“Being Rooted in Love”: The Trinitarian Ontological Perspective of Simone Weil’s Notion of Rootedness

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Abstract: This paper aims to explore the concept of rootedness in the final political reflections of Simone Weil. According to the French philosopher, rootedness represents “the most important and least recognized need of the human soul”. Weil goes beyond territorial aspects and considers the deep and authentic rootedness in one’s cultural heritage as an indispensable condition for the full development of human beings, both on individual and communal levels. Each culture originates from a unique and irreplaceable source of truth, shaping human environments in distinct ways. True rootedness fosters a genuine love for one’s place of origin and extends that sentiment to others, promoting a fraternal and solidarity-based relationship among diverse human communities worldwide. This political vision is grounded in an ontological reflection of being as a relation, which, from a Trinitarian perspective, can provide genuine meaning to human relationships.

Keywords: Simone Weil; rootedness; uprooting; love; community; relation; religion; trinity; trinitarian ontology

1. Introduction

In this article, we will explore the reflections of the French philosopher Simone Weil (1909–1943) on her notion of “rootedness” (enracinement). This concept took shape and developed during the final three years of her life, marked by her personal experiences of uprootedness. Faced with the Nazi invasion, Weil and her parents left Paris on 13 June 1940. They sought refuge in southern France, specifically Marseille, where she resided until mid-1942. Subsequently, she went into exile in New York for a brief period and eventually settled in London, where she passed away prematurely on 24 August 1943. The writings from her time in Marseille (1940–1942) reveal a gradual and significant maturation of her notion of rootedness, culminating in 1943 with her unfinished “spiritual testament”: Prélude à une déclaration des devoirs envers l’être humain (cf. Weil 2013), which Albert Camus titled “Enracinement” on its first publication.

We will initially provide an overview of the meaning of rootedness, emphasizing its significance as a vital necessity and an absolute obligation towards all human beings. We will then delve into its concrete aspects with community-relational and topological aspects. These aspects are essential elements for genuine rootedness and the complete development of human beings. However, Simone Weil’s understanding of rootedness surpasses mere territorial or limited interpretations, as it encompasses the universal and transcendent dimensions. We will analyze the fundamental conditions, according to Weil, for authentic rootedness that remains open to universal values. Additionally, we will highlight the role and significance of religion in this transformative process.

Lastly, we will briefly outline the ultimate foundation of Weil’s notion of rootedness, traced to her Trinitarian interpretation of being as a relationship and love. Through the divine logos, this interpretation unites and connects not only all entities within existence, but also transcends the realms of human and divine.
2. Rootedness: A “Vital Need” and an “Eternal Obligation”

Rootedness indicates a vital need of the human being’s soul. As such, it entails an obligation, that is, an absolute and universal duty. The last impels us to respond concretely to that inherent need for roots present in every human being, without exception. Need and obligation compose, in effect, an inseparable binomial for Weil, as evidenced in a letter from 1942 in which she states categorically: “Where there is a need, there is an obligation” (Weil 1973, p. 99).

The fact that the need for rootedness is vital reveals that the deprivation of it jeopardizes the full development of the human being, which hinders the full flourishing of humans not only from the physical point of view but also—consequently—morally and spiritually. From a Kantian perspective (cf. Kant 1996), Weil makes it clear that the sense of duty as such is due only to the human being because only a human is an “absolute”, i.e., an end in him or herself, and not a means because of something. In this sense, the notion of obligation as a safeguard of every human being in need must be at the basis of every right and positive law without being reduced to it.  

For example, the feeling of obligation that imperatively arises at the sight of a human being suffering from hunger or thirst is not the result of a purely natural prescription. According to Weil, this is based on the supernatural, that is, on the “unwritten law” that every human is called to obey before any other human-made law.

It is in this framework that we must also put the need for rootedness, considered by the French woman philosopher as one of the most important, because just as plants grow and develop by cultivating deep roots in the earth as they head towards the sunlight, so too the human being fully satisfies all their needs—both physical and of the soul—only within a concrete milieu vital, represented in particular by the community of origin (family, homeland, city, between others). This milieu always corresponds to earthly good and, as such, is imperfect, fragile, and necessarily mixed with good and evil. Although it is the only means—or in the Weilian language, “μεταξύ”—thanks to which every human being encounters the world and, with that, which is beyond it. Rootedness thus constitutes a sine qua non for the full development of each human’s genius and their fullest identity.

