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# Simone Weil's Radical Ontology of Rootedness: Natural and Supernatural Justices

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper argues that Simone Weil developed an anthropology of the human condition that is a radical ontology of the human spirit rooted in reality. Weil begins her account from the real, but this real is not only the historical or social reality. It is also what is true about the human person as a created being in connection with the transcendent reality. She believes that affliction reveals the human condition and provides an openness to transcendence in which the individual finds the meaning of the human operation of spirit. Therefore, Weil's radical ontology is based on a philosophy of the human being as an agent rooted in the world. In order to be rooted, a human being needs *decreation* (the creation of a new human) and *incarnation* (cross and love in the world). In her radical ontology derived from attention to the real, Weil argues for an active incarnation in social reality that recognizes others, especially the unfortunates, for the purpose of empowering them and promoting their dignity. Her radical ontology incarnates the human in the world between necessity and good, that is, between the natural and the supernatural.

**KEYWORDS:** human condition, reality, rootedness, natural justice, supernatural justice

Considering Emmanuel Gabellieri's characterization of Simone Weil's anthropological philosophy as a radical ontology, I examine Weil's account on natural and supernatural justices. According to Gabellieri, Weil's ontology is radical because it is "a metaphysics of the

human spirit oriented towards a full contact with reality.”<sup>1</sup> Full contact with the *reality* of the world is the starting point of Simone Weil’s philosophy. This contact is radical because the supernatural is present in reality, and a deep experience of reality opens the individual for the illumination of the supernatural, an experience of grace that reveals the truth of human existence and condition in the world. Therefore, Simone Weil develops an anthropology of the human condition that is a “radical ontology” of the human spirit rooted in the reality of the world. The experience of rootedness occurs in reality, but it is the supernatural that roots the human being. Weil suggests an anthropology of radical ontology following the Platonic tradition of a transcendental spirit that contemplates the *nous*. This generates a noetic knowledge<sup>2</sup> that impacts reality.<sup>3</sup> It is in this mediation between reality and the supernatural that the need for justice occurs, as a natural reality illuminated and guided by supernatural justice. In this account, she is also inside the Christian mystic tradition, in which the experience of grace impacts the ethical life leading to seek for justice.<sup>4</sup> To understand Weil’s radical ontology, this paper will discuss three points of her account: her starting point from the real, the movement of decreation and openness of the working of grace, and the supernatural justice that illuminates the natural justice in a rooted people.

## I. FROM THE REAL

*Reality* is related to what is *real*. Although these words are related, they have an important distinction in Simone Weil’s philosophy. She begins her account

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<sup>1</sup>Emmanuel Gabellieri, *Être et don: Simone Weil et la philosophie* (Louvain: Éditions Peeters: 2003; my translation), 28.

<sup>2</sup>*Noetic Knowledge* is a concept originated from Plato’s philosophy to refer to the experience of contact with the transcendental reality. This is an experience that generates knowledge because it is a contact with truth. It goes beyond a psychological experience, but rather it is an experience of the human spirit. In the Christian tradition, a *noetic experience* is also identified as a mystical experience in which the mystical person encounters with God, the truth. This encounter generates knowledge.

<sup>3</sup>Weil clearly stresses her philosophy as a movement of the spirit that seeks for truth in the supernatural in an experience that will be felt in all circumstances of life. See Simone Weil, *Ceuvres complètes VI: Cahiers 1* (Paris: Gallimard, 194), 174–176. In addition, she adopted Plato and his school of thinking as the true philosophy. See Weil, *Ceuvres complètes V: Questions politiques et religieuses 1* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 120.

