

main Nonconformists bodies. Churches Together in Wales (*Cytûn*) soon followed, as did the creation of Local Ecumenical Projects (LEPs) under the diocesan bishop.

In Part Four chapter one, Rowan Williams (Archbishop of Wales 1999–2002) examines the longstanding conflict between the Church and Nonconformity over ‘historic’ Welsh Christian identity. He draws attention to the Church’s lack of sensitivity in the face of changing cultural patterns in the post-War period, apart from a few notable exceptions among the episcopate. Chapter two reviews the history of Church in Wales schools since 1920. Through its schools’ system, and in cooperation with the State, the Church has been able to provide free education for all based on Christian values. Chapter three takes the reader on a journey from the time of disestablishment when the place of the Welsh language in the Church was almost non-existent, through periods of hope and lament, to the present time when Church services are available bilingually and ordinands are obliged to learn Welsh. In chapter four the Church’s diverse contribution to State and society is described by Joanna Penberthy, bishop of St David’s. Earlier diocesan welfare work receives attention, as does later activity through diocesan and provincial structures for social responsibility. Community development projects undertaken include running family centres and supporting farming communities facing difficulties.

Part Five is by way of conclusion. Chapter one focuses on how the image of the Church has developed since disestablishment. The Church’s changing image is viewed through different lenses: for example through its relation with society at large, its means of communication via the worldwide web, and its increasing attention to media relations. In chapter two John Davies, the current Archbishop, poses challenging questions on how the Church has fared in its core task of proclaiming the gospel and making disciples. He ends on an optimistic note by referring to recent developments in Church life and ministry.

This is a well-coordinated and richly informative publication which is enhanced by having a detailed bibliography, a biography of contributors, and a chronological list of plates. It deserves wide readership.

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EFFORT AND GRACE: ON THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISE OF PHILOSOPHY by Simone Kotva, *Bloomsbury*, London, 2020, pp. xv + 226, £80.00, hbk

Those convinced of the auto-anaesthesia of the late modern subject have often prescribed therapeutics of attentiveness: to riff as anti-mystical a thinker as Richard Rorty, attending to the contingency of our final vocabularies unmasks economies of power concealed behind concepts,

bringing us to see something that is, perhaps, much too simple to say. Yet as anyone who has attempted Husserlian *epoché* (or *vipassanā-sāmātha*, for that matter) can attest, ‘simply perceiving’ is a rather difficult business. However the state of attentiveness is described using motifs of receptivity (tranquillity, *theoria*, *contemplatio*, detachment, etc.), such passivity can only be preserved through the disciplined practice of an intense form of intellectual activity, which it is the work of philosophy to safeguard and cultivate. It is this paradox—never finally resolved—that Kotva’s extraordinary work interrogates, finding, in a way simultaneously reminiscent of Blondel’s analysis of action and Pierre Hadot’s account of philosophy as a way of life, that effort and grace exist in a kind of perichoretic fusion, and that this immanent dynamic captures the essentially asymptotic character of philosophy (even whilst it is the infinitely receding horizon of a world that vanishes into God that gives rise to this dynamic itself).

Among the most salutary features of Kotva’s account of philosophy as a spiritual exercise is its (sadly necessary) apologetic for introspection: a renewal of a metaphysics of the absolute can emerge from a disciplined cultivation of interiority (as Janicaud indicated). Those schooled in the anti-Cartesian theology of the twentieth century might well balk at this, having often perceived the latent heresy of modernity to be Gnosticism, with its dualistic degradation of bodily goodness and identification of the ‘true self’ with the thinking ‘I’ of privileged interiority. Yet, as Kotva shows (complementing John Macmurray on this point), introspection is itself a bodily action (with ‘bodily’ and ‘action’ being necessarily stressed with equal vigour). Omnipresent in Kotva’s analysis is Stoicism and the Stoic revival: evidently influenced by Christopher Brooke’s magnificent *Philosophic Pride*, there are hints that the heart of Kotva’s implicit genealogy of modernity is not so much resurgent Manichaeism as an inauthentic, secularised and secularising, Stoicism. Her prescription is, then, not an excision but an authentication and intensification, both of the Stoic and of the introspective, such that Kotva’s authentic Stoicism is, in fact, Christianity. Given Augustine’s notoriously complicated relationship to his Stoic patrimony (and its incomplete baptism in his thought), this impulse has profound implications for Western theology more generally; perhaps it is the unsubdued Stoical element that prevents an Augustinian synthesis from regressing into systematicity. Nonetheless, the basically Augustinian character of the introspective discipline that Kotva thematises is clear (finding Weil to have integrated Augustinian anthropology and French spiritualism in her account of attentiveness as ‘negative effort’): affirming *action* need in no way court Pelagianism.

