

cerned with. 3. What about the Whisky Rebellion? 4. Mr. Goodman assumes the existence of some kind of "decentralized functional politics," as an alternative to the concern of the common man with the federal government. If he means anything other than the local self-government about which a great deal has been written, what does he mean? Why assume that such a spontaneous political life went on? Why is it not possible to describe the essential state of the non-voters as substantial political apathy, encouraged by a long stretch of prosperity after 1787?

In the modern perspective, characterized so much by a fearful preoccupation with the centralized and omniscient state, the affairs of this early period seem relatively anarchic. They also seem pretty attractive. That this period was one of the high points in the history of the free man and of the estimable ideal of live-and-let-live, I have little doubt.

Columbia University

RICHARD HOFSTADTER

Mr. Goodman's conjecture embodies one significant insight and two important misinterpretations. He has perceived that the government of early America—that is, the method through which political power was exercised—was not simple. Rather it operated on several levels and through a variety of agencies. The main streams of American historiography have never given adequate weight to this factor because their attention has been focused entirely upon the national government; the majority of historians who have treated politics have written in terms of a succession of presidents. That is why political history has been quite sterile in this country. It is well to be reminded that the most important acts of government, those which had the most direct and most effective influence upon the life of the people and upon the structure of society, were exercised through "decentralized" political forms.

However, I cannot see that this amounted to anarchism or even quasi-anarchism. These forms proliferated not because people—at any social level—distrusted or were indifferent to government, but rather because they wanted a great deal of government. In the inter-constitutional period (1774-1788), the most authentic popular voices are those which call for an end to the state of nature and the beginning of "a State of well regulated Society," complete with "a fundamental Constitution securing . . . sacred Rights & Immunities against all Tyrants that may spring up." (See my *Commonwealth*, Ch. I) There was by no means indifference to government as such, although the affairs of the federal government often did seem remote from the interests of the great masses of people. (I think Goodman takes too literally the statement from Beard on property qualifications. The reference was to the period just before the break with England, and the Revolution changed a good deal. In any case, the property qualification—in a society of small farmers and artisans—did not of itself exclude a great many people.)

Finally, I am not sure whether the structuring of government and of attitude toward government in this period can really be termed pluralistic. I agree there were several levels on which power was exercised. But there was a willingness, on the part of some groups at least, to ascribe paramount authority to one level of government. The various decentralized political forms were not really autonomous, independent of each other. The town, the county, the parish, each had a life and function of its own. But the state could create such agencies, and destroy them at will. To that extent power was more hierarchically than pluralistically distributed. However, there was, at the time, no unanimity of opinion on this question; and the divisions over it may have been significant. It is certainly a question that merits further investigation.

Harvard University

OSCAR HANDLIN

The Life and Thoughts of Simone Weil

SIMONE PETREMENT

Editor's Note: Simone Weil is familiar to the readers of POLITICS from her several essays published here: Reflections on War (Feb. 1945), The Iliad (Nov. 1945), Words and War (Mar. 1946), Factory (Dec. 1946). Mlle. Petrement's essay is translated by Lionel Abel. It is reprinted, with permission, from "Critique" No. 28, 1948, and is, in part, a review of a collection of aphorisms from Simone Weil's notebooks recently published by Plon under the title: "La Pesanteur et la Grace."

The interested reader is also referred to the collection of letters by and reminiscences about Simone Weil which appeared in "Cahiers du Sud" (No. 284, 1947), and to the excellent study by Aime Patri in "La Table Ronde" (February, 1948).

IT is with misgiving that one resolves to speak of this book, for it has no need of us, while we may well fear that what we can say will prove inadequate. It is a work of a grandeur that is uncommon, and perhaps unique today, a religious work, not because it deals with religious questions, but because its beauty is inseparable from strength and purity of soul. It elevates us and saves us

