. It is a most dangerous criterion to apply to her notebooks for it allows one to assert that she didn't really mean things that she wrote, which is clearly untrue.

It makes more sense to see her Cahiers as a forum in which she wrestled with problems not by writing out contrary or contradictory arguments but rather grapling with a problem by indicating all the nuances and problems posed, for example, by a certain text. In the case of India, for example, it is most commonly the problem of reconciling the overwhelming transcendence of God in her own thought with those elements of the Indian tradition which spoke of the Absolute as immanent. It is more sensible to think of the Cahiers in particular as "thought" not in the sense of object but of activity. In the particular case of the subject of this dissertation it is the working out of the logic implicit in the nuclear terms of Simone Weil's thought -- terms such as "malheur", "obéissance",

"attention", "nécessité", etc. in relation to the logic implicit in nuclear terms of Indian spirituality -- terms such as prakṛti, ātman, Brahman, duḥkha, dharma, etc.

Having dealt with the question of "how she read", there is the equally important question of "what she read". This can be deduced in part from what is present in her library which is still, in part at least, intact in Paris, and in part from an observation of the references in her works. Simone Weil's interest in India seems to have been centered almost exclusively around the Bhagavad Gītā and the Upaniṣads. Here again we see her instinct for what is central and important for it is these texts which the tradition seems to have judged to be important. There is no indication in her writings of any interest in or reading of the Dharma Śāstra literature, the Rg Veda or the classical Indian systems, aside from one or two remarks on Śankara. She seems to have had a minimal interest in early Buddhism; she does not indicate much knowledge of the Pāli canon nor is there any indication that she ever studied or desired to study Pāli. Her references to Buddhism are almost always in the form "some forms of Buddhism" and by this she seems to have in mind Mahāyāna Buddhism. It is probable that her interest in Buddhism centered around the writings of D.T. Suzuki on Japanese Zen. There are references to Suzuki's books in her Marseilles

notebooks and there is a list of nine of his books in the New York notebooks.[1] It is unclear however whether or not she read them. One of these books was Suzuki's commentary on the Lankāvatāra Sūtra.

Insofar as modern Indians are concerned it would seem that it was only Ramakrishna who interested her. There are four or five references to his delightful parables although nothing more extensive than this. She makes only one or two references to Gandhi and this to express disagreement with his doctrine of ahiṃsa. There are no references to Aurobindo, Tagore or to other modern Indian thinkers.

She seems to have had some knowledge, at least, of some of the stories from the Rāmāyana. She makes reference to Rāma more often than to any other Indian legendary figure than Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. She has an almost total disinterest or ignorance of the Śaivite and Tantric tradition which is somewhat surprising, for reasons to be examined later.

It would seem that Simone Weil read no secondary writings on either the Upaniṣads or Bhagavad Gītā. Her personal library is singularly lacking in secondary writings on any subject. She seems, for the most part, to have fed intellectually almost solely on primary materials. There is, for example, no indication that she

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[1] La Connaissance Surnaturelle, p. 117.

read Lamotte's valuable French commentary on the Bhagavad Gītā. She worked from the French edition of the Bhagavad Gītā of Levi and Stickney as well as the French and Sanskrit editions of both the Gītā and Upaniṣads of Senart.

Of somewhat greater importance is the question of her spiritual attitude to the texts she read. In the case of a religious text it makes some difference whether one views a text as revelation or not, and if so, what one understands by revelation. Indian commentators on the Upaniṣads and the Gītā, for the most part, assume these texts speak with a degree of authority which modern western commentators would not be inclined to grant them. The former are śruti for a traditional Hindu and the latter smṛti of the highest order.[1] For scholars trained in modern western critical techniques they are human expressions, of the order of genius perhaps, but with the limitations of finite intelligence if not the inconsistencies of multiple authorship.

Simone Weil fits neither category exactly, although in two important respects she is closer to the traditional Indian bhāṣya

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[1] Śruti and smṛti mean literally "that which is heard" and "that which is remembered" respectively. The former is sacred knowledge present from the beginning and transmitted through speech by Brahmans from generation to generation. The second is sacred knowledge which is remembered and which possesses slightly less authority than śruti by virtue of its greater reliance on the contingency of human memory.

than to a modern Western critical analysis. She assumes, for example, a unity of thought in these texts. They teach one doctrine which may have multi-faceted aspects but certainly not inconsistencies. She would not be inclined to assert contradiction in the manner of Edgerton, or even of the much more moderate criticism of Zaehner. She is similarly uninterested in any theories of textual development in the manner of Garbe or Otto on the Gītā or of Ranade and Belvakar on the Upaniṣads.

She assumes an authority for the texts which brings her close although not identical to a traditional Hindu. She demands that all great writing be given a degree of attention as if it were man's sole access to the truth. These texts are guides to thought about the human condition because they are divinely inspired in the sense that their authorship is that of egoless personalities who because they are spiritually transparent allow truth to flow through them. The proof for her that they are divinely inspired is, in a sense, that they are anonymous. In this respect she is close to Śankara's doctrine of the impersonality and self-evidence of truth.[1]

She is different from the traditional Hindu in that other writings assume for her equal authority. She would place the

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[1]This is not the place for a detailed discussion of Simone Weil's notion of divine inspiration. The important matter at this point is to note the high degree of authority which Simone Weil grants these texts. The nature and source of this authority will be dealt with later in chapter four.

writings of Homer, the Pythagoreans, Plato and the Gospels, in particular that of John, as speaking with equal authority. And although she does not assert self-contradiction in the Gītā and Upaniṣads she does puzzle over contradictions which she sees between Upaniṣadic doctrine, for example, and writings such as those of Plato which are of equal authority for her.

In spite of the high esteem she holds for Indian religious texts, her comments are not of unreserved approval. She criticizes, for example, the Indian notion of transmigration as being unconducive to charity and the Bhagavad Gītā and Upaniṣads as offering little insight into that which is, as she put it, a priori in human behavior.[1]

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[1]The actual quotation in the case of the latter is as follows. Its fragmentary nature makes it somewhat enigmatic although some comments in chapter four may shed light on why it is fragmentary.

> Des actes qui élèvent et abaissent, comme les mouvements du gouvernail de profondeur dans un avion, indirectement. Mais qu'en sait-on? Comme on sait que la géométrie a une application technique, par l'experience?
>
> Oui mais expérience singulièrement limitée. Car je ne vais pas me mettre, par exemple, à voler, pour voir l'effet du vol sur l'âme.
>
> L'observation d'autrui doit suppléer, mais c'est difficile.
>
> Qu'est-ce qui, là-dedans, est a priori, qu'est-ce qui est a posteriori? Kant n'aide que faiblement à s'en rendre compte. Les Upaniṣads n'aident guère. La Gītā non plus, car le dharma . . . . . (Cahiers I, p. 164).

Nevertheless, on the whole, Simone Weil is reluctant to be critical of these texts. When there is something in them which she finds difficult to reconcile with some other aspect of her thought she is more inclined merely to express puzzlement or to maintain silence. This is dictated, undoubtedly, by a certain sense of humility at being an outsider, someone from the West, exegeting the texts of an oriental tradition; if not more strongly a feeling of corporate guilt at being part of a society which she saw as exploiting the Indian among other nations and uprooting the tradition in the process. No small part of this insensitivity on the part of the West was due to a feeling of superiority not only in its technology but in its intellectual and spiritual tradition, a sentiment from which Simone Weil recoiled with horror. She did not react as did some Westerners who made extravagent claims for the wisdom of the East[1] or who minimized the spiritual genius of the West.[2] She reacted much more sensibly by taking Indian texts to her attention and contemplating and thinking about them while still acknowledging and deriving her basic spiritual and intellectual

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[1]Schopenauer and Deussen, for example.

[2]The theosophists or moderns such as Alan Watts and the hippies.

diet from the nourishment the West had to offer. Part of this attention, however, derived from a reverence for these texts and resulted in the refusal to assert self-contradiction of them which for any serious thinker is the ultimate in contempt.

Her most important difference with traditional Indian commentators however is the basic fact that intellectually and spiritually she is a child of the West -- and in addition of the modern West. One must acknowledge initially that she is rooted in her own understanding of the Greeks and of Christianity. As such, she assumes a certain function for reason; she thinks of society in terms of justice and charity and of the universe in terms of God and creature. Moreover she is a modern. She has experienced the profound trauma of the Western religious and philosophical tradition broadly since Descartes, but more particularly in the last century. One who has experienced the milieu of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud will not write of dharma, tyāga and kāma in the same way as one who has not. She is indifferent to modern scholarship but not to modern thought at its deepest.[1]

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[1]I am not arguing at this point for the superiority of her approach but only attempting to establish some criteria for judging her writings which is appropriate to what is being judged. To judge an orange by saying that it is not a good apple is hardly a sensible judgement! To judge Simone Weil's writings by criteria wholly within the Indian tradition and say that she has not written a good bhāṣya misses the point as much as to say that she was a poor scholar and to leave it at that. She makes no pretences to being either.

Simone Weil is a serious modern Western thinker attempting to come to terms with Eastern (in particular Indian) religious and philosophical thought. The problems she faces are those of any serious Westerner who understands his own tradition. The eminence of her own writings on the Western tradition qualify her to speak and to be judged on somewhat different criteria than those of scholarship alone.

Simone Weil grew up in the milieu which produced the philosophy of the absurd. The France of her day experienced the nihilism of modern German thought and politics not as one who perpetrates but as one who suffers. There is bound to be an element of terror and urgency in her exegesis which will be alien to a traditional bhāṣya if not to the texts themselves. In a sense, to examine her writings on the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gītā is to ask whether these texts can speak to this terror which lies at the heart of the modern West, and if they can, in what way. To say they cannot will be to relegate them to the rank of the curiosities of dusty inky scholars.

In practical terms, the dissertation will proceed initially to see what she says about Indian religious thought as it presents itself principally in the Bhagavad Gītā and the Upaniṣads. Following that it will proceed to examine whether or not the texts are actually

saying what she says they are saying. The next chapter is an explication of her writings; following in the second, third and fourth chapters is an analysis and criticism. As such the dissertation is not a "judgement" so much as a continuation of the project initiated by Simone Weil -- an attempt to see wherein lie both the unities and the contradictions between the spiritual experience of the West and that of India.

CHAPTER I

WHAT SIMONE WEIL WROTE ABOUT INDIA

A clear statement of what Simone Weil wrote about the Gītā and the Upaniṣads in particular, and India generally, necessitates an introduction of the principle themes in her complete writings, of the basic categories of her thoughts. Her comments on these texts are not intelligible by themselves. They must be seen within the context of her writings as a whole.

This chapter is an "explication" of Simone Weil's thoughts on Indian religion. Its purpose is to gather together the comments she made and to make explicit that which is implicit in these comments, to make intelligible certain references and terms which are foreign to the Indian religious and philosophical tradition but which comprise the main categories of Simone Weil's thought. Its method is to construct a framework around these comments which makes their meaning more apparent by clarifying the terminology she uses in these writings.

Simone Weil's writings on Indian texts can be broadly categorized as falling under two broad headings, obedience and transcendence.[1] Both describe man's relationship to perhaps the central category of Simone Weil's thought, that of necessity (la nécessité). In Indian terms we may roughly translate it into the terms of dharma and mokṣa and their relationship to saṃsāra whether that be thought of in terms of māyā, prakṛti, karma, or whatever. It is

essentially a description of the human condition, of man's situation being born into a world of which he is not the master and which does not satisfy his desire for good, and the form that his freedom from this condition can take.

The category of "necessity" is central to Simone Weil's view of nature, both human and non-human. Her point of departure is a short passage from Plato's Republic which I quote in her own translation.

> Les choses nécessaires, il les nomme justes et belles, car il est incapable de voir ou de montrer à autrui à quel point diffèrent en réalité l'essence du nécessaire et celle du bien.[1]

The themes and nuances of this passage echo through all of her writings. The realm of necessity which comprises the entire physical universe and almost the entirety of human social activity is characterized by laws whose essential feature is their total indifference to the good. The fundamental human error is to mistake what is necessary for what is good, to see good in necessity, providence in chance.

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[1]La Source Grecque, p. 90 (The Republic, IV, 493c.).

Since God and the good are equated for Simone Weil, one necessary aspect of the correct conception of God is to conceive of Him as absent from the universe. It is a mistake to conceive of Him as acting in the sphere of the natural,[1] or more correctly it is a mistake to conceive Him as having power in the universe. Man has the choice of worshipping a God who is all-powerful or a God who is good. If God has power in the world He cannot be excused for not exercising this power to alleviate, for example, the suffering of children. He is therefore not good. If He is good it is because He is unable to intervene in creation. In a passage making reference to the Bhagavad Gītā, she writes:

> Dieu ici-bas ne peut être que tout à fait impuissant. Car toute puissance limitée est une union de puissance et d'impuissance, mais d'une unité d'ici-bas, au lieu qu'en Dieu l'unité de ces contraires est au plus haut. Il faut que Kṛṣṇa soit séparé de son armée, qu'il ne prenne part au combat que comme cocher, comme serviteur.[2]

Creation is the withdrawal of God and necessity the mechanism, by which we should conceive the universe as operating in His absence.

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[1]Simone Weil's use of the word "nature" and "natural" will be discussed more fully later. Suffice it to say that she uses "nature" to mean something like the "totality of phenomena". As such it is not a translation of the Greek phusis. It is in this respect closer to the Sanskrit prakṛti.

[2]Cahiers, III, p. 197.

God in the world is impotent and pure, a teacher not a warrior, Christ not Caesar, charioteer not swordsman.

Balancing the notion of the withdrawal and absence of God was Simone Weil's assertion of the beauty of the world. It was a beauty which could only be identified correctly with the totality of the universe but which touched all men in the shadows of particular forms of beauty in the world. Man's experience of beauty was for a man of pure soul verification enough of the goodness of God. It was the seduction by beauty which opened the possibility of man's transcending of his harsh experience of necessity. Man was oriented to this beauty, as she saw it, through the self-denial of loving contemplation (in her language "attention") rather than the self-assertion and indulgence of lust. The flower was to be contemplated not plucked.

Simone Weil's assertion of the beauty of the world gave to the world a presence which allowed man to orient himself to God without a presence which ameliorated or negated the harshness of man's experience of suffering. It was a presence which rendered irrelevant a great many of the traditional formulations of the problem of theodicy -- that central theological problem within Semitic religion. The incorrectness of traditional formulations of this enigma she felt had contributed, on the one hand, to an honesty which led to atheism and ultimately to nihilism; and on the other to

a theism which was dishonest in its tendency to ignore the seriousness of human suffering. Her rejection of the former lay in her teachings on the beauty of the world; her refutation of the latter in her writings on necessity. How these two are held together we shall see later, but let us turn initially to her understanding of necessity which is of such importance in her interpretation of Indian texts.

The category of necessity is extremely important when we turn in particular to her writings on the Bhagavad Gītā, its analysis of the human condition, man's relation to society on the one hand and his relation to the ultimate on the other, or in traditional Indian terms to dharma and to mokṣa. As we shall see later these spheres are not ultimately totally divorced from one another. But for the time being it is useful to consider them separately.

Professor Surendranath Dasgupta, writing on the Gītā in his A History of Indian Philosophy, entitled a short section of his work an "Analysis of Action". In this passage he writes the following:

> The Gītā seems to hold that everywhere actions are always performed by the gunas or characteristic qualities of prakṛti, the primal matter. It is through ignorance and false pride that one thinks himself to be the agent . . . The philosophy that underlies the ethical position of the Gītā consists in the fact that, in reality, actions are made to happen through the movement of the characteristic qualities of prakṛti . . . It is, therefore, sheer egoism to think that one can, at his own sweet will, undertake a work or cease from doing works . . . . . So Kṛṣṇa says to Arjuna that the egoism through which

> you would not fight is mere false vanity, since the prakṛti is bound to lead you to action. A man is bound by the active tendencies or actions which necessarily follow directly from his own nature and there is no escape.[1]

It is this "analysis of action" which is of prime concern to Simone Weil in her reading of the Gītā. The passages in which she mentions the Gītā are frequently pursuing themes such as the relation between prakṛti and action, the nature of human choice, or the notion of action detached from its fruits. She frequently refers to the "problem" of Arjuna and like all readers of the Gītā attempts to understand the forces that necessitate his involvement in a fraticidal war.

Since Simone Weil considered necessity to be "la réalité de ce monde", it is obvious that her discussion of man and his actions in this world involve in a central way the notion of "nécessité". Necessity under one of its aspects is the cruel and indifferent force which drives the cold iron of affliction into the soul of man. But this does not account for all of human experience. Man also has the sensation at times of controlling to some extent both the external world and other men -- in other words of being the master of necessity. At still other times his experience is somewhere between these two poles, man being neither in control of nor controlled by the world around him. It is in this connection that Simone Weil speaks of an "équilibre" between man and necessity.

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[1]Dasgupta, A History of Indian Philosophy, pp. 515-516.

> La nécessité est une ennemie pour l'homme tant qu'il pense à la première personne. A vrai dire il a avec elle les trois espèces de rapports qu'il a avec les hommes. Par la rêverie ou par l'exercice de la puissance sociale elle semble son esclave. Dans les contrariétés, les privations, les peines, les souffrances, mais surtout dans le malheur elle apparaît comme un maître absolu et brutal. Dans l'action méthodique il y a un point d'équilibre où la nécessité, par son caractère conditionnel, présente à la fois à l'homme des obstacles et des moyens par rapport aux fins partielles qu'il poursuit, et où il y a une espèce d'égalité entre le vouloir d'un homme et la nécessité universelle. Ce point d'équilibre est aux rapports de l'homme avec le monde ce qu'est la justice naturelle aux rapports entre les hommes; dans l'organisation du travail, de la technique et de toute l'activité humaine il faut s'efforcer de l'obtenir le plus souvent possible.[1]

Simone Weil then goes on to say:

> L'équilibre entre le vouloir humain et la nécessité dans l'action méthodique est seulement une image; si on le prend pour une réalité, c'est un mensonge. Notamment ce que l'homme prend pour des fins, ce sont toujours simplement des moyens. La fatique force à s'apercevoir de l'illusion. Dans l'état de fatique intense, l'homme cesse d'adhérer à sa propre action et même à son propre vouloir; il se perçoit comme une chose qui en pousse d'autres parce qu'elle est elle-même poussée par une contrainte. Effectivement la volonté humaine, quoiqu'un certain sentiment de choix y soit irréductiblement attaché, est simplement un phénomène parmi tous ceux qui sont soumis à la nécessité. La preuve est qu'elle comporte des limites. L'infini seul est hors de l'empire de la nécessité.[2]

Although the equilibrium between man and what he experiences as his will and the order of necessity is "seulement une image" and not ultimately a "réalité", it is necessary to discuss the image if

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[1] Intuitions Pré-Chrétiennes, p. 144.

[2] Ibid., p. 181.

one is to speak meaningfully of human action in the world. There is little doubt that in a large portion of her comments on the Gītā, Simone Weil is speaking at this level when she treats the ethical problem posed by Arjuna's actions.

Arjuna's agony is a search for the equilibrium between his own inner nature and the situation which confronts him in the world. According to Simone Weil, Arjuna's spiritual state at the time dictated that he must act:

> Le tort d'Arjuna consiste à vouloir s'élever dans le domaine de la manifestation extérieure. De cette manière on ne peut que s'abaisser et épaissir le mal à la fois au-dedans et au-dehors. Cette action de combattre correspondait à son niveau, puisque c'était à elle qu'il s'était résolu. Il ne pouvait pas faire mieux, mais seulement plus mal.[1]

For Simone Weil it is the state of being of the person who acts which is of decisive importance. It is what a man is which dictates what a man must do. She says in another statement "Puisque Arjuna avait décidé la guerre, c'était seulement la pitié sensible qui le détournait. Il n'était pas digne de ne pas faire la guerre".[2]

Simone Weil extends the imagery of equilibrium by referring to action as the pointer of a pair of scales of which the two balances are man's inner nature and the exterior necessity which he must confront.

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[1] Cahiers, II, p. 236.

[2] Ibid., p. 112.

> Arjuna voulait s'élever dans l'échelle du bien par une action. (Dans son cas la non-résistance.) C'est comme vouloir modifier l'équilibre d'une balance en déplaçant l'aiguille indicatrice. Si dans une balance où les poids sont inégaux on saisit l'aiguille et qu'on la maintienne sur le zéro, on augmente seulement le déséquilibre.[1]

In another passage she uses the same image:

> Arjuna a tort parce qu'il se laisse submerger par la pitié au lieu de peser clairement le problème: puis-je ne pas combattre? Il a oublié sa balance.[2]

The source which exerts the most influence over the equilibrium which is human action is that provided by the social order. Any action in society must take account of the forces which are at play. Since these forces are of the order of necessity, it is not a matter of doing good or evil but of keeping the evil to a minimum. In certain situations the forces which comprise society force one to do evil. It is in this connection that Simone Weil interprets dharma. As an example, Simone Weil cites the example of Rāma, forced by society to banish his wife around whom the suspicion of infidelity has unjustly arisen and of Rāma's execution of the Śudra who by practicing "tapas" had violated caste duties.

> Dans une situation donnée, toute action possible comporte une certaine proportion de bien et de mal, ou plutôt, la proportion n'étant pas mesurable, un certain mélange. Le dharma est une règle pour le choix du mélange convenable

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[1] Cahiers, III, p. 10.

[2] Cahiers, I, p. 223.

> à un homme. Ainsi Râma, faire du mal à son épouse plutôt qu'à son peuple, quoiqu'il sache que l'épouse est dans le vrai et le peuple dans le faux, mais parce qu'il est roi. La même règle lui tait tuer le śûdra.
>
> S'il pense qu'il est mal de tuer le śûdra, il faut savoir s'il est possible d'établir peu à peu un autre équilibre stable où un śûdra puisse agir ainsi sans châtiment. En attendant, il doit le tuer.[1]

Both Rāma and Arjuna must assess correctly the equilibrium of social forces. In addition they owe an allegiance to the souls of those who make the social order.

The first objections formulated by Kṛṣṇa:[2]

> On ne doit pas accomplir une action telle que, dans les circonstances déterminées où on l'accomplit, il soit sûr qu'elle ne sera comprise de personne. C'est épaissir l'ignorance. La signification d'une action, comme la saveur d'un poème, doit être perçue.[3]

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[1]Cahiers, I, p. 162. Both Rāma and Arjuna are less "free" in this respect than other men since they are rulers and are therefore personifications of the social order and not just members of it. For ordinary members of society Simone Weil offers a role in which man is able to pursue a more independent course:

> Si on sait par où la société est déséquilibrée, il faut faire ce qu'on peut pour ajouter du poids dans le plateau trop léger. Quoique le poids soit le mal, en le maniant dans cette intention, peut-être ne se souille-t-on pas. Mais il faut avoir conçu l'équilibre et être toujours prêt à changer de côté comme la justice, cette fugitive du camps des vainqueurs.

[2]See Gita 3:26

> na buddhibhedam janayed ajñānāṁ karmasaṅginām.
>
> Let him not unsettle the minds of the ignorant who are attached to action.

[3]Cahiers, I, p. 228.

