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Yves R. Simon: A Philosopher's Quest for Science and Prudence

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Abstract: This essay treats the inspiration and nature of Yves Simon's philosophical life. His embrace of that life was importantly shaped by his engagement with the republican tradition in France, his passionate opposition to the fascist threat to France, and his later attachment to the aspirations of American democracy. However, his early philosophical interests took direction and inspiration from his encounter with Jacques Maritain who drew him to Thomism. His devotion to the truth was fierce, and he confronted honestly the threats to this defining quality of philosophical life from the pressures of social conformity and from the discouragement of seeing the inadequacies and disagreements in the history of philosophy. He came, as especially evident in his most influential book, *Philosophy of Democratic Government*, to esteem highly the virtue of prudence, seeking to protect it from both philosophy and social science.

From a plentitude of early loves and political concerns, Yves Simon's call to philosophy emerged as dominant and defining for his life. He wrote some plays and poetry, and at one point thought that he might devote himself to literary studies. At a later time, being fascinated by the enterprise of modern empirical science and what it could do for humankind, he began down the path of medical studies. Entering his university years, he was engaged by political issues that lingered from the great divide of France's past, and then, ever more passionately so, by the struggles for genuine peace in the 1920s and 1930s and a possible fascist future for France and Europe. His Catholic family of republican convictions knew first hand, in personal loss and other ways, the sufferings of the First World War, and his own life (1903–1961) seemed marked by a special capacity to appreciate the concrete historical contingencies that must and should bear on specific moral and hence political decisions. It is not surprising that Simon was attracted to philosophy both as a way to understand the ingredients of good moral decisions, and as the true and complete science, in the classic Aristotelian sense. Near the very end of his life, he appeared especially interested in protecting the sphere of practical judgment or prudence from both philosophy and social science. What direction he provided to politics was democratic in character; what direction to education, specifically education for political choices and leadership, was humanist, emphasizing historical and literary learning and the enrichment of direct human experience, and cautioning against a curricular dominance of philosophy and theology.

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Before he arrived at his university studies, Simon had already experienced the satisfaction of philosophical studies in his French schooling. As he entered higher studies and throughout his years before his 1938 departure to the United States, he wrote almost constantly for journals, magazines, and newspapers, and though political themes and issues were by no means his exclusive concern, they were regularly in evidence. Upon his arrival at the University of Notre Dame in 1938, he predictably got involved in a small circle of faculty planning and supporting the launching of *The Review of Politics.* He wrote a book review within the first year of the journal's appearance, and his mentor and life-long friend, Jacques Maritain, writing on "integral humanism," was the author of the first article in the maiden issue of *The Review.* Speaking in 1961 in praise of Maritain, Simon remarks that Maritain came relatively late in life at age 45 to "political and related subjects"[1] and thus seemed aware of his difference from Maritain in this respect.

Yves Simon is sometimes thought to be a rather obscure philosopher, who came somehow, as if it all dropped out of the sky one day, to write a remarkable book on democratic theory. His *Philosophy of Democratic Government* (1951)[2] is particularly surprising to political scientists who suspect that the work of a Thomist must be largely deductive and heavily freighted with religious assumptions. They are wrong on all counts with respect to Simon. There is an intimate connection between his life and writings in his emphatic attention to human freedom, its exercise in moral choices, and the institutions that secure its practice.[3] His modern classic and so much of his writing is made especially memorable and effective by his evident attention to common human experience.[4]

[1]Yves R. Simon, "Jacques Maritain: Homage in Words," in *Jacques Maritain: Homage in Words and Pictures*, ed. John Howard Griffin and Yves R. Simon (Albany, NY: Magi Books, 1974), 9. Simon's text, revised shortly before his death, was the basis for his last public lecture.

[2]*Philosophy of Democratic Government*, initially published in 1951 by The University of Chicago Press, is available since 1993 at the University of Notre Dame Press. The Notre Dame edition incorporates a detailed index and certain editorial corrections of earlier editions.

[3]Anthony O. Simon, "Editor's Note" in *Acquaintance with the Absolute: The Philosophy of Yves R. Simon* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), xiii. I am indebted to Anthony Simon, a son of Yves Simon and director of the Yves R. Simon Institute, not only for suggestions relevant to this essay but also for his fruitful efforts over the years at seeing to publication and/or into translation much significant work of his father that had not appeared in his lifetime and at maintaining regularly the kind of complete bibliography that is available in the volume cited here.

[4]Notable is his rich treatment of the common good including the "vivid examples" of the frustration in attaining the common good when a family's best planning of a holiday nonetheless results in disaster, and of the success of reaching the common good with the aid of an indefatigably uncompromising, single-minded but conscientious Latin teacher nearly fanatic in his attachment to the advancement of Latin.