during such times as we are concerned with it, but only by lifting us to a point at which we cannot long remain. Since it takes us so far out of ourselves, we should recognize that we have little chance of assimilating to our own level, or of properly discussing it in our own terms. Not that this work is inhuman, for surely one feels the troubles and griefs of the human condition to the degree that one resists them and rises above them. But Simone Weil resists them with such unconquerable energy, and seems to see them from so far off, that the effect is frightening. To have known her does not help us much to understand her; on the contrary, the knowledge we have of her could very well lead us astray, since it gives a feeling of familiarity with a genius about whom so much is still not known. We ought to be more on guard than others, since, limited to the same means of understanding, we might imagine ourselves provided with better ones. Much effort and close attention will be necessary, and if we are to arrive at her thought, we shall have to rely almost entirely on what she wrote, very rarely on what she said in conversation, and then only when we are sure that we recall exactly the words she used. Her life instructs, it is true, and in such a way as to better prepare one to understand her work.

1.

Her life instructs, as much as a human life can, and with a light blinding to our frailties. Almost all lives are ambiguous, confused, subject to more than one interpretation; hers is terribly distinct and pure, not only in its actions, but also in the complete liberty (or the purely internal necessity) by which just these acts were chosen. The daughter of a Parisian doctor, a graduate of the *Ecole normale supérieure*, where she took her degree in philosophy, she was certainly never compelled to cast her lot with those who bear the weight of others. But the choice she made, in complete freedom, of not being separated from them, and of not defending them only by words—an acceptable career, that—but of sharing their hardships, this choice is evident in every detail of her life. As soon as she began to teach—this was at Puy, in 1931—she profoundly affected all in contact with her, eliciting the admiration and friendship of her students and scandalizing the bourgeoisie of the town by going along with strikers who demonstrated before the mayor's office. It was like this throughout her short career as a professor. While devoting herself passionately to her work, she was a militant in the unions, spoke and acted fearlessly and uncompromisingly, was regarded as a communist by many, and as a trotskyst by the communists; the fact is that she never supported either party. In 1934, obeying a sense of obligation that took precedence over every other inclination, she stopped teaching to take a job in a factory, and despite her poor health remained at this job for the whole period she had decided on. Some time after this she took part in the Spanish Civil War, on the Republican side, without hope, and without enthusiasm for the way the war was being conducted, but simply in order not to be spared its dangers; her parents found her in a Spanish hospital, wounded as a result of some accident, poorly cared for, and in a condition which worsened daily.

In June of 1940 she was in Paris, and despite the love she felt for her parents, and they for her, she refused to leave with them until Paris was declared an open city. She followed her parents to Marseilles, and there she decided, freely, not compelled by circumstances, to become an agricultural worker for a while. She had wanted to do this long before, and doubtless she now felt that her time was short. In 1942 she left for America with her parents, expecting, after this detour, to reach England and participate in the war. She had to go to England alone; her parents were not permitted to follow her. Her request that she be parachuted to French soil was turned down, but as she restricted herself to eating very little, having in mind all the time the hunger of the peoples of Europe, she died of exhaustion in an English hospital in 1943.

It must be added that her whole life had been saintly. She gave herself freely, never taking into account her time, her money, her weariness, her knowledge. She was always in the most difficult spot. Obstinate when it came to defending others, she often could not bear to defend herself. For example she was unwilling to send a protest to the Vichy Ministry about the non-payment of her salary. When she saw an opportunity to save not only the life, but also the dignity, the humanity of someone, she scarcely noted whether the means to so doing involved risk to her own person. In Italy she gave her confidence to a stranger, not

a fascist, but politically shaky and in want, and who had informed her that the fascists would pay well any one who informed on an anti-fascist. Perfectly well aware of the risk she was running, but hoping that by overcoming temptation he would recover his lost dignity, she confided to him that she had fought in Spain. He was equal to the test, and did not denounce her.

From the beginning of the war she led an ascetic life, sleeping on the ground, eating very little, certainly eating less than her official rations allowed when she was in Marseilles, for she gave half of her allotments to the political prisoners in a nearby camp, and she refused to buy on the black market. This asceticism—so strange to us—was not at all arbitrary. Not only were the needs of others greater then, but the war itself elicited such conduct from the noble soul of one who wanted to share to the utmost a frightful misfortune. One cannot recall a single circumstance of her life in which she had not shown herself pure, tender, courageous, and absolutely generous.