The only conditions under which Arjuna could refrain from fighting would be if his own presence were such that it transformed the situation in which he found himself. The distinguishing feature of the great man is that his own personality alters the equilibrium of the problem. It is in these terms that Simone Weil interprets non-violence. She writes:

> La non-violence n'est bonne que si elle est efficace. Ainsi, question du jeune homme à Gandhi concernant sa soeur. La réponse devrait être: use de la force, à moins que tu ne sois tel que tu puisses la défendre, avec autant de probabilité de succès, sans violence. A moins que tu ne possèdes un rayonnement dont l'énergie (c'est-à-dire l'efficacité possible, au sens le plus matériel) soit égale à celle contenue dans tes muscles . . . ... S'efforcer de devenir tel qu'on puisse être non-violent.[1]

It is this which accounts for Arjuna's despondency. His shame lies not in what he is about to do but in what he is -- or more correctly in what he is not. His failure, if one may call it that, lies in not being such that he could solve the situation in a non-violent way, without abdicating his responsibilities. In this respect, his problem at this moment is not to decide what to do but rather to realize what he is.

> Le moment de pitié d'Arjuna, c'est du rêve. Sa défaillance avant de tuer est comparable à la défaillance avant de mourir. A un moment donné

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[1] Cahiers, I, p.222-223.

> ou n'est pas libre de faire n'importe quoi. Il faut accepter aussi cette nécessité interne. Accepter ce qu'on est, à un moment donné, comme un fait, même la honte.[1]

What impels Arjuna to battle is neither the exterior conditions in which he finds himself nor the divine imperative of Kṛṣṇa that he must fight. It is rather an imperative from within Arjuna's own nature or as Simone Weil has put it, a "nécessité interne". It is in this light that she speaks of one of the central themes of the Gita:

> Détachement des fruits de l'action. Se soustraire à cette fatalité. Comment? Agir non pour un object, mais par une nécessité. Je ne peux pas faire autrement. Ce n'est pas action, mais une sorte de passivité. Action non-agissante.[2]

As an example of an action performed out of this inner necessity she cites the pure charity of Saint Nicholas who while rushing across the Russian Steppes to meet God "ne pouvait pas s'empêcher de manquer l'heure du rendez-vous en s'attardant à dégager dans la boue la voiture embourbée d'un moujik". Simone Weil comments that "Le bien accompli ainsi, presque malgré soi, presque avec honte et remords, est pur. Tout bien pur échappe complètement à la volonté. Le bien est transcendant. Dieu est le bien".[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 170. At another point she writes, "Faire seulement ce qu'on ne peut pas ne faire. Action non-agissante", ibid., p. 222.

[2] Cahiers, I, p. 254.

[3] Cahiers, III, p. 37.

Both Nicholas's act of charity and Arjuna's act of fighting are necessitated by their own nature. For neither is it a matter of choice. Simone Weil notes that:

> Kṛṣṇa ne passe guère de temps à démontrer à Arjuna qu'il doit combattre, parce que dès avant l'entretien il est hors de doute qu'Arjuna combattra.[1]

In another passage she says of Arjuna:

> Il est déchiré entre la pitié et la nécessité du combat. Après avoir vu Viṣṇu sous sa vraie forme (et il ne l'aurait, semble-t-il, pas vu s'il n'avait été déchiré), la seconde pensée demeure seule.[2]

The purpose of Kṛṣṇa's counsel to Arjuna is to ask him to accept the necessity imposed by his situation and his nature. Simone Weil sees at the heart of the Gītā the core of her own thought about man in this world. The highest calling for man, and for the representative man, Arjuna, is obedience to necessity. In one of the last comments she wrote on the Gītā she said:

> L'accomplissement pur et simple des actes prescrits, ni plus ni moins, c'est-à-dire l'obéissance, est à l'âme ce que l'immobilité est au corps. C'est là le sens de la Gītā.[3]

In an essay on "L'Amour de Dieu et le Malheur" Simone Weil writes:

> L'homme ne peut jamais sortir de l'obéissance à Dieu. Une créature ne peut pas ne pas obéir. Le seul choix

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[1] Cahiers, I, p. 167.

[2] Ibid., p. 168.

[3] La Connaissance Surnaturelle, p. 306.

> offert à l'homme comme créature intelligente et libre, c'est de désirer l'obéissance ou de ne pas la désirer.[1]

Since necessity is the order under which God willed that the universe be, obedience to necessity is an ultimate obedience and paradoxically the only true freedom for man.

> La nécessité est l'obéissance de la matière à Dieu. Ainsi le couple de contraires constitué par la nécessité dans la matière et la liberté en nous a son unité dans l'obéissance, car être libres, pour nous, ce n'est pas autre chose que désirer obéir à Dieu. Toute autre liberté est un mensonge.[2]

Simone Weil interprets the Gītā's understanding of "dharma" in terms of obedience to necessity. She writes:

> L'obéissance est la vertu suprême. Aimer la nécessité. La nécessité et le dharma ne font qu'un. Le dharma, c'est la nécessité aimée.[3]

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[1]Attente de Dieu, p. 113.

[2]Intuitions Pré-Chrétiennes, p. 152.

[3]Cahiers, I, p. 222.

Simone Weil has here taken the central concept of the entire Indian tradition and has interpreted it to correspond to the central notion of her own thought. To carry out one's dharma is to "accepter d'être soumis à la nécessité et de n'agir qu'en la maniant".[1]

The idea of man's obedience to necessity including the necessity which is his own nature, however, raises questions as to the nature of the human personality. What is it in man that is the point of consent? What is it in man that acts? What is it in man that can separate itself from the psychic life and contemplate it as an object? It is necessary to digress for a moment to examine these questions.

The matter becomes of crucial importance when one's attention focuses on the following verse from the Gītā:

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[1] Ibid., p. 150. Simone Weil does not enter into the debate, so acute in India, as to whether or not dharma ought to be understood primarily in terms of caste-duties. Dasgupta, for example writes:

> The word 'dharma' seems to be used in the Gītā primarily in the sense of an unalterable customary order of class-duties or caste-duties and the general approved course of conduct for the people and also in the sense of prescribed schemes of conduct (op. cit., p. 486).

Simone Weil tends to minimize and ignore this dimension of the notion of dharma. It ought to be pointed out, however, that part of what she understands by necessity is the social order, which those in positions of authority, in particular, must attempt to preserve.

The way in which Simone Weil relates "dharma" to the "karma theory" is discussed in the third chapter.

> He who sees that all actions are done only by nature (prakṛti) and likewise that the self (ātman) is not the doer, he verily sees.[1]

The distinction between ātman and prakṛti is fundamental to the Gītā.[2] Simone Weil comments upon this distinction:

> Ce n'est pas l'ātman qui agit, c'est la nature. (prakṛti). Toute action qui a réellement eu lieu se laisse réduire à un jeu de nécessités, sans qu'il reste aucun résidu qui soit la part du moi.[3]

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[1]prakṛtyaiva' ca karmāṇi
kriyamāṇāni sarvaśah

yaḥ paśyati tathā 'tmānam
akartāram sa paśyati (Gītā, 13:29)

[2]Monier Williams defines prakṛti as it is found in the Sāṁkhya philosophy which underlies the Gītā in the following terms:

> the original producer of (or rather passive power of creating) the material world (consisting of three constituent essences or Gunas called sattva, rajas and tamas). Nature (distinguished from puruṣa, Spirit), as Māyā is distinguished from Brahman in the Vedanta.

Edgerton translates prakṛti as "material nature" but notes that it includes "what with us are often called the 'mental faculties' of living beings, particularly man. The three gunas which comprise prakṛti: sattva, rajas and tamas represent three "modes of being" according to Eliade (Yoga: p. 19): "sattva (modality of luminosity and intelligence); rajas (modality of motor energy and mental activity); tamas (modality of static inertia and psychic obscurity).

[3]Cahiers, I, p. 166.

At another point she makes clear that what acts in man is prakṛti:

> Ne pas croire qu'on tue -- ni qu'on sauve, bien entendu. Ne pas croire qu'on a une puissance. Prakṛti avec ses guṇas fait tout -- même le bien -- même le mal -- le mal et le bien, tout.[1]

In the Gītā, prakṛti and the three guṇas which comprise it describe both the external world which surrounds man and the psychic life which is his subjectivity. Tamas, for example, describes "static inertia" in the external world while also describing "psychic obscurity" in the subjective world. This insight in the Gītā corresponds to Simone Weil's conviction that nature and man are both subject to similar mechanisms. Human behaviour, she believed, could be understood in terms of laws analogous to those which describe the phenomena of the physical sciences.[2] The terminology of physics -- terms such as "pesanteur", "vacuum" and "équilibre" recur throughout her writings on human behaviour.

It is necessary to keep this in mind to grasp her interpretation of the three guṇas which comprise prakṛti:

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[1] Ibid., p. 223.

[2] She once wrote in her notebooks:

> . . . il y a lieu de chercher à formuler en 'psychologie' des principes analogues à la conservation de l'énergie et à l'entropie. Aussie en sociologie. C'est en ce sens que ce peuvent être des sciences. (Cahiers, I, p. 213).

> Tamas est à la fois l'égarement -- le hasard, le morcellement des morceaux du temps, la non-prévision, la non-adaptation des moyens aux fins -- et la fatique, la passivité. Nécessairement domaine des śûdras. La matière est non-prévoyance et passivité. Le śûdra imite la matière qui l'accable.
>
> Le rajas, c'est cette force supplémentaire que possède l'homme et qui est concentrée en quantité maximum chez les kşatriyas. (Parenté de l'amour et de la guerre.) C'est l'énergie.
>
> Le sattva est quelque chose dans la nature qui permet au surnaturel, en un sens, d'exister. Mais c'est quelque chose dans la nature. Sentimus experimurque nos aeternos esse, et le 'sens de l'immortalité', l'état primordial.[1]

The identification of "tamas" with "matter" is clarified somewhat in a passage from "Etudes pour une Declaration des Obligations envers l'êtres humain". She writes:

> Tous les êtres humains sont absolument identiques pour autant qu'ils peuvent être conçus comme constitués par une exigence centrale de bien autour de laquelle est disposée de la matière psychique et charnelle.[2]

If man is a centre "autour de laquelle est disposée de la matière psychique et charnelle", it is "énergie" (rajas) which accounts for motion in man. The use of the term "énergie" to describe the motive power of moral effort occurs at numerous places in Simone Weil's writings. In the Cahiers she writes:

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[1] Cahiers, I, p. 220.

[2] Ecrits de Londres, p. 76.

> L'objet d'une action et le niveau de l'énergie qui l'alimente, choses distinctes.
>
> Il faut faire telle chose. Mais où puiser l'énergie? Une action vertueuse peut abaisser s'il n'y a pas d'énergie disponible au même niveau.[1]

In a passage in the Cahiers Simone Weil answers her own question as to the origin of energy. She writes:

> Les objets ne donnent sûrement pas d'énergie; ils concentrent ce qu'il y a toujours en nous . . . . d'énergie vitale non orientée, dispersée.[2]

Simone Weil then goes on to make reference to Arjuna:

> Beaucoup d'énergie concentrée, tout d'un coup libérée. Grand déséquilibre. Ou si l'objet de l'énergie devient objet de répulsion. Arjuna. (Comment se produit l'abattement soudain? Énergie tournée contre le corps, plus intérieurement que dans le cas de celui qui se frappe la poitrine.)[3]

Of Simone Weil's interpretation of the three gunas; tamas, rajas, and sattva, it is the latter, however, which is most enigmatic. She speaks of sattva as "quelque chose dans la nature qui permet au surnaturel . . . d'exister". At the same time it is completely "natural".

Sattva, as has been noted, is associated with luminosity in Indian thought.[4] By the same token, Simone Weil describes the

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[1]Cahiers,

[2]Cahiers, II, p. 95.

[3]Ibid., p. 95.

[4]See footnote p. 38.

relationship between the natural and the supernatural using the analogy of light. She writes in her Cahiers:

> L'objet de la recherche ne doit pas être le surnaturel, mais le monde. Le surnaturel est la lumière: si on en fait un objet, on l'abaisse.[1]

The supernatural is related to the natural either as being transparent (in the sense that it is not discernible with the natural faculties) or as an infinitely small point within nature. In Oppression et Liberté Simone Weil describes the decisive importance of the infinitely small point:

> La nature, qui est un miroir des vérités divines, présente partout une image de ce paradoxe. Ainsi les catalyseurs, les bactéries. Par rapport à un corps solide, un point est un infiniment petit. Pourtant, dans chaque corps, il est un point qui l'emporte sur la masse entière, car s'il est soutenu le corps ne tombe pas; ce point est le centre de gravité.
>
> Mais un point soutenu n'empêche une masse de tomber que si elle est disposée symétriquement autour de lui, ou si l'asymétrie comporte certaines proportions. Le levain ne fait lever la pâte que s'il lui est mélangé. Le catalyseur n'agit qu'au contact des éléments de la réaction. De même il existe des conditions matérielles pour l'opération surnaturelle du divin présent ici-bas sous forme d'infiniment petit.[2]

This infinitely small point Simone Weil admits to be the point of paradox. The point which is the centre of gravity, if supported, defies gravity. But, in a broader sense, this point at

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[1] Cahiers

[2] Oppression et Liberté, pp. 217-218.

which the natural meets the supernatural is also the point at which the complete and utter obedience to necessity leads, as we shall see, to the transcending of necessity.

The idea of obedience to necessity finds its contrary and complement in the transcending of necessity. What is involved in Simone Weil's notion of human transcendence is worked out in part at least in her writings on both the Bhagavad Gītā and the Upaniṣads. It centres around her particular notion of "attention". In an essay on the "Formes de l'Amour implicite de Dieu", Simone Weil makes the following observation on man's spiritual quest:

> L'effort par lequel l'âme se sauve ressemble à celui par lequel on regarde, par lequel on écoute, par lequel une fiancée dit oui. C'est un acte d'attention et de consentement. Au contraire, ce que le langage nomme volunté est quelque chose d'analogue à l'effort musculaire.[1]

The discipline of "attention" Simone Weil saw as essential to all genuine intellectual and spiritual endeavour. In intellectual pursuits, it is a method for piercing through to the truth to which statements point. In man's spiritual life, "attention" is the means by which man prepares himself to receive the divine grace.

Simone Weil cites as an example of the intellectual use of attention the following:

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[1]Attente de Dieu, p. 189.

> Un problème de géométrie ou d'arithmétique doit être résolu; il suffit de le regarder. Un texte latin, grec ou sanscrit doit être traduit; il suffit de le regarder.[1]

The operation of attention is essentially impersonal. If attention is focused on a problem, the problem, in a sense, solves itself. Truth, if the conditions are met in the mind of the recipient reveals itself in a pure and necessary manner. The conditions she saw as purity. Spiritually she understood this purity as annihilation of the ego (or as she termed it often -- of personality). Intellectually it was clarity of thought through the removal of illusion, illusion resulting from an assertion of ego. She writes at one point:

> Si un enfant fait une addition, et s'il se trompe, l'erreur porte le cachet de sa personne. S'il procède d'une manière parfaitement correcte, sa personne est absente de toute l'operation.
>
> La perfection est impersonelle. La personne en nous, c'est la part en nous de l'erreur et du péché.[2]

At another she identifies the philosophical activity of the Upaniṣads with such purity.

> L'esprit n'est forcé de croire à l'existence de rien. (Subjectivisme, idéalisme absolu, solipsisme, scepticisme. Voir les Upaniṣads, les taoïstes et Platon, qui tous usent de cette attitude philosophique à titre de purification.)[3]

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[1]Cahiers, II, p. 246.

[2]Ecrits de Londres, p. 17.

[3]Cahiers, II, p. 257.

Simone Weil makes it clear that the realm of truth and grace has its own necessity.

> Nous devons être indifférents au bien et au mal, mais en étant indifférents, c'est-à-dire en projetant également sur l'un et l'autre la lumière de l'attention, le bien l'emporte par un phénomène automatique. C'est là la grâce essentielle. Mais c'est là la définition, le critérium du bien.
>
> Une inspiration divine opère infailliblement, irrésistiblement, si on n'en détourne pas l'attention, si on ne la refuse pas. Il n'y a pas à faire un choix en sa faveur, il suffit de ne pas refuser de reconnaître qu'elle est.[1]

This consent to recognize the existence of the good and the divine inspiration which stems from it, means that attention presupposes faith. By the same token, attention is the necessary condition of charity. Simone Weil makes this connection in the following comment in the Cahiers.

> Le poète produit le beau par l'attention fixée sur du réel. De même l'acte d'amour. Savoir que cet homme, qui a faim et froid, existe vraiment autant que moi, et a vraiment faim et froid -- cela suffit, le reste suit de lui-même.
>
> Les valeurs authentiques et pures de vrai, de beau, de bien dans l'activité d'un être humain se produisent par un seul et même acte, une certaine application à l'objet de la plénitude de l'attention.[2]

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[1] Cahiers, II, pp. 248-249.

[2] Cahiers, III, p. 57.

It is in connection with this last assertion that truth, beauty and goodness in human activity result from a certain state of attention that many of Simone Weil's comments on the Gītā become intelligible. In the Cahiers she makes the following reference to Arjuna:

> Le tort d'Arjuna consiste à vouloir s'élever dans le domaine de la manifestation extérieure. De cette manière on ne peut que s'abaisser et épaissir le mal à la fois au-dedans et au-dehors. Cette action de combattre correspondait à son niveau, puisque c'était à elle qu'il s'était résolu. Il ne pouvait pas faire mieux, mais seulement plus mal. Tout ce qu'il pouvait, c'était, en demeurant à travers son action en état de contemplation, en doutant d'elle, en restant hors d'elle, en tendant au mieux non représenté, se préparer à devenir plus tard capable de faire mieux.
>
> C'est cela que signifie son dharma.
>
> L'action est l'aiguille indicatrice de la balance. Il ne faut pas toucher à l'aiguille, mais aux poids.[1]

Arjuna's mistake is to seek his salvation in action alone, rather than in a state of attention which accompanies action. It is clear that Simone Weil considers Arjuna's spiritual posture of more importance than the actions he is to perform. It is thought, not action, which is decisive in man's spiritual quest. The negative side of this central notion in Simone Weil's interpretation of the

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[1]Cahiers, II, p. 236.

Gītā is expressed succinctly in the following entry in the Cahiers. "Ne pas chercher le bien dans l'action. C'est là l'enseignement de la Gītā."[1]

In another passage, Simone Weil elaborates upon this theme.

> La question du mérite des oeuvres a au centre cette vérité -- qu'avait méconnue Arjuna --: on ne monte pas par les actes, mais par la seule contemplation de Dieu. On peut seulement descendre par les actes, l'omission du devoir étant un acte parmi les autres; si on accomplit tout son devoir dans le domaine de l'action, on se maintient seulement au niveau où on est. Les actes sont l'aiguille indicatrice de la balance. Si on la bouge, on fausse la balance. "J'etais nu, et vous m'avez habillé." Ce don est simplement le signe de l'état où se trouvaient les êtres qui ont agi de la sorte.[2]

The superiority of contemplation over action is not only its implicit value in being the only link between man and that reality which lies beyond the world. Its superiority lies also in the fact that it is thought which is truly decisive in the realm of action. Simone Weil describes the dominance of thought over action in the following note:

> La vraie difficulté, non pas faire ce qui est bien quand on l'a vu, mais le voir si intensément que la pensée passe en action, comme quand on lit de la musique, et les notes qui entrent par les yeux sortent en son au bout des doigts -- comme quand on voit un ballon de rugby, et on l'a dans ses bras.[3]

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[1] Ibid., P. 228.

[2] Cahiers, III, p. 37.

[3] Cahiers, I, pp. 169-170.

Simone Weil saw the Upaniṣads as offering a spiritual technique by which thought was disciplined through the principle of association -- a discipline which was ultimately determinant not only of deliberative action but also of involuntary reflex. She writes in a note:

> . . . l'influence du corps sur (les sentiments et) les pensées vient de ce que le corps est plus rapide que l'intelligence inférieure, donc a déjà répondu à la situation nouvelle quand l'intelligence travaille; l'intelligence ne peut qu'enregistrer. Mais l'intelligence supérieure est plus rapide que le corps. Ex•instants de très grand lucidité dans l'extrême danger. Que faut-il en penser?
>
> Mais peut-être peut-on créer une habitude d'empêcher le corps de répondre prématurément? On peut aussi ne pas le croire, mais c'est un procédé inférieur, à cause du phénomène de la lecture.
>
> Association. La répétition (dans les textes antiques, Homère, Upaniṣads, etc.) la rime, la mesure -- ne serait-ce pas une purification de l'association? Lui faire sa fait. Sa part légitime.[1]

The man whose actions result automatically from an application of attention or the discipline of association is free from the sensation of choice. The experience of decision at a point in time Simone Weil saw as essentially illusory and as resulting from a lack of selfawareness. Simone Weil sees Arjuna, in the opening chapter of the Gītā, as being under this illusion. In the concluding section of a passage which was quoted only in part previously this is made clear.

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[1]Cahiers, I, p. 154.

> Il (Kṛṣṇa) ne passe guère de temps à démontrer à Arjuna qu'il doit combattre, parce que dès avant l'entretien il est hors de doute qu'Arjuna combattra. Délibération intérieure comme il y en a beaucoup (toutes?). Arjuna n'en est plus au moment du choix. Quel est le moment du choix?
>
> Presque toujours, le moment de la délibération ne coïncide pas avec celui du choix. On délibère quand on a déjà choisi, on peut-être, plus rarement, quand on n'est pas encore en mesure de choisir.[1]

Implicit in Simone Weil's position on this matter is the awareness that human choice is a process involving the dimension of time. The application of attention through the passage of time is the decisive aspect of human existence -- Simone Weil interprets the notion of reincarnation in the Gītā as a symbolic expression of this truth. She writes.

> Gītā. Noter que le dharma, dépendant de la caste, donc de la naissance, donc de l'incarnation précédente, dépend d'un choix antérieur. Ce n'est pas qu'on n'ait pas le choix, mais que, si on se place à un moment donné, on n'a plus le choix. On ne peut plus faire autre chose; il est vain de rêver à faire autre chose; mais il est bon de s'élever au-dessus de ce qu'on fait. Par là on choisit, pour plus tard, quelque chose de meilleur.[2]

To rise above what one is doing at a given time, Simone Weil saw as a matter of attention. In the Gītā it is seen in terms of detachment from the fruits of action (niṣkāma karma). Simone Weil makes the connection between her categories and those of the Gītā

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[1] Ibid., p. 168.

[2] Cahiers, I, p. 170.

when she notes that "l'attachement est fabricateur d'illusions, et quiconque veut le réel doit être détaché".[1]

In this matter it is necessary to see the work of attention in negative terms. Through the application of attention one is able to dispel illusions and to suspend in oneself the activity of auto-suggestion and imagination. It is also the means of eliminating in oneself a false perspective on the world. Indeed, Simone Weil describes one of the most important functions of attention as that of the creation of a void. The void is created, at one level of consciousness, by eliminating concern for the "fruits of action".

> Nécessité d'une récompense, pour l'équilibre; de recevoir l'équivalent de ce qu'on donne (c.f. plus haut); mais si, faisant violence à cette nécessité forte comme la pesanteur, on laisse un vide, il se produit comme un appel d'air, et une récompense surnaturelle survient. Elle ne vient pas si on a un autre salaire; ce vide la fait venir.[2]

What is meant by this "vide" is elaborated on in the following note on the Gītā.

> Gītā. Renoncer à l'action ne produit pas un vide. Renoncer, non à l'action, mais à son fruit; là, il y a vide.
>
> Continuellement suspendre en soi-même le travail de l'imagination combleuse des vides et des déséquilibres.[3]

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[1] Cahiers, II, p. 292.

[2] Cahiers, I, p. 267.