<sup>4</sup>Educated in a secular Jewish family, Weil did not have a religious formation, but in her search for the truth, she found it in Jesus’ cross, through a mystic experience described by her as an encounter with Christ that led her to discover Christianity as a religion of slaves. She had to embody this tradition among them. Simone Weil, *Attente de Dieu* (Paris: La Colombe, 1950), 75.

from the real, but this real is not only the historical or social reality. It is also what is true about the human person as a created being in connection with the transcendent reality. In Robert Chenavier's words, "the awakening of the real is the starting point of philosophy for Simone Weil."<sup>5</sup> Chenavier argues that Weil has a philosophy that is an exercise of attention to what is real. It is a philosophy from the real that includes the reality of the materialist world and goes beyond with the intervention of the supernatural.<sup>6</sup> From what is concrete, Weil develops her understanding of human existence and history. However, her philosophy is not a materialistic anthropology; otherwise, Weil would be characterized as a person who had described only material realities. This is her criticism of Aristotle and modern philosophy that, according to Weil, are only good representations of the universe. They do not follow the transcendental orientation of the Platonic method.<sup>7</sup> Following this orientation, Weil's anthropology is an exercise of the human spirit illuminated by the supernatural. It is a creative exercise of attention, that includes attention to those who are unfortunates (*malheureux*).<sup>8</sup> These, for Weil, are those who suffer because of any kind of oppression, marked by an experience of affliction, that I will develop later. In her context, first half of the twentieth century in France, the workers, oppressed by precarious working conditions, long hours and low wages, were the unfortunates that she first knew and experienced also being a worker herself. Then she expanded this group. Maria Clara Bingemer helps us to understand Weil's expanded conception of unfortunates and its relationship with her own experience of affliction:

The contemplation of connaturality of the poor in this world with Christianity . . . is felt by Simone Weil, marked like red hot iron of slavery in her experience in the factory, as the place to which she belongs. Being on the side of the least of the world, of those who are disdained and consid-

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<sup>5</sup>Robert Chenavier, *Simone Weil: L'attention au réel* (Paris: Éditions Michalon, 2009, my translation), 35.

<sup>6</sup>Commenting on this aspect of Weil's thought, Chenavier says: "The role of the supernatural in the world, in its silent intervention, does not escape from the law of the real, which is necessity. To deny that this intervention can be studied as a specific form of necessity is to deny the reality of the supernatural." Then he quotes Weil's work *Oppression et liberté*: "True knowledge of the social mechanism implies the knowledge of the conditions under which the supernatural operation of an infinitely small quantity of pure good, when properly placed, can neutralize this gravity." Chenavier, *Simone Weil*, 53.

<sup>7</sup>Simone Weil, *Œuvres complètes V 1: Questions politique et religieuses* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 120.

<sup>8</sup>Weil, "Formes de l'amour implicite de Dieu," in *Œuvres*, ed. Florence de Lussy (Paris: Quarto Gallimard, 1999), 724.

ered insignificant, is where the Christianity should be, and it is where she should also be.<sup>9</sup>

Bingemer examines Weil's account in dialogue with liberation theology and its concept of preferential option for the poor. According to her, the *unfortunates* is the Weilian name for the poor, the victims of oppression and the agents of transformation for liberation theology.<sup>10</sup> In the reality of the unfortunates, Weil experienced the supernatural in the midst of her own affliction. This occurs in a double movement of attention: *to* the supernatural, which Weil encountered Jesus's cross, and *to* the unfortunates in their suffering, creating an encounter between history and transcendent. In this reality, the movement of the spirit is the movement of the intellect that creates philosophy.

*Real* is a better word than *reality* to express the starting point of Simone Weil's philosophy. But real and reality move together in Weil's concept of attention to what is historical and transcendent. Sometimes the distinction between real and reality is in the details of specific sentences and their complexity. Following Plato, who for her is "a mystical heir of a mystical tradition in which Greece was entirely immersed,"<sup>11</sup> the real is also God who created the earthly reality and, by the incarnation, decided to be part of his creation as a suffering God who assumes the human condition. The real occurs between the natural, the earthly world, and the supernatural, the transcendent world, mediated by the incarnation of the Son. Reality is the history that the human being walks as part of creation. Humankind and its history are real. They have the presence of God, who is real through His presence in suffering and love (Jesus's cross is the concrete mediation). The attention to the real is a double orientation: *to the reality* of creation where humankind realizes its being throughout history and *to the reality* of God who, by a double gesture of self-humility, creates the world and incarnates in it.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, Weil's philosophy presents an anthropology in which the immanent originates in the transcendent (by creation) and gains autonomy and the transcendent chooses to be in the immanent (by incarnation) to love and liberate it, providing an authentic consciousness of the fragile condition of humankind as a created

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<sup>9</sup>Maria Clara Bingemer, "A desventura e a opção pelos pobres: Simone Weil e a Teologia da Libertação Latino-Americana," *REB* 69, no. 276 (2009): 782 (my translation).