It is not unreasonable to pay special attention to the words of those whose lives are saintly. There is only one wisdom, the same wisdom that makes one live rightly, makes one think clearly. Since we have lost this heroic and incorruptible lass, who was at the same time so reasonable, there is not much chance that we can find a better guide than the words she left us. But even if one left her life out of account, her work would be well-nigh indispensable. For the problems she had raised courageously and tried to solve, with the necessary science, intelligence and integrity, are perhaps the most important and difficult that we confront. What some lack to solve these problems is science, but what most lack is complete honesty of thought; she had both. In politics and on questions of social organization and work, as in philosophy and in religious reflection, she developed a powerful and original line of thought; there is no need to look at her life to perceive that. Moreover, she was able to combine various fields, and in an epoch in which there is no lack of specialists, but in which there are few indeed who are able to see the various fields as a whole—so that a thinker may be reasonable on details and yet childish and illogical when it comes to understanding the whole—in such an epoch, a mind that is powerful enough to see the whole is just what we need.

2.

There is little about politics in this book, and the few things one finds do little more than suggest her profound criticisms of Marxism and her own positive doctrine; these are known to very few. However, the fragments touching on politics are far from negligible. Moreover, one cannot pass by politics without a word when speaking of Simone Weil, for her lucidity in this domain is one of the main supports of her philosophy. She herself remarks in this book that “to contemplate the social is as valid a way as to withdraw from the world,” and thus she was not wrong “to keep close to politics for so long a time.” By contemplating the social she was able to recognize what makes for the most shameful abjectness; it is neither poverty nor suffering, but the sway of force over the mind. One is so afraid of force that one does not even strive to protect one's idea of the good; one is convinced of having been mistaken, that the good was not good, since it was not vic-

torious. She remarks that one is willing to do in behalf of the powerful what one would not be willing to do for the sake of justice alone, and that the idea of force sustains the soul even when the force in question is prevented from acting and really aiding.

¶ "Although one gains nothing by victory, one is ready to die for the cause that will be victorious."

¶ "One will die for the strong and not for the weak, or at least for the party which, momentarily weak, preserves a halo of force."

¶ "To see a good, loved as such, condemned by the next turn of events, is intolerable. . . . The strength of soul shown by the communists is to be explained by the fact that they are directed not only towards what they believe good, but also towards what they believe must ineluctably and soon come to pass. Thus, without being saints—they are very far from that—they are able to bear dangers and sufferings which only a saint could endure for the sake of justice alone."

Perhaps it is impossible to understand the ideas of Simone Weil without taking into account the moral position of Alain—of which we shall speak of later—as well as this meditation of hers on force, this resolution never to let oneself justify force simply because it is force, never to confuse what is good with what is not good but only victorious. Even if a political view has no possible application at the present moment, one must not relinquish the right to call good what is good, and evil what is evil. Moreover, it is only thus that one can discover and apply the least harmful solutions. If from the beginning we renounce the good, we have no longer any means of judging.

She was profoundly mistrustful of the future, but was steadfast in her esteem for those values which the future threatens. Society dominates man more and more, she knows this, and she speaks of the social with a scorn that is truly liberating (whereas so many of our contemporaries are so naively happy to use this word.)

¶ "Consciousness is seduced by the social. . . ."

¶ "The social is irreducibly the domain of the prince of this world. One has no other duty with respect to the social than to try to limit the evil done (Richelieu: The salvation of states is only in this world). A society which pretends to be divine, like the Church, is perhaps more dangerous for the ersatz of good it contains than for the evils that soil it. A divine etiquette of the social: an intoxicating mixture legitimizing every license—the devil in disguise."

¶ "The Leviathan is the only object of idolatry, the only ersatz of God."

¶ "It is the social which covers the relative with the color of the absolute."

¶ "Of course the city is a necessary milieu in which the individual takes root. But this is not the social. It is a human milieu of which one is no more conscious than of the air one breathes, a contact with nature, the past, tradition. Taking root is something other than the social."

We see in this book certain ideas which make one think of Rousseau, and which sometimes seem to be better founded than with him. Perhaps because it was Rousseau's temperament that led him to such ideas, but not hers; on the contrary, it is only by an extreme attention that she

arrives at them. We see, for instance, in what sense society corrupts men.

