

Contents

Some Problems in Approaching Simone Weil	1
<i>Chapter 1: 1909–1930</i>	11
Childhood and youth, 11; evidence of early interest in “the realm of truth,” 16; education, 19; interest in manual labor, 21; work as a means of knowledge of the basic ideas of time, space, and causality, 23; her École Normale dissertation <i>Science et perception dans Descartes</i> : an attempt to see work both as a means of knowledge of the material world and of the realm of value, 24.	
<i>Chapter 2: 1931–1933</i>	30
Relation of philosophy to social and political theory, 30; <i>agrégée</i> and revolutionary, 31; trade union activism and writing, 32; criticism of the subordination of man to machine in modern industrial technology, 35; criticism of Stalinism, 37; trip to Ger-	

many and analysis of communist responsibility for the weakness of the German working-class movement, 39; questioning of the revolutionary hopes of Marxism in "Prospects: Are We Heading toward a Proletarian Revolution?" 41.

Chapter 3: 1933–1934

44

The philosophy class at Roanne, 44; *Lectures on Philosophy*, 45; the problem of the causes of social oppression, 46; "Reflections Concerning the Causes of Liberty and Social Oppression," 47; oppression bound up with the modern system of production, 49; analysis of the instability of power, 50; domination of the powerful by their own instruments of power, 51; the ideal relationship between the mind and the world, 52; the absence of thought a characteristic of modern civilization, 54; the loss of the idea of necessity, 54; work as a source of human value, 55; modern society on a trajectory toward war, 59.

Chapter 4: 1935–1936

63

The year of factory work, 63; teaching at Bourges and the correspondence with Bernard on improving psychologically oppressive conditions in the Rosières foundry, 67; the election of the Popular Front and the strikes of May–June 1936, 73; the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, 75; hopes for the revolution in Spain, 76; journey to Spain, 78; brief experience as a member of a CNT militia, 80; observations that the atmosphere bred by war destroys the ideals for which the war was being fought, 82;

return to France and analysis of war as an inevitable generator of mechanisms of oppression, 82; the necessity of avoiding international war, 83.

Chapter 5: 1937–1939

85

Trip to Italy, 85; need of a new framework in which to understand social phenomena, 86; analysis of social force, 88; the opposition between the social order and justice, 89; the need for milieus “favorable to the development of the soul,” 90; the beginnings of mystical illumination, 91; the conviction of the need to resist Hitler and the repudiation of pacifism, 95; analysis of the similarities between Hitler’s methods of domination and those of ancient Rome, 95; metaphor of the Greek spirit versus the Roman spirit, 97.

Chapter 6: 1939–1941

99

Desire to be an active participant in the war, 99; German offensive in the west, 101; the flight from Paris, 103; the fall of France and the armistice, 104; residence in Marseilles, 105; “*The Iliad, or The Poem of Force*” and the compassionate vision of Greek epic and tragedy, 105; the worship of power and the crisis of values, 108; the responsibility of writers and of modern science for the contemporary enfeeblement of the sense of value, 109; criticism of post-Renaissance science, 110; *relation of science, art, and religion in ancient Greece*, 112; the disappearance of scientific truth *and the consequences of the loss of the idea of truth*, 114.

<i>Chapter 7: 1941–1942</i>	116
Reflections on the nature of God, 116; meeting with Gustave Thibon, 119; deepening of mystical experience, 122; writings of November 1941–May 1942, 124; theology of mediation, 127; the many aspects of necessity, 130; the importance of consent to necessity, 131; the beauty of the world as an opening to God, 132; the role of suffering, 135; de-creation, 136; the human being as mediator between the world and God, 137.	
<i>Chapter 8: 1942–1943</i>	138
The decision to leave France, 138; arrival in New York, 139; relation to Catholicism, 140; argument for a “philosophical cleanup” of Catholicism, 142; attempts to get to London and desire to be sent to France, 143; work for Free French Committee in London, 146; foundations for a new social order, 148; relation of politics to art, 149; needs of the soul, 150; <i>The Need for Roots</i> , 151; the vocation of Europe, 154; the need of roots in the transcendent realm, 155; the ideal of a civilization founded on the spiritual meaning of work, 159; collapse and hospitalization, 160; death, 161; “suicide is ersatz de-creation,” 161; burial, 163.	
Conclusion	165
Footnotes	171
Bibliography	180
Index	183