[3] Ibid., p. 279.

The renunciation of the fruits of action Simone Weil sees as freeing oneself from a false perspective which places the "I" at the centre of the universe. This act of renunciation is "se vider de sa fausse divinité, se nier soi-même, renoncer à être en imagination le centre du monde, discerner tous les points du monde comme étant des centres ou même titre et le véritable centre comme étant hors du monde".[1]

She expresses the same thought negatively in a passage in which she connects the thought of the Upaniṣads with a text from the Pauline epistles.

> Upaniṣads: Brahma est l'espace. St. Paul: soyez enracinés dans la charité pour avoir la force de saisir, comme tous les saints, ce qu'est la longueur et la largeur, la hauteur et la profondeur . . . .
>
> Être enraciné dans l'absence de lieu.[2]

At the same time that one gives up the illusion of being the centre of the universe one sees oneself both as an infinitely small point in the universe and at the same time as identified with the totality of the universe. To accept the void is to love the universe and, in a sense, to become the universe. One is all and nothing. Simone Weil speaks of this form of attention in a passage which it is necessary to quote at some length. She writes of the Upaniṣads:

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[1]Attente de Dieu, p. 148.

[2]Cahiers, II, p. 244.

> L'ātman -- que l'âme d'un homme prenne pour corps tout l'univers. Ait avec tout l'univers le même rapport que celle d'un collectionneur à sa collection, d'un des soldats qui mouraient en criant "Vive l'Empereur" à Napoléon. L'âme se transporte, hors du corps propre, dans autre chose. Qu'elle se transporte donc dans tout l'univers . . .
>
> S'identifier à l'univers même. Tout ce qui est moindre que l'univers est soumis à la souffrance étant partiel et par suite exposé aux forces extérieures. J'ai beau mourir, l'univers continue. Cela ne me console pas si je suis autre que l'univers. Mais si l'univers est à mon âme comme un autre corps, ma mort cesse d'avoir pour moi plus d'importance que celle d'un inconnu. De même mes souffrances.[1]

It is not possible, however, to claim this particular identification of the soul with the universe immediately as the Ātman-Brahman identification of the Upaniṣads. Simone Weil goes on in this passage to say:

> Que l'univers entier soit pour moi, par rapport à mon corps, ce qu'est le bâton d'un aveugle, pour l'aveugle, par rapport à sa main. Il n'a réellement plus sa sensibilité dans sa main, mais au bout du bâton.[2]

The essential point about the blind man's stick is that it mediates between the man who holds it and reality which he perceives through it. By the same token the whole universe mediates between man

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[1] Cahiers, I, p. 127.

[2] Cahiers, I, p. 128.

and God. To take on the entire universe as one's body is to use the universe as meditation (metaxu).[1]

It is at this point that one sees clearly the implication for her interpretation of Indian thought of Simone Weil's belief in the infinite distance and transcendence of God. To accept the entire universe as mediation is to be in the purest relation to God but at the same time to be at the furthest distance from him.

Simone Weil obviously found the tat tvam asi of the Upaniṣads as difficult to accommodate with her own view of supreme transcendence. She almost ignores the principle thrust of Upaniṣadic ontology, and where she sees it she expresses reservation or warning. The following comment is typical. She exegetes Bṛihad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4:4:19:

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[1]Les choses créées ont pour essence d'être des intermédiaires. Elles sont des intermédiaires les unes vers les autres, et cela n'a pas de fin. Elles sont des intermédiaires vers Dieu. Les éprouver comme telles dans la connaissance, l'amour et l'action. (Cahiers, III, p. 128.)

Metaxu is not only the universe as totality but also as particular. She sees the Muṇḍaka Upanisad teaching on Aum in terms of metaxu.

> Muṇḍako. : arc -- atman: trait-Brahman: but.
> -- id. III, II, 3 grâce. (arc i.e. metaxu).
>
> Comme les rayons dans le moyeu, à l'endroit précis où les canaux se joignent, à l'intérieur . . . (ainsi l'ātman). Syllable om. Un seul son pur, clef de toutes choses. (Cahiers, I, p. 160.)

> Trouver l'ātman "engagé dans les ténébreuses complexités (?) du corps".
> "La pluralité n'est pas;
> Il court de mort en mort,
> Qui croit voir la pluralité dans l'univers."
>
> Grèce
> La parole de Platon: "il ne faut pas faire l'un trop vite" s'applique aussi à la recherche du Bien (de Dieu -- de l'ātman -- dut Tao -- etc.) Il ne faut pas faire l'un sans passer par le hoposa. En Inde aussi, certainement, passage par le hoposa. En quoi consiste-t-il?[1]

In another passage she claims the Upaniṣads to teach a doctrine of transcendence.

> Le rapprochement de Dieu et de l'homme est défendu par la nature même de la création, par l'abîme entre l'être et le paraître. Upaniṣads: les dieux ne le veulent pas. C'est défaire de la création, et elle se défait dans la souffrance.[2]

Simone Weil is not unaware of the logic of monism. She follows it consistently in a comment on Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad of which Śankara himself would approve. She refuses to say, however, that this logic leads her to a point which is in contradiction with almost the entirety of her own thought. She writes:

> De quoi aurait-on peur, quand on est seul? Si on passe du solipsisme à la connaissance de la réalité seulement en passant par Dieu, comme dans Descartes, où le mal peut-il s'introduire? La non-dualité est en même temps non-terreur, non angoisse.
>
> so'bibhet tasmād ekākī bibheti sa hāyam īkṣām cakre yan mad anyan nāsti, kaṣmān nu bibhemīti, tata evāsya bhayaṁ vīyāya kasmād hy abheṣyat, dvitīyād vai bhayaṁ bhavati.

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[1] Cahiers, I, pp. 128-129.

[2] Cahiers, II, p. 143.

> On a peur quand on est seul, mais on a tort. La peur est d'autre chose. La solitude absolue est sans terreur. Qui me ferait du mal? Abhaya, non-terreur, non-angoisse, paix, félicité.[1]

Simone Weil is very close to India here, but very distant from other parts of her own thought, in particular her understanding of the crucifixion and her writings on "malheur". The "terror" of Christ she says elsewhere is the proof of his divinity. And she certainly saw "malheur" and aloneness as integral to her own spirituality.[2]

Simone Weil notes that "l'harmonie est definie par les Pythagoriciens comme l'unité des contraires".[3] Man and God are united in harmony when they are at opposite ends of the universe. Man achieves his perfection as creature when the full weight of creation weighs upon him and separates him from God. Experiencing creation in its separateness from God and in its basic contradiction is a central aspect of Arjuna's dilemna. It is this which is hinted at in a short but important note on Arjuna in the Cahiers:

> Il est déchiré entre la pitié et la nécessité du combat. Après avoir vu Viṣṇu sous sa vraie forme (et il ne l'aurait, semble-t-il, pas vu s'il n'avait été déchiré), la seconde pensée demeure seule.[4]

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[1]Cahiers, I, p. 233.

[2]This is not the place for extensive judgement. This matter will be pursued exhaustively in the chapters to follow.

[3]Intuitions Pré-Chrétiennes, p. 28.

[4]Cahiers, I, p. 168.

The important words in this passage are those which Simone Weil bracketed. The fact that Arjuna's being torn was a necessary condition of the revelation of Viṣṇu is related to what Simone Weil refers to elsewhere as the experiencing of the "contradictions" inherent in created existence. The contradiction of which Simone Weil speaks here is one not of contraries but of contradictories. Contraries such as "this is hot" and "this is cold" can be reconciled by a difference of perspective. Contradictions such as "I love and respect this man" and "I must kill this man" cannot. The more deeply man enters into life the more he experiences his life as one of contradictories not contraries. Contraries may be experienced with equanimity; but contradictories tear one apart.[1]

Arjuna is "torn" in his growing realization of the necessity to slay his relatives and teachers. The necessity forced upon him involves more than the sacrifice of his own life. It is essentially a sacrifice of all meaning in his own existence.

Arjuna experiences the contradiction of existence because he is aware both of the necessity to wage war and the fact that the war is to be waged against those he loves. As Simone Weil notes, the

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[1]Cahiers, II, p. 370.

Historically one can see Simone Weil's teaching on contradiction as a rejection of that element of Christian theology which culminated in the logic of Hegel.

transcending of contradiction is possible only if one experiences or contemplates both sides of the contradiction at the same time. She writes:

> Ou l'esprit maintient réele en lui la notion simultanée des contradictoires, ou il est balloté par le mécanisme des compensations naturelles d'un des contraires à l'autre. C'est ce que la Gītā entend par "avoir dépassé l'égarement des contraires".[1]

It is the effort of attention which allows the mind to hold within itself the two sides of the contradiction at the same time. Without the effort of attention the mind alternates, grasping one side and then the other and remains in a state of confusion. In this condition man can never rise to the Good. Simone Weil writes:

> Idée pythagoricienne: le bien se définit toujours par l'union des contraires. Quand on préconise le contraire d'un mal, on reste au niveau de ce mal. Quand on l'a éprouvé, on retourne au premier. C'est ce que la Gītā nomme: égarés par l'égarement des contraires.[2]

The value of contradiction for human existence is that it is the path leading toward God. Simone Weil refers to the "existence simultanée des vertus contraires dans l'âme" and "pensée simultanée des vérités contradictoires" as "pinces pour atteindre Dieu".[3]

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[1]Simone Weil is undoubtedly referring here to verse 7:28.

yeṣām tv antagataṁ pāpaṁ
janānāṁ puṇyakarmaṇām
te dvandvamohanirmuktā
bhajante māṁ dṛḍhavratāḥ

[2]Cahiers, III, p. 54.

[3]Cahiers, II, p. 381.

The contemplation of the contradiction of this world leads the mind eventually to contemplate the reality outside the world. Simone Weil makes it clear that attention at this point becomes synonymous with supernatural love and prayer.[1] Insofar as the Gītā is concerned the object of attention at this level is Kṛṣṇa. As Kṛṣṇa says:

> But those who laying their actions on me, intent on me,
> worship, meditating on me, with unswerving devotion.
> These whose thoughts are set on me, I straightway
> deliver from the ocean of death-bound existence.[2]

Simone Weil makes reference to this aspect of the Gītā's teaching in a note concerned with Arjuna's situation. She writes that:

> Elle (Gītā) enseigne que même dans une telle
> situation le salut est là, si, tout en agissant,

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[1]"L'amour surnaturel et la prière ne sont pas autre chose que la forme la plus hautre de l'attention. (Cahiers, II, p. 261.)

[2]ye tu sarvāṇi karmāṇi
mayi saṁnyasya matparāḥ
anayen' aiva vogena
māṁ dhyāyanta apāsate.

teṣām ahaṁ samuddhartā
mṛtyusaṁsārasāgarāt
bhavāmi nacirāt Pārtha
mayy āveśitacetasām. (Gītā, 12:6, 7)

> on rejette l'action au-dessous de soi, et si on aime Kṛṣṇa.[1]

It is through the love of Kṛṣṇa that one rises or, more correctly, that God descends. In a passage in which she speaks of the descending movement of God, Simone Weil writes:

> Il ne faut avoir en vue dans la prière aucune chose particulière, à moins d'en avoir reçu surnaturellement l'inspiration. Car Dieu est être universel. Certes il descend dans le particulier. Il est descendu, il descend dans l'acte de la création . . . de même l'incarnation, l'eucharistie, l'inspiration, etc. Mais c'est un mouvement descendant. La liaison entre universel et particulier est un mouvement descendant, jamais montant; un mouvement de Dieu, non de nous. Nous ne pouvons opérer une telle liaison qu'autant que Dieu nous le dicte. Notre rôle est d'être tournées vers l'universel.[2]

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[1]Cahiers, I, p. 167. It is clear that Simone Weil felt that Kṛṣṇa and Christ were different manifestations of the same reality. Meditation on Kṛṣṇa for an Indian is as efficacious as meditation on Christ for a European. In Lettre à un Religieux in which she defined her position in relation to Roman Catholicism, Simone Weil wrote:

> Toutes les fois qu'un homme a invoqué avec un coeur pur Osiris, Dionysos, Kṛṣṇa, Bouddha, le Tao, etc., le Fils de Dieu a répondu en lui envoyant le Saint-Esprit. Et l'Esprit a agi sur son âme, non pas en l'engageant à abandonner sa tradition religieuse, mais en lui donnant la lumière -- et dans le meilleur des cas la plénitude de la lumière -- a l'intérieur de cette tradition. (pp. 29-30)

[2]Cahiers, II, p. 255. This descending movement is of a sacrificial nature. One of the ideas which intrigued Simone Weil was the relation between incarnation and sacrifice. For her both were combined in the figures of both Christ and Kṛṣṇa. In a passage in Attente de Dieu in which she maintains that Noah had received a revelation after offering up sacrifice, Simone Weil writes:

> Les chrétiens appellent sacrifice la messe, qui répète tous les jours la Passion. La Bhagavad Gita, qui est antérieure à l'ère chrétienne, fait dire elle aussi à

The awareness that the bond between man and God is established through a descending movement, a movement on God's part not on ours means that man's posture is one of obedience not one of assertion. At the same time to be turned toward the universal is to be in a state of attentive waiting. It is at this point in the contemplation of the divine that obedience and attention become one. It is at this point at which man becomes a being perfectly unified in consent and attention. And it is at this point, Simone Weil believes, that God descends.

> Dieu incarné: "Le sacrifice c'est moi-même présent dans ce corps". La liaison entre l'idée de sacrifice et celle d'incarnation est donc probablement très ancienne. (Attente de Dieu, p. 244)

This is undoubtedly a reference to Gita 8:4.

> adhibūtaṁ kṣaro bhāvah
> puruṣas' c' ādhidaivatam
> adhiyajño 'ham ev' ātra
> dehe dehabhṛtāṁ vara.

CHAPTER II

THE UNDERSTANDING OF "REALITY" IN SIMONE WEIL AND INDIA

The task of answering the question "what did Simone Weil say about India" has been completed. The more difficult question now awaits us, "Was she right about what she said?". Or to put it another way, "Can these texts (the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gītā in particular) be legitimately used and interpreted as she has used and interpreted them?". Has she caught their essence, or has she distorted their intent and their meaning beyond recognition? To answer such a question it is not sufficient to examine her exegesis piecemeal, but rather to ask questions about the basic vision and key ideas, which lie behind her thought and that of India. It is only then that the true differences, if there are such, become apparent; and the true unities, if they are indeed so, can be claimed.

Assuming thought to be consistent, it can be claimed that every point in the thought of a serious thinker or a serious system of thought is a terminus a quo and a terminus ad quem. Every point in thought will take one logically to every other point. To put it in a slightly more modified and practical form, it can be said that a useful method for studying such a system of thought is to identify certain nuclear ideas and terms and to work out the logic of such ideas to see both how they are related and where they lead. This is a particularly useful technique when comparing different structures of thought for it allows one to see not only the differences and unities but the bases of differences and unities.

It would seem logical to begin this analysis with the question of ontology.[1] In the systems of thought under discussion here, ethics and what I have called "spiritual technique" follow inevitably from ontology. The question of the principles by which men live together in the world in relation to one another and of the principles by which they act in relation to the universe as a totality follow inevitably from what they conceive the nature of that universe to be. It is not necessary here to get into the question of the "naturalistic fallacy". It is sufficient to note only that both Simone Weil and the Indian darśanas would assume the "naturalistic fallacy" to be itself fallacious and thus there can be no difference on this matter. Even Buddhism, if we understand it to be minimizing the importance of ontological questions, begins with an ontological statement "sarvam duḥkham". The movement of thought of the four noble truths is the basic movement of all thought under discussion here and is the train of thought in the next two chapters. We are concerned initially with the question of what is so and then with the question of how men should act -- in the first instance in

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[1] I do not wish to get into the complexity of the word "ontology". I use it for lack of something better which would embrace both Western and Indian thought. I use it in a naive sense to mean the study of statements about that which is so. In the context of this thesis it is concerned in particular with the question "what is real?" or "what possesses the fulness of reality?" as opposed to "what is less than real?" or "what is unreal?". Ontology means here the study of "reality" and the ambiguity of the latter term reflects exactly the problem of this chapter.

relation to their fellows and in the second instance in relation to what they conceive to be the absolute. The concerns are, as has been pointed out, ontology, ethics, and "spiritual technique".

In the case of ontology it would seem natural to begin, as did the Biblical scribes, with the beginning. Theory of creation, cosmogony, doctrine of the origin of things, what you will, is not temporally prior in any thinker's thought. It is like the introduction of a book -- usually writen last. Yet it can be a good place to begin the study of a philosophical system or a religious vision -- for the entire ontology is usually there by implication.

Before approaching the specific question of Simone Weil's conception of creation it will be useful to point out some aspects of Indian cosmogony as a method of approaching by implication the question of its ontology.

Two questions arise immediately. The first of course is which texts and which creation accounts speak for India? There are innumerable accounts within the tradition. How do we choose? The second question is whether or not it is correct to speak of "creation" at all within an Indian context.

Nevertheless, we are not without recourse on these matters. As for the selection of texts, it is only natural to centre on those texts to which Simone Weil addressed herself -- the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gītā, texts which not only Simone Weil saw as speaking for the tradition, but which the orthodox philosophical tradition

has equally seen as authoritative. We shall note at appropriate points the insights offered by the Indian darśanas in their interpretation and exposition of these texts.

We note, of course, that it is somewhat incorrect to speak of "creation" within an Indian context for strictly speaking the world does not originate as an act of creation either on the model of a craftsman "making" or the model of an act of will or legislation that the world come into being. It is neither of these. Even the word "cosmogony" is somewhat erroneous for strictly speaking, the universe is not a "cosmos" in the exact sense of the Greek term.

We must be even more wary when we note that Śankara warns that creation accounts must not be taken literally for the world is without beginning (although not without end). In addition Śankara, insofar as he is willing figuratively to speak of the origin of the world and to model it on human activity characterizes it as an unconscious act on the part of Brahman -- almost a mistake. The world in a sense, "slipped" into being because Brahman had his mind on other things.

There are, however, more positive accounts in the authoritative texts of India -- those with which Simone Weil was concerned. There are numerous creation myths which could speak for India, but perhaps the most typical is that to be found in Taittiriya 2:6

> He (the supreme soul) desired. Let me become many, let me be born. He performed austerity. Having

> performed austerity he created all this, whatever is here. Having created it, into it, he entered.[1]

The image of the Absolute entering into creation is found in numerous places in the Upaniṣads[2] and is perhaps one of the most distinctive features of the Upaniṣadic cosmogony.

Deussen points out that this is also common to many of the creation hymns of the Rg Veda and Brāhmaṇas. He writes:

> We have . . . learnt to recognize a series of descriptions of the creation of the universe from the Hymns and Brahmanas, and to point out as a feature common to many of them that (1) the original principle (2) creates matter out of itself, and then (3) as first-born enters it.[3]

He goes on to suggest:

> . . . the motive of the conception that dominates all these passages may be described to be the recognition of the first principle of the universe as embodied in nature as a whole, but especially and most of all in the soul (the universal and the individual soul). Hence the idea arose that the primeval being created the universe, and then as the first born of the creation enters into it.[4]

A detailed discussion of the Upanisadic conception of the origin of things is not necessary at this point. What is necessary is to observe the recurring image of the supreme (in most cases the

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[1]so 'kāmayata, bahu syām prajāyeyeti, sa tapo' tapyata, so tapas taptvā, idaṁ sarvam asṛjata, yad idam kiṁ ca, tat sṛṣṭva tad evānuprāviśat.

[2]Brh. Ar. 1:4:7; Chand. 6:2:3, Svet. 1:3:11.

[3]Paul Deussen, The Philosophy of the Upanisads (New York: Dover, 1966), p. 182.

[4]Deussen, The Philosophy of the Upanisads, p. 183.

ātman) entering into creation. It is an image which is the consistent expression of the Upaniṣadic doctrine that that which is the essence of a thing is the divine which lies within.

Elements of the same doctrine are to be found in the Gitā although, for the most part, here the personal God Kṛṣṇa replaces Ātman-Brahman as the supreme. But it is the same divine within to be found in the Upaniṣads. "I am the self established in the heart of all contingent beings[1] (10:20) or even the more explicitly immanent reference:

> In water I am the flavour, in sun and moon the light, in all the Vedas the sacred syllable AUM, in space I am sound, in their manliness am I. (8) Pure fragrance in the earth am I, flame's onset in the fire: and life am I in all contingent beings, in ascetics their fierce austerity. (10) Know that I am the primeval seed of all contingent beings: insight, glory in the glorious am I. (11) Power in the powerful am I -- (such power) as knows neither desire nor passion: desire am I in contingent beings but such desire as does not conflict with righteousness (7:8:11).[2]

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[1] aham ātmā, Guḍākeśa, sarva-bhūt, aś'aya-sthitaḥ.

[2] Bhagavad Gita 7:

(8) raso 'ham apsu, Kaunteya, prabhā 'smi śaśi-sūryayoḥ,
praṇavaḥ sarva-vedeṣu, śabdaḥ khe, pauruṣam nṛṣu.

(9) puṇyo gandhaḥ pṛthivyāṁ ca, tejaś c' āsmi vibhāvasau,
jīvanaṁ sarva-bhūteṣu, tapaś c' āsmi tapasviṣu.

(10) bījaṁ māṁ sarva-bhūtānāṁ viddhi, Pārtha, sanātanam:
buddhir buddhimatām asmi, tejas tejasvinām aham.

(11) balaṁ balavatāṁ c' āham kāma-rāga-vivarjitam:
dharm' āviruddho bhūteṣu kāmo 'smi, Bharata 'ṛṣabha.

Clearly the absolute, in a text such as the Gītā, is both immanent and transcendent. We are not concerned at this point, however, with the latter.[1] The undeniable immanence however, is of importance. Since the divine lies within nature and since the latter cannot ultimately be separable from the former when the question of contingency arises the logical thrust of Indian thought has been to deny ontological status to contingency -- i.e. to deny its ultimate reality. This logic has its most consistent expression in the māyā-vada of Śaṅkara for whom, as we have seen, the contingent world is, in a sense, the result of a mistake and cannot thus, be seen as ultimately meaningful. The fact that this position tended to deny common sense has always meant that it has been argued against vigorously by much of the tradition but always with considerable difficulty by those who accepted the Upaniṣads as authoritative. The ontologies of those who have done so, in particular, Viśiṣṭādvaita and Sāṁkhya, although impressive, have something of the nature of a half-way house about them. The clear thrust intellectually in Indian thought is in the direction of māyā-vada. Differences arise basically, only over the matter of what this means.

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[1]What is understood by transcendence and immanence in Indian religion will be discussed later.

What the Indian seeks spiritually lies within and the world as it presents itself in its contingency is basically experienced as an impediment to what he seeks. He seeks to dissolve contingency in order to approach what lies within it. This applies to his own being as well as what surrounds him. And since the reality he seeks is spiritual, his own consciousness being an expression of that reality, he is inclined to look within as readily as without.

This being the case, the spiritual genius of India finds its greatest expression not primarily in philosophy as in the case of the Greeks or the saintliness of loving obedience as in the case of Semitic religion. Although elements of both of these are present within the Indian tradition, the centre of the tradition is still something quite different -- the spiritual techniques of yoga.[1] For it is through these techniques that the Indian seeks reality by quietening and rendering transparent the contingent world in order that the reality which lies within it may be seen and experienced. This is true of the orthodox tradition which centres on the reality within and of Buddhism which concentrates on the unreality of contingency.[2] Both however imply the other. Māyā implies Brahman; saṁsāra implies Nirvāna.