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 783.

<sup>11</sup>Weil, *Œuvres complètes IV 2: Écrits de Marseille* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), 75. All quotes of Simone Weil's writings from French editions are my translation from the original in French.

<sup>12</sup>Weil, *La Pesanteur et la grâce* (Paris: Plon, 2007), 56–57, 82–83.

nature.<sup>13</sup> Attention to the real is an awakening from a dream to the human condition, its fragility, and the presence/dependency on God.

We are in unreality, in a dream. Renouncing our imaginary central situation, and renouncing it not only through our intelligence, but also in the imaginative part in the soul, it is an awakening to the real, to eternity; it is to see the true light, to hear the true silence. A transformation operates then in the root of sensitivity itself, in an immediate way, to receive sensible impressions and psychological impressions.<sup>14</sup>

The real begins to be *real* for an individual when he/she realizes the world as harmony between the earthly reality and the divine presence. The earthly reality is where the natural justice is embodied to be concrete, or real justice, by the action of the divine presence, that is, the supernatural justice. (Although, for Weil, humankind tends to kill justice when it is manifested in the world. She argues this while presenting the killing of justice in Plato's *Republic*, the suffering servant in Isaiah, and the crucifixion of Jesus.)<sup>15</sup> The perception of this harmony (also mediation) is a movement of openness of spirit to be affected by the love that is responsible for maintaining the order of the world, a natural order that must also be an order of justice. This is the movement of philosophy presented in Plato, especially in his allegory of the cave. Moving beyond the cave, what Weil characterizes as the material reality and its organization as a human society is an act of searching for the true light in which knowledge will flourish. It is a movement of the ascent of the human spirit to find a light that is the good. Finding this good, the human will love it, and from this relationship of love rises a knowledge that is the vision of our intelligence.<sup>16</sup> Weil interprets Plato as stressing the experience of revelation of the real, that is, the real human nature and its relationship with God, or in Plato's language, the Good.

## 2. IN THE REAL, DECREATION

For Simone Weil, there are many ways that a person can live this movement of attention to the real and the supernatural. But any way must be an experience of *decreation*, as a process of annihilation of the "I." She says: "The only way into truth is through one's own annihilation; through dwelling a long time

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<sup>13</sup>Weil, *Œuvres complètes IV 1: Écrits de Marseille* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008), 273. She reflects here the connection and non-separation between the Creation and the Passion.

<sup>14</sup>Weil, *Œuvres complètes IV 1*, 300.

<sup>15</sup>Weil, *Œuvres complètes IV 2*, 221–223.

<sup>16</sup>Weil, *Œuvres complètes IV 2*, 211.

in a state of extreme and total humiliation.”<sup>17</sup> This is an experience of grace: “Only by the supernatural working of grace can a soul pass through its own annihilation to the place where alone it can get the sort of attention which can attend to truth and to affliction.”<sup>18</sup> Although Weil does not deny the possibility of decreation in a personal effort of asceticism, she sees the experience of affliction as a privileged way of decreation and openness for the working of grace.<sup>19</sup> In this experience, the person is enlightened about the situation of oppression of the reality surrounding him/her, understanding that social conditions of oppression are not a necessary part of the human existence. However, it is still necessary to develop awareness to comprehend the mechanisms that create this oppression. After graduating from *École Normale Supérieure*, Weil saw her work of teaching proletarians in a factory as a mission and contribution in this process of social awareness.<sup>20</sup>

Weil believes that suffering and the experience of work reveal the human condition and provide an openness to the supernatural in which the individual finds the meaning of the human operation of spirit. Suffering and discovering the human authenticity of being and its realization in history are a process of growing in humility in imitation of God who had to humiliate himself both to create and to incarnate. Therefore, the radical ontology of Weil is based on a philosophy of the human being (anthropology) as an agent rooted in reality by the mediation of the God’s presence (grace: creation and incarnation) in the world. In order to be rooted, a human person needs *decreation* (the creation of a new human) and *incarnation* (cross and love in the world).