Let us now go gradually to the root of, pun intended, Weil’s notion of rootedness.

3. Community: Bridge with the Past, Present, Future, and Eternity

The nodal point of this concept is found in the essential role that the community of belonging plays in the full development of the human being as a source of nourishment and the flowering of their deepest essence. In this sense, it is worth emphasizing that although the community represents a “bridge” between the present and the past, the primacy for Weil always belongs to the past. The notion of rootedness refers to “taking deep roots in one’s origin”, which, in the first place, means actually receiving and adhering authentically to one’s tradition of belonging to one’s own inherited culture. Nevertheless, it does not end there.

The past has a primacy in the Weilian notion of rootedness because, on the one hand, the absolute good is eternal, and therefore, meta-historical. On the other hand, the closest link that each human being possesses with transcendence is the past as a source of spiritual values that could come only from the original good and truth. It is understood in this way why, according to Weil, the respect due to human being communities must be “très élevé” because it is through them that each person has access to a pure spiritual treasure which “is directly connected with the eternal destiny of Man” (Weil 2002b, p. 7). Therefore, Weil maintains: “All we can look to for encouragement here below is in those historical atolls of the living past left upon the surface of the earth” (Weil 2002b, p. 47). For this reason, the destruction and loss of the past represents for Weil the most atrocious crime of uprooting and the worst human tragedy: “The past once destroyed never returns. The destruction of the past is perhaps the greatest of all crimes” (Weil 2002b, p. 48).
Nevertheless, this reflection of Weil’s should not be taken as mere nostalgia: “Love of the past has nothing to do with any reactionary political attitude” (Weil 2002b, p. 48). The past is important not in itself but as a condition to be well-rooted in the present as well as a source of inspiration for the future. This is, in essence, the meaning and the mission par excellence of all rootedness in a specific milieu vital: «namely, maintaining throughout the present the links with the past and the future» (Weil 2002b, p. 96).

The connection with the past—which means with eternity—is necessary to be truly connected to the present and rightfully projected into the future.

A human being has roots by virtue of his real, active, and natural participation in the life of a community. This participation preserves in living shape certain treasures of the past and certain expectations for the future. This involvement is a natural one. Place, birth conditions, profession, and social surroundings automatically bring it about. Every human being needs to have multiple roots. She or he must draw the whole of their moral, intellectual, and spiritual life well-nigh by way of the environment of which she or he forms a natural part (Weil 2002b, p. 40).

Nevertheless, the notion of rootedness does not end here either.

4. Rootedness and Openness to Universality

Contact with eternity implies, so to speak, an authentic relationship with the different stages of time in order to live fully rooted in the present. In this regard, a person fully rooted in the inheritance she or he has received entails a strong sense of belonging and personal responsibility towards their homeland and its members. The above, paradoxically, does not lead to an enclosure in one’s community but quite the contrary and vice versa. Thus writes Weil in her Marseilles’ notebooks: “The truly precious things are those that constitute steps towards the beauty of the world; overtures (openings) to it. The one who has gone further, even to the beauty of the world itself, does not bear less love for them, but much more than before” (Weil 2008, p. 314).

According to Weil, the secret to achieving a legitimate love for one’s homeland and place of origin is to base such love on compassion or pity. They are pure feelings that, while leading to a deep love for our homeland, do not make us lose sight of its finiteness and fragility as a pure earthly good (µεταξύ), thus preventing us from falling into absolutization and improper nationalism. In this regard, one of the direct consequences of uprooting is totalitarianism which should be understood as the “cutting off” of relations that leads to enclosure and idolatry, namely, the consideration of a means as an end: “Uprooting breeds idolatry. [...] The first consequence of this malady, equally affecting all spheres, is generally that, relations being cut, each thing is looked upon as an end in itself” (Weil 2002b, p. 65). That is why, for Simone Weil, those nations whose members have not put down roots deeply and legitimately in their own culture despise and look upon the other nations and their members as an enemy and/or with an air of superiority: “Whoever is uprooted himself uproots others. Whoever is rooted himself does not uproot others” (Weil 2002b, p. 45).

