



ENQUIRY

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① Simone Weil: the Martian
#WeilTheMartian

② Populism's Ineffectiveness at Governing
#PopulismIneffective

Simone Weil: the Martian

By CLAIRE ANASTASIA KITZ
STAFF WRITER

Simone Weil was a 20th century French philosopher and mystic who died at age 34, in 1943, of tuberculosis. Her father was a doctor, her mother an heiress to a business fortune. Both parents overindulged their precocious child. She loved to learn and could speak

“Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity.”

ancient Greek, delighted in the study of mathematics and physics, memorized long prose passages, and taught herself Sanskrit after reading the *Bhagavad Gita*. But her parents were somewhat neurotic and passed on to her unhelpful habits and fears regarding health and diet. This upbringing made her transition into adulthood awkward and paved the way for clumsy social interactions. When Simone studied for what would be comparable to a master's degree in philosophy, one of her classmates, upon getting to know her, called her “the Martian.” She graduated first in her class but was ignored by her peers.

As a young adult, despite her privileged upbringing, she was an advocate for the working class and expounded on syndicalism – the movement for transferring ownership of the factories to the workers. She had the courage of her principles, making the unusual decision to work as a drill press operator, a meat packer, and then as a machinist. That year permanently compromised her health. After her health had improved somewhat, Simone made the bold but imprudent decision to enlist in a radical brigade in the Spanish Civil War. Again

her health faltered, and her parents brought her back home to France. It was during this “radical” period of her life that something happened, which she would never have anticipated given her background.

Brought up without any religious instruction, she unpredictably encountered God in three mystical experiences that changed the direction of her life. The three mystical contacts occurred in a Portuguese fishing village, in Assisi, Italy, and in a Benedictine abbey in Solesmes, France. These experiences were a revelation; she had never believed a personal encounter with God was even possible. Through them, she converted to Catholicism. She was never baptized, however. She believed with confidence that her particular vocation from God was to witness to the Church as an outsider – “at the gate,” as it were – for all those, she said, who were estranged or had lost their way.

After her mystical experiences at age 26, she continued to write. One area of focus in her writings was the idea of attentiveness,

“She would have been dismayed by the current Western fixation on digital technology: iPad, iPhone, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, and Netflix.”

a receptive waiting. She wrote: “Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity.” Attention or attentiveness was, Weil believed, the beginning of any thoughtful human engagement or interaction. She thought attentiveness countered the human default setting – selfishness and self-regard. Attentiveness was essential in order to help the suffering “other.”

She would have been dismayed by the current

This Week's News in 140 Characters

EDITORIAL REPORT



Joe Walsh @WalshFreedom · 2h

Any college student who shuts down any speech he or she finds offensive should be suspended from school on the spot.

Grow up.



Ryan Struyk @ryanstruyk · 9h

Under-the-radar stat in ABC/Post poll: 67% (!) say Democratic Party is out of touch with concerns of Americans -- more than GOP and Trump.

58

306

297



State of the Union @CNNSotu · 44m

DHS Sec Kelly: "If you are simply here illegally, we don't have the time to go after you. We are looking for bad men and women." #CNNSotu

23

30

44



FoxNewsSunday @FoxNewsSunday · 34m

OMB Director Mulvaney tells @FoxNews @POTUS' tax reform announcement, expected Wednesday, will focus on principles, ideas and rates. #FNS

16

42

79



Jay Nordlinger @jaynordlinger · 1h

What will the Kremlin do with the 400 churches it is set to seize? Turn them into museums of scientific Putinism? Disgusting beyond words.

7

28

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Populism's Ineffectiveness at Governing

By ALLISON ZUCKERMAN
STAFF WRITER

The first round of France's presidential election, which took place on April 23, received much international attention. The four leading candidates were so close in the polls that the winners could not be predicted. The issues at stake – France's continued involvement in the European Union and its immigration and business policies – could have negative global repercussions depending on what changes the new president makes. In light of some recent elections elsewhere, an additional concern is the protest candidate.

After the United States presidential election, there is no need to point out the significance of the protest vote. Many American voters chose Donald Trump as their president because of all the things he was *not*. He was not a member of the Washington elite or a reflection of the establishment politician. He actively campaigned against the

POPULISM'S INEFFECTIVENESS *cont.*

“Washington establishment,” and in his inaugural speech promised to transfer power from Washington back to the American people.

This anti-establishment attitude is obvious in America's current political culture and is emerging in Europe as well. Citizens have sometimes elected candidates based on their distrust of conventional politicians or because they simply resent the government. This misguided way of electing politicians, however, must be addressed, especially in France. As French citizens choose their next president in the second round of the election, institutions

“Many American voters chose Donald Trump as their president because of all the things he was not.”

like the EU are on the line. One needs to look no further than France's neighbor, Italy, to see why voting for candidates simply because they are not politicians is a horrible way to maintain a functioning government. In 2013, the Five



Western fixation on digital technology: iPad, iPhone, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, and Netflix. Her writings strongly suggest that she would say the heavy use of these technologies ensures that people don't pay the slightest attention to the other, even to one's neighbor, but instead looked constantly at glowing screens. People, she would lament, are focused on reading text messages, listening to iTunes, scrolling down their

"She believed with confidence that her particular vocation from God was to witness to the Church as an outsider ..."

newsfeeds, taking a selfie for Snapchat or streaming a movie. Technology holds people in its sway. It is so much easier to avert one's gaze than to engage face-to-face.

