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SIMONE WEIL AND POLITICAL THEOLOGY

Boyle Z. (Contact) , Boyle Z. (Chair)

KU Leuven ~ Leuven ~ Belgium

Subject Area: Politics, Philosophy, Theology

Number of Accepted papers: 2

Hours: 3

Panel description: In response to the increasingly demanding and knotty problems of our world, we require new strategies of analysis and ways of thinking. Taking up this challenge, political theology unmasks the frayed relationship between the secular and the religious at the cornerstone of liberal, technocratic (post)modernity. Many scholars invested in the insights of the vast field of political theology have often engaged heavily with Simone Weil (1909-1943); however, no connection between political theology and Simone Weil has yet been fully fleshed out. During her short lifetime, Weil's thought is infused by her witness and resistance to the totalitarianism welling up around her. Many recognize that her later turn to Christian mysticism is no less than a continuation of her explicitly political writings, such as those on Marx, labour, Hitlerism, French colonization, as well as Indian, Tibetan, and Ancient Greek thought. This panel is interested in how Weil's work through a theopolitical lens can shed new insights into our failing world and how this approach best fits with her own faithfulness to such a world.

Papers:

MYSTICISM, WORK AND THE AUTONOMY OF MAN. WEIL'S SPIRITUAL PHILOSOPHY OF NECESSITY IN THE CONTEXT OF POLITICAL THEOLOGY.

Faber C. (Speaker)

University of Vienna ~ Vienna ~ Austria

Simone Weil is regarded as a thinker who uniquely combines radical social critique with Christian mysticism. This paper challenges that reading by arguing that the political radicality of her thought is ultimately neutralized rather than deepened by a spirituality of necessity. While Weil offers a powerful analysis of modern uprootedness, factory labor, and oppression, her response to these conditions does not lie in the political transformation of social relations but in a mystical formation of the subject. Through attention, decreation, and consent to necessity,



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recognize them as expressions of a necessary order that demands spiritual consent. Mysticism thus becomes a substitute for politics: it preserves the experience of suffering while simultaneously depriving it of political intelligibility. I thus read her in dialogue with Johann Baptist Metz's critique of "bourgeois religion" and his notion of a "hope without expectation." In my view, Weil's theology lacks an eschatological horizon capable of sustaining genuine historical openness. Approaching Weil through the lens of political theology does not deny the significance or spiritual depth of her thought, but it does call into question the widespread assumption that her mysticism can ground a politics of resistance. Instead, it reveals a theopolitical logic that risks sanctifying social suffering by embedding it within a metaphysical economy of order, obedience, and consent; thereby neutralizing political struggle.

THE EMPTY THRONE: SIMONE WEIL ON SOVEREIGNTY AND NEGATIVE POLITICAL THEOLOGY

Boyle Z. (Speaker)

KU Leuven ~ Leuven ~ Austria

As Miguel Vatter states in his 2021 book *Living Law: Jewish Political Theology From Hermann Cohen to Hannah Arendt*, the partition of the globe at the hands of the expansionist territorial sovereign nation-states through imperialism, colonialism, and world war has given rise by all groups to demand their rights to become a nation-state, and for every human being to be legally and politically recognized. Despite this rampant nation-building, however, persists the effect of statelessness, persecution, and forced migration. Vatter employs political theology as a critical tool to expose and reconfigure the various theological underpinnings of the nation-state, such as sovereignty. His model of a Jewish political theology of sovereignty follows that the seat of the sovereign must remain empty. Interestingly, he concludes *Living Law* with a final interlude about how Simone Weil's Pythagorean writings in *Descente de Dieu* might act as a preeminent model of the empty throne. For Giorgio Agamben, the empty throne is the negativity of the Creator Father's presence, which was appropriated as the means of an analogy between Christ king and the human sovereign. Agamben's thesis is thus that this "anarchy" is the hidden structure of liberal government. Qualifying Agamben, Vatter leads from Martin Buber who offers Jewish theocracy as the displacement of a human sovereign in place of YHWH, thereby installing a model of negative political theology. This presentation will further expand upon Vatter's proposal that Weil's thought might be characterized by a negative political theology of the



