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## CHRONOLOGY

Below only the main details of Simone Weil's life are given. No attempt is made to chronicle the writings—essays, reviews, notes, letters—that she published during her lifetime and that are scattered in small and often obscure French periodicals. For a chronological listing of her writings one should consult Michel Thiout's *Jalons sur la route de Simone Weil, 2: Essai de bibliographie des écrits de Simone Weil*, Paris: Minard, Archives des Lettres Modernes, III, 26 (Octobre 1959). In France books containing her various writings have been appearing since 1947; translations of these into English have been coming out since 1951 (see Bibliography).

1909 Simone Adolphine Weil is born in Paris on February 3, the second child and only daughter of Dr. Bernard Weil (1872–1955), a distinguished and well-to-do physician, and his wife, Selma (1879–1965), then living at 19 boulevard de Strasbourg.

Her brother, André, the only other child of the family, was born on May 6, 1906. He is a famous mathematician, now at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey.

1912 The Weil family moves to an apartment at 37 boulevard St. Michel, Paris.

1914 Dr. Weil is almost immediately mobilized into the French army upon the outbreak of World War I.

Mrs. Weil and the two children follow her husband almost everywhere. The school studies of the children are irregular, and they take lessons mostly by correspondence.

1917 Becomes a student at the Laval Lycée.

1919 Spends the holidays with her family at the seaside resort of Penthhièvre in Brittany.

Enters the Lycée Fénelon, a public high school and junior college for girls in Paris.

1921 Begins to suffer, at about the age of twelve, from the headaches that are to plague her intermittently for the remainder of her life.

1924 Admitted to the *baccalauréat* on June 22 in the classical section. Beginning October 1, studies philosophy at the Lycée Victor Duruy.

1925 Takes her *baccalauréat* in philosophy on June 27.

In October enters the Lycée Henri IV, where she spends three years. Studies under Alain (1868-1952), the pen name of the influential French philosopher, teacher, and journalist Emile-Auguste Chartier.

1928 Simone Weil's parents move to an apartment on 3 rue Auguste Comte, facing the Jardin tu Luxembourg, Paris, and remain there until 1940.

Passes first in the (entrance) examination of the Ecole Normale Supérieure. (Simone de Beauvoir is second.)

Enters the Ecole Normale at the end of the year. Here she first comes into contact with a syndicalist movement called

- La Révolution Proletarienne* and shows her early sympathy for Marxism, pacifism, the trade union movement, and the working classes.
- 1930 Has her first serious attack of sinusitis, which is to aggravate her health for the rest of her life.
- Completes her diploma-monograph, *Science and Perception in Descartes*.
- 1931 Passes her *agrégation* brilliantly in July.
- In August obtains her first position as a teacher of philosophy at the girls' Lycée of Le Puy, seventy miles southwest of Lyons.
- 1932 In Le Puy actively supports unemployed demonstrators. A public scandal ensues and she is transferred.
- Visits Germany in the summer to observe the political situation, just before Hitler's accession to power.
- Begins to teach at the girls' lycée in Auxerre, near Paris. Her controversial teaching methods cause problems and her students do poorly in their examinations. The school administrators abolish her position as a teacher of philosophy, and she is released.
- 1933 Her interest in political sociology begins to take firm shape.
- Spends the month of August with her parents at Chambon-sur-Lignon.
- Takes a new teaching position at the girls' Lycée in Roanne, a city sixty-five miles to the west of Lyons. Acquires a reputation for being a communist and an atheist.
- On December 3, in the city of Saint-Etienne, takes part in the famous "March of the Miners" planned by the National CGT \* Miners' Federation to protest against unemployment and wage cuts.

\* Confédération Générale du Travail.

- 1934 Obtains a year's leave from teaching.

On December 4 begins work as a factory hand at the Alsthom electrical works in Paris, remaining there for four months. This decision marks the beginning of her increasing reverence for physical labor as being the spiritual core of a well-ordered social life.

- 1935 On April 11 begins work as a packer with Carnaud at the Forges de Basse-Indre in Boulogne-Billancourt. Fails to work fast enough and is dismissed on May 7.

Works June 6–August 22 at the Renault works.

Physically and spiritually exhausted, she leaves the Renault factory; her parents take her for a holiday to Portugal.

Begins to teach at the lycée at Bourges. Her teaching methods here are typically unorthodox but academically successful. Gives away most of her salary.

Religious interests in aspects of Christianity appear.

- 1936 In March works on the farm of a family in Carron de Gron in Cher in order to learn about problems of farm life.

The Spanish Civil War breaks out in July, and Simone Weil, a pacifist, takes the train for the Republican Front in Barcelona at the beginning of August, posing as a journalist with a certificate from a Paris trade union.

Joins anarchist-syndicalist elements stationed in Aragon, about nine miles from Saragossa.

While remaining in camp to do cooking, she accidentally pours a basin of boiling oil over her left leg. Treated at Terramar Hospital in Sitges. Spends less than two months in Spain.

