

Totalitarianism in the Work of Simone Weil: Insights from an Early Confrontation¹

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Abstract

Simone Adolphine Weil initially saw herself as a Marxist and anarchist and became involved in revolutionary-syndicalist trade unions before increasingly becoming their early and extremely sharp critic. From 1933 onward, she distanced herself more and more from the syndicalist movement in terms of content, and at the same time she was increasingly skeptical of its politics. She saw in the syndicalists, socialists and communists no more accurate knowledge of society than in the conservatives or fascists. This led her very early on to the concept of totalitarianism, which appeared in her philosophy and only became widespread in Western societies after World War II, when Weil was already dead.

Although Weil's concept of totalitarianism has been referred to in various essays, it has not yet been researched in her complete works. This article attempts for the first time to capture the concept of totalitarianism in Simone Weil's work, which was ahead of its time, and at the same time to group it systematically. The reader will thus be able to trace it in the various writings and recognize for the first time in how many different variations it found its way into Weil's oeuvre.

Keywords: Simone Weil, Totalitarianism, Marxism, Stalinism, National Socialism.

[O TOTALITARISMO NA OBRA DE SIMONE WEIL: PERCEPÇÕES A PARTIR DE UM CONFRONTO INICIAL]

Resumo

Simone Adolphine Weil viu-se inicialmente como marxista e anarquista e envolveu-se em sindicatos revolucionários-sindicalistas antes de se tornar cada vez mais a sua

¹ An earlier, much longer version of this paper, "Simone Weils frühes Verständnis des Totalitarismus als existenzielle Bedrohung", appeared in *Labyrinth. An International Journal for Philosophy, Value Theory and Sociocultural Hermeneutics* 25, no. (1) (2023): p. 56-108., in German. Portions of that paper are reproduced here with the publisher's permission.

crítica precoce e extremamente acutilante. A partir de 1933, distanciou-se cada vez mais do movimento sindicalista em termos de conteúdo, ao mesmo tempo que se tornou cada vez mais cética em relação à sua política. Ela não via nos sindicalistas, socialistas e comunistas um conhecimento mais exato da sociedade do que nos conservadores ou fascistas. Isto levou-a muito cedo ao conceito de totalitarismo, que surgiu na sua filosofia e só se generalizou nas sociedades ocidentais após a Segunda Guerra Mundial, quando Weil já tinha morrido.

Embora o conceito de totalitarismo de Weil tenha sido referido em vários ensaios, ainda não foi pesquisado nas suas obras completas. Este artigo tenta, pela primeira vez, captar o conceito de totalitarismo na obra de Simone Weil, que estava à frente do seu tempo, e ao mesmo tempo agrupá-lo de forma sistemática. O leitor poderá, assim, localizá-lo nos vários escritos e reconhecer pela primeira vez em quantas variações diferentes encontrou o seu caminho na obra de Weil.

Palavras-chave: Simone Weil, Totalitarismo, Marxismo, Estalinismo, Nacional-Socialismo.

Introduction: Weil's Early Recognition of Totalitarianism as a Phenomenon

Coming from anarchist circles and revolutionary-syndicalist trade unions, Simone Adolphe Weil initially saw herself as a Marxist and an anarchist, before increasingly becoming their early and extremely pointed critic. From 1933 on, she distanced herself more and more from the syndicalist movement in terms of content, and at the same time she was increasingly skeptical of its politics. She saw in the syndicalists, socialists, and communists no more accurate knowledge of society than in the conservatives or fascists. The article attempts to situate Simone Weil's early disillusionment with syndicalism, socialism, Marxism and Stalinism, as well as her recognition of what was widely labelled totalitarianism in Western societies at the latest after the Second World War, in her writings.

Much has been written about Simone Weil's personality and life, about her more than premature and tragic death, as well as about her Jewish origins and the fact that she herself stubbornly refused to consider herself Jewish or to show solidarity with Jews persecuted by National Socialism². In her lifetime she changed from being at first religiously unmusical, seeing herself as an atheist, then religiously awakening to Christianity under clearly anti-Jewish auspices, but without being baptized and joining the Catholic Church. The reader can participate in this transformation and the accompanying religious deliberations in various writings³.