¶ "To confront things liberates the mind. To confront men degrades, if one depends on them, and this whether the dependence take the form of submission or of domination."

¶ "To face nature and not men is the only discipline. To depend on another's will is to be a slave. . . . The slave depends on the master and the master on the slave, a situation which makes one servile or tyrannical, or both at once (*omnia serviliter pro dominatione*). On the contrary, facing inert nature, one's only recourse is to think." Man is not really human, that is to say reasonable, except before things, or at least it is much more difficult for him to be human when before other men.

But henceforward we shall depend much more on men than on things. "Capitalism has succeeded in freeing the human collectivity from nature. But this collectivity has taken up with respect to the individual the oppressive function formerly exercised by nature." Somewhere else she says that technics are *accursed*. It is modern technique that gives force to the social; and those who today believe that machines, as they are now, can serve human liberation as well as human enslavement, are likely to be dupes. They do not see that these machines, as soon as one tries to utilize them, impose certain forms of work, of organization, of domination and of obedience. The same is true of science, which is too vast now to be carried by the individual; it imposes a certain type of organization, and makes for the force of the state which alone can possess it entirely. We must "individualize the machine, individualize science," says Simone Weil. But in the meantime, all that one can do, it seems, is to preserve as much as possible whatever gives the individual roots, whatever enables him still to lead a human life, and not be completely swept up by the infernal wave of society, completely subject to the "Leviathan." One must do whatever can be done to protect the individual from the immediate future and to prepare for a more remote future. Act at each moment not to advance towards an illusory paradise, but to reestablish a human order, an equilibrium constantly broken or menaced. "If one knows at what point society is unbalanced one must do what one can to add weight to the light side of the scale. But one must first have conceived the equilibrium, and be always ready to change sides with justice, 'that fugitive from the camp of the conqueror'."

Despair is a sign of weakness only when it is unreasoning or the result of merely personal failures. Simone Weil gives a content to the wholly gratuitous despair of our philosophical and artistic schools. What the epoch feels as a sort of vague foreboding she justifies, thus founding the philosophy of the epoch along with her own. By conceiving the good as being in no way assured of success, one is able to conceive of a transcendent and absent god, weak and crucified here below, distinct from the world and power. (Power determines the judgment of the world, but there is another type of judgment.) By the notion that the mind itself is enslaved when slavery exists, we become aware that there must be a pure, absolute and unalterable truth, which is not weakened when it yields; and if there is no such truth, if the mind is entirely at the mercy of force, it will always yield to force, and even ought to.

3.

But to understand this philosophy of Simone Weil, we must look at the ideas of Alain, for she was his pupil and ever faithful disciple. Now this might seem to take us off the main trend of contemporary philosophy; but only apparently. Alain, while above this epoch, belongs to it nevertheless, and his philosophy, as will be seen, contains the essential points of phenomenology. He had derived from Lagneau the idea that there is no such thing as subjective knowledge, and, without using Husserl's terms, he showed in his lectures that knowledge is directed towards a real object, that simply by describing the act of knowing one can be assured that knowing is not dream, or rather that the dream is already an act of knowing. (When one circles about an object in order to grasp its character, the center of one's understanding is the object.) On the other hand, the cardinal point of existentialism is not, as the French think, that "existence is prior to essence," which is simply the formula of empiricism, but rather the notion that "subjectivity is the truth," as Kierkegaard put it. The word "subjective" has a different meaning here than as used above: what has to be grasped is that one cannot judge a doctrine independently of the man, of the *existant* who maintains it. Now Alain rediscovered this idea: his position on the history of philosophy consisted essentially in preferring those doctrines that are strong, and which could only be projected or held by strength of will, to those doctrines that are weaker, though apparently more orderly; much as Kierkegaard preferred the faith of Abraham (leading his son to death while yet believing in the promise) to the cunning system of Hegel. Finally, Sartre himself seems to have gotten from Alain his fundamental idea; that man is free insofar as he believes in his freedom; along with many other of his soundest notions: for example, his ideas about the importance of the "situation," about man's freedom to change the meaning and value of his past, about what really defines the "bourgeois," and the ideas he developed in *L'Imaginaire*.