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essential for human flourishing, rootedness is the most important and, yet, the hardest to define. Her description of rootedness as "real, active and natural participation in the life of a community that keeps alive treasures of the past and has aspirations for the future" seems to point us towards tradition as the key to rootedness. But in our contemporary situation, tradition is a problematic concept: a contested concept in the life of the Church, misused in political discourse. Given these difficulties we might try and avoid the concept altogether. But given the perils of rootlessness have not abated since Weil's time, in fact seem to have become worse, Weil's concept of rootedness should command more attention, even if it remains hard to define. In this paper I attempt to give a fuller account of what kind of tradition is needed with reference to various sources from social anthropology to moral philosophy. In doing so, I show how tradition, which I argue is at the heart of rootedness, can be understood not as a conservative return to some invented perennialism, but a strategy for conservation and liberation in a fractured world.

"DIEU DANS PLATON": MYSTICISM AND MEDIATION IN SIMONE WEIL'S PLATONISM

Schneider P. (Speaker)

University of Vienna ~ Vienna ~ Austria

Written during her stay in Marseille between 1941 and 1942, my paper explores two lesser-known manuscripts of Simone Weil containing a series of notes entitled "Dieu dans Platon" ("God in Plato"). These notes offer a condensed glimpse into Weil's highly original and deliberately anachronistic reading of Plato, in which she does not present him as the founder of Western metaphysics or political philosophy, but as an "authentic mystic" *avant la lettre*. Accordingly, Plato does not appear at the beginning of Western philosophy but rather at the end of a largely lost tradition of Greek wisdom encompassing currents such as Orphism and Pythagoreanism, while at the same time anticipating key themes of later Christian mysticism. His dialogues are thus not to be read as systematic philosophical treatises but as texts that hint at a deeper spiritual doctrine that cannot be directly stated but must be "divined". Starting from the manuscripts of "Dieu dans Platon", my paper examines how Weil transforms central themes of Platonic philosophy into elements of a distinctly religious and political vision. Of particular interest is the way she understands Platonic philosophy not as a doctrine of truth or salvation in transcendence, but as a demanding practice situated within the conditions of earthly necessity. By reading Plato as a thinker of



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relationship between Greek philosophy, mysticism, and political thought.

WEIL AND ROSE ON THE POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF ATHEISM AND AGNOSTICISM

Meir P. (Speaker)

University of Haifa ~ Haifa ~ Israel

Simone Weil, a philosopher and activist exiled from Vichy France due to her Jewish origins, converted from Judaism to Christianity yet refused baptism — condemning the practice as an idolatrous remnant of Judaism. Gillian Rose, a Jewish-born thinker of the late twentieth century, was baptized on her deathbed, declaring she did so to "gain my Judaism more deeply." Despite their opposing religious gestures, both thinkers advanced forms of nonreligion throughout their lives. These paradoxical positions are illuminated by Weil's concept of atheism, which Rose develops into her own concept of agnosticism. For Weil, idolatry consists in mistaking a worldly institution for God, risking totalitarianism and religious conflict. Since God does not "exist" in the ordinary material sense but only as a Platonic idea withdrawn from the physical world, "atheism is a purification": denying that God is a thing among things opens a gateway to genuine faith, which requires acknowledging that institutions merely mediate toward the divine rather than embody it. Rose glosses this: "Weil says [...] Agnosticism is the only true religion because to have faith is not to give up knowledge, but to know where the limit of knowledge is." She concurs that faith means identifying the boundary between knowledge and its limits, but substitutes "agnosticism" for "atheism," arguing that declaring God unknowable risks dissolving the concept's ethical and socio-political weight. For Rose, "God" mediates something undefinable yet real — analogous to "freedom" or "ethics" — each generating institutions that strive toward the absolute while perpetually falling short. These conceptions cut through contemporary religious-secular divides and inter-religious conflicts by paradoxically situating nonreligion at the center of theology. Politically, they demonstrate that secularism can unwittingly become theocratic, while genuine faith requires atheism or agnosticism to avoid idolatry.