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Robert Mulvaney notes that "every major writing of Simon devotes some attention to practical wisdom and its epistemological underpinnings."[5] Indeed, there seems a clear trajectory in Simon's life and work moving from (1) probing reflection on the specific political concerns of his youth and early adulthood to (2) his early book on moral knowledge and its final chapter concerned explicitly with defending his use of examples drawn from political science in exhibiting "the noetic characteristics and method of moral philosophy"[6] to (3) *Philosophy of Democratic Government* and the deepening and expansive studies on authority and practical knowledge that follow it. It is important to note that this is a journey of the mind, of the inquirer, not one that leaves active politics simply behind. Simon's migration to the United States was but a new stage in his concern for a free and liberal France.[7] Nevertheless, his embrace of his new American homeland entailed a strong and ever-developing critical awareness of its history, politics, and larger culture as well as a sharing in the aspirations and challenges of American democracy. An advocate of democracy, he was thought by Leo Strauss, who deeply admired his work, to go too far in claiming a basis in the work of St. Thomas for the authority given the people in modern regimes, and he clearly wrestled deeply with whether Thomism and in part Catholicism were obstacles rather than aids in defending genuine and hence healthy developments in liberal modernity.[8]

Simon, *Philosophy*, 21–22, 45–46. The example of the family is richly elaborated for another purpose at 31–35. The singularly apt phrase, "vivid examples," is that of James V. Schall, S.J., "Introduction: Immanent in the Souls of Men" in *Acquaintance*, 4.

[5]Robert J. Mulvaney, "Practical Wisdom in the Thought of Yves R. Simon," in *Acquaintance*, 148, 153.

[6]This book, his second in the year 1934, was *Critique de la connaissance morale.* The quotation here from the last chapter is taken from the English translation by Ralph McInerny, *A Critique of Moral Knowledge* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 75.

[7]Simon initially came to the United States for a year as a visiting professor at the University of Notre Dame, but he welcomed the opportunity to stay when free France fell.

[8]See Strauss's review of *Philosophy of Democratic Government*, which appeared in *The New Scholasticism* (July, 1952) and is reprinted in Leo Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1959), 306–11. Strauss strongly praised Simon's analysis of modern democracy, specifically *Philosophy of Democratic Government*, in the presence of this author. Simon's concerns with the adequacy of Thomism and, to a degree, Catholicism in resisting fascist authoritarianism come to the fore in correspondence between Simon and Maritain especially during 1941, and this is reviewed in John Hellman's "The Anti-Democratic Impulse in Catholicism: Jacques Maritain, Yves Simon, and Charles de Gaulle during World War II," *Journal of Church and State* 33, no. 3 (Summer, 1991): 458 ff. It appears that the period between the intense days of early World War II and his writing *Philosophy of*

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Yet if we consider Simon's self-understanding, Vukan Kuic is surely right that he regarded himself as a philosopher.[9] Nonetheless, it is clear that the weight of his work thus far made public and of the attention he has drawn relate to practical philosophy, in an Aristotelian understanding that encompasses both moral and political philosophy. Simon seemed to care, not so much what he was called—political philosopher, moral philosopher or simply philosopher—but about understanding what philosophy is, what practical judgment and choice are, and accordingly what is that seemingly middle terrain that might be called moral and/or political philosophy and what is its work. Such clarification of fundamental concepts and categories is an important dimension of his writings and is in part what he regarded as strictly philosophical work.

At the Sorbonne Simon studied social theorists of the nineteenth century, especially Pierre-Joseph Proudhon for whom he had a singular enthusiasm. Proudhon, sometimes described as a libertarian socialist, was interested in worker organizations and opposed to central political forms, garnering at times the reputation of an anarchist. Simon was simultaneously drawn to Maritain, and under his tutelage, studied the philosophical-theological work of St. Thomas Aquinas at the Institut Catholique de Paris. Some years later in an autobiographical reflection, Simon marveled that this "was surely the first time that a student of Proudhon happened to be a student of St. Thomas."[10] The keen interest in Proudhon and the social theorists appears wholly understandable for a young, bright student particularly concerned with the issue of economic justice, as it arose in early twentieth-century Europe in the ravages and turmoil that followed the First World

Democratic Government as well as an essay that appeared in 1954 saw Simon giving more and apparently more thorough attention to the alleged and sometimes felt tensions between Thomism and Catholicism on the one hand and modern democracy on the other. The essay of 1954 is "The Doctrinal Issue between the Church and Democracy," in *The Catholic Church in World Affairs*, ed. Waldemar Gurian and M.A. Fitzsimons (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1954), 87–114. A recent and fine interpretation of "the Thomist case for democracy" that Simon came to make in his work of the 1950s is found in Jeanne Heffernan Schindler, "Democracy and Tradition: A Catholic Alternative to American Pragmatism," *Logos* 11, no. 2 (Spring, 2008): 35ff.

[9]Vukan Kuic, *Yves R. Simon, Real Democracy* (Lanham, MD., Rowman and Littlefield: 1999), 1. As Anthony Simon observes in *Acquaintance*, ix, his father regarded himself as a "non-specialized philosopher by principle." Yves Simon's range of philosophical interests is represented in the courses he offered as a member of the University of Chicago's Committee on Social Thought (1948–1961). They are found on page xii of Vukan Kuic's "Editor's Preface" to Yves Simon's *Work, Society and Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1971).

[10]"Yves R. Simon," in *The Book of Catholic Authors*, ed. Walter Romig (Detroit:Walter Romig and Co., 1945), 266.