Alain is one of the rare thinkers of our epoch and of France who dared teach morality, and he could do this: he had the necessary strength. He who can paint a face that is beautiful without yielding to convention, is stronger than the one who can only feel his force and originality by painting ugliness. Alain taught self-mastery, domination of nature, freedom. But above all, he taught one to think, and not to shun consciousness of truth. Simone Weil took up Alain's ethic with all the generosity of her nature, and she carried this ethic to its most extreme point. Perhaps it is impossible to halt mid-way, perhaps there is no middle ground between extreme weakness and saintliness. The fact is that the desire to see if one is capable of detachment leads to detachment. The desire to know whether the principle of one's actions is will or nature leads one to test oneself, and to test oneself continually. But what is most serious is to love the truth, and to be always seeking more lucidity and consciousness. Alain, in a joking way, let it be understood how frightful the truth can be. He said, ironically, that one must never seek the truth for one never knows what one will find. One is committed only to the search for it.

Here again Simone Weil went the furthest possible, as becomes clear in this work. For her the imaginary is almost evil itself. To encourage oneself with illusions or by simply turning aside from the real, is the essential sin and the cause of all the others. "The root of evil is revery," she said, not here, but in a letter to Joe Bousquet. And even in this work: "What arises in us through Satan is the imagination." "The possible is the locus of the imagination, and consequently of degradation." "One should prefer a real hell to an imaginary paradise." Hell is to "erroneously believe oneself in heaven." The most atrocious acts are caused by the desire to escape from one's misery.

¶ "Whoever suffers, tries to communicate his suffering—either by injuring someone or by eliciting pity—in order to diminish it, and in so doing really succeeds in diminishing it. He who is completely beaten down, for whom no one grieves, who has no power to injure anyone (if he has no child, if there is no one who loves him), his suffering remains within him and poisons him."

¶ "To do harm to others means to get something in return. What? What has one gained (and which must be repaid) when one has done evil? One has augmented oneself, extended oneself, one has filled an empty place within oneself by creating a vacancy in others."

¶ "Patience consists in not transforming suffering into crime."

¶ "I can sully the whole universe with my grief and not feel it—or I can contain it within me."

In this search for lucidity, unhappiness is preferable to pleasure. For pleasure deceives much more than pain. "There is no contradiction in the domain of the imaginary." Contradiction, that which wounds the soul and gives the lie to hope, is not what our imagination loves to fabricate; rather is it the evidence of what really exists outside ourselves.

¶ "We do not fabricate our grief, it is real. This is why we ought to cherish it. All the rest is imaginary."

¶ "Human life is *impossible*, but only misfortune makes this felt."

¶ "To love the truth means to endure the void and hence accept death. Trust is on the side of death."

Not that pleasure is rejected, but one must not expect true knowledge from it.

¶ "Pleasure can be innocent if one does not expect to learn by it."

¶ "Human misery contains the secret of divine wisdom, pleasure does not."

4.

One who has followed this ethic to the end, understands that it is necessary to change it into a kind of mysticism, for one has some notion of what it means to "seek the truth." One must, so to speak, become intimate with death, which is unendurable; one must observe and accept one's limitations, which means to transcend them in a sense; one must go over to *the side of the truth*, against oneself, and without any natural support. And how could one do this, if the truth itself had no power at all? "One would quickly soil the point of internal purity if one could not renew it by contact with an unalterable purity, placed beyond anyone's reach."

In total misery one learns that the truth exists, for without it nothing could make us seek it. The truth is not willed by us, but contemplated.

Moreover it must exist, and it must appear to us of itself, for he who is involved in evil does not know it. How could he will to emerge from evil? "When one does wrong one does not know it." "Evil, when one is caught up in it, is not felt as evil, but as necessity or even as duty."