Weil saw herself as a follower of Marxism and anarchism in her school and student days. At first, she was a pacifist. After her studies as a young teacher, she became a practical trade unionist. All the positions she had taken, however, she threw over again in a very short time. The Marxist and anarchist became a critic of the same, the pacifist became a militant anti-fascist in the Spanish Civil War, and the practical trade unionist and labor theorist increasingly became a philosophical mystic until the end of her life. Only one thing remained constant: Simone Weil never gave up her political activism; she was simply too much of a *zoon politicon* (ζῷον πολιτικόν) for that.

Today Simone Weil is known primarily as a labor theorist ("Factory Journal" from 1934-1935) and as a philosophical and religious mystic. Her critique of Marxism and

² Cf. ABOSCH, 1994, p. 12-15.

³ Cf. WEIL, 1962; *idem*, 1996; *idem*, 2002; *idem*, 2012.

Stalinism, but also of revolutionary syndicalism and fascism as well as Hitlerism, has increasingly receded into the background. It is completely unrecognized how early and clear-sightedly she brought up the concept of totalitarianism, which only after the Second World War penetrated the debates of the great postwar philosophers as well as their societies.

For this reason, an attempt will be made here to trace the aspects of totalitarianism in Simone Weil's work by grouping them according to content, since otherwise they would be repeated again and again throughout the work, with revisions and changes, but in such a way as to be relatively redundant. Therefore, the chronological presentation is omitted, even if one can take the sources of the respective concept from the footnotes and assign them accordingly to the works, in order to be able to achieve a better clarity in the sense of the reader.

In addition, the grouping by content is intended to facilitate the qualitative classification of the respective concept and its philosophical significance, although it must be said in advance that certain shortcomings in the author's definition of totalitarianism must be outweighed in favor of the very early recognition of the phenomenon. In this context, it is important to appreciate Weil's early anticipation of totalitarianism, which was only beginning to emerge in her time.

1. Aspects of Totalitarianism in Simone Weil's Writings

In Simone Weil's diverse works, a number of different references to totalitarianism can be found, which can be grouped and summarized as follows:

1.1. The Totalitarianism of Marxism and Communism as Ideologies of Fixation on Relations of Production

According to Simone Weil, Marxism and communism are misguided because of their exclusive fixation on means of production. Both seek exclusively the causes of domination in relations of production. Marxism is guilty of a serious error here, since domination is not explained by economic conditions alone. To this extent, the teaching of Marxism would be wrong in this respect. Rather, domination is the essence of a social structure.

Weil therefore criticizes Marxism as a continuation of the capitalist ideology of production. This ideology, like communism, does not recognize that workers would lose their dignity in the "industrial hells". Rather, it always assumes only that workers are materially underprivileged, as if this were the only criterion. For this reason, Marxism and communism are wholly committed to the overthrow of the property order. For Weil, however, this is not an explanation for the "social oppression" found in workers' labor relations.

Marx suggests that the abolition of capitalist property and profit can be equated with the realization of socialism. But this is not the case. The failure of Marxism therefore lies in the fact that a change in property relations still does not mean a solution to the misery of the exploited workers. Marxism and communism, however, voluntarily accept the exploitation of the workers. Indeed, they assume that this is what creates the gravediggers of the capitalist system in the first place. In history, however, no system of enslavement had ever been overthrown by slaves.

Marxism and communism not only mislead the workers with the false narrative of the proletarian revolution that liberates the workers, but they participate in their oppression in a totalitarian and degrading way. This oppression is not only by the capitalists, but also by other regimes, be they parties, unions or totalitarian governments.