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War.[11] Such interest seems simply to reflect a good republican citizen's concern with issues of the time. But what of that which appears anomalous at this stage of his life, his deep commitment to studying philosophy in the mode of St. Thomas?

Simon's reflections back on this period from different stages of his life provide the basis for seeing how he understood his call to philosophy and the specific philosophical terrain that he marked out for his work.[12] In 1945, he recounted how, more than twenty years earlier, he first encountered Maritain as a teacher of modern philosophy, taking courses under him on Descartes and Kant. He was drawn by Maritain "to love the truth that Maritain loved, and to feel anxious to know more about it." Conceding that he learned much about "methods of work and fields of research" from his teachers at the Sorbonne, Simon thought the overall teaching he received there was "unsystematic," best described "as a combination of positivism and idealistic relativism." He characterized his study of social theory at the Sorbonne as "practicing philosophy as a mere cultural exercise." He realized with satisfaction that he had turned to philosophy with higher expectations, "looking for a system of philosophical truth." It was yet another matter whether that system would be found in what he called "the newly rediscovered philosophy of St. Thomas."[13]

Simon's decision to move toward a rigorously argued philosophical system had much to do with the qualities of both Maritain and Thomas. For Simon, this was not only a move against the regnant practices of academic philosophers but also an overcoming of what he realized was a personal obstacle. Even after his introduction to St. Thomas at the Institut, he felt deficient with respect to his background in mathematics and "scientific instruction." Setting aside his "reading a great deal in a random way," he committed himself to developing "the characteristics of the scientific mind. True to this resolution," he added, "I became increasingly eager for accuracy, exactness, and systematic orderliness in all fields of knowledge."[14]

Though Maritain's treatment of the relation between philosophy and experimental science was, Simon later confessed, "an important reason why I followed [his] teaching ... more than that of any other teacher," in time

[11]A detailed examination of these studies and their impact on Simon's later thinking is found in Ralph Nelson, "Freedom and Economic Organization in a Democracy," in *Freedom in the Modern World: Jacques Maritain, Yves R. Simon, Mortimer J. Adler*, ed. Michael D. Torre (Mishawaka, IN: American Maritain Association, 1980), 141–52.

[12]This essay made very little use of Simon's correspondence; a more extensive study of that will likely shed further light on his self-understanding and development as a philosopher. The following has just appeared as this article goes to press: *Jacques Maritain, Yves Simon, Correspondance*, vol. 1, 1927–1940, ed. Florian Michel et al. (Chambray-les Tours, France: Éditions CLD Cahiers du Livre et Disque, 2008).

[13]Simon in Romig, *Book of Catholic Authors*, 264–66.

[14]Simon in Romig, *Book of Catholic Authors*, 267.

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Simon came to think of his own "calling" as strictly philosophic with the attendant "special guaranties of epistemological purity and logical rigor." This was in contrast to Maritain who was seen truly to deserve the title Christian philosopher by dint of treating "philosophical issues in the particular *state* that they assume by reason of their relation to Christian faith and theology."[15]

It will seem paradoxical to some that Simon's nourishing "the characteristics of the scientific mind" cemented and developed his attachment to St. Thomas. In his 1955 foreword to the collaborative translation of *The Material Logic of John of St. Thomas*, Simon conceded the element of mystery "in religion, in metaphysics, in philosophy generally, and in human affairs," but then lamented the "widespread aversion to scientific forms" in these very areas of learning. Again setting his philosophical orientation off against "literary" approaches to philosophy, he observed, "What is lacking in our relation to mystery is neither earnestness nor abundance of ideas, it is the rigor of the scientific spirit." What he sought concretely and found present in St. Thomas and the best of Thomism was "clarity in the statement of questions and principles, firmness in inference, rational evidence of conclusions, appropriateness in prediction, integral preservation of past developments, lucid order, and the unique defense against error that rational forms alone can provide."[16]

In the initial publication in French of *Foresight and Knowledge* eleven years earlier, Simon had urged scientists to appreciate that Thomists share their "same spirit," "belong to the same breed." The very terms by which Thomists are at times ridiculed by other philosophers and elements of "the cultured public" are the "mental traits" they "owe to the Aristotelian school—the only school in which philosophical disciplines have been brought to a degree of technical elaboration comparable to that which accounts for the prestige of the exact sciences." Those "traits" for which Simon here apologized with irony are "[our] perpetual criticism of the meaning of words, these distinctions, this concern for precise definitions and exhaustive divisions, for rigorous deductions and necessary arguments, this horror of vague approximations."[17]

The kinship of philosophy with empirical science goes beyond style of argument and inquiry or method. Thomists, Simon claimed, have a conception of philosophy that "implies above all that philosophy is itself a science or, to be more precise, that philosophic disciplines are each of them a science." Later in this work Simon returned to this theme and specifically

[15]Simon, "Homage," 8–9, 14 (see also 11 for emphasis on how Maritain remains clear about and loyal to the philosophical calling).