Decreation is the status that makes possible restoring equilibrium<sup>21</sup> in the world by taking the human being from a force responsible for preventing him from an authentic life. Decreation liberates the person from the influence

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<sup>17</sup>Simone Weil, “Human Personality,” in *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, ed. Siân Miles (New York: Grove Press, 1986), 70.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 71–72.

<sup>19</sup>It seems for me that the natural justice can only exist when it is embodied by people in this status of humiliation, as a result of a supernatural work of grace. Therefore, the supernatural justice becomes the guide of the natural justice performed by humble people who recognize their obligations toward others, and their necessity of meet their needs.

<sup>20</sup>Weil, “Carta a Albertine Thénevon,” in *Simone Weil: A Condição Operária e Outros Estudos sobre a Opressão*, ed. Ecléa Bosi, 2nd ed. (São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 1996), 79. In her experience as an employee of a car factory, Weil joined her co-workers after a long day of manual labor to teach them the mechanisms that guide society and create oppression. She believed that one of the main sources of oppression was the separation between intellectual and manual labors. She had to work to unify them.

<sup>21</sup>Bartomeu Estelrich has an article about the relevance of Simone Weil for our current time in which he reflects about this relation between decreation and restoring equilibrium in the world. See Estelrich, “Simone Weil on Modern Disequilibrium,” in *The Relevance of*

of the *pesanteur* (gravity) and opens to the supernatural with the possibility of receiving the grace. Decreation not only opens the human being to receive God's grace,<sup>22</sup> but it also embodies human suffering and its lack of meaning before the silence of God. This reveals the nature and the condition of the human being as a created, finite being. Even if the experience of grace does not happen—Weil, following the Christian mystical tradition, emphasizes grace as a decision that depends only on God's wish and love—decreation will liberate the person from a false satisfaction of the human void. Suffering is the privileged way to experience this process of revelation of who the human being is and [perhaps] the encounter with God's grace.

Decreation is not destruction of creation. Rather, it is the new creation that reveals what creation, especially humanity, is and its real vocation. Simone Weil says: "God created the world and wishes eternally that it is. . . . To destroy [the world] is wrong, other than making it pass from created to uncreated. Destruction is a bad imitation (an ersatz) of this operation."<sup>23</sup> Actually, decreation is the way of raising the "new man," the new creature, as the New Testament affirms, to be the experience of encounter with the Incarnate God. The new creation is not new, rather it is a movement of finding the created nature of humanity and all things in the world, a consciousness that humanity has lost by filling its void with illusions and denying its suffering condition. Commenting on this, Emmanuel Gabellieri stresses: "Yet one needs to note that de-creation, far from corresponding to destruction of creatureliness, on the contrary, corresponds to consenting to this one [creatureliness]."<sup>24</sup> Decreation is actually a recreation of the person in an experience of God's mercy in the world. For Weil, "mercy is the visible presence of God here [on the earth]"<sup>25</sup> by experiencing God's mercy and embodying compassion towards the other. This is the supernatural work of grace with real consequences in human relations.

It is in this movement of decreation and openness for the supernatural work of grace that Simone Weil builds her account of natural and supernatural justices as *reality* (or social organization) that allows the human search for his/her roots, and the grace (or supernatural reality) that roots the human in his/her fragile and contingent condition.

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*the Radical: Simone Weil 100 Years Later*, ed. A. Rebecca Rozelle-Stone and Lucian Stone (New York: Continuum, 2010), 3–17.

<sup>22</sup>Scholars often have asserted that Weil develops a "mysticism of decreation." For example, see Gabellieri, *Être et don* 1; 250–252.

<sup>23</sup>Simone Weil, *Œuvres complètes VI 2: Cahiers 2* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 349–50.

<sup>24</sup>Gabellieri, *Être et don*, 493.

<sup>25</sup>Weil, *Œuvres complètes VI 4: La connaissance surnaturelle* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), 131.