Here there is an abrupt departure, or at least so it appears, from the philosophy of Alain. While with Alain we are led to believe the "I" is good, and that the spontaneous activity of the ego should be an object of admiration and confidence, for her, on the contrary (but perhaps only apparently), the "I" is what forges the imaginary and substitutes it for the real; it is the "I" which resists truth. "The ego is only the shadow projected by sin and error which ward off the light of the divine." "Sin in me says 'I.'" Doubtless we should modify this opposition, seeing that for Alain the ego is not good without qualification, and that for her it is not to be always feared or totally overcome; but it is the opposition between their views on this question which first strikes one. While with Alain it is the *will* which makes for the truth, with her, on the contrary, it is the *effacement* or *limitation* of the will, and real intelligence and knowledge are *contemplation* rather than *action*.

¶ "It is extreme attention which constitutes the creative faculty in man."

¶ "Try to remedy one's faults by attentiveness and not by will."

¶ "Attention is linked to desire. Not to the will, but to desire. Or more precisely to consent."

The will, being ours, cannot take us beyond ourselves.

¶ "One cannot rise: one has to be pulled up."

¶ "Man's moral energy comes from the outside, as with physical energy."

¶ "The irreducible character of suffering by which one cannot but feel horror for it at the moment one endures it, results in stopping the will, as absurdity stops the intelligence, and as absence stops love, so that, come to the end of human faculties, a man folds his hands, stops, looks and waits."

¶ "Evil consists in actions, the good in non-action, in non-acting action."

¶ "The good accomplished . . . almost despite itself, almost with shame and remorse, is pure. All absolutely pure good completely escapes the world. The good is transcendent. God is the good."

¶ "In all things, only what comes from outside, gratuitously, by surprise, as a gift of fate, without our having thought it, is pure joy. Similarly a real good can only come from outside, never from our own effort. We can in no circumstance make something which would be better than us."

¶ "We ought to be indifferent to good and evil, but, in being indifferent—i.e., in projecting on both alike the light of our attentiveness—the good wins us automatically. Here is the essence of grace."

¶ "From the moment that there is a point of eternity in the soul, one does not have to do anything except preserve it, for like a seed of grain, it grows of itself. One

must maintain around it an armed unmovable watchfulness and sustain it by the contemplation of numbers, of fixed and rigorous relationships."

5.

It is true that the spontaneity of the ego is a condition without which one cannot rise higher.

¶ "Desire is evil and lying, but yet without desire, one would not seek for the veritable absolute, the really illimitable. There is no other way. Woe to those whom fatigue deprives of that extra energy which is the source of desire."

¶ "Deprive no human being of his *metaxu*, that is to say of those relative and mixed goods (home, fatherland, traditions, culture, etc.), which warm and nourish the soul and without which, except for saints, a *human* life is not possible."

¶ "One must love life very much to be able to love death still more."

¶ "To say that the world is worthless, that life is worthless, and to cite evil as proof, is absurd, for if these are worthless of what can evil deprive one? . . . Of what can suffering deprive the one who is without joy?"

On the other hand, liberty is certainly not denied. There is at least a liberty to give or refuse attention. "A divine inspiration works infallibly, irresistibly, if one does not relax one's attention. . . . One does not have to choose in its favor, it is sufficient not to refuse to recognize that

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it is there." "If one direct the intelligence towards the good it is impossible that little by little the whole soul should not be drawn there, despite itself."

We are free but there is a necessity in the things of the soul, though they be free. "A rigorous necessity which excludes anything arbitrary, every sort of chance, governs material phenomena. There is if possible even less of the accidental and the arbitrary in things of the spirit, which however, are free." One thinks of Spinoza; there are various planes, but necessity is present in all of them. Liberty is only in the relationship of the different planes. The higher escapes the lower, it is not contained in it, rather it contains it.

One thinks again of Spinoza when she expresses love for the necessity of the world. "The absence of God is the most marvelous testimony to the most perfect love, and this is why pure necessity, necessity so clearly different from the good, is so beautiful." "This world, insofar as it is entirely empty of God, is God Himself." We do not have here a pantheism such as springs naturally from the imagination (which is not to be found in Spinoza either). What must be understood is that the more the world is seen as empty of God, as pure and impersonal necessity, the more the world relates us to God, and the more it is God, at least for us. For it is transcendent. The imagination cannot conceive necessity.