[16]Yves R. Simon, foreword to *The Material Logic of John of St. Thomas*, trans. Yves R. Simon, John J. Glanville, and G. Donald Hollenhorst (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), xxii–xxiii.

[17]Yves R. Simon, *Foresight and Knowledge* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 4.

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invoked metaphysics: "In our view, whoever wants to work out a theory of the relations between philosophy and the sciences should above all take note of the scientific character of philosophy and understand that metaphysics, which is the archetype of all philosophical thinking is at the same time purely and simply the archetype of all scientific thinking."[18]

Simon emphasized that philosophical inquiry—from the moral/political to the ultimate metaphysical inquiry—often arises from the perplexities and issues in the practical realm.[19] He thus acknowledged the role of simple but direct wonder in moving inquiry and thought, but he also insisted on the commitment of true philosophy, as of science, to explanation that aspires to be demonstrative and productive of consensus.[20] First science or philosophy is at the level of abstraction that not only allows a grounding and defense of the concepts of moral and political philosophy but also locates the truths of empirical science in its comprehensive explanation. Simon provides some striking formulations that assist his readers in understanding this grand and significant set of relationships and how ultimate science or metaphysics can proceed. "Every positive scientist," he observes, "is on the wrong track when he uses a term whose meaning cannot be reduced to observable data. Every philosopher is on the wrong track who uses a term whose meaning cannot be reduced to being."[21] The analogy and the difference between the two kinds of facts, philosophical and empirical, was illustrated in Simon's speaking of philosophy's responsibility to disengage scientific facts from their strictly scientific form.[22]

The philosophical responsibility to abstract came again to the fore in Simon's reflection on the many ways of knowing at the conclusion of a lecture given near the end of his life (though first published in 1988): "The unintegrated multiplicity of disciplines and cognitions is," he observed, "in our time the heaviest burden of the human intellect. The greater simplicity that we so badly need is procured by formal abstraction, an intellectual operation relevant to serenity and to both theoretical and practical wisdom."[23]

[18]Simon, *Foresight*, 4, 91.

[19]In *A Critique Organized* (80). Simon wrote: "A metaphysics of man's ultimate end is implied by every political concept. No doubt, the same idea of the ultimate end is compatible with different opinions on how the city should be organized." See also earlier in the book (40) where the connection between moral science and metaphysics is made explicit.

[20]Yves Simon, *The Great Dialogue of Nature and Space*, Revised Edition (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2001), 21; *Practical Knowledge* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1991), 98–99; "The Philosopher's Calling" in *Philosopher at Work*, ed. Anthony O. Simon (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 4–5.

[21]Simon, *Foresight*, 76.

[22]Simon, *Great Dialogue*, 178. See, in addition, Chapters 7 and 9 of this book.

[23]Yves R. Simon, "Philosophy, the Humanities and Education," *The New Scholasticism* 62, no. 4 (Autumn, 1988): 471.

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So we have sketched Simon's understanding of the nature and object of philosophy, in fact of all science or rational learning.

More important to this essay is the subjective side of philosophy, namely, the philosopher and his state of mind and soul. Here Simon was understandably more self-revealing, and we encounter more the existential tensions of living out the call to philosophy. At the close of his autobiographical essay, Simon called attention to the indissoluble unity of love for truth and the love for justice that must mark the soul of the genuine philosopher.[24] In his last public lecture, he used the dedication to truth and to justice as a characterization of Maritain's practice with abstract ideas and thus of the resources that Maritain, the man so critical in drawing him to philosophy, brought to bear on public and intellectual controversies.[25] Yet attributing the "love of truth" to an academic person, a scientist or a philosopher is such a commonplace that the profound and unsettling challenge of living faithfully to such a love is easily slighted.

It is the force of the love of truth that drew Simon to respect all knowledge and modes of knowing and that pushed him on that metaphysical path sketched above toward the unity behind all the diverse experiences of humankind. The elevation of this drive reflected the distinctive human yearning for the fullness of truth and the conviction that both justice and charity will be served best when those called to find and communicate the truth live with vigorous fidelity to their vocation. It is not just on a grand scale that the devotion to the truth is to operate. Simon looked for this philosophic attitude in the treatment of practical issues of the day, even though he recognized that the philosopher himself at the point of practical choice may be among the most inept of citizens. Wary of "the flowery element of culture" that "makes for subjectivism, arbitrariness, and an attitude of frivolous aversion to nature and its laws," Simon pleaded that "the knowledge of truth, not the possession of culture, be our regulating ideal. And let us not doubt that, if truth is sought according to its own laws and to its own spirit, culture also will be attained."[26]

Simon's most moving and most nuanced statement on devotion to the truth, in fact to a culture of truth, appeared as the Second World War had just wound down. He emphasized the connection between a culture of freedom and one of truth in the first chapter of *The Community of the Free.* "The spirit of freedom," he wrote, "has no worse enemy than falsehood. The conquest of freedom in daily life implies above all else a daily fight against falsehood, a daily fight for truth."[27]

[24]Simon in Romig, *Book of Catholic Authors*, 270.

[25]Simon, "Homage," 13.

[26]Yves R. Simon, "The Concept of Work," in *Philosopher at Work*, 18.

