

The last three chapters of the volume shift the attention from the relics as objects of devotion to their practical application in various ecclesiastical and secular contexts, including liturgy and church consecration (Chapter four), the promulgation of laws and fortification of oaths and treaties (Chapter five), and the creation of political and military alliances (Chapter six). Again, Wycherley brings together a wide array of material to highlight the manner in which these methods of engaging with the surrounding society by means of saintly remains followed the broader developments on the Continent, thus challenging the perceived idiosyncrasy of the relic cults of the early Irish Church. At the same time, however, the analysis also succeeds in adding nuance to the understanding of the significance of these practices on a local level. As the author herself points out, the Church in the early medieval period was far from monolithic, and the diversity encountered in the early Irish sources also serves as an example of how the cult of relics adapted to surrounding circumstances in response to the changing needs of the community.

Overall, there is much to appreciate in this volume, which is a welcome addition to the Studies in the Early Middle Ages series by Brepols. The book is a good resource for anyone interested in the topic as it comes with a useful appendix presenting the relevant Hiberno-Latin and vernacular terminology, a detailed index, and an extensive bibliography. It is hoped that scholars in Celtic Studies and further afield will build upon the important groundwork done by Wycherley, and thereby continue to contribute to our appreciation of the role of relics in early Irish society.

Simone Weil: Late Philosophical Writings. Edited by Eric O. Springsted. Translated by Eric O. Springsted and Lawrence E. Schmidt. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2015. Pp. 204. Price \$20 (pbk). ISBN 978-0-268-04150-2.

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Despite having died at the young age of 34, Simone Weil (1909–43)—philosopher, unionist, mystic—remains one of the most intriguing female thinkers of the early 20th century; the ‘only great spirit of our time’ according to Albert Camus.

This recent volume, edited and introduced by the well-known Weil-scholar Eric O. Springsted, contains a collection of Weil’s late philosophical writings. As outlined in the introduction by Springsted, ‘(w)ith the exception of ‘What Is Sacred in Every Human Being’ [written in London 1943, the year of her death] all texts date from her time in Marseilles—September 1940 to May 1942’ (p. vii). A number of the essays presented here are published in English for the first time.

Springsted uses the introduction not only to acquaint the reader with some of the main ideas of the individual essays but also to develop Weil’s conception of philosophy as a whole. This is not an easy task. As Springsted rightly points out, the difficulty is, on the one hand, to look at Weil’s position regarding a particular subject (philosophy), while on the other, to take into account her work *as a whole* in order to understand her accurately (p. 1)—the classical problem of the hermeneutical circle. Springsted refers to two recurring mistakes that constantly crop up in the history of Weil-reception. One such mistake

is failing to see that Weil's 'interests and concerns go far beyond what academic philosophers normally treat' (ibid.). Not to take this into account means one may miss important aspects of Weil's thinking. A second issue to acknowledge is that Weil, while not being a systematic philosopher (which is often assumed), is by no means an incoherent thinker and, as such, the thoughts she develops in one area are often important for other parts of her work (p. 2). Finally, Springsted also draws attention to another important aspect which needs to be kept in mind when reflecting on Weil's concept of philosophy: that is, that Weil views philosophy as 'an affair of action and practice' (p. 16).

The ten essays contained in the work, each of which correspond to a chapter of the publication, are very helpfully introduced with a brief section setting out the context in which they were produced, as well as when and where they were first published. They also include a brief outline of some outstanding features.

The first essay, 'Essay on the Concept of Reading,' written in 1941, establishes, as the editor points out, an idea of reading that does not seem to be in response to any other thinker, thus being original. Indeed, if reading is understood properly, as Weil points out, it is 'to grab hold of other mysteries of human life' (p. 21).

The second essay, 'Some Reflections on the Concept of Value,' written by Weil in early 1941, is a response, as the subtitle states, to 'Valéry's claim that philosophy is poetry' (p. 29). It contains Weil's considerations of value as 'an orientation of the soul' (p. 33). This essay, however, also comprises some very important reflections on Weil's notion of philosophy. Philosophy, as Weil holds, should never construct systems as these would eliminate contradictions, what Weil would hold to be essential to thought. However, progress, as Weil insists (here and elsewhere in her work), can only be made when contradictions are exposed (pp. 35,36).