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[1]I am not concerned with the particular ontology of Patanjali Yoga at this point.

[2]The complexities of Buddhist formulations of this matter will be dealt with later.

When we turn to Simone Weil's understanding of creation, and by implication ontology, we note initially two accounts of creation, or perhaps more correctly two distinct elements in her account. The first account is distinctly her own and derives from her reading of Christianity. It shows both her indebtedness to traditional Christianity and her rejection of certain elements within it. The second is her reading of Plato's Timaeus in which she attempts to see a unity between the thought of Plato and the revelation of Christianity.

Insofar as creation accounts are modelled on human analogies, the analogy in the first instance is that of an act of will, in this case the act of renunciation. For it is in terms of renunciation that she portrays the will of God. The analogy in the second instance she identifies as that of "artistic creation", the technê of Plato's Demiurge. Connected with the latter account is the analogy of paternity in Plato's Timaeus in which she makes the connection between "artistic creation" and the logos doctrine of the gospel of St. John. The meaning of the universe is to be found both in the beauty produced by "artistic creation" and the son who is the essence of creation, the soul of the world. Beauty, son and creation unite in Christ. Let us examine each of these accounts to see what is involved.

The first account is taken from an essay she wrote on Pythagorean doctrine. Its importance necessitates that it be quoted at length.

> Dieu a créé, c'est-à-dire non pas qu'il a produit quelque chose hors de soi, mais qu'il s'est retiré permettant à une partie de l'être d'être autre que Dieu. A ce renoncement divin répond le renoncement de la création, c'est-à-dire l'obéissance. L'univers tout entier n'est pas autre chose qu'une masse compacte d'obéissance. Cette masse compacte est parsemée de points lumineux. Chacun de ces points est la partie surnaturelle de l'âme d'une créature raisonnable qui aime Dieu et qui consent à obéir. Le reste de l'âme est prise dans la masse compacte. Les êtres doués de raison qui n'aiment pas Dieu sont seulement des fragments de la masse compacte et obscure. Eux aussi sont tout entiers obéissance, mais seulement à la manière d'une pierre qui tombe. Leur âme aussi est matière, matière psychique, soumise à un mécanisme aussi rigoureux que celui de la pesanteur. Même leur croyance en leur propre libre arbitre, les illusions de leur orgueil, leur défis, leurs révoltes, tout cela, ce sont simplement des phénomènes aussi rigoureusement déterminés que la réfraction de la lumière.[1]

The similarity with traditional Christian doctrine of creation is immediately apparent. The world is "real", by virtue of being an expression of the will of God. He consents that it be. It must then be taken seriously as it presents itself. Man's response to it is one of obedience. The difference with traditional Christianity is equally apparent. To the extent to which God's activity can be seen as an act of willing the specific movements within creation in the Semitic tradition she expressed her rejection of this theology by portraying creation as an act of withdrawal (il s'est retiré).

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[1] Intuitions Pré-Chrétiennes, pp. 161-162.

The consequence of this is that Simone Weil is furthest from traditional Western Christianity over the matter of providence. She thought it was erroneous to see either personal or, even more so, historical events, as particular expressions of the will of God. She preferred the word "chance" to "providence". She thought the Judeo-Christian use of the latter doctrine (and what she regarded as its direct descendant, the modern notion of "progress") to be a horrendously mistaken way of viewing the world for it led men to seek good where it did not exist, i.e. in history. It led men to an illusory experience of their own condition, including human suffering; and of justifying the crimes perpetrated by societies who claimed that God had willed their victories. This was basically her reading of the theology of Israel and she considered Christianity as poisoned by its contact with this doctrine. The great historical tragedy within Christendom was that Christianity had lost the notion of the absence and non-action of God.

The relation of Simone Weil's theory of creation to the Platonic account in the Timaeus is more complex. As we have noted, there are two elements in the Timaeus account, the world as created on the model of an artificer creating a work of art through techné; the second the world as engendered by God on the model of a parent engendering an offspring. It is not our concern here to answer the question raised by some scholars as to whether or not these accounts are in contradiction particularly insofar as they have implications

for Plato's understanding of eidos. We are concerned rather to see the particular unity which Simone Weil saw between these accounts and her other account characterizing God's activity as one of withdrawal.

Simone Weil saw Plato's thought as a prophecy of the incarnation. Nowhere is this more apparent than in her reading of the Timaeus. This dialogue, for her, taught the essence of the Trinity. To simplify somewhat, the model of artificer (or "artist" as she preferred) taught the essence of the relation of the first and third persons of the Trinity; the model of parent to offspring the essence of the relation of the first and second person of the Trinity. The Trinity and creation were for her inextricably mixed for the relation of God to the world was the same as God to his "only begotten son". Positively expressed, the world possessed a soul as did the son; negatively expressed it was that the universe was in essence the cross of Christ. Let us examine each of these separately.

In her essay on the Timaeus Simone Weil writes that men can represent creation to themselves only on the analogy of some human activity. She rejected a strain of modernity which took "comme point de départ une activité telle que celle d'un fabricant d'horloges" an analogy which she saw as leading manifestly to absurdities for it

was impossible to "trouver assez de finalité visible dans le monde pour prouver qu'il est analogue à un objet fabriqué en vue d'une fin".[1]

A much better analogy, she held, was that of Plato -- that of artistic creation -- for the object of artistic creation was an object of beauty, i.e. its end lay in itself. The superiority of Plato's to the modern was that it was capable of "vérification éxperimentale dans le sentiment même de la beauté du monde, car le beau est la seule source du sentiment de beauté".[2] Man's experience of beauty was, for Simone Weil, the surest proof that the universe was ultimately benevolent and good. She held that the source of all beauty was transcendent and that the enrapturing quality of beauty had a positive function in the life of man.

The form of "artistic creation" which Simone Weil chooses as analogy is in one case that of painting, at another, that of composing music:

> Le Modèle à la ressemblance duquel l'Ame du Monde est engendrée est un vivant spirituel, ou un esprit vivant. C'est donc une personne. C'est l'esprit absolument parfait à tous égards. C'est donc Dieu. Il y a donc trois personnes divines, le Père, le Fils unique et le Modèle. Pour comprendre que la troisième puisse être nommée le Modèle, il faut se reporter à la comparaison

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[1] Intuitions Pré-Chrétiennes, p. 23.

[2] Intuitions Pré-Chrétiennes, p. 23.

> du début du Timée, la comparaison avec la création artistique. L'artiste de tout premier ordre travaille d'après un modèle transcendant, qu'il ne se représente pas, qui est seulement pour lui la source surnaturelle de son inspiration. Dès qu'on remplace modèle par inspiration, la convenance de cette image appliquée au Saint Esprit est évidente. Même en concevant la comparaison sous sa forme la plus grossière, quand un peintre fait un portrait, le modèle est le lieu entre l'artiste et le tableau.[1]

The identification of the Platonic "modèle" first with "inspiration" and then with the Christian "Holy Spirit" expresses Simone Weil's belief that all genuine "inspiration" has its origin in transcendent sources and that genius is genuinely a "gift". The appropriateness of the analogy of artist when applied to God was that it asserted a unity of the will and thought of God. As such the vocation of loving obedience of the Christian tradition and the use of reason which found unique expression in Greek philosophy could not be seen as contradictory forms of spirituality. For man's contact with transcendent model which gave meaning to the use of the mind in either its philosophical or artistic expression was equally man's contact with the Holy Spirit. As such man's quest for truth and his desire for pure beauty were inextricably mixed. It was through his sense of beauty, in a sense, that man was sustained in his quest for truth. And the essence of this sustenance was the presence of the Holy Spirit whether recognized as such or not.

The advantage of this conception of the third person of the Trinity, in Simone Weil's eyes, was that man oriented himself to

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[1] Ibid., p. 26.

God through his experience of the beauty of the world rather than through his experience of specific events. It was consistent with her notion of the withdrawal of God by virtue of the fact that it removed God's presence from the realm of history.

A further element in her ontology is revealed when she moved from creation as "artistic creation" modeled on painting to that modeled on musical composition. The second aspect of the beauty of the world seen from the perspective of creator is simultaneous composition on several planes. This principle is at work, for example, in a fuque in which two or more themes are pursued independently and yet remain harmonious when taken as a totality.[1] She writes, for example, of necessity:

> Dieu ne fait pas violence aux causes secondes pour accomplir ses fins. Il accomplit toutes ses fins à travers le mécanisme inflexible de la nécessité sans y fausser un seul rouage. Sa sagesse reste en haut (et quand elle descend, c'est, comme nous le savons, avec la même discrétion). Chaque phénomène a deux raisons d'être dont l'une est sa cause dans le mécanisme de la nature, l'autre se place dans l'ordonnance providentielle du monde, et jamais il n'est permis d'user de l'une comme d'une explication sur le plan auquel appartient l'autre. Cet aspect de l'ordre du monde doit aussi être imité par nous. Une fois un certain seuil passé, la partie surnaturelle de l'âme règne sur la partie naturelle non par violence mais par persuasion, non par volonté mais par désir.[2]

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[1]Simone Weil saw the same principle at work in Leonardo's Last Supper where two dimensions focus simultaneously on the head of Christ. A copy of this painting hung in her room.

[2]Intuitions Pré-Chrétiennes, p. 31.

The world must be seen from another perspective than a point in the world. Vertically, a single chord at one point in a fuque seems discordant when unrelated to movement before and after. By the same token, the movement of a single instrument is aimless taken by itself. Beauty lies only in the fuque as a totality. The order of the world is beautiful only as a totality and it is in this respect that necessity can be loved. On this analogy, attachment would be represented as one musician playing alone refusing to see that his music became meaningful only in the context of the entire orchestra. Social solidarity, the greatest temptation in religion and the one to which Simone Weil saw Israel and the church as having succumbed, was all musicians playing the same melody. The error in solidarity was that it ignored the fact that beauty lay in harmony not unanimity.

The beauty of harmony is the beauty of relations. It implies both unity and differences; contraries and their mediation. Harmony, for Simone Weil, was the essence not only of the relations of the three persons of the trinity (i.e. of God to himself), but of man to God, of men to men, and things to things. It expressed itself as the trinity in the first instance, as incarnation in the second, as friendship in the third and in the fourth as the order and lawfulness of necessity.

What is important to note at this point is that the principle of harmony has its origin in consent -- or more specifically in

consent to otherness. The creator consents to creation and experiences it as renunciation which allows otherness. The incarnation is a further consent on the part of God to creation. Friendship stems only from mutual consent among men as does justice which is just the expression of friendship at the level of society. Necessity is pure obedience and man can only experience it for what it is by consent to its inevitability and lawfulness. The consent to necessity is essentially an acknowledgement of everything that is not oneself in the universe.

If consent is, in essence, consent to otherness and thus to difference it is also the principle of unity. Creation is the love of God for himself, the incarnation the union of man and God, friendship the only legitimate unity among men and necessity the unity which lies behind the contingent experience of chance in human existence.

The importance of this in relation to the advaita thrust in Indian ontology is obvious. Whereas Simone Weil, following Plato, seeks unity in a harmony which allows the co-existence of otherness, India seeks unity in negation which denies otherness. For example, where Simone Weil sees the three sounds A. U. M. as achieving unity in the harmony of the three, India's understanding is that the unity lies in the silence which follows. The principle of harmony allows both Plato and Simone Weil to preserve the world in a way that India

is not concerned to do. Its ontology operates on the principle of negation not of harmony. The fourth of a series is a negation of the three which precede it, not their harmony. Mokṣa is the negation of dharma, artha and kāma not their harmony.

To turn, for the moment, from the question of harmony to the closely related subject of metaxu, (the idea that Simone Weil prefers to eidos in the writings of the Greeks) it is necessary to turn from the vision of creation as the product of artificer to the creation as offspring of the divine parent. This conception of God as father is not separate from but complementary to her understanding of God as artist. What unites them is that both are an act of love. Yet there are differences which make the vision of Simone Weil even more complex.

As was noted previously God as creator and God as father are not separate for Simone Weil. The second person of the Trinity is not only the Son but also the world or more correctly the Soul of the World. He is also, by implication, the Beauty of the World, God's presence as visible to man. Following John she links logos with the second person of the Trinity. It is this which saves reason for her. It is this which accounts for mediation -- for she finds logos and metaxu to be synonymous, translating both as mediation.

If the Trinity is truly a unity and the second person of the Trinity is synonomous with the created world one would be tempted to assert a basic advaitism to her thought and to see her ontology as in

fundamental agreement with, for example, Vedanta ontology. Yet the qualifications Simone Weil places on this doctrine make it clear that she wanted to avoid this. She asserts:

> Platon, quand il dit le monde ou le ciel, veut dire essentiellement l'Ame du Monde; de même que, quand nous nommons un ami par son nom, nous avons dans l'esprit son âme et non son corps. Cet être que Platon nomme l'Ame du Monde est le Fils unique de Dieu; Platon dit "monogenès" comme saint Jean. Le monde visible est son corps. Cela n'implique aucun panthéisme; il n'est pas dans le monde visible de même que notre âme n'est pas dans notre corps. Platon le dit explicitement ailleurs. "L'Ame du Monde est infiniment plus vaste que la matière, contient la matière et l'enveloppe de toutes parts.[1]

Advaita, of course, is not pantheism. Nevertheless her qualification which excluded the possibility of pantheism equally excluded the possibility of Advaita. The soul for Plato is, of course, a harmony. It implies a unity achieved by relation not by negation. Simply put, it implies multiplicity. By the same token the Soul of the World envelops and contains matter. It does not lie within and negate matter. The unity implied is one of order not of simple oneness. The particular which lies in the world can be experienced positively by Simone Weil only by relating it to the totality -- i.e. to the order of the world. It is meaningful not as an expression of God's being but by virtue of being a part of that totality willed by God to be other than himself.

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[1] Intuitions Pré-Chrétiennes, p. 25.

To summarize, then, briefly, the ontology of Simone Weil, it is possible to say that she holds in a delicate balance the two following contrary assertions:

> The world must be experienced negatively as totally other than God.[1] This is expressed clearly as the infinite distance between good and necessity. The crucifixion of Christ is the clear expression of this distance. Man must strive to remove from his imagination any illusion of good attached to this world or his existence in it.
>
> The world can be experienced positively only by seeing particulars within it as part of a totality which is the order of the world. Man's clearest and most immediate experience of this order takes place through his sense of beauty for he can acknowledge the unqualified good of beauty more unreservedly than anything else. All particular forms of beauty in the world are shadows and pale imitations of that one true beauty which is the beauty of the world. Their function is to seduce and ensnare the soul and to lead it to love of the Good which is transcendent. Both the beauty which the world offers naturally, the religious traditions of societies and individual acts of pure charity are metaxu -- that is, bridges which transcend the abyss between creation and creator. They serve to turn the soul toward the eternal where truth and goodness dwell.

The remainder of this thesis is an attempt to show that at the points at which this basic vision is consistent with the principle thrust or thrusts of Indian ontology her interpretation of Indian

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[1] I use the word "negative" here to mean "painful", that is, the experience of "the wrongness of existence" as J.G. Arapura has put it. It includes, in this context, factors such as the French "malheur", Sanskrit duḥkha, English "suffering" etc. I use the word "negative" only as the most all-embracing term to include all of these.

texts are correct and of extraordinary profundity. Conversely, to the extent that it is not to that extent she is in error and misreads texts, whether they concern ontology, ethics, politics, spiritual technique, epistomology or whatever.

When we confront the vision of Simone Weil with the world as portrayed by Indian spirituality we must recall those points noted earlier i.e. creation accounts which implied a profound immanence in Indian ontology along with a radical denial of ontological status to the contingent world. Here again we are confronted with creating some sort of order out of a very bewildering and complex variety of religious expression within the Indian tradition. The immanence, for example, of the orthodox tradition is somewhat more pronounced than it is within Buddhism, although it is not absent from the latter. By the same token arguments within the orthodox tradition have centered on what exactly the denial of the contingent world involved and certainly there was no unanimity in the solutions to this problem.

To proceed by comparing Simone Weil's thought to each Indian darśana in its turn is unnecessarily cumbersome and ultimately unmanageable. As has been mentioned previously it is necessary to postulate some kind of unity within the tradition. In practical terms it necessitates that one focus on certain key terms and explicate the logic implicit in them.

To set out the problem in its most simple terms, if the world as negative is seen by Simone Weil ontologically as nécessité with its experiental equivant being "malheur", its corresponding expressions in India is ontologically samsāra or māyā and its experiential equivalent duḥkha. Conversely the world as positive presents itself for Simone Weil as the beauty of the world with its experiental equivalent of l'amour or eros; the world as positive in India presents itself as śakti with its experiential equivalent of ananda (bliss). This, of course, is a gross simplication but it is the core of the matter to which other factors form somewhat the periphery. We shall proceed by examining the world first as negative and secondly as positive.

No word is more revelatory of Indian ontology as it applies to the world than that of māyā. In spite of the fact that the word is not used frequently in the earlier Indian texts, the consistent philosophical expression of the ontology implied in those texts worked out by the later tradition centered around this word. Eliade identifies it as one of the four "kinetic ideas" which bring us directly to the core of Indian spirituality.[1] The term is usually although somewhat erroneously translated into English as

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[1]Eliade, Yoga, p. 3.

"illusion", or "world illusion", or "cosmic illusion". The difficulty, however, of translating this complex word is revealed in the definition given by Monier Williams. He speaks of:

> . . . art, wisdom, extraordinary power (only in early language); illusion, unreality, disception, fraud, trick, sorcery, witchcraft, magic; illusory magic . . . (in philosophy) "Illusion" regarded as the source of the visible world.[1]

The connection with the idea of the conjuration of an illusion on the part of a magician is clearly there. Zaehner translates its early Vedic usage as "uncanny power", "magic", "deceit" and its Gītā usage as the "creative energy" of the Lord.

Perhaps the most negative characterization of māyā is that of Śankara, but Śankara is careful to say not only that it is not real but also that it is not unreal. It is most correctly interpreted as a false appearance from the point of view of man. The archetypal image of the rope and the snake made famous by Śankara is that something is taken for what it is not. The rope is taken for a snake. It is not that there is nothing. The rope is. It is merely that because of avidya the snake is superimposed on the rope. The snake is illusion, but only as snake. For Śankara, of course, the snake corresponds to the world as multiplicity and the rope to Brahman which is one.

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[1]M. Williams. A Sanskrit-English Dictionary.

Such a monist interpretation is not the only understanding of māyā in the Indian tradition, of course, although there is some reason to justify its claim to be the most consistent. It is argued with much justification that the Bhagavad Gītā in particular, and the Upaniṣads to a lesser extent, are far from seeing the world as negatively as does Śankara. Gonda prefers to translate māyā as it is found in the Gītā as God's "power". He translated Gītā (8:61) in such a way:

> The Lord (iśvara) dwells in the heart of all beings, and by his māyā (power) spins them around who are set on a machine.

He argues later that:

> God's creative power bewilders ordinary men and the plurality of the mundane phenomena produced by it prevents them from "seeing" the fundamental unity underlying and conditioning the world of appearances. Here, māyā, obviously assumes the character of a veil which hides the real and eternal from men's sight and understanding: God, veiled by his yogamāyā, is not revealed to all (7:25). It will on the other hand be difficult to maintain that these places teach the unreal, illusory and imaginary character of the world. Nor is there elsewhere in the Bhagavad Gītā any suggestion that world and nature are in any sense held to be unreal: the world is not an illusion, but a source of bewilderment and delusion.[1]

Śankara characterizes the essence of man as consciousness and therefore the source of the misery of the human condition is

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[1]Gonda, Change and Continuity, pp. 172-173.

epistemological, avidya. Simone Weil, by contrast characterizes the essence of man as desire (eros). This is revealed clearly in the following passage:

> Tous les êtres humains sont absolument identiques pour autant qu'ils peuvent être çoncus comme constitués par une exigence centrale de bien autour de laquelle est disposée de la matière psychique et charnelle.[1]

Accordingly the source of the illusory experience of the world lies, for her, in misplaced desire not epistemological error. This is her understanding of māyā although she is specifically confronting Plato not Śankara in the following passage:

> L'irréalité des choses que Platon peint si fortement dans la métaphore de la caverne n'a pas rapport aux choses commes telles; les choses comme telles ont la plénitude de la réalité, puisqu'elles existent. Il s'agit des choses comme objet d'amour. En cette qualité elles sont des ombres de marrionnettes.[2]

While a principle thrust of Indian spirituality revealed not only in Śankara but also in yogic technique and Buddhist meditation is the purification of consciousness -- to reveal ultimately, in the case of Śankara and yoga, at least, pure subjectless -- objectless consciousness, Simone Weil can be concerned with such a purification only insofar as it aided a purification of desire. It is this which permitted her to take more seriously than did Śankara the love of Kṛṣṇa in the Gītā in common with the Bhagavad cults with whom she

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[1] Ecrits de Londres, p. 74.

[2] Intuitions Pré-Chrétiennes, p. 74.

shared the primacy of the erotic. By the same token, however, this position meant that she took with a higher degree of seriousness the contingent world. It had to be taken seriously not only because it was the expression of the will of God but also because man could see it for what it was only by exhausting all attempts to find the good in it. The contingent world suffered from an absence of good not from a lack of being. As such it is, for her, real epistemologically and experientially. She is far from Śankara, for example, when she writes:

> Toute analyse serrée et rigoureuse de la perception, de l'illusion, de la rêverie, du rêve, des états plus ou moins proches de l'hallucination montre que la perception du monde réel ne diffère des erreurs qui lui ressemblent que parce qu'elle enferme un contact avec une nécessité . . . La réalité pour l'esprit humain n'est pas autre chose que le contact de la nécessité.[1]

If Śankara were to use her categories he would undoubtedly reply that contact with the "real world" would involve a contact with the good and the basic dissolving of necessity. The experience of Brahman would render <u>māyā</u> transparent.

As regards experience, the world experienced for what it is involves equally a contact with necessity for Simone Weil.

> L'existence n'est pas prouvée, elle se constate. Mais le plus parfait a plus de réalité que le moins parfait. Et la réalité pour un homme est d'exister ici-bas.

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[1]<u>Intuition Pré-Chrétiennes</u>, p. 142.

(Il y a convenance pour que l'être parfaitement
just existe.)

La plénitude de la réalité de Dieu est hors de ce
monde, mais la plénitude de la réalité d'un homme est
dans ce monde, cet homme fût-il parfait.[1]

Simone Weil is one with Śankara in insisting on a hierarchy of conceptions of reality. Śankara distinguishes para and apara vidya. Reality for man is not the same as reality for the Absolute. But she differs from Śankara, and in so doing denies perhaps the principal thrust of Indian spirituality, by refusing to attempt to adopt the perspective of the Absolute.[2] ". . . la plenitude de la réalité

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[1]Cahiers, II, p. 351.

[2]The matter of Buddhism is more complex, of course. To the extent to which Buddhism calls upon man to experience sarvam duḥkham it is one with Simone Weil. The question arises whether or not this is synonymous with a call to the experience of Nirvāna and what the latter may mean. All that can be said is that to the extent to which Buddhist doctrine refuses to characterize this experience as mere nothingness or annihilation and characterizes it, on the contrary as, in some sense, positive and absolute; and to the extent to which it calls men to this experience in this life; to that extent this assertion holds true of Buddhism as well.