[27]Yves R. Simon, *The Community of the Free*, Revised Edition (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 5.

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Simon then cautioned against underestimating how difficult a fight it is, for a community, for a single person, for the philosopher who is to be especially characterized by commitment to the truth. "I cannot imagine," he wrote, any society or group "which does not include amongst its current ideas an enormous dose of lies." He continued:

> Let us understand that it is hardly possible to ask of a man a harder sacrifice than this: for love of truth, he be ready to say No to what is thought and said every day by "his brothers and his fellows"; ready to discover the ravages of falsehood in the souls of those who are dear to him, and to continue to cherish their souls whilst he hates their lies; ready ceaselessly to unveil the lies of his own conscience. Negation and revolt are attitudes which have a certain charm, provided that the attitude which I reject and against which I revolt is voiced at a comfortable distance from my own person. But if I adopt the attitude of saying No to all falsehoods, including those which are manufactured and propagated around me as well as those which I feel welling up in myself, I know that I am setting out into a fearsome solitude, into a desert country, without roads and without water. There my dearest companions will fail me. My habits, my tastes, my passions will abandon me. With no support but truth, I shall go forward, stripped and trembling.

Simon then continued his reflection on this awesomely difficult commitment to truth.

> One thinks twice before making such a decision. Furthermore, it is a decision that will never be made once and for all, because the seductions of falsehood will never disarm. It will have to be repeated, all the ruptures that it implies will have to be accepted over again, each time that the wish for an easy life makes itself heard. Reflecting upon this program for life, we feel ourselves overwhelmed with agony. The real problem is now propounded; we must learn whether we love truth so much that we are willing to live with it, if need be, in agony, or whether we wish to avoid agony at all costs, even at the cost of truth.[28]

There are special challenges to the philosopher's maintaining fidelity to the commitment to the truth, and Simon noted them in other writings. Even in his stirring commitment to the truth at the end of his autobiographical essay there is an indication of his early discouragement with what passed for philosophy and his consequent need to find saving encouragement in the enthusiasm and authenticity of his young students.[29] Elsewhere he drew attention both to how often even great philosophers go wrong and to the

[28]Simon, *Community*, 5–6. In the pages that follow, Simon showed the sensitivity and deftness in the service of the truth that allowed him to envision withholding truth and even using silence as a means of serving truth in certain circumstances.

[29]Simon in Romig, *Book of Catholic Authors*, 270.

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disagreements that plague philosophy.[30] A significant cause of bewilderment in philosophy, Simon wrote, is that success is never unquestioned.[31] Despite such difficulties, Simon held that consensus is possible in philosophy even if almost never seen. He argued that there are accidental rather than essential reasons for the disappointing, pervasive disagreement among philosophers. He once enumerated the most important of these reasons as "(a) the inherent difficulty of philosophical questions, (b) the influence of human, moral, and esthetic attitudes on the directions of philosophic thought, and (c) the strange fact that people who have no real understanding of philosophical issues can be successful as philosophy students and as writers in philosophy."[32]

In concluding his essay "To Be and To Know," Simon offered a psychological explanation for at least some of the troubled history of philosophy. Pointing out the subjective pressure for closure around a proposed explanation rather than openness to the complexity of reality and the fullness of being, Simon observed, "This accident [premature closure] happens, in particular, to the numerous persons who feel that the really important thing, especially in philosophy and religion, is not to know the truth, but to enjoy the bliss of the satisfied intellect."[33] So we might say that Simon does not hesitate "to call a spade a spade" in assessing the history and state of philosophy and the weaknesses of many who have taken the title "philosopher."

Everywhere in his work, however, one finds evidence that in his regard for the complexities of concrete, contingency-ridden moments in human history, for the intricate depths of the human soul, and likely for the injunction of Scripture against judging others, he made no ultimate judgments on the goodness of other human beings. He thus showed both honesty and courage—some might say "folly," let us say "divine folly"—in facing up to the frequently sad state of philosophy and in remaining faithful to the philosopher's defining call to the truth.

Simon spoke often of the philosopher's call and the philosopher's duty.[34] To respond well to that call, there is no substitute "for the fearless love of truth, for selflessness, fortitude, and humility."[35] This enumeration of requisite virtues for the philosopher appears in his 1958 address upon receiving the Aquinas Medal from the American Catholic Philosophical Association. Assuming that "some philosophers have access to demonstratively established truths," he cautioned that this is certainly "nothing to brag about, for access to rare truth is the most undeserved of all privileges. And yet they

[30]Simon, "The Philosopher's Calling," 1–2; "Philosophy, the Humanities," 469.

[31]Simon, "The Philosopher's Calling," 3.

[32]Simon, "Philosophy, the Humanities," 469.

[33]Simon, "To Be and to Know," in *Philosopher at Work*, 193.

[34]In "Homage" (14), he presents Maritain as responding to his call rather than his choice in the sense of preference.

[35]Simon, "The Philosopher's Calling," 5.