Simone Weil never meant for her writing to be published. But her few friends, including Gustave Thibon, a Catholic theologian and philosopher, and a Dominican priest and her spiritual director, Father Jean-Marie Perrin, realized the depth, beauty, and perceptivity of her writing – essays, journals, letters. They had some of her papers published posthumously in a book titled *Gravity and Grace*. Other anthologies followed, including *Waiting for God*. Her books have been translated into several languages.

Thousands of readers have treasured her incredible spiritual insights. She wrote with clarity and conviction on various topics such as God, man, suffering, sin, the Church, materialism, grace, prayer, her role as an outsider, alienation, love, and attentiveness. Through her writing, she influenced people ranging from agnostics to the devout. Albert Camus, T. S. Eliot, Thomas Merton, and Pope Paul VI – to name but a few – considered her spiritual writings luminous and persuasive.

Sometimes God calls the outsider, the accidental mystic, the socially awkward, the clown, or the "Martian." Was Simone Weil a saint? She certainly seemed a blessed fool; she had occasions of profound insight coupled

with eccentric and erratic behavior. Maybe that is as God intended. He calls all to him – the lost, the pious, the estranged, the strange, and the broken. Blessed are the exasperating, for they will make God laugh.

POPULISM'S INEFFECTIVENESS cont.

Star Movement (Movimento 5 Stelle) received more seats than any other party in the Italian Chamber of Deputies, and two of its members have since been elected the mayors of Rome and Turin.

The Five Star Movement runs on the issues of public water, sustainable transport, sustainable development, the right to Internet access, and environmentalism. While these are all acceptable causes for a political entity to back, the Movement – which was

started by popular Italian comedian and blogger Beppe Grillo – does not have enough credentials or policy specifics to run an effective government.

This populist, anti-establishment party is so irresponsible in governing Rome and Turin that, according to the *Guardian*, Italian health officials are now blaming an alarming rise in measles on its anti-vaccination stance. Many Italians who voted last December to reject Prime Minister Matteo Renzi's reforms – and his role as prime minister more generally – are supporters of the Five Star Movement.

"... it was voters' responsibility to leave their hatred of establishment politics (and politicians in general) outside the polling place."

Populist movements like the Five Star Movement do not offer solutions to establishment politics. They do not create new, fairer systems of governance or wipe out corruption, as Rome's "anti-corruption" mayor should now be able to attest after the arrest of her top aide for alleged corruption.

Furthermore, protest candidates simply do not know how to govern. Germany's populist and pro-nativist party, Alternative for Germany (Alternativ für Deutschland) is facing internal problems for this very reason, especially in light of protests against the AfD in Köln, as the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported on April 23. The AfD

exists as a populist alternative to Angela Merkel, her politics, and her refugee policies. When it comes to actually running a government, the AfD, like most other populist parties, deals only with certain specific issues – in this case, promoting anti-Euro policies and attempting to restrict immigration.

In countries that tend to have coalition-run governments, many voters are choosing parties, like the Five

"When the economic, political, and humanitarian stakes are as high as they are now, it is irresponsible to choose a president based on who sticks it to the government the most."

Star Movement and the AfD, that cannot and should not form coalitions. As Reuters reported, no mainstream parties will consider working with the AfD. Should they, too, successfully (and miraculously) win the German federal election in September and oust Merkel from her fourth term, the German government would come to a standstill.

Donald Trump illustrates the problem with populist parties and candidates as well. Although the Republican Party has control of both houses of Congress, his credentials as a reality TV host and businessman and his "America First" foreign policies have contributed nothing to a viable domestic program. The utter failure of Trump's and Paul Ryan's health care plan, involving an issue central to Republican campaigns

in recent years, to pass Congress is strong evidence of the point.

As France chose among four candidates this past Sunday – the leader of the far-right National Front, a business-friendly, independent centrist, a mainstream candidate mired in corruption and nepotism scandals, and the far-left "Bernie Sanders of French politics" – it was voters' responsibility to leave their hatred of establishment politics (and politicians in general) outside the polling place. When the economic, political, and humanitarian stakes are as high as they are now, it is irresponsible to choose a president based on who sticks it to the government the most.

Voters must keep this in mind as they make their choice in the upcoming presidential run-off between the "far-right" candidate, Marine Le Pen, and the young "centrist," Emmanuel Macron.

CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION

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②

*Populism's
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vol. IV

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