### 3. NATURAL AND SUPERNATURAL JUSTICES

In *L'Enracinement*, Simone Weil argues for social justice embodying actions from a supernatural justice responsible to reveal the human condition and to assume the recognition of others as an imperative. As I said before, Weil follows the mystical Christian tradition based on God's mercy and love for the other. Emmanuel Gabellieri argues that Weil's writings offer a theology of mercy that begins with her own experience of God's mercy in her affliction.<sup>26</sup> Her account of natural and supernatural justices is better understood in light of her mysticism, that is between what Henrique de Lima Vaz defines as a "speculative and prophetic mysticism."<sup>27</sup> As this tradition asserts, Weil affirms that mystical unity depends only on God's grace, that the human being only creates conditions for this unity by emptying his/herself.<sup>28</sup> It is from this mystical unity—an experience of mercy—that one individual, once empty, free from what created *imagination fulfilling the emptiness*,<sup>29</sup> moves to the other in a movement of compassion and recognition.

This recognition occurs in the experience of humiliation: decreation and openness to the working of grace. Thus, *malheur* (affliction)<sup>30</sup> becomes the privileged form to lead us to the recognition of the other because affliction

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<sup>26</sup>Emmanuel Gabellieri, "Pensar a *Kenosis*: Filosofia e Teologia da Misericórdia em Simone Weil," *REB* 69, no. 276 (2009): 792–805.

<sup>27</sup>According to Lima Vaz, the mystic experience of Western tradition has three main forms: *speculative*, *mysterium*, and *prophetic*. See Henrique C. de Lima Vaz, *Experiência Mística e Filosofia na Tradição Ocidental* (São Paulo: Loyola, 2000). On the Christian mystical tradition, I recommend the tremendous work in three volumes of Bernard McGinn in which he affirms mysticism as a direct experience of God that happens in an instant. See Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, v. I (New York: Crossroad, 2003).

<sup>28</sup>Weil, *Œuvres complètes IV: Écrits de Marseille 1* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008), 267; Weil, *La Pesanteur et la grâce*, 82–84.

<sup>29</sup>"Imagination fulfilling the emptiness" is Weil's concept that she developed to show all the elements from the contingent world that the human being seeks and attaches him/herself to illusory fulfill the existence marked by a void imposed by the distance between God and the creation. Weil, *La Pesanteur et la Grâce*, 82.

<sup>30</sup>*Malheur* is the French word that Simone Weil chose to express a kind of suffering that affects human individuals in their totality, including physical, psychological, social, and spiritual suffering. Weil affirmed that this word is almost impossible to translate into other languages. Frequently, English commentators and translators of Weil's work translate *malheur* as *affliction*. See, for example, Diogenes Allen's and Eric O. Springsted's commentary of *malheur* in the chapter "The Enigma of Affliction" in *Spirit, Nature, and Community: Issues in the Thought of Simone Weil* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 97–100 and the translation of Simone Weil's essay "L'amour de Dieu et le malheur" that was published as "The Love of God and Affliction" in *On Science, Necessity, and The Love of God*, trans. Richard Rees (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).

reveals both who we humans are and our need for the supernatural. Therefore, the human roots are connected both to the natural (social historical reality) and to the supernatural (the transcendent reality, the grace that touches the human condition). The connection between these realities reveals the real of human existence.

The supernatural reveals our obligation of recognition, inclusion, and justice for the other in an active compassion toward establishing a concrete participation in the socio-political arena and social goods. In her radical ontology derived from attention to the real, Weil argues for an active incarnation in social reality that recognizes others, foremost the unfortunates, for the purpose of empowering them and promoting their dignity. This recognition becomes a realization of justice by the realization of obligations to others.<sup>31</sup> They must meet the needs of the soul,<sup>32</sup> being obligations for justice in compassion that stem from the human condition as a reality of insufficiency shared by all.

Compassion to the other is a key element for justice in Weil's account. E. Jane Doering suggests that Weil "develops the rationale for justice administered with compassion and explained the role of the supernatural love."<sup>33</sup> In the essay, *Formes de l'amour implicite de Dieu*, Weil argues that compassion and gratitude are essential for justice in the world because they lead us to respect the dignity of the unfortunates.<sup>34</sup> This occurs with a movement of attention to the neighbor, that is, the other who is in an inferior condition. While justice can realize only among equals and the relationship between the powerful and the weak is never equal, supernatural justice is necessary to make the powerful recognize the weak, that is the unfortunates, in order to treat him/her as an equal. Weil names it: "the virtue of the supernatural."<sup>35</sup> Thus, this virtue