Thus the good and the true become God, since they exist in themselves, since we contemplate them and could never know them otherwise, since it is by their grace and their light that we think and live. It is not only in the ego that they are found, but the ego is suspended from them, held in place by absolute forces. "Two forces govern the universe: Light and weight." Thus from a purely human view of knowledge one passes to a religious view. By a deepening of morality and method, Simone Weil went on to mysticism, which at first sight seems to deny both. But it is always necessary to surmount this apparent contradiction. One must constantly underline the bonds which unite morality to mysticism, for mysticism is valueless if it is not founded on morality. Alain is almost purely the moralist, he seems to refuse to go further. It is to be feared that there is a certain dryness in his thinking; but there is no other route to follow than his: it remains the foundation of everything.

6.

Thus religion is rediscovered as truth, and not something received through tradition; and there is much in this to frighten believers. For they do not imagine, the majority of them, that religion is true. They think it useful, convenient, consoling, a source of hope. But this useful, consoling religion which gives us hope, Simone Weil rejects firmly and considers an obstacle to real religion.

¶ "Religion insofar as it is a source of consolation is an obstacle to real faith. In this sense atheism is a purification."

¶ "When God has become as full of meaning as is his treasure to the miser, one should repeat to oneself firmly that he does not exist. Feel that you love him even though he does not exist."

¶ "The baser parts of myself ought to love God, but not too much. It would not be God. Let them feel love as one feels hunger and thirst. Only the highest has the right to be satiated."

The good is beyond this world. The imagination, which represented it to us in certain objects and actions, prevents us "from really encountering God, who is no other than the good itself, which is found nowhere in this world." The good is impossible, and this is no reason for not seeking it: "That action is good which one can achieve while maintaining one's intention and attention totally orientated towards the pure and impossible good, without veiling by any lie either the charm or the impossibility of the pure good." The good can exist in the world only in an infinitesimal state: "Within any given realm, a higher realm, and hence infinitely above it, can be represented in the former only by an infinitesimal. The mustard seed, the instant, image of eternity." The good does not intervene in the world so as to interrupt necessity. God is still. "Silence of God." "God is weak because He is impartial. He lets fall sunbeams and rain on good and evil alike. This indifference of the Father and the weakness of Christ, tally. Absence of God . . . God changes nothing to nothing."

Thibon rightly sees a difference between the religious thought of Simone Weil and the Catholic theology, in that the God of Simone Weil is much more transcendent, much more absent from the world and from society than that of the Church. Insofar as He is good He is absent from the world, if He is found there he appears as necessity. She uses such words as "creation" and "providence," but gives them a very particular meaning, one almost contrary to their customary sense. For the misfortunes of the innocent are here a proof, and not an objection. She speaks somewhere of an "uncreation" necessary to man. For "we are turned the wrong way, we are born so; to reestablish the proper harmony we must unmake the creature within ourselves."

From this difference others follow: For example, Simone Weil does not accept the God of the Old Testament, and does not recognize in him the God of the Gospels. "Christianity became totalitarian, aggressive, murderous, because

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it did not develop the notion of the absence and non-action of God on earth. It was as much attached to Jehovah as to Christ. . . . Israel alone could resist Rome because it resembled Rome." "Israel simultaneously chose the national God and rejected the Mediator." This Mediator, by his weakness, taught that God is absent and that He is not power; in Jehovah, the good is confused with power and with the social. Israel served as a buckler to the youthful Christianity in its struggle against Rome, but it, alas, aided the Church in becoming *Roman* in its turn. Simone Weil rejects the artifices by which the New Testament has been tied to the old.

¶ "Primitive Christianity invented the poison of the notion of progress, through the idea of the divine pedagogy

forming men so as to make them able to receive the message of Christ . . . the metaphor of the divine pedagogy dissolves the individual destiny, which alone is important for salvation, into that of collectivities. Christianity wanted to find a harmony in history. This is the germ of Hegel and of Marx."

¶ "The atheistic idea par excellence is the idea of progress, which is the negation of ontological experimental proof, for it implies that the mediocre can of itself produce the better. . . . All modern science moves to the destruction of the idea of progress."