Simone Weil expresses these in "Factory Journal" / "Factory Work"⁴, "Sketch of Contemporary Social Life"⁵, "War and Peace"⁶, "Analysis of Oppression"⁷, "Prospects: Are We Heading for the Proletarian Revolution?"⁸, "Reflections Concerning Technocracy, National Socialism, the U.S.S.R. and Certain Other Matters"⁹, "Reflections Concerning the Causes of Liberty and Social Oppression"¹⁰, and "Fragments, 1933-1938"¹¹ as well as in "Fragments, London 1943"¹².

1.2. Totalitarianism as a Parallel Between Stalinism and National Socialism

Ahead of her time, Simone Weil recognizes a clear parallel between Stalinism and the emerging National Socialism, which she sees as two almost identical political and social concepts: Both totalitarian social organizations react to external repression with their own repressive automatism in order to survive in the mutual competition of the bureaucratic systems. The victory of fascism can be defined only by the destruction of communism and vice versa.

Consequently, the victory of either of these ideologies can only be achieved through the destruction of the opponent. This is the fatal logic of totalitarian rule, which always needs an opponent to justify its own repressive regime. Such totalitarian regimes, of course, cannot imagine any other possible order than the existing one. This is how the repressive system maintains its oppression.

Similarly, both totalitarian ideologies are characterized by the same state capture of almost all forms of individual and social life. This appropriation includes both delusional militarization, unanimity achieved by coercion in favor of a single party, the fusion of the party with the state, and a regime of servitude to the working masses.

Her conclusion, during the ongoing first wave of purges of Stalin's Great Terror (1936-1938), even before the Second World War with its war crimes, the character of these two regimes was sufficiently revealed to the world is more than apt: there are no two nations more similar in their basic structure than Russia and Nazi Germany.

This theme is echoed in Simone Weil's writings "The Situation in Germany"¹³, "War and Peace"¹⁴, "Prospects: Are We Heading for the Proletarian Revolution?"¹⁵, "Reflections Concerning Technocracy, National Socialism, the U.S.S.R. and Certain

⁴ Cf. WEIL, 1987; *idem*, 1946; *idem*, 1977c.

⁵ Cf. *idem*, 1977b.

⁶ Cf. *idem*, 1987c.

⁷ Cf. *idem*, 1977d.

⁸ Cf. *idem*, 2001a.

⁹ Cf. *idem*, 2001b.

¹⁰ Cf. *idem*, 2001c.

¹¹ Cf. *idem*, 2001d.

¹² Cf. *idem*, 2001e.

¹³ Cf. *idem*, 1987a.

¹⁴ Cf. *idem*, 1987c.

¹⁵ Cf. *idem*, 2001a.

Other Matters”¹⁶, “Reflections Concerning the Causes of Liberty and Social Oppression”¹⁷, and in “Fragments, London 1943”¹⁸.

1.3. The Exerting of Power through Bureaucracy as Totalitarianism

Every bureaucratic system leads to oppression, and bureaucracy, in this respect, as Weil correctly recognizes, is a new factor in social struggle. Bureaucracy is not unique to capitalism.

Rather, it exists independently of the economic system.

It was thus clear to Weil that not only the rising National Socialism, Fascism and Stalinism, but also socialism and communism would become oppressors of the working class. Any organization that can exert real influence, whether it is called parties or unions, reproduces the flaws of the system it seeks to reform or abolish:

The systems changed, the oppression had remained. In the depths, there would have been no radical change, only in appearance. Groups replaced each other in power without anything changing for the mass of the oppressed. Not the powerless could conquer power, only those who had already participated in it before¹⁹.

It is in line with the logic of power that the one who has the economic and political power must not allow his power to be weakened. Even in the Soviet Union, despite all the glorified portrayals, it is not the working class but a state bureaucracy that is just as repressive as other ruling elites in other countries. If the state bureaucracy allowed its power to weaken, it would certainly lose it, as it would then be beset by competing ambitions and hostile powers.

Therefore, any power is expansive and repressive, which is in line with Lenin's dictum “oppress in order to liberate”.