The third essay, 'Philosophy,' also from spring 1941, reflects, as the title suggests, in even more detail on what Weil's notion of philosophy *is*. But in this essay her reflections include—rather unusually—a philosophical report on two lectures given to the Society of Philosophical Studies in Marseille and a dissertation defense. Weil here focuses on Ancient Greece, and displays her love for Ancient Greek culture and philosophy, whilst also revealing what she so admires in Ancient thought (and at the same time highlights what, in Weil's view, is missing in modern times): the notion of equilibrium not only in philosophy and arts but also geometry and the sciences (p. 41).

Chapter four, 'God in Plato,' entails ideas which were developed in early 1942. It is again not an actual essay but rather a collection of notes, standing out by being much longer than the previous essays (which all had been intended for publication by Weil). It consists of a number of layers which are clearly indicated by the layout of the published text: translations of Ancient Greek text passages, mainly Plato, Weil's own notes, and finally comments and interlinear notes she made on her own notes. The vocation of the Ancient Greeks, Weil thought, was 'the misery of human beings, the distance, and the transcendence of God' (p. 46). Nevertheless, the main part of the essay focuses on Plato whose philosophy and wisdom she interprets—well in line with her some of her more well-known work—as 'an orientation of her soul towards grace' (p. 55). It also contains some reflections on beauty as a way to grace (p. 81).

Chapter five is also a publication of notes, probably written during the latter part of 1941 on 'the Concept of Character.' In this chapter the question of the self comes to the fore, a question which concerned Weil throughout her writing.

The essay 'What is Sacred in Every Human Being' stands out amongst the published essays as it is the only one belonging to her London writings. It is written in the year of her death, i.e., 1943. Here she not only focuses on 'Personalism' but also philosophically targets the topic. Springsted points out that the Personalist she has in mind, though not named, is the French philosopher and Neo-Thomist Jacques Maritain (1882–1973). Weil believes that what is sacred in each human being is: 'him, this man, wholly and simple'; the source of this cannot be his person *but only the good* (emphasis added, pp. 104,105). Rather surprisingly Weil argues that the sacred is not that which is personal but that which is impersonal (p. 109).

'The First Condition for the Work of a Free Person,' chapter seven, again belongs to Weil's writings during her time in Marseille but was not published until after her death in 1947. In it she connects her reflections on the human condition with her life-long pre-occupations about justice and labor.

Likewise the article 'Literature and Morals,' written for the *Cahier du Sud*, was not published until after Weil's death in 1943. Here Weil reflects on the well-known phenomenon that fictional good is boring and fictional evil interesting while in reality it is the other way around (p. 145). Once again, Weil's Platonism becomes clearly visible. The poets with genius, according to Weil, are orientated towards the Good. These reflections lead then to a critique of modern writers who have, according to Weil, taken over from the priests the function of spiritual direction (pp. 148,149).

The penultimate chapter is a translation of a letter Weil wrote to the *Cahier du Sud* in 1941, responding to two previously published articles in the journal. While not published until 1951 by the same journal, the letter again gives further insight into how Weil reflects very critically on contemporary writers and their responsibility 'for the misfortune of our time' (p. 151).

The volume finishes with an extensive essay written in spring 1941 entitled 'At the Price of an Infinite Error,' another unfinished essay in which Weil discusses quantum theory but also, more importantly, modern science in relation to Ancient Greek thought, and it includes an argument for Weil's position that 'we have lost science without even being aware of it' (p. 155). The essay also links science to necessity, a term central to many of Weil's reflections.

A great number of themes discussed in the presented essays such as her reflections on Plato, necessity, grace, the Good etc., are very familiar to the Weil-reader. Thus, they prove Springsted's point in the introduction that Weil is by no means an incoherent thinker but that the same concepts recur again and again in her work.

This careful selection of essays, the manner in which each is set up and put into context, and the very useful index, provide an excellent contribution to the existing Weil publications. Together with Springsted's clear-sighted reflections on Weil's understanding of philosophy in the introduction, this volume is to be highly recommended not only for Weil scholars but for all readers who have an interest in Weil's philosophy.