Simone Weil can interpret the Buddha figure only in terms of descent not of ascent. She is much closer to traditional Hindus who, while recognizing the difference between the theological assertions of the orthodox tradition and those of Buddhism, still manage to accommodate the Buddha figure as a kind of avatara, than she is to moderns who see western atheism and Buddhism as compatable. (Atheism, of course, means something quite different when applied to Buddhism and since it is a western term and has its essential meaning within that context it ought not to be used in relation to Buddhism where its usage can only be misleading.)

I do not wish to minimize the problems in sorting out the relation of Hinduism to Buddhism. The problem lies precisely in the word Nirvāna. The ambiguity of this word is reflected in the ambiguity of Simone Weil's attitude to Buddhism. Her solution was

d'un homme est dans ce monde". The difference is that between contingent creature called to obedience and contingent expression of the divine which is called to realize its essence which lies within.

In so doing she denies by implication tat tvam asi, yogic kaivalya, Buddhist Nirvāna, as well as an element of the Bhagavad Gītā as we shall see later. To put it in more general terms there seems to be no place in her thought for the particular Indian understanding of jīvan mukti. More of this later however.

What is important in the difference between necessity and māyā is that the former possesses the fullness of reality for man. For Simone Weil, necessity is experienced for what it is most clearly as (1) unfulfilled desire and (2) violent affliction (malheur). It is a realm in which desire remains unsatiated and in which the most violent pain suffered by men must be granted the fullness of reality simply by virtue of the fact that such ordeals have been experienced. Only mediocrity of soul keeps us from contemplating them without illusions.

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to confine her remarks to Mahāyāna which she could accommodate by viewing the Buddha as the descent of the grace of God whose name men could call upon as legitimately as upon the name of Christ.

As for the problem of perspective in relation to Buddhism it will be dealt with in chapter four where it forms, in a sense, the basic conclusion of this dissertation.

Necessity is that which must be by virtue of God's withdrawal. It is contemplated most clearly, for Simone Weil, in the cross of Christ. She writes, "l'univers entier dans la totalité de l'espace et du temps a été crée comme la Croix du Christ".[1]

Simone Weil shares with all Indian philosophers the deep sense of the "wrongness of existence" although she characterizes the wrongness of the human condition somewhat differently. Her nécessité and malheur are considerably more violent than their Indian equivalents -- samsāra (māyā) and duḥkha. It is the difference between the terror experienced at the point end of the sword or of the nails of the cross and the sad contemplation of sickness, old age and death. The difference between the violence of the Iliad and the "disillusioning" sights of the Buddha is that between man suffering by virtue of being a member of the polis and man suffering by virtue of being an organism subject to the contingency of vegetative existence.[2] The resulting characterization of existence as "impermanence" (anitya) on the part of the Buddhists (who have worked out most thoroughly the understanding of duḥkha) is of minimal importance to Simone Weil.

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[1] Intuitions Pré-Chrétiennes, p. 166.

[2] These distinctions are not absolute. Simone Weil's own "malheur" was a combination of her constant migraine headaches and the tuberculosis from which she died and the terror wreaked by the Third Reich. Clearly she wanted to die, however, not from tuberculosis but at the hands of the Nazis.

Although she shares with Buddhism the primacy of suffering in human existence and its connection with desire -- eros in her case, trṣṇa (thirst) in the case of the Buddhists, her response to this situation seems initially to be diagonally opposed to the solution of the Buddha. While the latter calls for the cessation of desire and the resulting negation of suffering; Simone Weil calls for the purification of desire and obedience to suffering. Here we confront something basic to Simone Weil's reading of India or in broader terms about a basic difference between East and West. Suzuki expressed this from the perspective of the East when he writes:

> Whenever I see a crucified figure of Christ, I cannot help thinking of the gap that lies deep between Christianity and Buddhism.

The gap lies precisely at this point. It is the ontological status and resulting existential response to suffering. The Indian position is put clearly in Śankara's Vedanta Sūtra bhāṣya.

> The pain (duḥkha) of the individual soul (jīva) also is not real, but imaginary only, caused by the error consisting in the non-discrimination of (the Self from) the body senses, and other limiting adjuncts which are due to name and form, the effects of nescience.[1]

The solution to the problem of suffering in the Indian tradition has been to deny it ontological status.[2] The difference

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[1]Vedanta Sutra bhāṣya, II, p. 64.

[2]This, of course, is not to deny its existential reality. As Eliade points out, all Indian philosophies, Buddhist and Hindu, begin with the assertion "sarvam duḥkham". The question of the nature of this "solution" will be dealt with more thoroughly.

between Simone Weil and India on this matter can be seen graphically by contemplating Rembrandt's Descent from the Cross and a statue of the Buddha's enlightenment at one and the same time.

When we turn from the question of the world as negative, as painful to man, to the world as positive and offering the foretaste and possibility of salvation we turn, in Simone Weil's terms, from the question of necessity to the question of the beauty of the world. In Indian terms we turn from an examination of māyā to an examination of that element of the tradition, that centres around the term śakti.

Śakti, like the word māyā, is not a word which occurs often in the early literature such as the Upaniṣads and Bhagavad Gītā. Like māyā, however, the logic which centres around the word is there implicitly in the early literature to be drawn out more forcefully and consistently by those elements of the later tradition which fastened onto this aspect of Indian spirituality. If the logic of māyā is worked out most consistently in the later philosophical tradition particularly that of Vedanta the logic of śakti is done so in the later Puranic and Tantric tradition, although it is never entirely absent from any aspect of the tradition including the darśana of Śankara.

Heinrich Zimmer writes of *śakti*:

> The noun *śakti* is from the root *śak*, signifying "to be able, to be possible". *Śakti* is "power, ability, capacity, faculty, strength, energy, prowess; regal power, the power of composition, poetic power, genius; the power of signification of a word or term; the power inherent in a cause to produce its necessary effect; an iron spear, lance, pike, dart; a sword"; *śakti* is the female organ; *śakti* is the active power of a diety and is regarded, mythologically, as his goddess -- consort and queen.[1]

Two elements of *śakti* are important for the subject at hand -- *śakti*'s connotation of power and its clear identification with the feminine. This is a strange unity for the modern western mind which is more liable to see power as masculine in nature and the feminine as essentially passive. The Indian understanding of masculine and feminine is not a direct opposite to this western understanding but it is clearly somewhat different.

If one may be explicit and permitted the liberty of generalization for a moment, the differences boil down basically to this: while sexuality is seen in the modern West as the male in motion and the female as passive and receptive; the Indian understanding is of an erect *lingam* which, remaining stationary in its potency, is drawn into the act of creation by the active *yoni* which approaches it and draws from it its potency for life. The feminine is nothing

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[1]H. Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization* (N.Y. Harper and Row, 1956), p. 25.

without the presence of the male and is totally dependent on him. But he is present primarily as a still and silent power. Insofar as power is active and dynamic it is feminine in nature. Insofar as there is creation it is feminine.

The god remains inactive and transcendent; the goddess by contrast active and immanent. The modern Western male who visits Indian society often finds it odd that Indian women should view him as somewhat effeminate. For she sees his lack of masculinity in precisely those features in which he sees the essence of his manhood -- his absorption in the affairs of the world. What she worships in her partner is not his ability to order and control society, although he must be able to hold his own and not be victimized in this realm; but, on the contrary something quite different. What she worships and admires in him is his metaphysical orientation -- a superiority which is expressed in a slight indifference and contempt for the mundane activities of the world. The essence of father and husband lies more in his function as priest and contemplative than in his function as provider and protector. The latter are necessary but not the most important ultimately. The woman prays that her man may be like Śiva who in his asceticism is almost forgetful of the world.

In this sense the perfect masculine, not from the point of view of the feminine, but in and for itself, is embodied in the yogi. His retention of semen, his power and his stillness are inextricably mixed. His retention of semen, which is a retention of his potency is at the same time a refusal of creation. He sits in padmāsana on the banks of the Ganges in total stillness and quiessence in defiance of all motion and of all creation -- the completely phallicized body. The feminine bows before him knowing that he means her ultimate annihilation as a separate being and as mother.

The perfect embodiment of the feminine who, by contrast, cannot be considered in and for herself but only in relation to the masculine, is the seductive dancer who lures the masculine into creation. Her active creative power, her śakti, is totally dependent on her temporary ability to do this. It is only by virtue of this that she becomes Mother and thus that there can be creation. Creation for India, of course, is an affair which is ultimately sad but it at the same time remains under the protective custody of the Mother -- witness the importance of the Mother cult in Indian spirituality -- ancient and modern.

What seems to be absent from Simone Weil's reading of Indian spirituality is this element of the feminine. This is particularly so when she identifies prakṛti with her own notion of necessity. Prakṛti is clearly feminine in both the Gītā and in classical

Sāṁkhya. The latter saw its perfect embodiment in a naked woman or at another point in the dancer who seduces her master through her dance, is enjoyed by him, but who retreats out of shame when she is seen by him in her true nakedness, that is, when his eyes are clear and free from the clouding mists of desire.

It is not quite correct, as we shall see later in chapter four, to say that Simone Weil's necessity is more masculine than Indian prakṛti. We note, however, that Simone Weil's necessity is drawn from the harsh world of Homer's warriors -- it is the world of the trembling knee, the violent sword, the severed head. It is the world of the unconsolable widow, the orphaned child.

In the Gītā the dramatic situation is equally one of warfare and slaughter, and yet the slaughter of Kurukṣetra is experienced as if through a mist. The warriors become hazy and shadowy figures performing their warfare in the unreality of a dream, the cries of the victims muffled and scarcely heard except as a sad and quiet music. For ultimately prakṛti proceeds from Kṛṣṇa. It is his creative power at work. It exists, in a sense, by virtue of Kṛṣṇa's consent to the feminine. Although Kṛṣṇa, as in later legend, is more willing than Śiva to frolic in the warmth of the feminine and thus to give delight to woman; in the Gītā, at least, he warns Arjuna against losing himself in the dynamics of this realm for

it is he, Kṛṣṇa, and Kṛṣṇa alone which lies behind creation. It is he who supports it and gives it meaning. And it is to Him that it must return.

> 7:12 Know that all modes of being, be they sattvic, rajastic, or tamastic proceed from me; but I am not in them, they are in Me.
>
> 13 By these modes of being inhering in the guṇas this whole universe is led astray and does not understand that I am far beyond them and that I neither-change-nor-pass-away.
>
> 14 For all this is my creative power (māyā), composed of the guṇas, divine, hard to transcend. Who shall put his trust in Me alone, shall pass beyond my māyā.[1]

Arjuna must succumb initially to the warmth of this metaphysic -- in practical terms to the protective custody of the structure of dharma. His salvation in the long run, however, lies in the renunciation of the feminine and the still power of the masculine (i.e. of the stitha prajña of chapter two).

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[1] Gita 7:

12: ye c'aiva sāttvikā bhāvā rājasās ca ye
matta ev' eti tān viddhi; na tv ahaṁ
teṣu, te mayi

13: tribhir guṇamayair bhāvair ebhiḥ sarvam
idaṁ jagat mohitaṁ, n'ābhijānāti mām ebhyaḥ
param avyayam

14: daivī hy eṣā guṇamayi mama māyā duratyayā mām eva
ye prapadyante māyām etāṁ teranti te

The identification of the duality good-necessity with ātman-prakṛti or puruṣa-prakṛti which Simone Weil continually makes is particularly apt in those sections of the Gītā which emphasize Kṛṣṇa's transcendence in terms of beyondness, and distance and height. But there is equally in the Gītā, as elsewhere in Indian thought a movement toward depth -- a movement in which the distinction between immanence and transcendence (in this case a transcendence of depth) is blurred.

Within the orthodox tradition the transcendence of neti, neti goes hand in hand with the immanence of tat tvam asi and the two are inseparable. Within the Buddhist tradition those elements of the tradition which contemplate most seriously the silence of the Buddha insist most vigorously on the identity of Nirvāna and saṁsāra. Kṛṣṇa says, "Higher than I there is nothing whatsoever" and in the same verse "on me this universe is strung like clustered pearls upon a thread".[1]

It is this transcendence of depth which Simone Weil seems unable to appropriate. Her difficulty with the term ātman in particular is that she cannot interpret it as the essence of man. Man is the longing and striving for the good; he is not the good itself. She uses the word "moi" as something which must be annihilated and

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[1] Gita 7:7

mattaḥ parataraṁ n'ānyat kiṁcid asti dhanaṁjaya
mayi sarvam idaṁ protaṁ sūtre maṇigaṇā iva

the word "je" in much the same way. She uses these terms in a way that corresponds to the Sāṁkhya-yoga "ahaṁkāra" -- i.e. the sense of the significance of the individual, usually translated into English as "ego-sense". Her translation of ātman as the "good" is correct in that it does not involve individuality or contamination with the world but it lacks the element of being within.

> L'idée centrale, essentielle de Platon est celle du Bien. "Le Bien est ce que cherche toute âme, ce à cause de quoi elle agit dans toutes ses actions, pressentant qu'il est quelque chose (de réel) mais incertaine et incapable de saisir suffisamment ce qu'il est." Il est donné dans se mouvement même. Le comprendre, c'est le salut. L'idée centrale, essentielle des Upanisads est celle de l'Ātman. "On aime sa femme à cause de l'ātman, ses fils à cause de l'ātman, ses richesses à cause de l'ātman . . . L'ātman seul est précieux." C'est exactement, identiquement la même idée. La tradition grecque et hindoue sont une seule et même chose.[1]

The peculiarity in her usage of the word is that she uses the term as object rather than as subject. For her the ātman is that of the beloved not that of the lover. For the Indian tradition, or more specifically for the orthodox tradition in which the word is used, ātman is ultimately both beloved and lover. And for at least one side of the tradition, that represented specifically in yogic technique, ātman is in the first instance lover and it becomes both

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[1]Cahiers, III, pp. 136-137.

lover and beloved by dissolving the illusion that there is the beloved as something separate, that is by refusing and thus dissolving the duality of creation. It is this that is represented in the Gītā by stitha prajña.

The divine transcendence of depth must, of course, be distinguished from divine immanence. The difference is that between Sāṁkhya puruṣa, for example, and tantric śakti. In the Gita the difference is expressed in those sections which speak of stitha prajña and the severing of contact with creation and those sections in which Kṛṣṇa speaks of himself as the flavour of water, the light of sun and moon, the fragrance of the earth and the seed of all contigent beings:[1] those sections, in other words which affirm creation.

The difference between the divine transcendence of depth and divine immanence is the difference between male and female; between god and goddess. More specifically it is the difference between the Absolute, in and for itself, and the Absolute insofar as it concedes to creation. Here it is necessary to turn from the figure of Kṛṣṇa to the figure of Śiva who is less ambiguous in this respect.

Śiva, the archetypal yogi, concentrates all power within himself, by virtue of his tapas. In so doing he becomes oblivious of the world which falls in ruin and can be saved only by a child

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[1]See 7:8-10.

of Śiva -- that is only insofar as his consort Pārvati is able to draw him into the act of creation. It is only Siva's willingness to be drawn into this duality which allows the world and Pārvati (i.e. the feminine) to survive. The total dependence of the feminine on the masculine (of the world on Brahman) is expressed not only in the androgynous representations of Śiva and Pārvati, the duality of Śiva and Śakti but also the assertion of a basic advaitism beneath this duality, that is the assertion that Śakti is ultimately only the "creative" expression of Śiva's power.

By contrast the return to unity occurs by virtue of a movement from the creative and dynamic power of Śakti (of prakṛti) to the power of the ascetic Śiva -- the silent still presence of the puruṣa. It is a movement from the immanence of the active productive yoni to the transcendence of the erect and rigid lingam which increases its potency by virtue of its refusal of creation. It is because of this that sainthood in India has, for the most part, meant the presence of the greatest power -- a power expressed mythically in the figure of Śiva. It has also meant a kind of superiority and immunity to creation. Siva who in one myth saves the world by drinking the poison which threatens to engulf it himself suffers no effects from the poison. Pārvati grasps his throat and the poison goes no further.

The figure of Kṛṣṇa is more complex in this respect. Although immune to creation in the Gītā, in later legend he does suffer and die. It is worth noting that he is the only Indian

avatara to do so. Simone Weil does not seem to have been aware of this for she undoubtedly would have mentioned it if she had, so important was the fact of Christ's suffering to her notion of incarnation.

Although never attracted to the figure of Śiva she was attracted to Kṛṣṇa -- not only the Kṛṣṇa of the Gita but the Kṛṣṇa who frolicked and loved the milkmaids. She loved the god who descended to give meaning, joy and beauty to creation. One wonders whether or not the loves of Kṛṣṇa and his death are not inextricably mixed. In other words, to the extent that he entered creation he must suffer its fate. Śiva remains much more transcendent and for this reason is loved in awe by the feminine as opposed to Kṛṣṇa who is loved in frolic, ecstacy and warmth. Viṣṇu (Kṛṣṇa) of course means the maintenance of creation. Śiva ultimately its destruction. Insofar as Kṛṣṇa is concerned to uphold creation he must enter the structures of creation -- kāma in the case of the girls, dharma in the case of the Gītā.

To return to the primary subject at hand the difference between Simone Weil's "beauty of the world" and Indian śakti lies in two areas which are inextricably mixed though separable in part. They are the matter, once again, of power and the role of the feminine in the understanding of the world.

I think it is possible to say that for Simone Weil creation is related to God as the feminine to the masculine as in the case of India. But the difference lies in the fact that God is absent from creation and thus creation in a sense is to be thought of as an abandoned woman -- a woman who is barren not a Mother. It is a woman who possesses not the śakti, the creative power of the feminine which has seduced the masculine and bears the fruit of the seed which lies within her, but who loves someone who is absent and can think of him only by virtue of some things he has left behind. This is what the beauty of the world is for Simone Weil -- the momento of someone who is far away. Man as creature can only love this beauty and that to which it points. The impotence of Simone Weil's sainthood, as contrasted with its power in India, is the impotence of a barren feminine. The total transcendence of the lingam (God) means inevitably the withering and annihilation of creation. Creation, which sees itself for what it is, is called to a pure and impotent love of the beauty of the world and he who left behind this beauty but is now absent.

We can only suggest this element in Simone Weil's ontology at this point for it is more properly the subject of the fourth chapter. We shall leave until then the full meaning and implications to be drawn from it.

CHAPTER III

THE ETHICAL AND POLITICAL DIMENSION IN SIMONE WEIL'S WRITINGS ON INDIA

The discussion of the relation of man among his fellows can be seen as in large measure an enucleating of what is implicit in certain seminal terms which are used in that form of thought which in the West is commonly called political philosophy. One very good method of examining a civilization's conception of social relations is to go directly to the core of the matter by analyzing these central terms. The terms differ in different civilizations and the study of both their unities and differences will tell us much about social realities and the variety of conceptualizations of these realities (i.e. how they were experienced).

At the risk of oversimplification, it is possible to say that terms such as "justice" (Greek dike), "charity" (Christian caritas) and the modern "freedom" have formed the nuclei of western political thought. The movement of western political philosophy has been in large measure the modification or replacement of one of these terms by the introduction or increased emphasis on another.

The introduction of Christian "charity" for example could not but make a difference in the understanding of justice. This is clearly the case in both political thought and political and social actuality. The chant of "liberté, equalité, fraternité" ushered in not only innovations in political theory but the most traumatic changes in political and social structure.

It is not necessary, at this point, to address the question of whether political and economic realities dictate or result from political philosophy. The Marxist account of the relation, of course, Simone Weil dealt with in depth. What is necessary at this point is only to establish a connection and to assert that the heart of this connection lies in these seminal terms.

The crisis of modern political thought, which Simone Weil experienced to the depth of her being occurred in a milieu in which "freedom" was clearly the central and nuclear term of political thought. The sense of hierarchy of the Greek "justice" had been lost and the demand for justice seemed synonymous in the modern mind with the demand for "freedom now". The demands of Christian charity seemed to have been dissolved in the faith that if all men were "free" the necessity for charity would be a superfluous alienation from the pursuit of real happiness in the free expression of man's potential as a creative being.

The crisis of modernity historically confronted thoughtful men in the form of disillusion with the praxis of Marxism in Soviet Russia and the terror wreaked by the Third Reich. A civilization which thought through its political realities in terms of "freedom" was confronted with two societies in which two men possessed absolute freedom (i.e. freedom to do what they wished) and all others were slaves. To make the issue even more stark, the men who possessed this freedom were manifestly mad.

Such is the historical and intellectual milieu in which Simone Weil rethought political philosophy. Her thought she saw as a rejection of those elements of modernity which led to a situation in which there were no criterion by which to condemn Hitler -- a manifestly absurd end to the political philosophy of the West. Her rejection of modernity took two basic forms -- the first chronologically was an attack of unparalleled brilliance on Marx. The second, which came toward the end of her life was an attack on liberalism which took the form of a critique of the notion of "rights". Metaphysically this rejection was expressed in the description of the notion of "choice" as "une notion de bas étage" which she denied had any significance ultimately and had only a limited practical validity.

Simone Weil brought to political philosophy the notion of "obligation", not only as the most sane nucleus around which modern social thought could revolve, but as embodying the essence of Greek and Christian genius, in addition to (and this is what concerns us here) the essence of Indian political thought. Obligation was the essence of not only Greek dike, Christian caritas[1] but also of Indian dharma.

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[1]I am not suggesting that Simone Weil saw herself as an Augustinian. Her notion of l'amour, however, is very close at times to Augustinian caritas, the latter combining the Greek agapé and eros in much the same way as did Simone Weil's 'l'amour'.

The notion of "obligation" or in the plural "obligations", points in two directions. It is directed outside the world by virtue of the fact that it is rooted there. Its source is transcendent. The contradictions of modernity she saw in its refusal to recognize such a transcendent realm.[1] The second direction was into the world. Obligations, insofar as they were social, were defined, in nature, by virtue of the needs of others to which they corresponded. The existence of obligations must be derived from transcendent inspiration, their nature and form derive from empirical observation. We observe the needs of men, both material and spiritual, and deduce the corresponding obligations which are necessary if these needs are to be filled. The material needs she defined as food, warmth, sleep, health, rest, exercise, fresh air. The spiritual needs, or needs of the soul, she listed in pairs of opposites which balance and complement one another. These pairs of opposites she listed at one point as: equality and hierarchy, consented obedience and liberty, truth and freedom of expression, solitude and social life, personal property and collective property, punishment and honour. Another list adds risk and security, order and rootedness, the latter being for her perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul.

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[1]The supreme contradiction of Marxism she saw as ascribing to matter what was the essence of "l'esprit" -- i.e. an unceasing aspiration toward the best.

All men can be seen to possess such needs by empirical observation. Every human being has an obligation to fulfill these needs in all other human beings by sole virtue of the latter being a human being, "sans qu'aucune autre condition ait à intervenir, et quand même lui n'en reconnaîtrait aucune".[1] No man can escape such obligations without committing a crime. The sole exception is when he experiences two obligations which are contradictory, and must sacrifice one of them.

A man must acknowledge these obligations both by his actions as an individual and by the society he attempts to construct. A social order can be judged on two criteria. The first is the degree to which it fulfills these needs in the men who comprise it and does not prevent their fulfillment in other societies with which it has relations. And secondly the degree to which it keeps to a minimum situations which create contradictory obligations in men.

The dilemna of man's life as a political being is that he is in practical reality often confronted by situations of this nature in which the fulfillment of one obligation was achieved only by violating another. It is this situation she claims confronts us when we open the Gītā. Its greatness lies in the fact that it places us before the most extreme expression of the contradictory nature of man's existence as a man among men -- i.e. a fratricidal war.