On the other hand, the rooted person goes beyond the confines of their land, recognizing that every homeland is equally worthy of love and protection. «More than one nation exists on the earth’s surface. Ours is certainly unique. However, each of the others, considered by itself and with affection, is unique in the same degree» (Weil 2002b, p. 127). Indeed, the homeland is a vital environment, a “life-giving environment” (milieux porteur de vie) “and such as it is, deserves to be guarded like a treasure for the good it contains” (Weil 2002b, p. 158).

In this way, taking root allows a vertical and transcendent openness, as we mentioned at the beginning, and a horizontal openness incarnated and committed to one’s community of belonging. Thanks to compassion, it is possible to love and protect all the other earthly homelands up to reach the entire universe; which reflects the heavenly country and, as such, the only true homeland of man for Weil (cf. Weil 2008, p. 312). In short, a rooted person always feels at home, even far from their country.
It is thus evident at this point that Weil’s notion of rootedness is not reduced to a particular physical territory—it is worth recalling the great esteem that Weil had for the civilization of Languedoc, who considered their “language” as their homeland (cf. Weil 2009, pp. 403–24), just as it is not reduced to a single homeland or culture of belonging, but rather facilitates openness to other milieux.

Indeed, taking root in “multiple places” is healthy and life-giving since it allows the “breathing” of a new and, at the same time, familiar air. The above is because it comes from the same supernatural spirit of truth at each culture’s base. Following this logic, the multiplication of roots is also necessary for the flowering and “aeration” of thought through the circulation of diverse and different ideas, thereby contributing to renewal and actualization both on a personal and community level:

We must also keep, above all, well to the fore in any political, legal, or technical innovations likely to have social repercussions, some arrangement whereby human beings may once more be able to recover their roots. This doesn’t mean they should be fenced in. On the contrary, never was plenty of fresh air more indispensable. Rooting in and the multiplying of contacts are complementary to one another (Weil 2002b, pp. 48–49).

In this sense, intercultural exchange is indispensable but should not be imposed. The freedom and consent of each side are essential and indispensable for true rootedness. In the same way, the richness and uniqueness of a particular milieu can be fully accepted and “digested” only from a deep and legitimate rootedness in one’s own culture.

5. “Return to the Truth”: The Role of Religion

As we have just seen, the remedy proposed by Weil to counteract the flagellum of an uprooted and uprooting culture is quite evident at this point: reprendre des racines, which we can also translate as a “retour à la vérité” (cf. Weil 2002b, p. 289) through an authentically rooted spiritual life:

Totalitarianism’s idolatrous course can only be arrested by coming up against a genuinely spiritual way of life. If children are brought up not to think about God, they will become Fascist or Communist for want of something to which to give themselves. […] The soul of a child, as it reaches out towards understanding, has need of the treasures accumulated by the human species through the centuries. We do injury to a child if we bring it up in a narrow Christianity which prevents it from ever becoming capable of perceiving that there are treasures of the purest gold to be found in non-Christian civilizations (Weil 2002b, p. 289, our underline).

Regarding this issue, it is worth recalling that the basis of all totalitarianism for Weil is idolatry, which, as we have already mentioned above, is a consequence of the “cutting off” of relations and the consequent asphyxiating enclosure within oneself. According to Gabellieri, idolatry is not only lacking in relations but also “forgetting” them and, because of its “self-referentiality”, it inevitably leads to the negation and or opposition of all other existing connections (cf. Gabellieri 2019, pp. 219–26).

Continuing with our discourse, we have also said that each tradition hides in the manifestations of its typical geniality the transcendent good. However, by an “eternal hierarchy”, the “pieces of good and truth” are mainly found in religion, and from it descends to the other social spheres, shaping the way of life of a population: “If the spirit of truth is almost absent from religious life, it would be strange indeed if it were to be present in secular life. It would be the turning upside down of an eternal hierarchy” (Weil 2002b, p. 245).