Weil underlines this thesis in “The Situation in Germany”²⁰, “War and Peace”²¹, “Sketch of Contemporary Social Life”²², “Analysis of Oppression”²³, “Uprootedness and Nationhood”²⁴, “Prospects: Are We Heading for the Proletarian Revolution?”²⁵, “Reflections Concerning Technocracy, National Socialism, the U.S.S.R. and Certain Other Matters”²⁶, and “Reflections Concerning the Causes of Liberty and Social Oppression”²⁷.

¹⁶ Cf. *idem*, 2001b.

¹⁷ Cf. *idem*, 2001c.

¹⁸ Cf. *idem*, 2001e.

¹⁹ Cf. ABOSCH, 1987, p. 11 [Translation by the author].

²⁰ Cf. WEIL, 1987a.

²¹ Cf. *idem*, 1987c.

²² Cf. *idem*, 1977b.

²³ Cf. *idem*, 1977d.

²⁴ Cf. *idem*, 1977e.

²⁵ Cf. *idem*, 2001a.

²⁶ Cf. *idem*, 2001b.

²⁷ Cf. *idem*, 2001c.

1.4. Shortcomings of Marx's Theory as the Cause of Totalitarianism Due to The Relations of Domination

According to Weil, Marx's theory could never lead either to a revolution of the proletariat or to its liberation, since even the socialization of the means of production, which Marx saw as a necessity for the establishment of free social relations, could not change this.

This is because even new rulers of state power would have to abide by the existing hierarchical relationships in the factories, since these hierarchical relationships result from the structure of large-scale industry and are inherent in the system. It is social relations, not social institutions, that would oppress workers.

Marxism has not succeeded in changing the relations of domination because it would not have realized them at all beyond the economic sphere. It is therefore unable to create the dreamed-of society free of domination.

This could be shown even where, as in Russia, the alleged revolution had taken place. Even the socialization of the factories and the planned and state economy had not eliminated the misery of the workers, since this had not changed the task of the factory to produce as many products as possible.

This aspect of totalitarianism can be found in Weil's writings "The Situation in Germany"²⁸, "War and Peace"²⁹, "Sketch of Contemporary Social Life"³⁰, "Analysis of Oppression"³¹, "Uprootedness and Nationhood"³², "Prospects: Are We Heading for the Proletarian Revolution?"³³, "Reflections Concerning Technocracy, Nationalsocialism, the U.S.S.R. and Certain Other Matters"³⁴, "Reflections Concerning the Causes of Liberty and Social Oppression"³⁵, "Fragments, London 1943"³⁶, and in "Is There a Marxist Doctrine?"³⁷.

1.5. The Permanent Revolution as a Perpetual Motion Machine of Enduring Totalitarianism

The peculiarity of totalitarian revolutions and regimes is that they must constantly keep a "climate of revolution" artificially alive, because without the permanent revolution the regime could not remain in power: This *perpetuum mobile*, which is once triggered by an initial repression in order to foment a "climate of revolution", must then continue to be repressive so that the climate can be maintained, since only in this way can revolution endure as the teleological goal of ideology. This is the essence of totalitarian revolutions.

²⁸ Cf. *idem*, 1987a.

²⁹ Cf. *idem*, 1987c.

³⁰ Cf. *idem*, 1977b.

³¹ Cf. *idem*, 1977d.

³² Cf. *idem*, 1977e.

³³ Cf. *idem*, 2001a.

³⁴ Cf. *idem*, 2001b.

³⁵ Cf. *idem*, 2001c.

³⁶ Cf. *idem*, 2001e.

³⁷ Cf. *idem*, 2001f.

Repression is done for the sake of repression. Ultimately, this is how failed or doomed ideologies are artificially kept alive so that the rulers and functionaries can consolidate their power. The constant enthusiasm for the coming revolution propagated by the state is, of course, a single staging, with which a political emptiness of content corresponds, because nothing develops in the direction of the coming, imagined totalitarian revolution and the rulers have no solution to offer for the concrete social problems, since these would theoretically have taken care of themselves after a successful revolution.