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[1] L'Enracinement, p. 10.

Before examining the very central question of the understanding of contradiction in the Bhagavad Gītā it is necessary to examine the nucleus of Indian social thought -- dharma. The difficulty of a Western comprehension of this term is witnessed to by the multitude of renderings the word is given in different texts translated into Western languages. It is variously translated into English for example, as:

> duty, justice, right, virtue, morality, religion, decree, statute, law, usage, practice, customary observance, nature, character, essential quality, doctrine as well as many others.

The word has personal, social and cosmic dimensions. Ethical questions within the Indian tradition have been asked in terms of dharma, svadharma, paradharma and adharma. What is dharma? What is svadharma? Social order has been experienced by Indian society as varnāśrama dharma, dharma of the four classes and the four stages of life. On an even larger scale, cosmic process is seen at points as a struggle between the forces of dharma and adharma or as the descent of dharma through the four yugas. In the Gītā, Kṛṣṇa descends for the sake of dharma not for mokṣa.

Few words are more important in the Indian tradition; few words so much the topic of discussion; and few words so difficult to understand in both its assumptions and consequences. Western puzzlement at Indian social structure whether it is mixed with a

sentiment of admiration or of disapproval is only a concrete and practical consequence of the deeper theoretical difficulties of coming to grips with this key term.

The word "dharma" is derived from the root "dhṛ" meaning "to hold, have, maintain, preserve, sustain". Although there is little dispute among scholars as to the derivation of the word, there is some variation in the interpretations which are made of this fact.

Zaehner, for example, traces the Latin "firmus" (firm) and "forma" (form) to the same root. He concludes from this that dharma is ". . . the 'form' of things as they are and the power that keeps them as they are and not otherwise".[1] He goes on to say that "just as it (dharma) maintains the whole universe in being in accordance with eternal law (sanātana dharma) so, in the moral sphere, does it maintain the human race by eternal moral law".[2] He notes that "law exists on two levels: on the one hand it is written down in the sacred texts, on the other, it is inscribed in the hearts and consciences of men. Sometimes the two exist side by side in harmony, sometimes there is tension and conflict".[3] Zaehner is here refer-

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[1]R.C. Zaehner, Hinduism (Oxford: University Press, 1962), p. 3.

[2]Ibid., p. 3.

[3]Ibid., p. 3.

ring to a possible conflict between dharma dictated by social custom, i.e. primarily caste duties inherited by birth, and dharma dictated by an inner spiritual law.

Another Western interpreter of Indian thought, Betty Heimann, agrees with Zaehner that "dharma" is derived from the Latin "tenere" "to hold". She writes:

> Dharma comes from the root dhar -- the same as the Latin tenere, "to hold", whence the English "tenet". It means "position" in all the implications of that word. The term dharma remains relative and elastic. There are many dharmas standing side by side. They are all . . . only darśanas and dṛṣtis, viewpoints and aspects of nearly equal validity.[1]

Miss Heimann then goes on to connect "dharma" with the "law of natural dynamics" and gives it connotations of motion. She writes:

> Dharma, "motion", as being natural is "good"; conversely a-dharma, as being against the law of dynamics, stands for "end". It is not that out of the meanings "position" and "tenet" the ethical meaning has developed, but that just from its dynamic and unfixed meaning of "motion" an ethical significance can be traced the ethical sense comes in from the cosmic law of continuous movement, transformation and change.[2]

An Indian commentator, Sri Aurobindo, in his Essays on the Gita gives us again a third emphasis to the word. Tracing the word to dhṛ which he translates as "to hold" he writes, "Dharma means

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[1]Betty Heimann, Facets of Indian Thought (New York: Shoken, 1964), p. 176.

[2]Ibid., p. 176.

literally that which one lays hold of and which holds things together, the law, the norm, the rule of nature, action and life".[1] This definition of Aurobindo includes dharma as understood both by the individual and by the social order. The individual experiences dharma as that which he "lays hold of" in an attempt to order his actions. Society experiences dharma as that which "holds" the social order together. Neither of these experiences can be totally abstracted from one another nor from the more cosmic dimensions of the word.

We have not the space or time to write a history of the usage of the word dharma in the Indian tradition. R.V. Kane has written five volumes on dharma in Dharmaśastra literature alone. We must however note one or two things about the word. The first concerns the sources of dharma.

The dharmaśastras see the sources of their teaching on dharma both in Vedic scriptures and in traditional custom. Combined with this is an emphasis upon the authority of the man of wisdom to pronounce upon matters of dharma. The Gautama Dharmasūtra begins with the words:

> The Veda is the source of dharma
> And the tradition and practice of those who know
> (the Veda) (1:1-2)

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[1]Sri Aurobindo, Essays on the Gita (New York: The Sri Aurobindo Library, Inc., 1950), p. 24.

The Apastambha Dharmasūtra opens in a similar vein:

> Now, therefore, we will declare the acts productive of merit which form part of the customs of daily life, as they have been settled by agreement. The authority is the agreement of those who know dharma (and the authorities for the latter are) the Vedas alone. (1:1:1:1-2)

Both the Manusmṛti and the Yajnavalkya dharmaśastra see the sources of dharma as five in number -- perhaps best expressed in Yajnavalkya's law book.

> The Veda, traditional lore, the usage of good men, what is agreeable to good men, what is agreeable to one's self and desire born of due deliberation -- this is traditionally recognized as the source of dharma. (1:7)

What is important to note is that the concrete expression of dharma in life is not decided by any explicit orientation to the needs of others. It is oriented to cosmic order which has empirical expression in the organization of Indian society.[1] It can be argued that this order is so constructed to provide for those needs to which Simone Weil felt obligation was directed. Nevertheless there is a difference. For the man who performs dharma does so in response to cosmic order not to contingent need.

To use Western terminology, for a moment, the Indian assumes that responsibility for contingent justice is not his -- it lies in

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[1] In this respect dharma is, of course, the legitimate heir of Vedic ṛta.

the cosmic order and in the source of that order. He is responsible neither for history nor for contingent suffering of those around him. He is responsible only for his own dharma, Svadharma. The response to injustice is not to right the wrongs but to maintain dharma. This may take ritual expression in yajña, or social expression in varna-aśrama dharma. Nothing seems so strange to modern western mentality than a response to social chaos in terms of ritual sacrifices. Yet this is absolutely consistent with the Indian understanding of dharma.

Professor Arapura has characterized this aspect of Indian spirituality as one of "deliberate innocence". In the Bhagavad Gītā Kṛṣṇa claims himself to be the source of dharma and integral to his teaching on niṣkāma karma is a logic which denies Arjuna's responsibility for what is about to take place. His revelation to Arjuna includes the revelation that the enemy has already been annihilated by himself (Kṛṣṇa). The actors in the drama are only puppets who whirl about in the cosmic māyā and who are controlled elsewhere. The sentiment of pity which Simone Weil sees as the essence of Arjuna's condition at the beginning of the Gītā is merely the anticipatory expression of a sentiment which is experienced in the actual activity as crime and in retrospect as guilt. She is right in saying that Kṛṣṇa teaches Arjuna that his sentiment is not a serious one. But she does not go far enough for the sentiment of crime and guilt are of the same order.

Simone Weil is clearly western in her response at this point for the essence of Christian spirituality is guilt. Freud made much of psychological expressions of this in his analysis of his patients. But Freudian man is European man (i.e. Christian man) and the inapplicability of his theories to the Indian psyche has been noted by more than one western psychologist. The gap between ideal (using this term in its mundane everyday usage) and sordid reality which in the western psyche is filled by guilt is filled by nothing equivalent in the Indian psyche.[1]

In spite of Simone Weil's westerness at this point she is clearly a westerner who is spiritually, at least in some ways, moving toward the East. The question of pacificism and violence which had occupied her thoughts through most of her life and confronted her concretely and inescapably after the Nazi intentions become absolutely clear in the German invasion of Prague; these questions were thought out most deeply in her meditations on the Gītā. I think it is safe to say that the Gītā spoke more force-

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[1]Nothing is more comic than to watch Western visitors to India who appeal to this sense of guilt in Indians being constantly frustrated and amazed -- most often in contempt and disbelief. But they are appealing to the wrong place. Their appeal must be to dharma. They must appeal not on behalf of their own need but to obligation determined, in practical terms, by an Indian's position in society, which rests ultimately on an appeal to cosmic order.

fully to her on this crisis in her life than did either Greek or Christian texts. She appealed neither to Plato nor to the Gospels nor to Acquinas' doctrine of the just war on this matter. She thought it out in terms of the Gītā.

What kept Simone Weil at some distance from the notion of dharma is obvious. Her understanding of necessity and its infinite distance from the good negated the experience of immanent cosmic order which is integral to experiencing the world as dharma, an order which had expression as the level of society. One must never lose sight of the root dhṛ connoting "maintaining, supporting, sustaining". The existence of this order is never seriously challenged in India. Buddhism, of course, challenged its social expression to some degree; but it is safe to say that this challenge never cut very deeply into Indian society. The Aśokan dharma pretty well preserved the traditional dharma. The challenge to brahmanic dharma wilted and led ultimately neither to social revolution nor intellectually to political philosophy.

Nehru in modern times and from a modern western perspective noted that India was perhaps the most tolerant civilization intellectually and the least tolerant socially. What he seems to regard as an accidental conjunction is in reality a causal connection. A society which never challenged dharma could not feel threatened by intellectual speculation. The Indian reaction to

both Moslem and Christian invasions was a retreat into the structures of dharma and it has survived seven hundred years of foreign control. Christianity in south India and Islam in north India survived only to the extent that they declared a truce on the matter of dharma (in concrete terms varna-aśrama dharma).

The distance of Simone Weil from this is revealed in her note on Rāma quoted above:

> S'il pense qu'il est mal de tuer le çûdra, il faut savoir s'il est possible d'établir peu à peu un autre équilibre stable où un çûdra puisse agir ainsi sans châtiment. En attendant, il doit le tuer.[1]

Simone Weil is clearly wide of the mark here. For the possibility of establishing "un autre équilibre stable" is clearly out of the question for Rāma. The social order is given to man, it is not created by him. A social order in which a śudra practiced tapas would be adharma. It would result in chaos. Simone Weil neglects to note that an infant brahman died as a result of Sambuka's tapas. The absolute dread of the chaos (embodied in the doctrine of matsyanyaya) which would result from "paradharma" (the dharma of another) or from "adharma" (that which is not dharma) pervades all Indian writings on dharma, including the Bhagavad Gītā.

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[1] Cahiers, I, p. 162.

The reason Kṛṣṇa gives for his descent as avatara is to restore order in the cosmos -- the sustenance of the world i.e. the restoration of dharma.[1] Disorder is portrayed with the utmost horror in the opening chapter as mixture of caste varna-saṁkara.

Simone Weil has an inkling of the conservatism involved in Indian political thought, although she did not fathom its depth. Immediately following the passage quoted above we find this note.

> Mais cela n'est bon que dans une société stable. Les gens n'ont pas fait de règles pour les sociétés instables.[2]

Indian society of course had its unstable moments in terms of its political realities, but not in terms of its political thought. We understand something basic about the difference between East and West when we confront the difference between Greek philospher and Indian Brahman. The former is a lover of wisdom, the latter a possessor of wisdom. It is for this reason somewhat of a misnomer to speak of Indian political philosophy. The closest traditional Indian texts get to raising western questions of how one should live in society and how society should be structured is the Bhagavad Gītā and its answer is Kṛṣṇa's reaffirmation of the traditional

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[1] Bhagavad Gita, 4:7.

[2] Cahiers, I, p. 162.

wisdom. Indian political thought is expressed not in philosophical dialogue but in *śruti* and *smṛti* -- that which is heard and that which is remembered.

Plato can raise the question of justice in the *Republic* only because what is each man's "due" is no longer common knowledge. What justice is is in question. Not only is the essence of justice in question, its concrete application is even more ambiguous. In the notion of *justice* we see the beginning of the ambiguity which characterizes western political thought.[1] ***Caritas*** is even more ambiguous, for what does it mean to love another for the sake of God? The logic of the Inquisition showed the possibilities to be almost infinite. Modern "freedom" is pure ambiguity. It is fitting that Simone de Beauvoir who wrote up the Sartrean ethics should entitle her work "the ethics of ambiguity".

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[1]Professor Leo Strauss has put this in a somewhat different form when he writes in connection with the idea of natural right:

> The first things and the right way cannot become questionable or the object of a quest, or philosophy cannot emerge, or nature cannot be discovered, if authority as such is not doubted or as long as at least any general statement of any being whatsoever is accepted on trust. The emergence of the idea of natural right presupposes, therefore, the doubt of authority. (*Natural Right and History*, p. 84)

The question of nature (Φusis) for the Greeks is the question of justice. In other words, to ask the question of the nature of man is at least in part to ask the question of the nature of justice.

Simone Weil who shared her classroom with Simone de Beauvoir shared also the historical and intellectual milieu in which the political and ethical thought of the West had come to this end. Her response was not to embrace ambiguity as the essence of man as active but, in turning to the past, reaffirming the authority of ancient texts (including the Gītā) and insisting on the concreteness offered in society by rootedness. In this respect she is reaffirming the essence of dharma even if she cannot embrace its particular concreteness.

Her remarks on the Gītā are her principal writings on the question of ambiguity, freedom and choice in ethical matters and what she sees there is a negation of these principles. As we have seen in the second chapter numerous of her comments concern this matter. She sees Kṛṣṇa as teaching Arjuna that his feelings that he has a choice on his immediate course of action are illusory.

At times, however, she does not quite hit the mark. Let us take the following example which I quote in translation:

> In a given situation, every possible action contains a certain proportion of good and evil, or rather since the proportion cannot be measured, a certain mixture. Dharma is a Law for choosing the mixture that is suitable for a man.[1]

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[1] Cahiers, I, p. 162.

Let us suggest an alternative wording which would be more correct:

> In a given situation, the results of every action contain a certain mixture of good and of suffering. Dharma is a principle which negates choice and thus removes from the actor the sentiment of guilt and places responsibility in the nature of the universe.

Simone Weil is closer to the mark when she simply negates choice, at least in connection with action. The following reveals what is involved:

> Ce qu'il y a de mystérieux dans la notion de choix, c'est que ce représenter deux choses comme possibles, donc comme éventuellement réelles, c'est se les représenter comme éventuellement conformes à la volonté de Dieu, donc comme éventuellement bonnes; alors que d'autre part la notion de choix implique que l'une soit bonne et l'autre non. Ainsi la notion de choix est contradictoire. Au reste c'est une notion de bas étage.[1]

All that one can say in response to this is that India has been much more sure what the will of God is than has the West. The sureness of this conviction is essential to dharma. Without it one must experience life in other terms. What must be said of Simone Weil is that she pointed out something very basic to dharma but can appropriate it only to the extent to which she was willing to treat Indian texts as authoritative, which was considerable but with limits. These limits were also the limits of her understanding.

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[1] Cahiers, II, p. 341.

For dharma does not ultimately need to respond to appeals of charity, to accusations of evil or to criterion of needs. It responds only to obligations imposed by the cosmos.

If we can take "necessity" in the strictly philosophical meaning of "that which must be", Simone Weil has identified dharma correctly when she writes:

> L'obéissance est la vertu suprême. Aimer la nécessité. La nécessité et le dharma ne faut qu'un. Le dharma, c'est la nécessité aimée.[1]

The ultimate dependence of ethical questions on ontology is admitted by Simone Weil. Real moral dilemnas are not questions of choice as to what is to be done but rather questions of interpretations as to what a given situation entails. It is a question of "la lecture" to use Simone Weil's category. Kṛṣṇa's teaching is not to tell Arjuna what to do but rather to get him to see the events which confront him in a new way -- or more correctly to reaffirm the traditional "lecture". Kṛṣṇa rejects Arjuna's experience of ambiguity for the structures of dharma. The teaching is not a commandment but a revelation of the nature of the cosmos. He does not tell him that he should fight but that he will fight for nature (prakṛti) will compel him to fight.

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[1] Cahiers, I, p. 222.

Simone Weil's "necessité" is much closer than "duty" or "justice" as a description of what is involved. For the experience of obligation as consent to necessity clearly implies a spiritual detachment. It implies at least a moral tranquility for one cannot experience radical guilt over that which must be.

Here again Simone Weil moves toward India but can only move half-way for she does accuse Arjuna of a kind of guilt. She sees the necessity for his distasteful obligation in a personal inadequacy. "Il n'était pas digne de ne pas faire la guerre". She affirms a form of choice although it is not at the level of action. It is at the level of spiritual state of being which is determined by the nature and object of contemplation.

> Si on se place à un moment donné, on n'a plus le choix. On ne peut plus faire autre chose; il est vain de rêver à faire autre chose; mais il est bon de s'élever au-dessus de ce qu'on fait. Par là on choisit, pour plus tard, quelque chose de meilleur.[1]

In making ethical judgements of men as opposed to actions, Simone Weil is inclined to replace the dichotomy good-evil with the dichotomy good-mediocre. What she feared in life was spiritual mediocrity. In this respect she subscribed to the Augustinian

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[1] Cahiers, I, p. 170.

definition of evil as an absence. It resulted from a lack of feeling for the "real".

Simone Weil clearly accused Arjuna of such a mediocrity. Indian thought can accept this criticism but the force of the accusation is mellowed somewhat by the fact that it must be experienced within the confines of its understanding of karma. Karma is an assertion both of causality and of transmigration for India. Simone Weil understands the first but does not accept the second. She is aware of the latter dimension of the term but clearly does not think within it. This is somewhat surprising in someone who treated Pythagorean thought as the height of western genius but it is nevertheless true. It is rejected on Christian grounds -- as an impediment to charity. She does not reject it on the grounds of most modern westerners -- i.e. that it sanctions injustice understood in an egalitarian sense. Rather her rejection results from her insistence that obligation must be oriented to and determined by "needs". The following passage reveals this:

> Conception hindove doit ôter un stimulant à la charité, si on se dit: au cas où je ne lui ferais pas ce bien, ou il ne le mérite pas, ou il le recevra d'ailleurs. (La croyance à la Providence aussi, d'ailleurs.) Au lieu que si l'on se dit: au cas où je ne ferais pas cela, personne au monde . . . .
>
> Possibilité. Notion qui n'a aucune sens, car elle transporte dans le temps les dimensions de l'espace. Notion dont cependant nous ne pouvons nous passer.

> Elle est la cause de tous les paralogismes concernant la liberté. Elle fait la différence entre l'avenir et le passé.
>
> Nous sommes contraints d'employer continuellement dans nos délibérations avec nous-mêmes une notion absurde et contradictoire.
>
> Le plus haut stimulant est: si je ne fais pas cela, cela ne sera pas. Oeuvre d'art; c'est évident. Celle que je ne fais pas, nul autre ne la fera jamais. Mais je n'ai pas le choix entre plusieurs oeuvres d'art. De même pour toute grande chose. Et si un tel ne fait pas tel poème, je ne le lirai jamais. De même un bienfait.[1]

Her rejection of it is not so much that it is not ultimately true but that it is not a good thing to represent to oneself (at the level of action) as being true. Thought about the afterlife must be in hierarchies according to what part of one's being is contemplating it. At the level of action death as total annihilation is most salutary. In this respect, and this only, she holds to Marx and the whole thrust of modern outrage at cruelty and violation of human needs sanctioned by belief in afterlife. Karma would be for her just a variation of "pie in the sky when you die", if it is permitted to be contemplated by that part of one's being which lays at the level of action. Her difference with Marx was her assertion that there were other levels of the soul -- some, presumably, which could entertain the notion of karma legitimately.

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[1] Cahiers, II, p. 99.

Her own conception of death, as we shall see later was somewhat different. It was much closer to the vertical event experienced by the West than the horizontal event experienced in India. She is far from the sad tranquility offered by the contemplation of aeons of existences through the rounds of samsāra offered by India. Her distance from this tranquility gives her writings a peculiarly western tone which bespeaks urgency.

This urgency was not merely theoretical. It is clearly manifest in the intensity of her life. She was clearly more at home in the confusion that is portrayed by Rembrandt's Descent from the Cross than in the serenity which surrounds the Ajanta Buddha or the Gītā stitha-prajña. This judgement, however, must be modified when we examine her notion of detachment and hierarchies of the soul in the next chapter. Nevertheless she refused any peace of mind in the contemplation of the social order and to this extent saw the karma theory as offering dangers if it operated in this sphere.

Insofar as caste is concerned, we should note that Simone Weil ascribes the necessity involved in Arjuna's dharma to his "spiritual state". This is her understanding of varna dharma. She does not reject considerations of birth as a determinant of dharma totally but her interpretation of the relation of birth to caste is so ethereal that it would be far from the actuality of Indian society. For her, a brahman would give birth to a brahman

only if his soul was in a sufficiently pure state at the time of conception. By the same token, a śudra if he was of equivalent purity could equally well give birth to a brahman. Considerations of this nature are certainly to be found in Indian texts and they ameliorate somewhat the rigidity of Indian society (Buddha was a kṣatriya, Gandhi a vaiśya and Kabir a śudra). Even so, the overwhelming conservatism of the texts leaves Indian society in actuality much less fluid than Simone Weil would think should be the case. She reacted against the classless Marxist ideal she had embraced in her youth on the grounds not only of its impossibility but also on the soul's need for order provided by legitimate and consented hierarchy in society. Nevertheless she insists on an equality of respect given to each human being by virtue of his being a human being. Any tendency to construct a hierarchy by describing some as lesser or more than others would be offensive to her as would the connection of varna with colour. A spirit which described Christianity as a "religion of slaves" could not but embrace the spirit if not the doctrine of Gandhi's life with Harijans (the people of God) and his critique of Indian society as it had become. The effect of Gandhi's social thought has, of course, been experienced as a trauma by Indian society.

The elements of fraternity ("all men are brothers") in Gandhi's thought is not intrinsic to orthodox Indian social thought.

It becomes an element of the tradition only after the Islamic and Christian invasions. A traditional Hindu would not dispute the element of social chaos in modern India but his response would be very different from Gandhi's -- a reaffirmation of dharma. It is not without significance that the seminal term in Gandhi's thought was not that of the tradition -- i.e. dharma but a more peripheral term ahiṃsā -- a term which was as often as not seen in smṛti literature to be in conflict with dharma. This is so of the Gita as much as of any text and there is no doubt as to which took priority. Arjuna must fight because he was born a kṣatriya and battle faces him.[1]

Simone Weil in this respect was right to see in the Gītā a justification for war and to disagree with Gandhi on this matter. She is closest to Gandhi insofar as he orients his social concern to human needs (in Gandhi's case that of the untouchable). In other words she is closest to him in that aspect of his thought which derived from the West.

Ironically, however, it is over the matter of ahiṃsā that one can see something specifically Indian in Gandhi's thought and something specifically western in Simone Weil's thought. At one level she is closer to the Gītā than is Gandhi (i.e. it teaches the necessity for war); at another level she is more distant and Gandhi is closer.

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[1]Bhagavad Gita, 2:31-3.

It is at the level of the ontology presupposed in the question of violence or non-violence.

Non-violence, for Simone Weil, was a question of tactics. It was for her a legitimate policy if effective but a policy to be dropped if not effective. She would use it if it worked, reject it if it did not. She was open both to ahiṃsā and to revolution (though not terror). Both were subordinated to justice.