¶ "Nothing can have as its end what it did not have for its origin. Contrary idea, idea of progress, poison. The tree which bore this fruit ought to be uprooted."

TRANSATLANTIC

FRANCE (1):

Why I Left France

SEVERAL months ago, I emigrated to the United States. I am a journalist, and it is not too easy to adapt this calling to a strange tongue and a foreign milieu. But, like many of my compatriots, I felt that I could do nothing useful in France today, and that emigration was the only solution. The difference between me and them is simply that I was able to actually do it.

Let me try to explain why so many Frenchmen—traditionally among the most firmly attached to the homeland of all European peoples—have come to the dismal conclusion: escape or perish.

For us, in France, the future is summed up in a few key phrases: "we will flounder about a little longer—six months? a year?—in the bog of the Christian-Socialist 'Third Force'; then we will have the dictatorship of General DeGaulle and under-cover civil war; then, sooner or later, war and a Russian occupation."

We feel there is so little question about it that everyone is acting accordingly; some join the Communists whom they see as the masters of tomorrow. Some join DeGaulle, not out of "fascist" inclinations or a morbid desire to plunge the country into civil war, but because they are looking for a solution to the current grind of daily life, because they fear the Communist threat, because of a sense of the incapacity of the Christian-Socialist "Third Force" (which is generally referred to as the "Third Weakness.")

When I say these things on this side of the Atlantic, people look at me with skepticism and invariably answer: "You have a sense of defeat before the battle has begun, and of illogical fatalism. There are so many factors that could change the course of events: the Marshall plan, the strengthening of ties among Western countries, the fact that the 'Third Force' is not yet dead, that America does not like DeGaulle, and that, after all, NOBODY REALLY WANTS WAR. . . ."

The Marshall Plan

I want to say candidly what is often heard in France when the Marshall plan is discussed: "The Marshall plan? I can't see that it is working. To judge the success of the plan you have to look not just at official figures on imports and hand-outs, but at the general *standard of living*. Well, in spite of American help, that is still going down."

It is unquestionable that the plan has averted a real economic

catastrophe in France. But it is just as unquestionable that along with prices as high as those in this country, the average salary of a French industrial or white-collar worker is equal to about *one quarter* of the average salary of an American worker. And even this ratio is steadily deteriorating.

There was a great wave of hope among us around the middle of last year when the Marshall plan was first spoken of; even those who knew that the trouble was very deep, that France had already absorbed nearly \$3 billion in American credits and \$2 billion more representing foreign investments—even they believed that the ship could be turned around and a new chapter would open in the history of the West.

And then, little by little, this hope turned to disillusion.

In the first months, during the debates in Congress, the plan appeared as an extraordinarily complicated system of "charity-credits" begged for by our government and granted, with a string attached, by Washington. Every senator, every congressman seemed to want to bargain over, pare down and diminish these credits.

Our newspapers, unfamiliar with American parliamentary procedure and lost in the complicated maze of reports and committees analyzing the plan, would run a banner headline one day reading "plan definitely adopted . . ." and contradict it the next in a back-page notice explaining that the plan still had to "pass from a Senate Committee to a House Committee (or vice versa) before the adoption is final, as it surely will be this time." And the plan began its Calvary again from the first to the last page of our newspapers, through all the well known episodes that preceded the final passage of the plan a few months later. All the psychological benefit of the plan, hurriedly put to use before the final vote of Congress, was thus frittered away.

Few Frenchmen have forgotten this preface to the Marshall plan, of which it was said that, "the older it got, the more it shrank." Furthermore few people in France could say how the plan, for all its celebrity, actually works, and just what the importance of the allotted credits is. For, absurd and shocking as it may seem, there is more concern over what the government is exporting or is supposed to be exporting than over what is being received or is supposed to be received. How many times standing on line at a market, I have heard the remark, "Oh Lord, it's gone up again! . . . They're exporting everything, and our children are hungry. . . !"

I know that the bitter truth is that our economy has been shaken to its foundations and that reconstruction is going to be a problem of long duration. The heart of the matter is that our shaky production is scarcely beyond the level of 1938 and that at