Therefore, the only thing left in such regimes is idolatry, which is constantly repeated ritually and stabilizes the totalitarian regime, but brings no relief to those who suffer under tyranny. For the regime, however, enthusiasm for the revolution must never end, because it is, after all, the cornerstone of its rule.

This concept can be found in Weil's writings "The Situation in Germany"³⁸, "War and Peace"³⁹, "Analysis of Oppression"⁴⁰, "Prospects: Are We Heading for the Proletarian Revolution?"⁴¹, "Reflections Concerning Technocracy, National Socialism, the U.S.S.R. and Certain Other Matters"⁴², "Reflections Concerning the Causes of Liberty and Social Oppression"⁴³, "Fragments, 1933-1938"⁴⁴, and in "Is There a Marxist Doctrine?"⁴⁵.

1.6. "*Anathema sit*" or the Ecclesiastical Totalitarianism

The French philosopher also applies the concept of totalitarianism to the Church. The Latin expression "*anathema sit*", literally "let this be accursed", used by them in the past, was an expression of an ecclesiastical ban which corresponded to the sentence of excommunication, possibly banishment or, in the past, in the context of the inquisition, torture and death.

The Church as an institution imposed this on those it accused of heresy. She notes that the church can also play the role of a totalitarian regime. Thus, in their view, the driving force of ecclesiastical totalitarianism was only the two words "*anathema sit*", the use of which made the Church act with the same kind of power that all current parties in transmission use to establish a totalitarian regime. She speaks in no uncertain terms about the Church being totalitarian in the age of the inquisition.

These passages are found in the writings "Spiritual Autobiography"⁴⁶, "Uprootedness and Nationhood"⁴⁷, and *Waiting for God*⁴⁸.

³⁸ Cf. *idem*, 1987a.

³⁹ Cf. *idem*, 1987c.

⁴⁰ Cf. *idem*, 1977d.

⁴¹ Cf. *idem*, 2001a.

⁴² Cf. *idem*, 2001b.

⁴³ Cf. *idem*, 2001c.

⁴⁴ Cf. *idem*, 2001d.

⁴⁵ Cf. *idem*, 2001f.

⁴⁶ Cf. *idem*, 1977a.

⁴⁷ Cf. *idem*, 1977e.

⁴⁸ Cf. *idem*, 1951.

1.7. The Dictator as the Epitome of Totalitarianism

With regard to totalitarianism in dictatorships, the French philosopher emphasizes, in relation to the person of the dictator, that the dictator's ego, in its collective meaning, represents the dictator's appropriation of society.

At the same time, it is an indirect *pluralis majestatis* aimed at eliminating all individuality in the last instance and thus suppressing individuals. It is in the inner logic of these totalitarian systems that those in power feel called to defend the order and the system.

This can be both communist and fascist, as the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany have shown, and typically comes in the form of a *Führerstaat* and a steel state machinery. Simone Weil sees this as confirmation that fascism, communism are almost equivalent expressions of a single evil.

These references can be found in the writings "The Situation in Germany"⁴⁹, "Reflections Concerning Technocracy, National Socialism, the U.S.S.R. and Certain Other Matters"⁵⁰, and *Awaiting God*⁵¹.

1.8. The Historical Mission of Marxism as a Totalitarianism Enabler

Weil raises the charge of totalitarian imperialism against Marxism. Through the fantasized scientific certainty of its mission, which must end in revolution, Marxism claims for itself that its program will be implemented by the workers in all countries of the world and that the revolution can only succeed if it is carried out simultaneously in all countries of the world, which is an impossibility and an illusion, but nevertheless the driving force for the workers to act in the direction of overthrowing the existing powers and revolution.

