

**What are you going through?**

Toril Moi describes my version of Simone Weil as a 'Simone of the Suburbs' (LRB, 1 July). The phrase is catchy and her dislike of the burbs – those bastions of 'moderation' – is clear. Less clear, though, is her claim that Weil was 'never a champion of "moderation"'. That depends on what one means by moderation. In my book I suggest that Weil believed, as did her editor Albert Camus, that moderation was another word for resistance. Moi might disagree with this claim, but instead she scants it.

My book, in fact, receives scant attention in her review. She can ignore it, of course, but I cannot ignore her few misleading references to it. Space allows me to cite just two instances. First, Moi mentions my account of the moral confusion I feel whenever I stop my car next to a panhandler. She assumes – something this admirer of Weilian attention does quite a bit – that my dilemma is whether to stop and give him money. What I actually asked, however, is whether my children, in the back seat, would one day open the car window and, as Weil urged, ask the panhandler: 'What are you going through?' Acting on the other's humanity, I wrote, is the 'important question', not whether to hand over a buck.

Second, Moi finds my book a 'conundrum'. 'I am no more capable,' she writes, 'of living up to Weil's demands than Zaretsky is.' Fair enough. 'But the solution,' she adds, 'is not to argue that ideals aren't worth having.' Malgré Moi, I never argued this. Should she ever come to Houston, we can meet at the coffeeshop in my corner of the benighted burbs and compare our clearly different versions of the same book. Would this change Moi's mind? All I can do is try – like her, I'm an idealist.

**Robert Zaretsky**

University of Houston, Texas