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<sup>31</sup>Weil opens her book: "The notion of obligation goes beyond the notion of rights that are subordinated and relative [to obligation]." She states that right does not support by itself, but it is an obligation that originates from human beings who recognize each other the rights of the other. Consequently, this leads to an obligation of respecting and promotion of rights. She adds: "Identical obligations link all human beings, although they correspond to different acts according to situations." The object of these obligations is the human being who is an imperative for the other by the simple fact of being a human. This fact connects everybody in the same requirement of fulfilling obligations. Moreover, obligations are not limited by contexts and structures. They are eternal. See Simone Weil, "L'Enracinement," in *Ceuvres*, ed. Florence de Lussy (Paris: Quarto Gallimard, 1999), 1027–1028.

<sup>32</sup>According to Simone Weil, the needs of the soul are: order, liberty, obedience, responsibility, equality, hierarchy, honor, punishment, freedom of opinion, security, risk, private property, collective property, and truth. See Weil "L'Enracinement," 1031–1051.

<sup>33</sup>E. Jane Doering, *Simone Weil and the Specter of Self-Perpetuating Force* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 184.

<sup>34</sup>Weil, "Formes de l'amour implicite de Dieu," 720.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 722.

establishes a relationship of exchange between compassion and gratitude. The reference to the neighbor is related to the Gospel because this relationship is a teaching from Jesus: “Christ taught us that supernatural love to the neighbor is the exchange of compassion and gratitude that is generated as a light between two beings in which one has power and the other is prevented from this human personality.”<sup>36</sup>

Weil emphasizes that supernatural love is a movement of attention to the unfortunates, who are our neighbor and we do not see them. Attention is a creative force which makes us to see what is not seen, as the Samaritan in the Gospel saw the wounded man on the road. She says: “Creative attention consists in making the true attention to see what does not exist.”<sup>37</sup> Then she adds: “Love sees the invisible.”<sup>38</sup>

In her radical ontology from attention to the real, Simone Weil argues for an active incarnation, as a true attention to the invisible, in social reality in recognition of others, with the unfortunates first in line, toward their empowerment and promotion of dignity. Weil explains this by emphasizing the rootedness of people in the reality between natural and supernatural justices. The metaphor of rootedness may give the interpretation of a passive attitude in the world, but it is actually the exact opposite. It is an active and dynamic incarnation in the world from a supernatural power that defines this incarnation in society. Simone Weil’s existential choices, activism, and mysticism do not allow us to interpret her proposal in a different way.<sup>39</sup>

Weil’s notion of obligations specifies the social dynamism of a rooted people that a focus on individual rights cannot provide. In this sense, an argument for human rights from the metaphysical dignity of the individual, as Jacques Maritain was arguing at that time,<sup>40</sup> is insufficient to lead to justice because this argument omits human suffering in the midst of social conditions and the necessity of humility to recognize the needs of the others. A notion of inalienable rights, grounded on a metaphysic of inner, “fails to be of much

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 724.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 726.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>On her existential choices, see Maria Clara Bingemer, *Simone Weil: Mystic of Passion and Compassion* (Eugene, OR.: Cascade Books, 2015), 4–37.

<sup>40</sup>Jacques Maritain, *Os Direitos do Homem* (Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio Editora, 1967).

See also Joseph M. de Torre, “The Common Good and The Good Society” in Garvin T. Colvert, ed., *The Renewal of Civilization: Essays in Honor of Jacques Maritain* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 31–39. In this essay, Torre examines Maritain’s conception of individual dignity and its relation to the society.

help when dealing with the afflicted.”<sup>41</sup> In addition, only human rights with metaphysical foundations seem to have a romanticized aspect that leads to a certain passivity of discourse without a practice that embodies it. Simone Weil wrote *L'Enracinement* before the International Declaration of Human Rights. She had before her the frustrated Napoleonic human declaration, the oppression of workers, World War II, and a debate about defending human dignity. Today, more than a half-century after the Human Rights Declaration, we see how human rights have been present in many discourses by world leaders but that they have lacked the power to make people and nations have real obligations. Human rights language has been used according to what is convenient for the “I” (which could be the interest of one person, a group, or a nation); it has even functioned as an argument for military coups, invasions, and wars.