These prescriptions, immanent in Marxism, lead to a paradoxical situation, because even in states like the Soviet Union there is, on the one hand, the prestige of justice and, on the other, the prestige of cold brutality that characterizes the politics of a totalitarian state. Thus, labor imperialism, with all its otherness, leads to the same results as fascism. It is only another variety of the imperialist and totalitarian, which at the same time absolutely needs the counterpart as an enemy in order to maintain its own ideology and the internal tension in its own sphere of rule.

Again, these aspects can be found in "The Situation in Germany"⁵², "War and Peace"⁵³, "Analysis of Oppression"⁵⁴, "Uprootedness and Nationhood"⁵⁵, and "Reflections Concerning the Causes of Liberty and Social Oppression"⁵⁶.

⁴⁹ Cf. *idem*, 1987a.

⁵⁰ Cf. *idem*, 2001b.

⁵¹ Cf. *idem*, 2012.

⁵² Cf. *idem*, 1987a.

⁵³ Cf. *idem*, 1987c.

⁵⁴ Cf. *idem*, 1977d.

⁵⁵ Cf. *idem*, 1977e.

⁵⁶ Cf. *idem*, 2001c.

1.9. Parties and Trade Unions as Totalitarian Organizations

Simone Weil accuses the parties of suppressing the individuality of their members, solely in the interest of unlimited growth of their power base. The parties are totalitarian in principle and engage in propaganda. Their expansive striving, their hunger for power, aims at total power. It counts not only National Socialism or Communism among the type of parties, but all groups and organizations which, when they join, demand or enforce the submission of their members to the authority of the leadership.

This applies to supporters of churches, unions, political parties and other large organizations. Weil continues to accuse the parties of always understanding democracy in such a way that the larger number is the decisive criterion. Whoever has the greater number in the form of the majority on his side decides. But a number is not a good and certainly not a guarantee that one is right to do something. Majorities cannot say anything about good and evil. Crime, lies, disinformation and manipulation cannot be legitimate. This proves that there can be only one truth and one justice, which must be established in an appropriate mode of general agreement.

But since this is not the case in reality, it calls democracy as a whole into question. It justifies the need for their abolition on the basis of three essential characteristics that they have: They generate collective passion rather than reason; they exert collective pressure on their members; and they seek growth at any cost (including more members, more voters, more funding, etc.), i.e., they are expansive by nature.

For these reasons, a political party is always already and inevitably totalitarian and designed to kill off truth and justice - since party politics and truth are diametrically opposed - and to establish a tyranny instead. Weil sees this as an evil that must be ended, and this can only be done, he says, by dissolving and abolishing the parties, since they require the self-sacrifice of their members' thinking.

This theme can be found in *On the Abolition of All Political Parties*⁵⁷, "The Situation in Germany"⁵⁸, "War and Peace"⁵⁹, "Freedom of Opinion"⁶⁰, "Uprootedness and Nationhood"⁶¹, "Human Personality"⁶², "Fragments, London 1943"⁶³, and "Reflections Concerning the Causes of Liberty and Social Oppression"⁶⁴.

1.10. Social Order as a Cause of Totalitarianism

For Simone Weil, the core problem of totalitarianism is that every social order is always already bad because it always degrades the subjugated, the conquered, to some degree. Those who govern or command, the powerful, could not help but always defend the social order against others. This would be the essence of politics. In this respect, it can be stated that for Weil every policy contains totalitarian tendencies,

⁵⁷ Cf. *idem*, 2013.

⁵⁸ Cf. *idem*, 1987a.

⁵⁹ Cf. *idem*, 1987c.

⁶⁰ Cf. *idem*, 1977f.

⁶¹ Cf. *idem*, 1977e.

⁶² Cf. *idem*, 1977g.

⁶³ Cf. *idem*, 2001e.

⁶⁴ Cf. *idem*, 2001c.

which can only be mitigated by a balance of interests, so that violence and discrimination remain prevented.

This consequence results in Simone Weil from the overall view of the works mentioned here before as footnotes in section 1.