Weil emphasizes the central role that all great religions have played in history in the growth and development of a particular human civilization: its function is to impregnate with transcendent light all the environments of public and private life, not in an imposing or authoritarian way, but as a source of inspiration and silent and imperceptible elevation, like leaven in the dough (cf. Mt 13, 33; Lk 13, 20–21), of the whole society (cf. Weil 2008, pp. 263–79).
Hence, the importance and valorization Weil gives to religion is not as an absolute, but a “link” (μεταξύ) with the truth. If uprooting is to cut the connections and roots with that which is essential in a person’s life, religion, if we consider its etymology, means precisely to resume (reliquare) those connections which, after all, have a transcendent origin. In this way, and in coherence with what we have just stated above, an authentic religious life is open. It has a universal orientation: “Religious thought is genuine whenever it is universal in its appeal” (Weil 2002b). Similarly, religion, like any earthly good, is distorted when it becomes an end in itself and is instrumentalized by merely personal or group interests. It is necessary to love one’s religion in a detached way to avoid falling into this trap. That is, “desiring the truth purely and deeply”, and thus, being ready even to abandon one’s religion in the name of truth.

But for religious feeling to emanate from the spirit of truth, one should be absolutely prepared to abandon one’s religion, even if that should mean losing all motive for living, if it should turn out to be anything other than the truth. In this state of mind alone is it possible to discern whether there is truth in it or not. Otherwise, one doesn’t venture even to propound the problem in all its rigour. God ought not to be for a human heart a reason for living, like his treasure is for a miser. (Weil 2002b, p. 244)

This attitude, undoubtedly painful, is a purification condition for purifying one’s limited conception of God. As God is always more than the idea one may have of him, indeed, it does not coincide with it at all. In this sense, Weil remarks in her Spiritual Autobiography that one must always prefer only the truth, even more than Christ because loving the truth is to love Christ. Therefore, there is no contradiction: “Christ likes us to prefer truth to him because, before being Christ, he is truth. If one turns aside from him to go toward the truth, one will not go far before falling “into his arms” of Christ” (cf. Weil 1966, pp. 38–39; 1973, p. 69).

Finally, it is also worth adding that religion is, for Simone Weil, a form of recitation of the name of the Lord. It is an action that—as she affirms in À propos du Pater—has the virtue of “transforming the soul” (cf. Weil 2008, pp. 337–45). In this same way, the thinker also considers religion as a “mother tongue” given by the divine, so that every human community can pronounce the name of God and relate to him; hence, her incisive maxim: “Every religion is the only true one” (cf. Weil 1997, p. 326).

It is thus clear that the profound intentionality that moves these affirmations of Weil’s is not the denigration or relativization of religion, which, as we have just pointed out, plays an essential and lofty role in society. Through an attitude detached from all earthly good, Weil seeks to direct us toward the essential to the deep, towards that profound essence of the truth at the root of all civilization. This essence can only be love since only authentic love is chaste, and therefore, free and detached from or of the other. The above is illustrated as follows: “That is why chastity is indispensable to love” (Weil 1970, p. 10). Furthermore, it is also from this love that is born the impulse towards the universal and true, which is also the sign of all authentic rootedness.

We finally see that the Weilian notion of rootedness is, paradoxically, an uprooting in its ultimate sense, an uprooting that is essentially different from the imposed uprooting and illegitimate one. Authentic uprooting is that which “turns away from “that which is passing by”’’ to take root in the essential, that is, in the only milieu capable of the infinite desire for goodness present in the human heart of man. This desire is rooted in the “heavenly homeland” (patrie celeste), which, paradoxically, can be loved only through our detached love for this concrete world.

We have a heavenly country, but in a sense it is too difficult to love, because we do not know it; above all, in a sense, it is too easy to love, because we can imagine it as we please. We run the risk of loving a fiction under this name. […] Let us love the country of here below. It is real; it offers resistance to love. It is this country that God has given us to love. (Weil 1973, p. 178)
The above seems to be the profound meaning of the laconic and abrupt Weilian affirmation, typical of her too-frank and direct style: “taking root in the absence of place” (cf. Weil 1997, p. 423).

However, what is the ultimate foundation of these Weil reflections?