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have to express their well-founded convictions with firmness and zeal." To so embrace this duty can appear as "insane pride," for one's tested philosophical convictions cannot be offered as mere "personal opinions," nor is one in the end to be governed by "mutually accepted opinion" and "good social manners." The philosopher's duty is to an "often solitary fight against learned and dignified persons, against Descartes and Spinoza and Berkeley ... with the inescapable implication that he, the solitary fighter, knows better about the really important issues than most of the greatest among philosophical geniuses."

From his understanding of genuine philosophy, Simon sought to clarify the muddle in the general use of the word "ideology," a problem continuing to our present day.[36] Ideology for him is what results from a would-be philosopher conforming too closely to the socially accepted opinion of any specific group, if not of the larger society. Not surprising in this student of social theories, Simon found the concept useful as in "ideology of the working class." He understood ideology as a "system of ideas relative to subjects of philosophic interest ... but which are held: ... in a particular society, ... at a given period in its evolution, and ... in answer to definite needs." Ideology thus entails an "interpretation of truth which is sociological, evolutionistic, and pragmatic." Most philosophical systems have ideological components, and most ideologies have a philosophic core. John Locke's writings, for example, are riddled with ideological elements, Aristotle's teaching and Cartesianism quite free of them, and Herbert Spencer's is "principally, if not entirely reducible to an ideology."

Clarifying what he means by ideology, Simon wrote that Spencer's views, likely by his intention and/or that of his publisher, "represented the synthesis demanded by the industrial age, especially in English-speaking society." Overestimating, perhaps, how "easy" it is to recognize the ideological components of a philosophic system (after all, just a page earlier he had hesitatingly wondered whether Aristotle's treatment of slavery and work represented ideological elements), Simon continued: "What is hard but much more worthwhile is to go after the philosophic core of an ideology—that is, after the truth that is at variance with ideology precisely because it is independent of society, because it is independent of history, and, above all, because it is independent of human needs and aspirations."

Despite philosophy's difficulties—from its seemingly endless contentiousness to its embeddedness so often in ideology—Simon found, beyond the high call of duty to the truth, certain deep satisfactions in living the philosophical life. In his autobiographical statement he saw in philosophy, at least that of St. Thomas, the capacity of inspiration and thus of drawing one to a spiritual life.[37] As he closed his Aquinas Medal address, he described how

[36]Simon, *Work, Society and Culture*, 107–9.
[37]Simon in Romig, *Book of Catholic Authors*, 267, also 264.

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reaffirming of the call to philosophy are those times when the philosopher breaks out of his solitude, in which his work must be largely done, and finds the joy of friendship born of successfully communicating his inspiration and love along with at least some particle of truth.[38]

Simon was acutely aware how rare are those moments even for the genuine philosopher. Philosophy at its best—the study of it and the continuing inquiry in living the life of the philosopher—draws humans away from ordinary experiences and the moral and political problems associated with them. Even as he was becoming a philosopher, Simon lamented some of the effects of the process, and these concerns about philosophy's handicaps with respect to practical life constituted a very important theme in his philosophical work. In his autobiographical statement, Simon described his withdrawal for several years from "writing any magazine articles in order to concentrate upon his philosophical research" and his doctoral dissertation. With satisfaction, he noted that "[o]nce I had obtained my doctor's degree, it became possible for me to turn again to current events and … the burning problems of the day." Earlier he had taken a formal break from university studies though he continued to study much each day. Reflecting on that period, he commented that "I now realize that this studious life was over-intellectual, gave too little a share to social and human experience." At another point he feared that his lack of experience and isolation would render his philosophical work unrealistic and sophistical.[39]

Near the end of his life and in that final lecture in praise of Maritain, Simon was saying much the same, only now with more experience not only with such realities as the deteriorating international situation of the 1930s, the Spanish Civil War, and church-state issues in various nations of the West, but more experience also with philosophers and the life of philosophy. Simon complained that "political philosophers and theologians have a tendency to oversimplify things and to derive obnoxious satisfaction from the host of illusions that their lack of experience renders inevitable."[40] A little later in the lecture, he developed the perspective on contingencies and prudence that had already played an important role in *Philosophy of Democratic Government*.[41] Simon's analysis proceeded from the observations that the "factual situations," in which essential social and political realities exist, are marked by contingency, and that in general "to assume that moral science can deal with contingent matters without being supplemented by the virtue of prudence, is a silly illusion." We know from his other writings that

[38]Simon, "The Philosopher's Calling," 5–6.

[39]Simon in Romig, *Book of Catholic Authors*, 269, 265, 267.

[40]Simon, "Homage," 11.

[41]Robert J. Mulvaney, "Editor's Note," in Simon, *Practical Knowledge*, xii, adds, "[Simon's] message is a simple one: the traditional concept of practical wisdom has been lost in the past four centuries of Western experience. Its recovery is an urgent need in our individual and social lives."