2. Criticism of Totalitarianism as Criticism of the Collective

Simone Weil's critique of totalitarianism is at the same time a critique of the collective. The great ideologies of totalitarian character demand that the individual completely subordinate himself to the collective, which suppresses individual thought and action. Even more moderate parties, large organizations or even the churches are not immune to the totalitarian tendency to think and act for the individual. According to Weil, every collective always presents its truth as the only true one and demands unconditional obedience from its members.

Simone Weil, a religious philosopher at the end of her life, recognized in Marx's faith in history a secularized formula of religious salvation, which explains her thought in *First and Last Notebooks*: "If everyone who dies outside the Church is damned, the Church's power can be much totalitarian than that of the Empire"⁶⁵. This becomes even clearer from a quintessence from the Notebooks of Simone Weil: "The Church has always been a totalitarian Great Beast"⁶⁶.

Submission to a totalitarian collective is equivalent to submission to faith, because both are absolute and totalitarian regimes demand such absolute submission. Therefore, one can also speak of a "substitute for Christianity" in the case of totalitarian regimes, because under these circumstances there is no longer any place for Christianity. The logic in this regard is easy to grasp: Only one belief system can be absolute – either the religious or the political.

Under these circumstances, such a process corresponds to an immersion in a collective, which is not accompanied by more moral and intellectual insight, since the scope of the individual is considerably limited by the collective: "Weil's understanding stems from being submerged into the collective. This movement entails a diminishing of the freedom and room to pursue acts beyond collective expectations that promote the growth of intellectual and moral understanding"⁶⁷.

Antony Fredriksson's statement, while treading a point with Weil's critique of the collective, at the same time significantly weakens Weil's actual radicalism. For Weil, totalitarianism already begins at the point where one has to perform an idolatry. For the Christian, who was a strict believer towards the end of her life, it was self-evident that one should have no idols other than God.

In the political sphere, Weil was convinced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's republican ideal that reason can only be formed from the reason of all men. The republican ideal must therefore refer to the concept of the common will elaborated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *Social Contract*⁶⁸. However, this presupposes that each individual can form his or her own opinion on a problem.

In order to realize the universal consensus of truth and reason, it is necessary to understand the concordance of different opinions. In this respect, truth and justice can only exist if they can be established in a suitable mode of general agreement.

⁶⁵ Cf. *idem*, 1970, p. 217.

⁶⁶ Cf. *idem*, 2004, p. 620.

⁶⁷ Cf. FREDRIKSSON, 2021, p. 100.

⁶⁸ Cf. ROUSSEAU, 2003.

Consequently, individual judgment to determine general truth and justice – whether apt as individual judgment or not – is a *conditio sine qua non* of the mechanism of agreement of reason demanded by Rousseau, which contradicts immersion in a collective.

The religious philosopher, on the other hand, recognized in Marx's faith in history a secularized formula of religious salvation, which dissolves her initial quintessence in the *Cahiers*: "Totalitarianism is a substitute for Christianity", which could no longer allow a common search for reason, truth and justice by aligning the ideas of each individual in a society.

Marx is thus at odds with both Rousseau and Weil, for both hold that social conflict is not the all-dominant force in society, but a result of the judgments and actions of individuals. It is precisely for this reason that Weil, like Rousseau, rejects all historical determinism. Rather, history is always the product of people and their actions.

There cannot be an already a priori predetermined course of history, which would then eliminate all grievances and bring forth paradise at one stroke. Therefore, nothing can lead to liberation in the form of the proletarian revolution anticipated by Marx. Weil is certain that any definitively established system would be fundamentally wrong and would give people false hopes that could never be fulfilled. In this respect, Marx's promise of an all-liberating revolution is also only a kind of opium for the people.

According to Weil, the political leadership of a totalitarian state always pursues its own interests. Consequently, it is no coincidence that Simone Weil was considered one of the harshest critics of Soviet Russia in her time, but she was not wrong about the rise of National Socialism either.