6. The Ontological Foundation of the Notion of Rootedness

Considering all that has been stated above, it does not seem unfounded to affirm in the first place that the idea of “relation” underlies Weil’s reflection on rootedness. Indeed, the ultimate function of rootedness is to “recover the original pact between man and universe” (Weil 1991, pp. 29–109). At the same time, this balanced relation is a sign and condition of a correct connection with the transcendent truth: the source and inspiration of all other relations/connections in existence.

Based on the Greek conception of the world, the universe (cosmos) is a harmonious and proportional order of necessary relations. Such order is truth and beauty or “éclat de la réalité”, which, for Weil, is “the radiant manifestation of reality” as pure love. Weil sees in this way something else behind the web of connections that extends throughout the universe: it is the eternal wisdom that wisely persuades matter and mysteriously leads the whole existence towards the good: “Divine Providence is not a disturbing influence, an anomaly in the ordering of the world; it is itself the order of the world, or rather it is the regulating principle of this universe. It is eternal Wisdom, unique, spread across the whole universe in a sovereign network of relations” (Weil 2002b). Logos—the Supreme Metaxy—for Weil signifies above all relations: “That is what the word Logos indicates, signifying connection [relation] even more than the word” (Weil 2002b, p. 183).

If, during creation, God creates by thinking of his Word, the universe is necessarily invested in it. For this reason, the divine Word represents, on the one hand, the order and beauty of the world and, on the other hand, it is Μεταξύ, the “mediator” between the Creator and creation (cf. Weil 1997, p. 331; 2002a, p. 48; 2008, pp. 285–336). God is love that thinks his Word, which, in turn, embodies and reflects an order that is the image of love. Weil explains it in her Notebooks, starting from a famous Aristotelian maxim: “Νόησε νοήσεως νοησίς. The meaning of the Trinity is that God is thought. Every thought has a subject and an object. The Father thinks his Word. This thought is love. This Word is order. This order is the image of this thought, of this love” (Weil 1997, p. 370).

In the second place, another essential characteristic of logos—precisely as a link and bond between beings and immanence and transcendence—is being a point of intersection and unity between different and even “contradictory” beings. It is the case with the union between the natural and supernatural planes (cf. Weil 1973, pp. 117–36). In this sense, as Chenavier states, the Weilian thought is dialectical in its deep platonic sense. It incessantly seeks harmony and balance between differences (cf. Chenavier 1991, pp. 63–83).

Moreover, this point of balance is the “intersection of the arms of the Cross” (Weil 1973, p. 136); or what Weil also calls another else, the “entre-deux” (cf. Weil 1994, p. 343), i.e., a space of mediation. Furthermore, this grounds the Weilian reflection of the detachment which, as we have seen, underlies this notion of uprooting, understood as rootedness in what is essential. On this, Gabellieri writes:

This flaw, this defect of identity and adequacy inherent to the phenomenon is positive: it reveals the “fissure”, the “hole” through which, being finite, it can open itself from within, towards a transcendent real that it does not possess in itself, but that it can take in through the option of opening itself to something greater than itself. (Gabellieri 2019, p. 213)

The relationship, therefore, necessarily implies a “void”. Indeed, for Simone Weil, there can be no real unity without separation, without a certain distance between the parties. Moreover, Weil writes to her friend Gustave Thibon, “Those who do not love each other are not separated”. And, she adds: “Encounter and separation are the human images of the absolute union between the Father and the Son in the Trinity, and of the inconceivable
laceration between the Father and the Son at the moment of the word: ‘My God, why have you forsaken me?’” (Perrin and Thibon 2003, p. 135).

From the above, we can recognize that the last chain of this ontological reflection of Weil is that of the absolute Being as relationship and unity. That is to say, of God as Trinity, or alternatively, as Weil refers to it, harmony or original friendship, where separate thinkers think together within love.