GRACE, GRAVITY, AND ANARCHY IN THE WORKS OF SIMONE WEIL

Costello V. (Speaker)

University of Illinois, Chicago ~ Chicago ~ United States of America

According to Simone Weil, grace is the pull of the divine. This interpretation parallels what the Buddhist tradition of Sodo calls "other



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the self, but also around the multidimensional force: gravity. For Weil, gravity is, first, the physical law that pulls the weight of our bodies toward the earth, and second, the moral force that draws the soul toward self-interest-our soul's efforts to avoid suffering, and its own tendency toward despair. Gravity and grace coexist as a living contradiction and serve as a central focus for this paper. Through a theopolitical lens, this tension reveals Weil's distinctive form of ontological anarchism. Within the word, "anarchy," the initial "a" is an alpha privative, meaning "not" or "without," and arche means beginning or ruling principle. Thus an-arche means without principle or empty of principle and we circle back to the emptiness allows for grace. This paper argues that Weil's anarchism is not primarily political but spiritual. It calls for the dismantling of the ego and all attachments that claim ultimacy, creating a void in which grace may enter. This emptiness is not negation but the precondition for fully perceiving others. By situating Weil's concepts within a theopolitical framework, the paper shows how her thought offers a radical reimagining of political life—one grounded not in sovereignty or will, but in attention and obligation that alone can, perhaps, counteract the tyranny of necessity.

THE AGE OF SAINTS: POLITICAL MODERNITY AS A SPIRITUAL OPPORTUNITY IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF SIMONE WEIL.

Rabah S. (Speaker)

Universite de Reims (URCA) ~ Reims ~ France

When, following what biographers have termed the 'factory year', Simone Weil experienced what she called her 'three mystical moments', she did not, however, choose to embrace a solely contemplative life, nor did she turn a blind eye to political matters. For the S.Weil of her early writings, the whole political challenge was to respond harmoniously to the relationship between the community and the individual, that is to say, to enable the individual to retain their autonomy, in the Kantian sense of the term, whilst participating in collective life. However, the integration of spirituality into her later writings places great emphasis on a spiritual realisation which, to attain a state of saintliness, must undergo a radical detachment from the 'self'. Although she regards saintliness as the human vocation par excellence, S.Weil continues to maintain the idea that the individual must retain its autonomy in relation to the community. If these two seemingly contradictory positions can be held coherently, it is because Weil distinguishes the sacred character inherent in every authentic spirituality from the political manifestations that claim to represent it. This distinction does not assert that religion is separate from



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provide the political means for everyone to achieve spiritual fulfilment. And what if, despite appearances, modernity were to be the age of the saints?

THE VIOLENCE OF THE GOOD? SIMONE WEIL AND THE RISK OF POLITICAL THEOLOGY

Sojer T. (Speaker)

University of Erfurt ~ Erfurt ~ Germany

Simone Weil's thought offers political theology powerful resources for diagnosing force, uprootedness, and collective idolatry. Yet it also contains deeply troubling practical implications. This paper argues that these are not accidental blind spots, but consequences of the same structure that gives her thought its clarity. Weil subordinates politics to an absolute order of truth, necessity, and the good. This sharpens her critique of domination, but at the same time weakens the claims of rights, pluralism, and procedural restraint. The danger in Weil is therefore not external to her most potent ideas, but internal to them. Reading Weil through the lens of political theology, I argue that her work exposes a constitutive risk within political theology itself: wherever politics is ordered to an absolute image of truth and the good, spiritual radicality can turn into political coercion.