Her criteria for violence was this test for any sane and reasonable man. If you can, in imagination, link your own life and death with that of the man in your sites and still pull the trigger you are justified in doing so. This criterion prevents one from the illusion of warfare that what one is killing is not a man or from perpetrating violence for any form of self-interest. Violence could only be justified if one could honestly say to oneself that things would be worse without it, worse not for oneself but worse for the world as the totality of men.

Clearly implied in that element of Simone Weil's ontology which stressed the infinite distance between the necessary and the good was the belief that justice was always subject to chance. There was nothing inherent in the universe which would support it (at least in a social context).[1] This meant that it could be

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[1]The "persuasion" of necessity by Good does not operate for Simone Weil at the level of society. The proper image for thinking of society is the great beast.

introduced or sustained at times only by violence. The question then reduced itself to keeping evil (injustice) to a minimum. She rejected the revolution on this principle (i.e. it would lead to greater injustice to workers than without it for it would fail and be followed by repression). She rejected ahimsā on the same principle. A German victory in the early forties would have led to more evil than that involved in stopping Germany (i.e. killing German soldiers).

The principle was, for Simone Weil, always a negative one -- removing injustice, removing evil. The human condition is such that injustice is more apparent to us than justice. We can see that needs are not fulfilled. It is only through injustice that we can get at justice. Here again we see that suffering is man's contact with reality.

It is important to note that Simone Weil was never motivated by the eschaton in either its Christian or Hegelian forms. Even her early writings testify to this. Evil had been and ever would be inextricably mixed with the human condition. Man's problem was only to keep it to a minimum.

Her argument with Marx was that his social thought centered around a dream rather than a reality. It centered around justice in the eschaton rather than injustice in the present. She brought the same criticism to bear on Christianity. She made little or nothing of either the resurrection or the second coming. Christianity's truth lay in the crucifixion.

Clearly Indian social thought has not been oriented to the eschaton in any way similar to that which has characterized the political thought which has come out of Christian civilization -- either in its orthodox Christian expression as the second coming or its modern secular expression as progress. But there is a cosmic immanence implied in traditional dharma, an immanence which was not totally lost in Gandhi's ahiṃsā.

Ahiṃsā was united in Gandhi's thought with that of satya (truth) and truth in the Indian tradition has always possessed power. It has been expressed mythologically in the numerous myths of the truth -- act and underlay Gandhi's belief in satyagraha. Satya (truth) united one with being (sat) and being was not impotent in the world. Gandhi believed that no man and no society could remain indefinitely alienated from truth and thus from reality. Falsehood and non-being were finite by definition and would dissolve in the face of truth and reality. In social terms disorder and injustice could not ultimately withstand the onslaught of truth.

Gandhi never wavered in this belief even over the question of a possible Japanese invasion of India. His response to this possibility was that if enough Indians died non-violently the Japanese would grow tired of killing. In western terms Gandhi's ahiṃsā was based on the presupposition that evil could be exhausted and this belief rested on an ontology which held the cosmic immanence implied by both dharma and satya.

Simone Weil by contrast did not feel that evil was exhaustible, at least not in any way that was meaningful at the level of social action. A "universal and perpetual tyranny" was, for her, clearly possible. Rome had achieved one in the ancient world for a thousand years and Germany was on the verge of one in 1940 if she were not stopped. For Simone Weil evil was to be limited not exhausted and the responsibility for the limitation lay clearly with men and implied violence. The question confronting men was always that of the minimizing of evil.

The criteria of the minimizing of evil never arises in the Gītā. Kṛṣṇa nowhere offers it as an argument to Arjuna. The most that can be said is that the structure of dharma assumes such a minimizing of evil. The Gītā rejects the ambiguity implied in the criteria and as we have seen, reasserts the traditional wisdom. It can do this by virtue of the immanence of the divine in the world.

As such man must address himself to the concrete obligation imposed by dharma. Contradiction in dharma had led Indian political thought not into philosophy but to the assertion of one form of dharma over that of another. The existential contradiction of Arjuna leads not to philosophy but to the authoritative assertion of the supremacy of varṇa-dharma over ahiṃsā. Dialectics does not

begin if one side of the contradiction is negated and the other takes precedence. The Indian rejection of ambiguity, of contradiction and of philosophy are one and the same.

This rejection can take place only by virtue of belief in traditional authority at the level of social obligation. It can take place, as we shall see in the next chapter, at the level of ontology only by virtue of the logic of māyā. For the principle thrust of Kṛṣṇa's argument is that those to be killed or more generally what is to be done do not possess the fullness of reality.

CHAPTER IV

THE PROBLEM OF "SPIRITUAL TECHNIQUE" IN SIMONE WEIL AND INDIA

We have identified, in the second chapter, the two central nuclei of Simone Weil's writings on man's spirituality as the notions of "obedience" and of "attention". These notions, as we have seen, have their implications in the field of ontology, from which, in a sense, they derive; and for the field of ethics, where, indirectly, they have their consequences. But it is when we approach the question of man's relation to the absolute that one can see the full range and depth of the dynamics involved in these terms. It is in the question of man's response to the universe in which he finds himself that we realize fully the implications of any thinker's thought. This is true of Simone Weil's thought no less than others.

For want of a better term, I have used the term "spiritual technique" to describe the subject matter of this chapter. The word "technique" implies the ordering of means toward an end, and the word "spiritual" implies that both end and means in this case are centred around man's mind and soul, or more broadly the core and centre of his being however one wishes to designate that centre. What we are concerned with here roughly corresponds to Indian <u>mokṣa</u> and the means for its attainment, <u>yoga</u>. It is, in sum, the question of man's salvation and the means for its attainment. It differs from the concerns of the last chapter in that while the former treats of man in the community this chapter is concerned with that rugged territory in man's journey which is travelled for the most part in solitude.

As we have seen in connection with the two elements of Simone Weil's doctrine of creation, man confronts a universe from which God has withdrawn, but a universe, by the same token, which offers man pure beauty in its totality and the seductive shadows of this beauty in its particulars. Insofar as the universe presents itself as the withdrawal of God, man is called to obedience to the necessity which governs in his absence for it is only this necessity which he can truly represent to himself as being the will of God. Insofar as the universe presents itself in the totality of its relationships as beauty, man is called to be attentive. Attention, for Simone Weil, implies love for it is oriented ultimately to beauty; and it implies equally the rational faculties for this beauty must be seen in relationships -- relationships which can be sorted out in part with the assistance of the mind.

One can, at this point, anticipate both points of congruence with aspects of Indian thought as well as fundamental differences. Obedience involved for Simone Weil ultimately decreation. As is expressed most clearly in yogic and Buddhist discipline man is called upon to make the great renunciation (tyaga), which is essentially a renunciation of creation and its dynamics. But while Yoga and, in a more complicated way, Buddhism, do so in the name of an absolute which is within and which has only to be released from an illusory association with creation to lead necessarily to man's salvation;

Simone Weil does so in the name of obedience to a Good which is totally other, an obedience which may entail for man not only salvation but equally the possibility of annihilation in all the harshness of the Western representation of that possibility.

By the same token, the renunciation to which Simone Weil calls man does not take as its starting point a fundamental disgust with creation, an experience of the world as ugly. This disgust lies at the centre of Indian spirituality and finds its archetypal expression in the first three sights of the Buddha, of old age, disease and death which were the first cause for reflection, and the ugliness of sensuality experienced in the grotesque sleeping dancers on the night which precipitated the great renunciation. This classic Indian renunciation involves a fundamental rejection of man's sensuous nature symbolized both by the passionless Buddha, the stitha prajña of the Bhagavad Gītā or the entire severing of the senses in yoga. Simone Weil, by contrast, calls man to experience his carnal nature as a suffering by emptying it of all particular satisfactions and fulfillments. It is left to rust in disuse but it is never destroyed. It is to be emptied of all particular content only that it may be oriented to that totality which is the beauty of the world. Desire must be purified but not negated. As such the spiritual quest leads not to quiessence and self-fulfillment

but rather to the agonies of unfulfilled longing and self-deprivation. The agonies of this deprivation may only be assuaged by the descent of the beloved, that is by the grace of God. In this respect, man is not by his nature self-sufficient but totally dependent. Obedience is the expression of this dependence.

In one further respect we foresee both similarities and differences. And this concerns the place of the intellect in the spiritual quest. Since man is called upon to experience the beauty of the world in the totality of its relationships, relationships which preserve otherness and do not negate them; man's reason has a positive function in clarifying these relationships. The mind must not be stilled as the source of an illusory attachment to the structures of unreality as in classical yogic technique, but must function positively to allow man to experience the world as it is in its reality. It must purge him of an illusory confusion of good and necessity and of an erroneous confusion of the shadows of beauty in particulars with the true beauty of the totality. Its limitation, for Simone Weil, lies in that its function ultimately is to prepare for the purification of the desire which is the essence of man. As such man's reason has the negative function of removing illusion rather than that of grasping truth. For man experiences truth ultimately, not with the mind but through his faculties of love.

Her preference for Plato, Descartes and Kant lay in that she identified their notion of the function of philosophy as one of purification (i.e. as removal of illusion). Conversely her dislike of Aristotle, Leibniz and Hegel lay in her rejection of the notion that philosophy was concerned to grasp the truth and to make ontological statements, a notion of philosophy which she held to underlay the project of these philosophers and of which she disapproved.

Simone Weil held that the distinction between discursive and intuitive thought was not absolute and that the former had its culmination in the latter. Discursive thought was a useful if not a necessary preparation for the intuitive experience of truth. Unlike many Westerners who are favourably disposed to the spirituality of the East she does not call upon the West to reject its tradition of philosophy but rather to return to the original understanding of the purpose of philosophy in its most eloquent Greek spokesmen the Pythagoreans and Plato, a purpose which was oriented always to the intuitive and mystical experience of the absolute -- a mysticism which she held to be present explicitly in the Pythagoreans and always to be present on the horizon of Plato's thought.

With this outline of some of the factors which must be taken into consideration in this chapter, it is necessary now to look more deeply at this aspect of Simone Weil's thought as it confronts the Indian religious tradition. We will commence with a consideration of the notion of obedience and the related notion of decreation before turning to those problems which centre around the notion of attention and the related understanding of rational thought and desire.

To see what is meant by Simone Weil when she speaks of obedience let us return to a portion of that central passage of her notion of creation. It is worth quoting again to bring it freshly to mind.

> Dieu a crée c'est-à-dire, non pas qu'il a produit quelque chose de hors soi, mais qu'il s'est retiré, permettant à une partie de l'être d'être autre que Dieu. A ce renoncement divin repond le renoncement de la création, c'est-à-dire, l'obéissance. L'univers tout entier n'est pas autre chose qu'une masse compacte d'obeissance. Cette masse compacte est parsemée de points lumineux. Chacun de ces points est la partie surnaturelle de l'âme d'une créature raisonnable qui aime Dieu et qui consent à obéir. Le reste de l'âme est prise dans la masse compacte. Les êtres doués de raison qui n'aiment pas Dieu sont seulement des fragments de la masse compacte et obscure. Eux aussi sont tout entiers obéissance, mais seulement à la manière d'une pierre qui tombe.[1]

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[1] Intuitions Pré-Chrétiennes, p. 161-162.

There are two elements to be noted immediately here. The first is that a consented obedience is the only act of freedom open to men and that what man in his "natural" condition takes for his freedom is in fact illusory. The second is that the logic of obedience points to a renunciation of creation and insofar as man is creature he is called to consent to his own annihilation. The principle of this consent she identifies at one point with the Indian category of sattva.

> Une créature raisonnable, c'est une créature qui contient en soi le germe, le principe, la vocation de la décréation.
>
> Sattva est cette tendance à la décréation.[1]

The thing which makes a man a man, and constitutes his superiority over "nature" is the possibility of a consented decreation. The dynamics of nature, (or prakṛti), insofar as it ignores this element within it (sattva) is the dynamics of a universe which is a series of centres of energy which desire to hold themselves in existence only to be annihilated unwillingly from outside. Since the principle of this whole realm is self-preservation, to give up this realm is to consent to self-annihilation. This is Simone Weil's equivalent to saṁsāra and it is this that she understands by necessity.

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[1] Cahiers, II, p. 206.

Self-annihilation as decreation is never suicide for Simone Weil, for suicide assumes an act of freedom which is illusory. Decreation is accomplished from outside (i.e. by necessity). Man's only choice is over the matter of consent. And even in this his choice is limited not to consent to decreation as such which is a psychological impossibility, but only to the possibility of decreation. Man can open himself to this possibility only by absolute devotion to pure love -- whether that be to the love of the will of God or the impossible demands of pure charity. These two are synonymous, of course for Simone Weil, although men may represent the latter to themselves without being conscious of the former. To the charge often made against Christianity that a Christian life is impossible to live she would undoubtedly answer only by saying that Christ died young. And we might be tempted to add so did she.

Simone Weil's writings on decreation are clearly thought out within the logic of Christianity. Let us turn, now, to the Indian understanding, which bears both remarkable resemblances and yet some differences which must give us pause.

The spirituality of India entered the West at least in part through Schopenauer and Schweitzer as a "world-denying" philosophy. There has been a concerted attempt by both Indian philosophers

(Aurobindo and Radhakrishnan) to refute such a charge as well as a concerted effort by Western scholars such as Basham and Younger to bring to the fore the undeniable sensuality and earthiness of Indian spirituality. We are not concerned to enter into this debate but only to note that the West has from the first experienced Indian religion and philosophy as involving an attitude to creation which it has found somewhat alien and has characterized as negative in nature.

Mircea Iliade, in his book on Yoga, has written perceptively on this subject. He rightly sees yogic technique as the dynamic heart of Indian spirituality, both Hindu and Buddhist, and he has characterized this spiritual technique as, in essence, a movement toward decreation -- to a fundamental negation of what he characterizes as "profane existence". He summarizes classical yoga in the following passage worth quoting at length:

> Let us recapitulate the stages of this long and difficult road recommended by Patanjali. From the first, its end is perfectly clear -- to emancipate man from the human condition, to conquer absolute freedom, to realize the unconditioned. The method comprises a number of different techniques (physiological, mental, mystical), but they all have one characteristic in common -- they are antisocial, or, indeed, antihuman. The worldly man lives in society, marries, establishes a family; Yoga prescribes absolute solitude and chastity. The worldly man is "possessed" by his own life; the yogin refuses to "let himself live"; to continual movement, he opposes his static posture, the immobility of asana; to agitated, unrhythmical, changing respiration,

> he opposes prāṇāyāma, and even dreams of holding his breath indefinitely; to the chaotic flux of psychomental life, he replies by "fixing thought on a single point", the first step to that final withdrawal from the phenomenal world which he will obtain through pratyahara. All of the yogic techniques invite to one and the same gesture -- to do exactly the opposite of what human nature forces one to do.[1]

In another passage he elaborates further:

> The yogin undertakes to "reserve normal behavior completely" . . . On every level of human experience, he does the opposite of what life demands that he do. Now, the symbolism of the "opposite" indicates both the post-mortem condition and the condition of divinity . . . The "reversal" of normal behavior sets the yogin outside of life. But he does not stop halfway -- death is followed by an initiatory rebirth. The yogin makes for himself a "new body", just as the neophyte in archaic societies is thought to obtain a new body through initiation.[2]

Now clearly decreation within both Simone Weil's understanding and that of Yoga involves a basic break with existence as it presents itself to man in its "natural" condition. We can speak of "conversion" or "reversal" or whatever; but, in any case, a fundamental change of direction is involved and both Simone Weil and yoga use the word "nature" (or prakṛti) in such a way that makes it clear that this movement is, in some sense, "unnatural".

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[1] M. Eliade, Yoga: Immortality and Freedom (Princeton: Princeton University Press), pp. 95-96.

[2] Ibid., p. 362.

Eliade uses the word "nature" in this case as almost synonymous with "profane" which is a term which necessarily implies its correlative "sacred". Profane existence is renounced in favour of "sacred" life. "Death" is followed by an "initiatory rebirth". As such the rejection of the dynamics of the profane is a rejection of the centrifugal movement of creation, and a retracing of this movement in the centripetal direction of salvation -- i.e. of a return to the primordial unity -- whether that be samādhi, satcitānanda, nirvāna or whatever.

What is important to note is that it is a movement which makes sense only by the logic of a unity which is within. Since the real is present within in silence and stillness, man is called into the logic of quiessence and the stilling of the movement inherent in prakṛti. Māyā, prakṛti, saṁsāra, whatever, is dissolved by a detachment which rejects the illusory dynamics which operate within this realm. It is a rejection of both space and time. Salvation lies in a unity which is nowhere and everywhere, and a moment which is eternity. Salvation is stillness, immobility and a unity which is characterized by yoga as isolation, by Vedanta as non-dualism by Buddhism as nirvāna which can only be spoken of in terms of its opposition to the moving stream of saṁsāra.

When we turn to Simone Weil we note as before, the language of decreation and of detachment from the dynamics of prakṛti. But we notice a difference, as well. For we note that she speaks not of the rejection of profane existence but of existence as such. We note also the absence of the element of quiessence and stillness and the presence of a thought which returns again and again to the contemplation of "malheur" in reflecting on both man's nature and his destiny. We note agony but very little tranquility.

What we note more than anything else is the absence of the element of yoga implied in its root yuj (union or yoking). The detachment implied in yoga is done only in the name of a fundamental "linking" with a principle which necessitates a break with its contradictory.

In contrast to the union implied in yoga we experience in Simone Weil a return again and again to the theme of disintegration. In contrast to yogic decreation which calls for the abolition and transcendence of space and time, Simone Weil's decreation calls man to a state in which he is totally victimized by both space and time. Affliction can be contemplated in physical pain which paralyzes everything else except man's sense of the duration of time; and of the violence which finds its extreme expression in a dismembered corpse. The imagery of being "torn apart" returns again and again

in her writings and, as we noted above, she asserted Kṛṣṇa's revelation to Arjuna was conditional upon Arjuna opening himself to this possibility. And in this sense much of what is important for Simone Weil in the Gītā had taken place before the dialogue ever began.

Christ, of course, was for Simone Weil the extreme expression of this obedience to space and time. The cross represented not only a slow death, but also the greatest distance between God and himself. The obsession with time implicit in the cross is revealed in the relief of the words "It is finished"; and the obsession with space in the cry of being foresaken by God which Simone Weil saw as the deepest words ever uttered -- words to which man must address himself in fundamental struggle with his increasing horror as he approaches their meaning. Time and space are the cross of man and by corollary the cross is the meaning of space and time.

We can only note at this point the contrast between this experience of man's condition and the still and silent figure of the solitary yogi on the banks of the Ganges who is oblivious both of the movement of the river which flows by him or the fact that the sun has risen and set since he turned his eyes within.

It is this fundamental theoretical difference with Indian thought which lies at the basis of many of the "un-Indian" elements in her personal and practical life. It is for example linked with

her general indifference to the health of her body which she ignored throughout her life and in the end declined even to give the nourishment for its bare subsistence. She toys at one point with yogic notions of respiration but never gave up her almost pathological chain-smoking. There is an element of asceticism common to her own and Indian spiritual disciplines, but in Simone Weil's case it stems from a fundamental indifference to the body, while in yoga, for example, asceticism is oriented to mastery of the body. From the perspective of yoga, one might argue that her indifference led her ultimately to be victimized by the body and thus under its control; while yoga, by contrast, achieves in the mastery of the body the only true indifference.

By the same token her immersion in the world of politics and social reform, as we have noted before, is not typical of the spiritual discipline of classical yoga or early Buddhism. In this respect, of course, she is closer to the Gītā's understanding of yoga which can, in some sense, include this realm. Although here again we find an alien element in her refusal to admit that detachment must operate within this realm. Man, for her, must open himself to the suffering of this realm. She writes, in a frequently quoted passage from her letter to Joe Bousquet, who had been rendered totally paralysed by the first world war:

> Heureux ceux pour qui le malheur entré dans la chair est le malheur du monde lui-même à leur époque. Ceux-là ont la possibilité et la fonction de connaître dans sa vérité, de contempler dans sa réalité le malheur du monde.[1]

We may summarize this analysis of her notion of obedience and decreation as it is applied to Indian spirituality by noting again the similarities and differences. Decreation in both Simone Weil and Indian thought involves a fundamental break with "natural" existence and a movement the dynamics of which are "unnatural". Such a break must be absolute and complete.

Decreation in yoga, however, involves a centripetal movement toward a unity which lies within; while Simone Weil by contrast, implies by decreation obedience to a good which is transcendent. Salvation, for man, in the case of the latter, is received as a gift; it is not a necessary result of self mastery. As such, man is necessarily oriented to the grace of God who is transcendent but whom man must hope will descend.

As such, renunciation (tyāga) and its ultimate consequence, salvation (mokṣa), which operate in a sense independent of anything that suggest the arbitrariness of "will" and are primals within Indian spiritual technique are secondary in the case of Simone Weil. Renunciation stems only from obedience in the case of Simone Weil

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[1]Pensées sans ordre, p. 76.

and salvation is dependent totally on the grace of God. The primacy of obedience in this dynamic illustrates the essentially Semitic basis of Simone Weil's thought (in this case Christianity).

Simone Weil states the ultimate expression of this principle in her insistence that detachment is demanded even over the matter of salvation. She writes:

> Si mon salut éternel était sur cette table, sous la forme d'un objet, et qu'il n'y eût qu'a tendre la main pour le saisir, je ne tendrais pas la main sans en avoir reçu l'ordre.[1]

In sum, the principle of obedience is absolute. By implication so are the dynamics of decreation. Man must be obedient to the good to the point of becoming indifferent to the question of its existence. The harshness of such a vision is clearly shocking in its starkness. We must, however, never lose sight of this aspect of Simone Weil to which so many have expressed objection based at times on misunderstanding, and at other times by a refusal to see the possibility of experiencing the world in terms which offer so little consolation to man, part of whose nature is an innate movement of the soul, described in the word "hope".

We must turn, of course, to those elements of Simone Weil's thoughts which ameliorate the toughness of this vision and there are

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[1] Cahiers, II, pp. 206-207.

such elements. But in doing so we will be wise to take her words on contradiction seriously. In other words, we are perhaps closer to her if we refuse to create a synthesis which is consoling and maintain and contemplate both sides of the contradiction as absolutes -- i.e. as contradictories not contraries. With this warning we turn to a consideration of the beauty of the world and man's orientation to this beauty through his faculty of a loving attention.

In the Cahiers Simone Weil writes:

> Le juste rapport avec Dieu est dans la contemplation l'amour, dans l'action l'esclavage. Ne pas mélanger. Agir en esclave en contemplant avec amour, mais ne pas agir pour ce qu'on aime.
>
> Tout ce que je fais est mauvais, sans exception, y compris le bien, parce que je est mauvais.
>
> Plus je disparais, plus Dieu est présent dans ce monde-ci.[1]

Here we see the relation between obedience and loving contemplation. The former is primal for man as acting creature; the latter primal for man in the passivity of attention. We see also a connection between both and the theme of decreation.

For Simone Weil, as we have seen, attention and love are one and the same activity. Attention, however, is the broader term for it includes within it the faculties of the intelligence and it is

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[1]Cahiers, II, p. 331.

for this reason undoubtedly that Simone Weil used it as the more-all-embracing term. In historical terms she held to a Christianity which preserved the genius and project of Greek philosophy as she interpreted that philosophy.

Attention, she saw, in the concentration of the faculties of mind and soul. It was a concentration, achieved, not so much by an act of will, on the analogy of the tightening of muscles; but rather a self discipline achieved through prolonged training in which the innate tendency of the mind to wander and to be guided by the sensuousness of the body was overcome. As such, teaching became the training of the intelligence of the student which meant for her neither the insertion of knowledge in the mind or even for that matter the drawing out of knowledge as in the popular representation of the Socratic model. It was rather a progressive training of the mind's ability to concentrate. It was only through such an ability that man could approach truth in whatever form.