On the one hand, a metaphysical foundation for the concept of human dignity is insufficient because it opens to a romanticized conception of human rights. On the other hand, a secular conception that dismisses the supernatural is unable to touch the authenticity of human existence and to promote it, especially where social suffering is destroying lives. Simone Weil provides a synthesis in which the radicalism of social activism is guided by the radicalism of grace in obligations embodied by an empty “I” rooted in the real. Weil's radical ontology incarnates the human in the world between necessity and good, that is, between natural and supernatural. Mediation is important here between creation and incarnation of the human as an imitation of God's humble actions of creating and incarnating. Being rooted is assumed to be a meditative function of participation in Jesus's cross, the mediation between natural and supernatural.<sup>42</sup>

In *L'Enracinement*, Weil proposes a society that creates conditions for individuals to become rooted in order to participate in Jesus, the mediator with roots in natural and supernatural realities. This becomes visible in obligations, practices of compassion, love, and justice to others. “Justice is the exercise of the supernatural love.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Allen and Springsted, *Spirit, Nature, and Community*, 181.

<sup>42</sup>Gabellieri develops the importance of mediation in Simone Weil's philosophy inspired in the Greeks and in her emphasis on Incarnation and its truth. See Emmanuel Gabellieri, “Simone Weil: Uma Filosofia da Mediação e do Dom,” in *Simone Weil: Ação e Contemplação*, ed. Guilia P. di Nicola and Maria C. L. Bingemer (Bauru: Edusc, 2005), 187–214.

<sup>43</sup>Weil, *Œuvres Complètes VI 4*, 174.

## CONCLUSION

Natural and supernatural justices exist in a harmonious relation in attention to affliction. This harmony occurs in an experience of decreation and rootedness that reveals the reality of the human condition and the world, leading individuals to see others in their suffering and struggles. Hence, the recognition of others is framed by compassion and obligations in the realization of natural and supernatural justices that force us to act in order to empower the other. These obligations concretize the rights of humans (as natural justice) who must satisfy their needs in a society that allows them to be rooted (encounter with the supernatural). The experience of suffering is a weakness that is paradoxically a strength against the *force*<sup>44</sup> responsible for uprooting individuals and peoples. At the same time, suffering raises compassion, a principle for recognizing the other in his/her vulnerability and pain. Consequently, to be real, compassion becomes a movement to force obligations on the human. In Weil's radical ontology, compassion and social reality are crucial for the incarnation of the supernatural justice in the natural justice necessary in the world, truth revealed in the incarnation of Jesus and his experience of affliction on the cross. Although Weil's account is grounded on a mystical experience which depends on God's grace and not on people's will, her radical ontology offers a path to Christians to unify a deep spiritual life of intimacy with God with the praxis of justice for the oppressed and the poor of our time. This perspective offers an alternative way for those who feel part of the Catholic faith, but have difficulty to accept the authority of its institutional dimension, reality that Weil experienced in her own faith in Jesus, considering herself a Catholic "of right" but not "of fact" in the threshold of the Church.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>On Simone Weil's account on force as a violence that 'crushed those whom it [force] touches,' see her essay "L'Iliade ou le poème de la force" in *Œuvres*, ed. Florence de Lussy (Paris: Quarto Gallimard, 1999), 527–51.

<sup>45</sup>Weil's love for the others and recognition of truth in other traditions were some of the elements that held her from officially becoming a Catholic by accepting baptism, despite her conversion to the Catholic faith. She affirmed to be a Catholic "of right," but not "of fact," because of institutional positions of the Catholic Church regarding other religious traditions. See her letter to Fr. Perrin called "Autobiographie Spirituelle," in *Attende de Dieu* (Paris: Le Colombe, 1950), 82. See also this commentary on the position of Weil in regards to the institutional Church and baptism and the hypothetical argument that she perhaps would change her decision if she were alive to see Vatican II and its development regarding the acceptance of the presence of truth in other traditions and its openness to dialogue with the modern world: Faustino Teixeira, "Simone Weil: Uma Paixão Sem Fronteiras," *Convergência* 42, no. 411 (2008): 313–327.

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