3. Conclusion

Simone Weil astutely anticipated many developments early on, including the thesis of bureaucratic rule and its tendencies to become independent. Whether there are no limits to the bureaucracy's hunger for power in a functioning democracy, however, may be doubtful. But Weil undoubtedly hits the nail on the head when she points to the power-hungry tendencies of the apparatuses to become independent.

Weil's examination of totalitarianism, however, is anything but systematic. As the article has hopefully been able to demonstrate, her main pronouncements on totalitarianism are scattered in a variety of writings, and she cannot be said to have developed a theory of totalitarianism in political philosophy.

Although she was a kind of precursor of the totalitarianism debate (Eric Voegelin, Hannah Arendt, Karl Popper, Karl Dietrich Bracher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Raymond Aron, Louis Althusser, Jean-Paul Sartre, etc.) after the Second World War, one can hardly speak of a theory of totalitarianism in Weil's case, for the thoughts in this regard are found in too fragmentary a form throughout the various writings. All the more, however, she can be called an early critic of totalitarianism.

However, what is critical about her reflections is that she does not sufficiently differentiate between repressive and totalitarian, which leads her to conclude far too quickly that everything that is repressive is also always totalitarian. This seems questionable; a qualitative gradation is quite conceivable here, which would then also allow the French philosopher's more far-reaching conclusions to appear in a different light.

Likewise, a party's hunger for power does not automatically lead to totalitarianism or to the struggle against the inherent tendency of political parties to tyranny; an assertion with a concomitant normative determination of the outcome that will occur that is more akin to a "self-fulfilling prophecy" than to sober analysis. In my opinion,

Weil overshoots the mark here, even if the unchecked hunger for power of some parties can be linked to the danger of slipping into totalitarianism. But it is equally conceivable that such a quest for power and expansion on the part of a party's leadership can also lead to party splits, open trench warfare, etc., especially when members feel cheated of content, as the history of the past more than 150 years has amply demonstrated.

Simone Weil broke every norm as a philosopher, evident both in her volunteer work in factories and as a trade unionist and in her free spirit reflected in her writings, and therefore not easily located in political philosophy: She counted herself on the left, but at the same time she was the harshest critic of the Soviet Union, both of Stalinism and of communism. The transformation into a religious thinker reveals clear more conservative traits in her thinking⁶⁹. At the same time, however, she clearly distanced herself from the emerging National Socialism of her time. If her life had been longer, we would certainly have witnessed one or two of her transformations and would be able to better understand her intellectual development today.

Her late work, *The Need for Roots*⁷⁰, revolves primarily around resistance and freedom, not classic leftist themes at the time, so a clear distance from the leftist movement is evident, which was further underscored by her aversion to collectives. Without a doubt, therefore, one can say that she had distanced herself from the French left of her time and that she was a thinker of the individual and not of the community or the collective.

Her philosophy is undoubtedly determined by two different, passionately pursued directions: first, the trade-unionist-proletarian direction and, toward the end of her short life, the religious-mythical direction⁷¹. But one thing is certain: Whether as a politically active philosopher or as a Christian philosopher she was and always remained a philosopher of individual human morality, which underlies every human being, who recognized the danger of totalitarianism early on and incessantly warned of this danger almost redundantly in all conceivable configurations until her death.

4. Closing Remarks

In this article I presented an attempt to trace the aspects of totalitarianism in Simone Weil's work by grouping them according to content, since otherwise they would be repeated again and again throughout the work, with revisions and changes, but in such a way as to be relatively redundant. In addition, the grouping by content was intended to facilitate the qualitative classification of the respective concept and its philosophical significance. In this context, it is important to appreciate Weil's early anticipation of totalitarianism, which was only beginning to emerge in her time.

⁶⁹ Roy Pierce confirms this assessment by pointing out that Weil's late phase is reminiscent of Edmund Burke (cf. PIERCE, 1962, p. 506), who is known to have been a conservative thinker and is not considered the father of conservatism by chance.

⁷⁰ Cf. WEIL, 1996.

⁷¹ Cf. WICKE, 1958, p. 248.

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