The formula: ‘Friendship is equality made of harmony’, (φιλίαν ἔνας Ἐναρμότητα ἑστηκε), is full of wonderful meanings, in relation to God, in relation to the union of God and man, and in relation to men, provided we bear in mind the Pythagorean meaning of the word harmony. Harmony is proportion. It is also the unity of opposites. To apply this formula to God, we need to bring it closer to a definition of harmony that is at first sight very strange: (δίχα φιλοτέντων συμφωνίας), “the common thought of separate thinkers”. Separate thinkers thinking together, there is only one thing that realises this in all rigour, and that is the Trinity. [. . .] Meditating on this formula leads us to the best way of explaining to our understanding the dogma of the Trinity. (Weil 2009, p. 262)

7. Rootedness, Uprooting, and Trinitarian Ontology

From our perspective, it is evident from what we have set out here that the Trinitarian framework of Weil’s reflections about rootedness can be perfectly matched to a Trinitarian ontological perspective on being and reality. As Piero Coda argues: “Trinitarian ontology designates every interpretation of reality that—explicitly or even only implicitly—moves from the place [the Trinity] within which the event of Jesus Christ has drawn us, taking into account its properly ontological relevance” (Coda 2012, p. 165).

Another characteristic aspect of Trinitarian ontology is the non-dichotomy between theological and philosophical reflection. According to Coda, Trinitarian ontology is an open and integral thought, which “is from and of theology being from and of philosophy. It inhabits the frontier of both, both presupposing and both referring back to” (Coda 2016, p. 233). In this way, Simone Weil’s “religious metaphysics”—to use a term coined by Miklos Vető (2014)—thinks about being and entities starting from a clear Christological and Trinitarian relational dynamic. This thought does not remain, however, a mere theology or religious philosophy of the Trinitarian stamp but, also, as trinitarian ontology (cf. Coda et al. 2021, pp. 41–56) because it is inspired by the dogma born from Christian Revelation. Moreover, it expresses a new way of thinking and interpreting the whole reality. In this direction, Weil also refers to a new kind of intelligence enlightened by supernatural love (cf. Weil 2019, pp. 159–97).

On the other hand, it is undeniable that the mystical influence is at the basis of Simone Weil’s later writings. Similarly, mysticism also plays a fundamental role in the Trinitarian ontology: “Mystical experience constitutes the phenomenologically relevant place in which the truth of the Trinity is given as the truth of B/being, which, as such, is consigned to ontology” (Coda et al. 2021, p. 257).

Based on these brief statements, we conclude that the Weilian reflection—as Marianelli (2008) and Gabellieri (2003, 2019) recognize—is entirely part of the grammar of the exercise of thinking that also constitutes Trinitarian ontology.

8. A Final Thought: “To Be Rooted in LOVE”

Although the Weilian reflection on the category of rootedness has indeed been elaborated in a very different context that, in many aspects, no longer exists today, we believe that in its essence, it is still a very valid and stimulating contribution to better understand and analyze in depth the various phenomena, new and old, of uprootedness in today’s globalized society (migration crisis, societies marginalized by different conflict zones, the boom of new nationalisms, the technology, between others).

Considering the above, to think of the world with its contradictions and deep truth is to think of the invisible link that unites and connects each entity with the others. Nevertheless,
as we tried to develop here grosso modo, this kind of thinking is possible only when it is accompanied by love, or, in Weilian terms, by that “beauty that bites at the heart of every human being” (cf. Weil 2002b, p. 279).

The profound truth of being is love because the full realization of women, men, and each human community is possible only through establishing authentic relationships founded on love, respect, friendship, and other benevolent feelings (cf. Weil 2002b, p. 202). As Professor Doering states: “True faith, she argued, meant giving sincere attention to the less fortunate and loving them for themselves, not commanding wherever one had the power” (Doring 2010, p. 185).

Based on this, it seems to us that Simone Weil’s notion of rootedness is, after all, a broad translation of the Pauline maxim: “being rooted and grounded in love” (Eph, 3:17). Moreover, for Weil, this means being rooted in the essentials and being attentive to everything we relate to and to the needs of every person, especially the most disadvantaged (cf. Weil 1994, p. 319). In this way, a more just and fraternal society will be achieved, where each individual will find the fertile milieu for their full personal development.

Because everything is connected, which means everything is related to God.

What must we conclude about the multitude of interesting things that do not speak of God? Are we to conclude that they are the prestige of the devil? No, no, no. We must conclude that they speak of God. Today, we urgently need to show this. (Weil 2006, p. 168).

