

## Book Review

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*The Selected Writings of Maurice O'Connor Drury On Wittgenstein, Philosophy, Religion and Psychiatry* by Maurice O'Connor Drury, Edited by John Hayes (472 pp.; ISBN 9781474256360). Bloomsbury, London, 2017

For readers who are too busy, hassled or otherwise preoccupied to read beyond the first lines of this review, I will summarise at this point: this volume is entirely splendid and is, in my view, one of the most important books related to psychiatry in Ireland to be published in recent times. It will also prove very useful for readers who are interested in the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), with whom Drury was friendly and who features heavily throughout the collection.

But first, some context. Maurice O'Connor Drury was born in Wiltshire in 1907 and studied philosophy at Trinity College, Cambridge. He was one of Wittgenstein's first students there after Wittgenstein's return to Cambridge in 1929. On that occasion, the great philosopher's sponsor, economist John Maynard Keynes, announced Wittgenstein's arrival by stating: 'Well, God has arrived. I meet him on the 5.15 train'.

Drury's life and thought were to be enormously influenced by his meeting with Wittgenstein. And Wittgenstein, too, was influenced by Drury. Theirs was a friendship rooted in both camaraderie and philosophy.

Professionally, Drury graduated in medicine at Trinity College Dublin in 1939 and, after a period in the Royal Army Medical Corps (including the Normandy Landings), worked as a psychiatrist in St Patrick's and St Edmundsbury Hospitals in Dublin. He died on Christmas Day, 1976.

This volume, 'The Selected Writings of Maurice O'Connor Drury', brings together many of Drury's lectures, conversations and letters on philosophy, religion and medicine. It is a fascinating collection that commences with a foreword by Ray Monk and a genuinely moving essay by the editor, Professor John Hayes, on 'Drury and Wittgenstein: Kindred Souls'. This is followed by a selection of Drury's 'Recollections of Wittgenstein', his 'Philosophical Writings' and writings 'On Religion' and, most interestingly, 'Medicine, Psychiatry and Psychology'.

Most importantly, this last section includes 'The Danger of Words', a 1973 text described by Ray Monk as 'the most truly Wittgensteinian book published by

any of Wittgenstein's students'. There is also a review of 'The Danger of Words' by Ilham Dilman, and various other writings by Drury on themes relating to medicine, psychiatry and psychology (such as hypnosis). These are accompanied by satisfyingly careful, detailed academic apparatus: biographical notes, historical notes, index, etc., making this volume the definitive one on Drury.

Putting all of this together was a work of enormous scholarship and great credit is due to its editor, Professor John Hayes, who is the retired Head of the Department of Philosophy and Dean of the Faculty of Arts at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick. Professor Hayes has used both published and unpublished sources as well as extensive archival material, with an editorial and curatorial eye that serves both Drury and Wittgenstein well.

Going through the volume, some of Drury's comments about Wittgenstein are, inevitably, eye-catching. In 1936, Drury wrote: 'I was now back in Dublin, preparing for my First MB examination. This involved the immense task of memorizing all the details of human anatomy. I wrote to Wittgenstein mentioning that I found this a tedious drudgery. In a letter replying to this he said, "You ought to be glad of this drudgery. It is just the sort of discipline you need." In the same letter he went on to say that he and Francis Skinner [a friend and collaborator] were seriously thinking of coming to Dublin and joining me in studying medicine' (p. 120).

Also in 1936, Drury brought Wittgenstein to visit the front square in Trinity which Wittgenstein said had 'the appearance of a fortress'. Drury arranged for the philosopher to meet with Dr Leper in St Patrick's Hospital, who permitted Wittgenstein to visit patients in the hospital with whom Wittgenstein discussed 'the philosophy of Herbert Spencer' (1936: 123).

Overall, this impressive, weighty book is important for many reasons, not least of which is the curious absence of published academic work relating to Drury in Ireland. One exception in the psychiatry literature is a fascinating paper by Dr John Wallace in the *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine*, titled 'Doctor Maurice O'Connor Drury, Wittgenstein's pupil' (2000).

But Drury's writings have been hard to find in recent years, and this volume both makes these writings more widely available and contextualises them with elegance and erudition. The insights into Wittgenstein are, of course, of great interest, but it is the figure of Drury that emerges most clearly from this book: fiercely intelligent, bracingly thoughtful, deeply compassionate and possessing a genuine gift for friendship. This volume is a unique and fitting tribute to Drury, a fascinating, inspired and often brilliant man.

**Conflicts of Interest**

B.D.K. has no conflicts of interest to disclose.

**Reference**

**Wallace J** (2000). Doctor Maurice O'Connor Drury, Wittgenstein's pupil. *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine* 17 (2): 67–68.

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