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Simon has empirical social science in mind as well as the philosophic sciences about which he is explicit here in defending the sphere of prudence or practical wisdom. "[P]rudence, as philosophers and theologians understand it, is a kind of wisdom so hard to get, to keep and to manage, that under a variety of names mankind is likely always to nurture *the ideal of science* which would suffice to trace our way in this world of contingency."[42] Once it is realized "that no scientific method will answer a question relative, in any way whatsoever, to contingent data, it soon becomes easy to understand that the philosopher, far from being able to answer *philosophically* the questions which puzzle his fellow citizens, may well be at a disadvantage and have particular reasons to remain silent." The disadvantage was, of course, the generally limited human experience that characterizes philosophers. In Simon's view, "a great deal of human experience is necessary" to acquire any kind of social and political prudence.

Experience is critical to prudence, but it is a necessary rather than sufficient condition in Simon's analysis. His definition of prudence in *Philosophy of Democratic Government*, where leadership is said "in the normal state of affairs" to belong to the prudent person,[43] draws our attention to another ingredient of practical wisdom. Setting prudence off once again against science, Simon defined it as "the fully determinate and unmistakably effective knowledge of the right use." He immediately added that prudence "is acquired, not principally by reading books and taking courses, but by practicing virtue."[44] Prudence appears to be both the fruit of the other basic virtues (temperance, courage, and justice) and their source, for they must be practiced by prudent choices to be realized.[45] This points toward the elusive area where the dispositions and the affective dimension of the person play a critical part in setting a course on the way of virtue. This seems to be one place where the incommunicable and mysterious element that Simon associated with sound and good practical choice enters the picture.

There is another way, in Simon's analysis, that experience in itself is not usually sufficient for prudence. Having protected the sphere of practical choice from simple determination by science, including that most important science of sciences, philosophy, Simon endeavored in a number of his writings to articulate what connection there might be between philosophy and the world of practical choice and action. "Moral experience," he wrote on one occasion, "reveals the keenly felt need for investigation by an adequate moral philosophy."[46] Then on another occasion, in *Philosophy of Democratic Government*, he made the same point with respect to macro-moral philosophy,

[42]Simon, "Homage," 12. The emphasis is mine.

[43]Simon, *Philosophy*, 279.

[44]Simon, *Philosophy*, 282–83.

[45]See Kuic, *Real Democracy*, 34–37, for an overall treatment of Simon's rejection of substitutes for the virtues as critical ingredients in practical wisdom.

[46]Simon, *Practical Knowledge*, 96.

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namely, political philosophy. While discussing the phrase "government by the consent of the governed," Simon observed (reminiscent of Thucydides' observation on the partisan appropriation of key political concepts, III. 82) that it has several meanings "which cannot be distinguished in political speeches or even in statements of principles. Such is the paradox of political notions considered in their sociological existence, for it is in a state of confusion that they are most active and produce their most important effects. About all the clarity that these subjects admit of will be procured *if instruments of clarification are available to whoever needs and cares to use them. To work out such instruments and see that they are kept in good order is what political philosophers are paid for.*"[47] Simon was both more extensive and more specific about the political philosopher's responsibility in his last public lecture when he described how he came to see that a prudent man would sometimes need more than a "commonsense ability to handle 'abstract ideas.'" A good friend pointed out to Simon that his critique of Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia, as any "defense of the public conscience against corruption by politicians and intellectuals," required or at least benefitted from Simon's philosophical work on such ideas as "right, law, contract, community, authority, force, legal coercion, violence, autonomy and civilization."[48]

In *Practical Knowledge*, Simon had proceeded at one point from a reflection that his reasonable and hence best guess is that however little we know about the physical universe, "it is less mysterious than the universe of morality." In morality "the inclinations of just hearts" and "the traditions in which such inclinations are embodied" may well suffice to lead to "fulfillment," meaning sound choice and action.[49] Moral philosophy, inclusive of political philosophy, might culminate in a general directive, and that form of practical wisdom is not yet the "ultimate practical wisdom" that is the action of the will fusing into the act itself. Here is where rules are applied in contingency-rich circumstances of each concrete individual considering a very specific action. Here is where what Simon called "the problem of recognition" and saw pervading the moral sphere applies (e.g., given equality of opportunity as a desideratum, is the specific case of inequality at hand one where the principle of equality of opportunity is applicable?).[50] Here too is ample space for the idiosyncratic and unpredictable aspects of the moral actor's experience to enter. So here at the moment of affirming the command to act, at the moment of ultimate practical wisdom (the actual final test of prudence on a given occasion), there is plenty of space for mystery around the necessarily solitary individual actor. Simon wrote that "[t]he incommunicability of the last [last with respect

[47]Simon, *Philosophy*, 190–91. Emphasis is mine.

[48]Simon, "Homage," 12–13. The reference to Simon's writing on the invasion of Ethiopia is to a book that initially appeared in French in 1936 and is soon to be published in English translation at the University of Notre Dame Press, 2009.

[49]Simon, *Practical Knowledge*, 96–97.

[50]Simon, *Philosophy*, 235 and throughout.