Kotva’s work operates on a number of levels, achieving a rare combination of vision in her programmatic proposal concerning the nature of philosophy with the detail-focussed character of her sustained and intense exegesis of a particular corpus of texts (hitherto rather neglected by Anglophone theologians). The arc of the book moves towards an account of Simone Weil’s encounter with the paradox of attention, establishing Weil

as a crucial figure in the modern reception philosophy as a spiritual discipline, in a way that has not yet been adequately recognised. To achieve this end, Kotva provides, almost *en passant*, the most compelling interpretation of French Spiritualism yet offered in the English language. Kotva's Weil is situated within the historical milieu of late French Spiritualism (mediated by her teacher Alain), at the site of a conflict (largely now forgotten) between Bergsonian revivalists and the emergence of new phenomenologies. Embedding Weil within the particularities of this historical horizon allows Kotva to trace with acute insight the complex relationship of Weil's thought to her predecessors and contemporaries, thereby allowing Kotva to unfold Weil's unique contribution with fresh clarity and power. Weil's 'negative effort' qualifies Bergson's valorisation of action, intensifies Ravaisson's destabilisation of effort, moderates Maine de Biran's quest for *self-knowledge*, integrates the Stoicism of 'Alain' with a non-identical repetition of Biran's effort-grace equivocation, all within the long shadow cast by Fénelon's raids on both Augustine and Descartes (as for the latter, Kotva avoids convenient stereotypes and instead channels something close to Jean-Luc Marion's reading of Descartes's passive thought). Crucial to this reading of Weil is the willingness to conceive of the possibility of a *philosophical* mystic (even if not a mystical philosophy?), influenced by John of the Cross and (in a more latent form) Fénelon. But what relationship does Weil's 'negative effort' have to the 'negative capability' of Keats (and, for that matter, W. R. Bion)? Kotva-Weil reflect not so much on the (in)capacities of the subject as on the identity of the grace-effort paradox with the spiritual life itself, and thus 'negative effort' is performed by the dance of both subject and object in synergy.

Effort and Grace will inevitably invite comparison with Pierre Hadot's *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, and such a comparison would certainly not be sterile. Nonetheless, those who read Kotva as contributing to a discourse generated by Hadot's work will do the book a fairly serious disservice. As Kotva indicates, Weil and Hadot emerge from the same generative moment of French intellectual history: Kotva's excavation of the voice of Weil, Hadot's elder peer, presents an alternative trajectory to that offered by Hadot. Hadot's study of Stoicism by way of Ignatian spirituality differs from Weil's Carmelite-influenced Augustinianism, by prioritising 'tension' over 'relaxation'. If Weil can be said to intensify Ravaisson by a critical qualification of Bergsonianism, Hadot's approach is inverted, intensifying Bergson's prioritisation of effort whilst downplaying the Epicurean elements of Ravaisson's repose.

The alternative Kotva-Weil trajectory is likely to have theological resonances absent from (or perhaps concealed by) Hadot. Nonetheless, the genealogical strategy that is essential to the establishment of this trajectory ultimately obscures some of Kotva's own programmatic vision, where the enclosure of effort by grace renders philosophy and theology coextensive. The reader has to attend to the skill of Kotva's interpretation, harvesting her own insights from the use she makes of others. Relatively little is

made of Ravaisson's Christocentrism, for instance, nor is Weil's emphasis on natural and intuitive action interrogated in terms of connaturality (or virtue more generally, perhaps with the help of Ravaisson and Biran on intellectual habits). Consequently, the conclusion is largely suggestive and slips the bonds of the earlier chapters, particularly as it reaches towards Sallie McFague and theologies of the environment. Yet these are quibbles in a book that exercises such control over an enormously wide-range of material.

The endorsements of Kotva's book are laudatory but not hyperbolic: 'brilliant [...] compelling' (Sherman); 'pioneering' (Pickstock); 'excellent and absorbing' (Milbank). Perhaps the greatest compliment is to raise a question that would be unfair to many lesser works: whither ontology? On the one hand, it is the *object* of attention—God 'receding endlessly from comprehension' (p.173)—that determines the effort-grace paradox, but elsewhere a theologised *subject* whose effort, bracketed by grace on both sides, dominates. Indeed, the flux of paradox seems to be a structuring principle of Kotva's ontology, but it is unclear whether this indicates openness to process thought or a hint towards Maximus the Confessor's ontology of repose, *systolē* and *diastolē*. The latter is suggested by the approval of *phusike theoria* (p.175, suggesting an openness to Christos Yannaras's extended apophaticism) but in the end the former seems most likely, as Kotva hints towards a reconfiguration of divine simplicity: 'it is no longer possible to leave weakness and vulnerability out of a description of God' (p.130). But without the absoluteness of infinite simplicity, can paradox overcome nihilism? To this end, Christ appears in Kotva's index, but God is absent. Or perhaps God is the index?

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SCM STUDYGUIDE TO RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE by Jeff Astley, *SCM Press, London, 2020, pp. xi + 306, £19.99, pbk*

For many years I co-taught an undergraduate course on the psychology of religion. It was often difficult to find supporting texts for it that did justice to all the phenomena and issues from a psychological viewpoint while remaining open to wider disciplinary approaches. At the very least I needed these to include the theological and philosophical. Although not particularly committed to a psychological perspective, and certainly not an introduction to the psychology of religion as whole, had Jeff Astley's book been available at the time I should have been pleased to add it to our list of recommended reading. Equally well, it could be flagged as worthwhile reading on a philosophy, theology, or religious studies degree, or suit a wider, intellectually curious readership.