- 1937 Her health deteriorates further as a result of her accident in Spain. Her sick leave is extended to the first term of the school year 1937–38.

1938

1939

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Continues to think and to write about problems of labor and management, and of peace and war.

Early in the spring visits the winter resort of Montana in Switzerland; then goes to Italy, visiting Milan and Florence. She spends Whitsun in Rome and goes on to Assisi. Alone in the little twelfth-century chapel of Santa Maria degli Angeli, where Saint Francis had often prayed, she kneels down for the first time in her life, drawn by "something stronger than I."

In October she begins to teach again at the Lycée of St. Quentin, some sixty miles north of Paris.

- 1938 In January is given sick leave until June because of her chronic headaches, their "pain situated around the central point of the nervous system, at the point of junction between soul and body, which goes on even through sleep, never ceasing for a second."

At Easter goes for a ten-day stay to the Benedictine Abbey of Solesmes, famous for its Gregorian plainchant. Experiences a mystical revelation.

A young Englishman introduces her to the English metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century—George Herbert, John Donne, Richard Crashaw. She is particularly responsive to Herbert's "Love."

From this point on her writings show strong religious concerns, with an emphasis on the supernatural, though her interest in social and political problems and organization continues.

Visits Italy in the summer. Spends a month and a half in Asolo and Venice.

- 1939 On March 19 the German troops enter Prague. Simone Weil's pacifism ends.

Her health is not improved enough for her to resume her teaching duties in 1938-39.

In July leaves for a six-month holiday, during which she spends time with her parents in Geneva.

With war breaking out in September, returns to Paris with her family.

At the end of the year, reads the *Bhagavad-Gita*, then goes on to study Sanskrit.

- 1940 At the beginning of the year, draws up a "Memorandum on the Formation of a Front-line Nursing Squad," with the hope it will receive governmental support.

With the coming of the armistice in June, crosses the frontier from Nevers into unoccupied France and stays with her family in Vichy for two months.

In October leaves Vichy to live in Marseilles, where she attaches herself to a group of thinkers and writers who express their views through *Les Cahiers du Sud*. Also, in Marseilles, develops an interest in *Les Cahiers d'Etudes Cathares*. Her association with these two journals inspires some of her most important social-religious writings.

Between 1940 and 1942 is engaged in intense mystical contemplation.

Dismissed from the state teaching service under Vichy anti-Jewish laws.

- 1941 On March 30 attends meetings of the Young Christian Workers' Movement in Marseilles.

At the beginning of June meets the Reverend Father J.-M. Perrin at the Dominican monastery in Marseilles.

Father Perrin helps her to find work on the farm of Gustave Thibon, in Ardèche, about 150 miles north of Marseilles.

Thibon arranges for her to work during the season of the grape harvest on a neighboring farm, from September 22 to October 23.

Continues her studies in Greek and Hindu philosophy and in Sanskrit.

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1942 At Easter journeys to Carcassonne. Stops at the Benedictine Abbey of En-Clacat, at Dourgnès.

Thibon sees her for the last time. She leaves with him a dozen thick exercise books containing her day-by-day thoughts, from which he later compiles the text of *Gravity and Grace*.

On May 17 leaves Marseilles for Morocco on the S.S. *Maréchal Lyautey*. On their way to the United States she and her parents remain seventeen days in the refugee camp of Aïn-Seba at Casablanca.

On July 8 their voyage ends when the *Serpa Pinto* docks in New York City. She lives at apartment 6G, 549 Riverside Drive.

In New York becomes friendly with Simone Deitz, whom she had first met in Marseilles. She begins to attend Mass every day in the Catholic Church of Corpus Christi on 121st Street.

Desperate to reach England and take a part in the French Resistance movement, she writes to Maurice Schumann in London for help.

On November 9 leaves her parents in New York City and takes a sixteen-day voyage on the Swedish ship *Valaaren* to Liverpool. Upon her arrival she goes to a wartime detention camp and is detained because of her status as a veteran of the Spanish Republican Army, as well as because of her early pacifist views.

Maurice Schumann obtains her release from the camp on December 14 and she goes to London.

1943 In January takes a room at 31 Portland Road, Holland Park, in the Notting Hill area.

Frequently refuses to eat because the people in German-occupied France are dying of hunger.

Works at the Ministry of the Interior for the Commissariat of Action upon France.



In London continues her close friendship with Simone Deitz and also renews her acquaintance with Maurice Schumann.

Writes *The Need for Roots*, her main political work of her later years, published in 1949. It is the result of reports related to postwar reconstruction of France assigned to her to do for the Free French organization in London.

In mid-April enters Middlesex Hospital but refuses medical treatment and nourishment.

Receives visits of a Catholic priest, who gives her sacerdotal blessing, but adheres to her refusal to be baptized.

On August 17 is admitted to Grosvenor Sanatorium in Ashford, Kent. Continues to take no food and grows steadily weaker.

She dies on Tuesday, August 24, of starvation and pulmonary tuberculosis. Buried in Grave No. 79, Ashford New Cemetery.

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