Moreover, to live and show; that is the vocation, essence, and challenge of a genuine Christian civilization.

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Notes
1. It is necessary to clarify that the notion of obligation is unconditional and absolute for Weil. Therefore, superior to that of right, belonging to the domain of facts, it must be subordinated to the notion of obligation: “The notion of obligations comes before that of rights, which is subordinate and relative to the former” (Weil 2002b, p. 2).
2. This obligation is not based upon any de facto situation, nor jurisprudence, customs, social structure, the relative state of forces, historical heritage, or presumed historical orientation; for no de facto situation is able to create an obligation: “This obligation is not based upon any convention [. . .]. This obligation is an eternal one. [. . .] This obligation is an unconditional one. [. . .] This obligation has no foundation, but only a verification in the common consent accorded by the universal conscience” (Ibid., p. 4).
4. The term μέταξώ is of Greek origin and inspiration, more specifically Platonic (cf. Martino 2022). It is a recurrent voice in the notes and elaborations of the last three years of Weil’s philosophical meditation (1940–1943). As Gabellieri rightly explains, although the root of such a word is meta, it does not refer—at least not in primis—to that which is “beyond”, but to the middle space (entre-deux) which necessarily occurs between every entity of existence and which characterizes all created things as “intermediary” and “mediation”. Μεταξώ indicates, then, the essential and irreducible relation that unites and connects every being or phenomenon with each other and with the whole universe, but not only. Indeed, “the ‘between’ indicates not only a horizontal but also a vertical relation, an orientation” (Gabellieri 2019, p. 162) towards the transcendent hidden in the world. In this line, the notion of μεταξώ is linked to a hierarchical conception of the world in its deep etymological sense, i.e., as an element that reveals the presence of a supernatural principle in and among things. We will further elaborate on this subject in our last point.
5. For Weil, genius is synonymous with sanctity and closeness to goodness and supernatural justice. According to Joseph-Marie Perrin, genius is human intelligence open to the wisdom of God (cf. Perrin and Thibon 2003, p. 96). Weil felt such geniality was alive and palpitating in the humble, pure, wise, and simple people from the town and the countryside (cf. Weil 2015). In this sense, taking root means assuming the “genius” proper to the origin civilization. Furthermore, that is what the contemporary world needs, according to Weil: “Today it is not nearly enough merely to be a saint, but we must have the saintliness demanded...
by the present moment, new saintliness, itself also without precedent. […] The world needs saints who have genius, just as a plague-stricken town needs doctors” (Weil 1973, p. 99).

For this reason, all earthly things that contribute to the full development of man must be treated with respect and deep veneration, but without falling into the absolutization of them. We will return to this idea in the following paragraphs.

And further: “Loss of the past, whether it be collectively or individually, is the supreme human tragedy” (Weil 2002b, p. 116).

«Les choses vraiment précieuses ce sont celles qui constituent des échelons vers la beauté du monde, des ouvertures sur elles. Celui qui est allé plus loin, jusqu’à la beauté du monde elle-même, ne leur porte pas un amour moindre, mais beaucoup plus grand qu’auparavant». This seems the same idea that Pope Francis develops particularly in Christus Vivit: “For this reason, in addressing young indigenous people gathered in Panama, I encouraged them to ‘care for your roots, because from the roots comes the strength that is going to make you grow, flourish and bear fruit’” (Francis 2019, March 25, n. 186, cf. specially chapter 6).

From this perspective, any kind of xenophobia is also unacceptable for Weil: “It is urgent also to get rid of xenophobia” (Weil 2002b, p. 161).