Clearly there are analogies here with yogic technique of concentration and the corresponding control and indifference to the body. One might say that Simone Weil is one with yoga to the point to which his discipline moves to the achievement of ekā gratā (one-pointedness). Although one is tempted at the same time, to say that this is the point at which she stops. For she is oriented not to

complete stilling of the mind's activity, nor to the non-differentiation of subject and object. It is on the contrary a complete orientation and openness to the object. The object always remains, whether it be in the case of charity, the needful beggar; or in the case of the universe as a whole the oneness and goodness of God. The attentiveness to a God who is other is not a practical assistance at a less than ultimate stage as in the yogic understanding of isvara but rather a complete and absolute orientation.

Simone Weil, unlike much of the modern West, uses the word "imagination" most often in a negative way. It is an impediment to true thought. An example of this use of the mind was the obsessive brooding of Shakespeare's Hamlet which led neither to decisive action nor more importantly to a real awareness of what was involved in what had happened. Thought must not be "sicklied o'er" but rather must possess the clarity of Pythagorean geometry.

The difference between "attention" which leads to truth and "imagination" which wallows in delusive ignorance is that "attention" maintains a contact with "reality" which is absent in imagination. She points out the reason evil can appear so attractive in imaginative literature while being so unattractive in reality is due to the absence of necessity from fiction.

Attention involves a contraction of the personality of the subject not its expansion as in imagination. It involves a stilling of subjective passion and a total openness to the object contemplated. If the object is false it will reveal itself to be so, so long as the personality of the man being attentive has been dissolved. Imagination and "personality" are inextricably mixed for Simone Weil and both must be negated.

We see at this point that she is saying something very close to Sāṁkhya here. What she says about "imagination" and "personality" bear close correspondence to what both the Gītā and Sāṁkhya Karika say about manas and ahaṁkāra. Manas, insofar as it is "mind" in relation to the senses must control the latter rather than be controlled by them. Manas subject to the senses becomes "imagination" and is led into the structures of delusion. Insofar as it is in control it is fulfilling its function. "Ahaṁkāra", which is usually translated "ego-sense" is the source of the sense of an individuality identified with creation (with prakṛti). This is exactly what Simone Weil means by personality. The rejection of the dynamics of ahaṁkāra are exactly what she means by the "destruction du je" and the achieving of a state which is "impersonnel".

Buddhi, the highest evolute of prakṛti Zaehner translates once as "will" and at another point as "soul".[1] Simone Weil's

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[1]Zaehner, The Bhagavad Gita (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 142-143.

"attention" is much closer to the essence of this term. As Zaehner notes buddhi is "nearest to the immortal 'self', is single, simple, one, because its true function is contemplation of the eternal". Surely "will" is much too dynamic, too rajastic to convey this meaning. Simone Weil's "attention" conveys the quietude and sattvic nature of buddhi as well as its orientation to the eternal much better. The word "soul" although it is the "responsible element in man" in the Christian tradition as Zaehner maintains, nevertheless retains the structures of ahaṁkāra (i.e. of individuality) which buddhi by definition transcends. The impersonality of Simone Weil's "attention" is again closer to the mark. It connotes the agent of integration in man as well as the faculty of salvation.

The liberation of attention from its struggle with the dynamics of imagination and personality necessitated an intellectual discipline. She writes for example:

> Même attarder son imagination sur certaines chose comme possible (ce qui est tout autre chose qu'en concevoir clairement la possibilité, chose essentielle à la vertu) c'est déjà s'engager. La curiosité en est la cause. S'interdire non pas de concevoir, mais de s'attarder sur certaines pensées; ne pas penser à. On croit que la pensée n'engage pas, mais elle engage seule, et la license de penser enferme toute license. Ne pas penser à, faculté suprême. Pureté, vertu négative.[1]

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[1] Cahiers, I, pp. 237-238.

Here we see both her negative assessment of imagination as well as her positive assessment of clear conception. As we noted before the structures of reason are never brought into question in her thought and to this extent she is at some distance from Indian techniques orthodox and Buddhist, which move to the negation of all discursive activity in the mind.

At another level she is closer to India in that she places limits on the use of reason and sees its function, as we have noted above, basically as negative in nature. She writes, for example, in the Cahiers:

> L'intelligence n'a rien à trouver, elle a à déblayer.
> Elle est bonne aux tâches serviles.[1]

This is not so far from Sankara's understanding or that recurring phenomena of the Upanisads -- speech followed by silence, a silence which is pregnant with truth. In a passage which immediately follows the above she seems very close to something very basic in Buddhism -- represented in that central object of contemplation for Buddhists -- the silence of Buddha -- a silence so eloquently exegeted in our day by T.R.V. Murti.

> Savoir que rien de ce qu'on touche, entend, voit, etc.
> rien de ce qu'on se représente, rien de ce qu'on pense
> n'est le bien. Si on pense Dieu, ce n'est pas le bien
> non plus. Tout ce que nous pensons est imparfait comme

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[1] Ibid., III, p. 120.

> nous, et l'imparfait n'est pas le bien. Ce que nous faisons, plus encore.
>
> Le bien est pour nous un néant, puisque aucune chose n'est bonne. Mais ce néant n'est pas non-être, n'est pas irréal. Tout ce qui existe comparé à lui est irréel. Ce néant est au moins aussi réel que nous.[1]

And yet she turns to the orthodox side when she writes:

> Le plus haut étant impensable, pour le penser, il faut le penser par le pensable.[2]

As the Upaniṣads put it, the truth shines. We have only to remove the veils which impede our vision. Simone Weil saw philosophy as a supremely useful method of removing these veils. She preferred to remove these veils systematically through philosophy rather than to slash through them with the violence of some schools of Zen, for example.

Here philosophy, however, is the philosophy of the ancients -- it is the meditatio mortis of Socrates and not the meditatio vitae of Spinoza or Hegel. It was the practice of the art of dying. It not only necessitated the control of the natural passions on the model of the bleeding and writhing horses of Plato's Phaedrus, but also of the destruction of the I, the annihilation of the illusory structures of self-interest, no matter how subtly these asserted themselves.

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[1] Cahiers, III, pp. 120-121.

[2] Cahiers, I, p. 176.

Her criticism of Marx, for example, centres, in some ways, around a personal failing on his part which affected his philosophical enterprise. For the ultimate test of philosopher qua philosopher was, as she put it, the choice between life and truth. Marx chose life, or more specifically, belief in the one thing without which he could not go on living -- hope in the future. His refusal to contemplate the possibility that justice might never be realized in actual society while, on the one hand giving him the energy to pursue the revolutionary goal and thus to live, at the same time opened him up to the possibility, or for Simone Weil, the probability that his entire philosophy was based on an illusion. The fact that it was based on a hope rather than on an absolutely honest and thus "impersonal" analysis of reality meant that it was a betrayal of real philosophy and, perhaps more tellingly, was a betrayal of what Marx held as his ideal in method, that embodied in that great Western word "science". The intrusion of Marx's personality in the form of a personal hope, even though it was a hope of a noble nature i.e. that of justice among men; this intrusion of ego nullified the Marxist claim to be "scientific".

Here we see something in Simone Weil which puts her at odds with something held by much of the Christian tradition to be central to the understanding of Christianity -- that of hope as a virtue.

Her teaching is clear on this matter and stems not from a mistaken reading of Christianity as so many of her critics have maintained but rather from a fundamental disagreement with the entire Christian tradition from St. Paul on.

"En plein connaissance de cause", she limits the meaning of hope to the definition: the knowledge that evil is finite. This is the only understanding of hope of which she will approve. This, more than anything else, leads her far from traditional Christianity, but on the other hand very close to India. Eliade, for example, speaking on Sāṁkhya Sutra 4:11 writes:

> Hope prolongs and even aggravates human misery; only he who has lost all hope is happy, "for hope is the greatest torture that exists, and despair the greatest happiness".[1]

It is not necessary to suscribe to the proposition that "despair is the greatest happiness" but only to note that hope is essentially a form of attachment particularly if it is oriented to events in the world. In Simone Weil, this goes to the extent of her refusal to contemplate the resurrection of Christ, which for St. Paul no less than for most later Christian theology was the sine qua non of Christian faith.

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[1]M. Eliade, Yoga: Immortality and Freedom, p. 29.

Her definition of hope as the "Knowledge that evil is finite" is, by contrast, closer in some ways to the orthodox and Buddhist assertion that saṁsara could be ultimately exhausted, an assertion implicit in the teaching of mokṣa and nirvāna.

Yet the correspondence on this matter is not one of identity for while there is something of the West which is rejected there is something at the same time which is retained. For Simone Weil's rejection of what she viewed as a delusory view of hope did not take the Indian form of a rejection of the dynamics of saṁsāra but a somewhat different Western form; that of amor fati. Her kinship with the stoics, particular Marcus Aurelius, is explicit in her writings. And she felt that Christianity had never made a greater mistake than its rejection of stoicism. It had betrayed its own essence in so doing.

What is important about amor fati in relation to India is precisely what is implicit in the term itself. Amor is exalted to the pinnacle for man and fati is embraced not rejected. Amor is embraced not as pleasure but as suffering, a suffering with the purity of detachment from illusions about its nature. Fati is experienced with the purity of detachment from illusory hopes superimposed on the dynamics of necessity.

It is, in a sense, the particular form of heroism involved in Simone Weil's embracing of amor fati that gives her a certain kinship with that most profound expression of the atheism of the modern world -- the thought of Nietzsche. Although she expresses a basic difference of interpretation with him on the matter of the Greeks and an almost "physical" antipathy to him personally, they are united on the matter of amor fati.

One is tempted to suggest that for all their differences, which are enormous, what unites them is that they both experienced to the limit the nihilism of modernity -- a nihilism which drove one of them mad and rendered the other dead at thirty-four. Simone Weil's call to sainthood has very much the severity of Nietzsche's call to the "ubermensch". Most of Nietzsche's attack on Christianity is rendered inapplicable in the case of Simone Weil. For her Christianity is a Christianity of no consolation and thus of no mediocrity. Nietzsche's "death of God" finds its correspondence in Simone Weil's "absence of God".[1]

We may argue that the "absence of God" is less radical than the "death of God". As we have seen, however, it is no less radical

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[1]Needless to say these words mean much more on the lips of Nietzsche and Simone Weil than they do in the mouths of the popularizers who have followed them and turned their words into slogans.

insofar as the demands it makes in terms of lived life. Metaphysically it is no less radical for while it calls us to the love of and obedience to the good; it calls us in addition to a detachment and indifference to the question of the existence of that good.

The question between Nietzsche and Simone Weil is not over mediocrity which results from a theology which centres on hope. It is rather a question of whether man achieves his height in the self-assertion of the will to power or the self-annihilation of obedience to the good. To Nietzsche's charge that such obedience stems from ressentiment in its social expression and from cowardice in its metaphysical expression; we can only note Simone Weil's reply that the "will to power" involved the most fundamental mistake a man could make, that of assigning some importance to his own existence. Such a mistake was for her the most basic element in mediocrity and betrayed the real essence of man's calling which was orientation to a good which was transcendent and an obedience which meant decreation.

We are not called upon to decide between the two. We only note two things when we turn to India. The first is that the orientation to power in Nietzsche finds a certain echo, as we noted in the third chapter in both the dynamic power of s'akti to which creation is called and the power of potency of the lingam to which the yogi is called. On the other hand, the element of decreation

and negation of the self in Simone Weil finds its correspondence in the Indian teaching on ahaṁkāra. Nietzsche's distance from India lies in his assertion of ego; Simone Weil's in the impotence which is a necessary result of her understanding of decreation.

It is necessary to turn now from Simone Weil's understanding of decreation to the very fundamental and crucial question of the place and understanding of "desire" in her thoughts. As we noted in the third chapter Simone Weil's eros is one of longing. It is the love of gazing and waiting. It is not the orientation to an unworthy object of Buddhist tṛṣṇā, the indulgence of kāma nor the bliss of ānanda. Insofar as it orients itself to the shadows of this world it is an illegitimate thirst which man must not attempt to quench but it is not to be destroyed in the process. Insofar as it seeks pleasure it betrays its nature which is to be oriented to the good not to the pleasant. Because of the transcendence of the good it does not offer the possibility of the bliss of union at least in this life.

What unites Simone Weil with India is that desire is not indulged. With India, she calls for detachment at the level of desire, from all particulars which the world offers to man. Where she differs from India is that, after the refusal of all indulgence, desire still remains. It remains by virtue of the beauty of the

world in its totality and the eros within man which is his essence and which is called to the contemplation of the beauty of the world.

This desire remains one of contemplation and longing not only by virtue of the inaccessibility of its object which is transcendent; but also by virtue of the clear inferiority of the subject. Simone Weil expresses again and again a sense of her own ugliness and her undesirability. She prefers the imagery of ugliness to that of guilt by virtue of her understanding of man in terms of desire rather than of will. The love of God for herself she always viewed as some kind of mistake. She saw her spirituality as contemplating the beauty of someone to whom she would always be faithful but who could not love her because of her own lack of beauty. Sexuality for her was both suffering and faithfulness at the same time.

The sexuality of India as we have seen in the third chapter is the sexuality of the potent lingam and of the creative yoni -- Śiva and Śakti, puruṣa and prakṛti, yogi and Mother. The choice for Indian spirituality is always between these two. If the feminine is chosen one is pulled into life, into creation and submits to the warm metaphysics of the Mother. One enters the realm of kāma, artha and dharma. If the masculine is chosen, one refuses life and creation. The semen is retained and begins to float through the blood and the entire being fills with the potency

of the phallus. The truest power in Indian spirituality begins with the act of renunciation (tyâga) and, salvation (mokṣa), if the correct disciplines are followed, is a necessary consequence of it.

Where does Simone Weil fit in with all of this and what do we make of her understanding of eros in relation to India? We have noted that Simone Weil's thought can take within it (with modification of detail but not of essence) India's contemplation of the suffering of the world but not its contemplation of its ugliness. She can take upon herself the Buddha's experience of disease, old age and death but not his experience of the obscenity of the dancing girls.

Since we now are drawn to speak of the deepest things of which we can only begin to see glimmers of what is involved let us be permitted to speak somewhat poetically. Simone Weil cannot share the Buddha's experience of the dancing girls because she is one of them. Let us attempt to understand. Perhaps the most apt expression of her spirituality was the image she chose to illustrate her own notion of "attendant". It was the image of the bride who waited patiently during the night at the door for the return of the bridegroom. It was only with a very small part of her soul that she believed that he might actually return. But the point was to wait -- not so much because of hope, for that had grown dim, but rather

because there was no alternative to waiting. Everything else was unworthy. It was only his presence or its possibility that would give any meaning.

Within an Indian context, as we have noted in chapter three, Simone Weil is clearly on the side of the feminine -- she is prakṛti much more than puruṣa. At the same time as woman, she is not Mother. She has not seduced the masculine but only loves him and desires him. She is seduced by the things he has left behind but he is absent. Let us try to state it exactly -- she is the feminine which has been renounced. She is prakṛti when puruṣa has withdrawn, śakti which Śiva has forgotten in his tapas. She is the dancing girl, the wife whom the Buddha has left behind. She is the feminine which pines from the absence of the masculine. She must see her spirituality in terms of a decreation which leads not to power but to disintegration. She takes upon herself a role strange in some ways to the tradition -- that of the feminine which has been abandoned by the masculine.[1] By virtue of the extreme transcendence of her thought about God she offers a unique perspective of what is involved in

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[1]Perhaps its closest correspondence is to the story of Sati whose love of Śiva made her existence in society an impossibility. The purity of her love necessitated her death. Śiva's withdrawal from society left her abandoned. She could choose only betrayal or decreation.

renunciation. But her perspective was that of the renounced as well as that of the renouncer. She assumes the perspective of creation, for all creation is feminine in relation to God.

Christ within this framework is clearly androgynous. Insofar as he is to be imitated he is feminine for he is the perfect embodiment of a creation abandoned by God. Insofar as he is to be contemplated as beauty itself he is masculine. Simone Weil clearly experienced him as a lover whose love she could never quite believe in by virtue of the great discrepancy of his beauty and what she saw as her own ugliness. All of this she expressed most intimately and beautifully in the Prologue found in La Connaissance Surnaturelle which must be read as a whole and to which I refer the reader.

Simone Weil spoke only twice of her mystic experience. On both occasions she does so in terms not of a voice nor of a vision, but rather in terms of an embrace. Salvation for her was both perfect bliss and an absorption in God in which all aspects of personality were left behind. It was both orgasm and annihilation -- the fulfillment of the feminine and its death. It was the statement "I am dying" said willingly.[1]

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[1]This is not so different from Buddhist nirvāna or orthodox mokṣa but we must remember it occurs after death. It is not "achieved" but is totally dependent on the grace of God -- a God who is either transcendent or non-existent. In the only place at which she speculated on such matters in a positive way in writing she writes:

As we noted in the third chapter, the difference between Christian incarnation and India avatara is, at least in part, a difference in regard to creation -- the former partaking of its essence to a greater extent than the latter. Śiva is totally immune to the vicissitudes of creation, Christ totally obedient to them. Kṛṣṇa as we noted lies somewhere in between partaking of joy and ultimately death. Although we note again that the death of Kṛṣṇa is much less central to his story than is the death of Jesus and indeed Simone Weil does not seem to have been aware of it.

Simone Weil clearly associated Kṛṣṇa with joy -- the joy of the descent of God. We note once again, in closing this section,

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> Le Jugement s'exercera ainsi. -- L'âme qui vient de traverser ce que les hommes nomment la mort reçoit soudain la certitude, irrésistible, ne laissant place à aucun doute, que toutes les fins de toutes les actions accomplies pendant la vie étaient illusoires, y compris Dieu. Avec cette certitude qui la pénètre tout entière, y compris la sensibilité, elle revit par la pensée toutes ses actions.
>
> Alors, dans la plupart des cas, saisie d'horreur, elle désire le néant et disparaît.
>
> Dans des cas rares, elle ne regrette rien; ou au moins elle peut s'accrocher à certaines actions qu'elle ne regrette pas, parce qu'elles étaient inconditionnées, parce qu'elles étaient pure obéissance.
>
> L'horreur ne la saisit pas, elle continue à être tournée amoureusement vers le bien.
>
> Mais sentant que sa personnalité la sépare du contact parfait avec le bien, elle en desire la dissolution et disparaît.
>
> (Le Connaissance Surnaturelle, pp. 104-105)

Simone Weil's reference to her approaching death in her last letter. It was not a reference to the decreation of the crucifixion -- of the abandoned feminine. It was rather the much less ambiguous expression of her own essence and if we may use the word with hesitation and care, of the only "hope" she permitted herself. "Pense à Kṛṣṇa". The letters were to two women -- her mother and her closest friend. It was a call to "attention" and to "attendant". And its object was the transcendent masculine -- a masculine which unlike the renouncing Buddha and to a greater degree than the ascetic Śiva -- deigned to love the feminine.

The closing words of the Prologue in which she revealed the depths of her soul speak the words of creation itself.

> Je sais bien qu'il ne m'aime pas. Comment pourrait-il m'aimer? Et pourtant au fond de moi quelque chose, un point de moi-même, ne peut pas s'empêcher de penser en tremblant de peur que peut-être, malgré tous, il m'aime.

CONCLUSION

What is to be made of the writings of Simone Weil on India? One can, of course, point to the obvious misinterpretation of texts which occur in her writings. On the other hand, one can point to the equally obvious brilliance of her insights at other points. We have done this throughout and there is no need to belabour these matters further. But when all this has been said and done, one seems to be left not with the question of subtracting the errors from the insights in order to arrive at some calculation of the value of her writings but rather with the profound questions posed by two basically different religious visions -- two visions which come together in a striking way at certain points but which seem fundamentally incompatible at others.

Simone Weil wrote the following note on the nature of contradiction in human thought:

> Loin que la contradiction soit toujours un critérium d'erreur, elle est quelquefois un signe de vérité. Platon le savait. Mais on peut distinguer les cas. Il y a un usage légitime et un usage illégitime de la contradiction.
>
> L'usage illégitime consiste à accoupler des pensées incompatibles comme si elles étaient compatibles. L'usage légitime consiste, d'abord, quand deux pensées incompatibles se présentent à l'esprit, à épuiser toutes les ressources de l'intelligence pour essayer d'éliminer au moins l'une des deux. Si c'est impossible, si elles s'imposent l'une et l'autre, il faut alors reconnaître la contradiction comme un fait. Puis il faut s'en servir comme d'un outil à deux branches, comme d'une pince, pour entrer par elle en contact direct avec le domaine transcendant de la vérité inaccessible aux facultés humaines.[1]

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[1]Oppression et Liberte, p. 228.

The greatest danger confronting one who addresses himself to the problem of a dialogue of East and West lies precisely in what Simone Weil calls the illegitimate use of contradiction -- that is, of coupling together incompatible thoughts as if they were compatible. It is, as we have seen, a tendency of which Simone Weil has been guilty some of the time in her writings on India.

The other danger is to dismiss, in a facile manner, one or other side of the contradiction -- for the West to ignore the East or vice versa. Insofar as Simone Weil refuses to do this and attempts, on the contrary to bridge the spirituality of East and West, or more particularly, the spirituality of the East and the modern West she opens herself to a kind of superficial dismissal. From the perspective of the East we may reject the ultimacy of suffering and consider Simone Weil's experiment with this side of the human condition as suicidal and insane. On the other hand, we may side with that part of the West which feels to the depth of its being the power of the modern critique of religion and accuse her of a betrayal of the earth and of bad faith.

Yet both of these assessments are questionable. For, in the first instance, Simone Weil died not from suicide but from a passion for justice which puts its case in the logic of the question -- "if my neighbour suffers affliction why should not I?" To flinch from this logic, for her, could only be a scandal.

In the second instance, it is difficult to accuse Simone Weil of betrayal of the earth for it is impossible, as we have seen, to find either physical or metaphysical comfort in her life and thought. Her religious vision is singularly lacking in illusions concerning the human condition. Her life puts Marxists and Existentialists alike to shame.

It is in this respect that the present author finds the thought of Simone Weil unique. For her whole being is torn between the contradiction that eternity is all and that time is all. She does not belong in time and yet she refuses the consolation of eternity. It is for this reason that everyone must feel uncomfortable with her thought.

At the same time, however, her thought must provide, by its very uncomfortableness, a stimulus to the thought of all. It may invite the East to share with the West the peculiar anguish which lies at the heart of the modern West, and perhaps, by implication, to rediscover the starting point of its own vision, sarvam duḥkham. On the other hand, it may cause the modern West to have second thoughts about the metaphysical nihilism by which it seems hypnotized in dread and fascination at this point in time and invite it instead to contemplate seriously and without illusions the metaphysical tranquility which the East claims is possible and in so doing to rediscover something vital and sane in its own past.

The present writer, of course, is not capable of thinking the unity of Eastern and Western spirituality. This could be the project only of a great thinker who may or may not arise within the next centuries. The greatness of Simone Weil, I believe, is that she opens us more deeply than others to what this project would involve. Whatever one may say of Simone Weil's religious vision, we have the feeling while reading her writings that we are in contact with something primal and elemental -- that the heights and depths of the human condition are being experienced in a naked and unmediated way in the soul of this woman. We are called to be attentive to what she has said.

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