From this perspective, it is idolatrous, for example, the rejection of the migratory phenomenon that characterizes so many of the new types of exacerbated nationalism that are taking place in Europe and beyond. Along these lines, a stimulating and complementary reading is given by Julia Kristeva, a Bulgarian writer and psychoanalyst who naturalized French, on the rise of the new nationalismas a failure of humanism and which have as their characteristic sign their rejection of the foreigner and, in a more general and not always immediately obvious way, of transcendence: cf. J. Kristeva, “Di cosa sono sintomo i nazionalismi?”, Vita e Pensiero, (Kristeva 2019, pp. 13–20). By the same author, for more on this subject, we also recommend: Stranieri a noi stessi. L’Europa, l’altro, l’identità. Roma: Donzelli editore (Kristeva 2014). In this vein, we can consider, too, technology as a new form of idolatry. It produces an even more significant uprooting since it isolates a person from their family and creates the illusion of human relationships that are not true. As stated by Professor Castleton (2021), “the devices produce a paradigm where modern life is left without a focal point, without a base that connects us with reality; life and identity itself are transformed into isolated fragments” (pp. 49–50, our translation). Gangs and criminal drug trafficking organizations also imprison some children and young people. The above happens not only because of money but also because of the need to belong to a community. This, again, is idolatry because criminal organizations also create the illusion of a community. However, in them, violence and the instrumentalization of its members prevail.

“The order of the world is the same as the beauty of the world. All that differs is the type of concentration demanded, according to whether one tries to conceive the necessary relations which go to make it up or to contemplate its splendour. It is one and the same thing, which with respect to God is eternal Wisdom; with respect to the universe, perfect obedience; with respect to our love, beauty; with respect to our intelligence, balance of necessary relations; with respect to our flesh, brute force’ (Weil 2002b, pp. 244, 288–89).

“Truth is the radiant manifestation of reality. Truth is not the object of love but reality. To desire truth is to desire direct contact with a piece of reality. To desire contact with a piece of reality is to love. We desire truth only in order to love in truth. We desire to know the truth about what we love. Instead of talking about love of truth, it would be better to talk about the spirit of truth in love. Pure and genuine love always desires above all to dwell wholly in the truth whatever it may be, unconditionally” (Weil 2002b, pp. 247–48).

“Eternal Wisdom imprisons this universe in a network, a web of determinations. The universe accepts passively. The brute force of matter, which appears to us sovereign, is nothing else in reality but perfect obedience. That is the guarantee accorded to Man, the Ark of the Covenant, the Covenant, the visible and palpable promise here below, the sure basis of hope. That is the truth which bites at our hearts every time we are penetrated by the beauty of the world. That is the truth which bursts forth in matchless accents of joy in the beautiful and pure parts of the Old Testament, in Greece among the Pythagoreans and all the sages, in China with Lao-Tse, in the Hindu scriptures, in Egyptian remains. It lies perhaps hidden in innumerable myths and tales. It will appear to us, before our very eyes, clothed in our own knowledge, if one day God opens our eyes” (Weil 2002b, p. 279).

«Νόησις νοήσεως νόησις. Le sens de la Trinité est que Dieu est pensée. Toute pensée a un sujet et un objet. Le Père pense sa parole. Cette pensée est amour. Cette parole est ordre. Cet ordre est image de cette pensée, de cet amour».


There is, however, no confusion between the method proper of each science, but, as Pili makes more explicit, Trinitarian ontology is an event that is born and subsists in the fruitful reciprocity between philosophy and theology: “Such Trinitarian ontology lives of and in the ‘between’ (zwischen, Hemmerle would say)—or of and in the ‘and’ (Rosenzweig) or of and in the ‘combining’ (Rosmini)—of philosophy and theology. It points towards an integral and broader thought than philosophy and theology alone” (Pili 2017, p. 55).
Marianelli, in the wake of Gabellieri (2003), recognizes in Weilian ontology and anthropology a rhythm that “is the expression of a Trinitarian ontology, the foundation of a metaphysics of mediation and gift” (Marianelli 2008, p. 129). In turn, Gabellieri maintains that more than philosophy is needed for a profound understanding of the Weilian metaxology in which the Trinity is the archetype of all relations (Gabellieri 2019, p. 165). However, Trinitarian ontology is necessary: “We can go no further here in S. Weil’s metaphysics of being and gift, which implies if we place ourselves on the theological and mystical level, a trinitarian ontology through the unity between the immanent dimension and the static dimension in the personal ‘processions’ within the Trinity” (Gabellieri 2019, p. 268).


Cf. (Francis 2015, May 24, n. 91–92).

Gabellieri, Emmanuel. 2019. Trinitarian ontology through the unity between the immanent dimension and the static dimension in the personal ‘processions’ within the Trinity. (Weil 1973, p. 75).

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