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to a specific action] practical judgment results from the affective and nonlogical character of the act that determines this judgment."[51] In what follows he speculated on the reasons why we humans can reach what agreement we can in the practical realm, in other words, how our isolation with respect to practical matters is mitigated. Our communities need the structures of authority to find a way to overcome our solitude, singularity and peculiarity, and to act for the common good.[52]

Wrestling with the complexities of practical wisdom in the last stage of his life, Simon had come full circle from his initial youthful interest rooted in political activism about sound moral and political choice.[53] His journeys into the science of sciences led him to highlight the essential solitariness and mystery in philosophical work. So whether at the peak of our effort to understand reality, or at the moment of deciding to act in this way rather than that, the human is alone with his own history, dispositions, character, and set of experiences inclusive of what is known from empirical science and the perspectives of technical experts. Such solitariness seems to complement and accentuate Simon's emphasis throughout his work on autonomy, liberty, and responsibility. Freedom, in other words, goes along with dedication and accountability to the truth.

That truth was a notably elusive one for Simon at the peak of inquiry and at the point of action. His basic attitude seemed ever to be one of calling us to respect reality and thus to resist forcing it wholly, and surely not hastily and with an arrogant certainty, into our rational modes of explanation. Yet the drive for explanation, whether emanating from simple wonder or the need for guidance rooted in our need to direct and control human action and nature around us, is a distinctively human possession that joins us with others across cultures and ages. Finding the unity beneath the diversity of experience and of the various modes of knowing, abstracting, in other words, is the human way. Earlier in this essay, Simon, writing from his position on the multidisciplinary Committee on Social Thought, was seen noting that "the unintegrated multiplicity of disciplines and cognitions" is the "heaviest" current "burden of the human intellect." In what immediately preceded this statement, he acknowledged the danger of oversimplification in seeking unity yet observed that that danger "should not blind us to the fact that the greatest scientific progress consisted in, or involved admirable simplifications."[54] Respecting reality is honoring the desire for truth and thus maintaining differences and hence distinctions where appropriate. This fundamental stance of respect for reality, of seeking to articulate difference

[51]Simon, *Practical Knowledge*, 24.

[52]Simon, *Practical Knowledge*, note 17, 40.

[53]For some further elaboration of this and what follows in this essay, see especially Simon's exchange with Maritain, *Practical Knowledge*, 106–08, and Mulvaney's interpretive commentary on some aspects of the exchange. Mulvaney in *Acquaintance*, 175.

[54]Simon, "Philosophy, the Humanities," 471.

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while striving for simplicity and unity, seemed to capture the persistent philosophical attitude of Simon. He appeared confident that this tensional position promised good for humankind both in understanding and in action. It is reflected in such pregnant observations as his crisp summation that "ontological optimism does not entail moral optimism." To which he quickly added, "it certainly does not entail moral pessimism either. It does not procure even a suspicion of what the ratio of good and evil" will be in the exercise of human freedom.[55] Later in his political classic, writing of the mix of good and evil in the institutions humans create, Simon observed that "the task of human wisdom is to find a principle capable of safeguarding the good and forestalling the evil." To that "significant platitude" he wished to join another, namely, if that "principle is expected to work without a high ratio of failure, disappointment is bound to follow." Simon saw "two sorts of minds" that might and do arise to face the challenges of imperfect human practices and institutions: "[T]hose who accept with determination the prospect of never ending uncertainties, never ending trials and errors, incomplete successes, and new failures and those who decide that institutions causing so much trouble, opposing such obstacles to the reign of reason in society, entertaining in human history darkly mysterious regions, must disappear, regardless of the cost." The simple triumph of the latter mind, reflective of our human desire for rational direction and control, meant for Simon that "liberty is gone and death is coming."[56]

How might the institutions and processes of education reflect what Simon learned from his experiences and his inquiries? He came to be particularly concerned that his fellow philosophers and the Catholic tradition of his time might so emphasize philosophy and theology that students would suffer as human beings and human actors. In that final public lecture, he rejected the tendency to center training in the liberal arts on "philosophy. . . . I rather think that on the college level it is man considered in the contingencies of his concrete existence who should be the main subject of liberal studies."[57] In the lead-up to this statement, Simon reflected on a view that apparently he and Maritain shared, that "scholastic philosophy is a philosophy of professors," and that "the professor is precisely the worst enemy" of the philosophy of St. Thomas. "Scholastic" culture is that of the

[55]Simon, *Philosophy*, 80.

[56]Simon, *Philosophy*, 139–39.

[57]Simon, "Homage," 4. It is reasonable to assume that in the different contingencies of today when philosophy is minimized or entirely marginalized in liberal education, Simon would argue differently. Furthermore, it is clear that he expected and likely thought justified that technical education and scientific instruction would take more curricular space than in the past (*Philosophy*, 279), yet he was concerned that the more holistic perspective that human inquiry needs could be neglected in these developments. See *Practical Knowledge*, 141, and Raymond L. Dennehy, "Yves R. Simon's Metaphysics of Action," in *Acquaintance*, 38.

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classroom "with little or no concern for what goes on in public affairs, in art and literature, and in spiritual life." The humanists of the sixteenth century were decidedly better than the scholastics when it was "a question of understanding man in the contingencies of history, in the indefinitely many accidents of his concrete existence, ... understanding what we now would call the existential man." Yves Simon, who had rejected "literary" approaches to philosophy for system, rigor of demonstration and assurance, seemed aware all along that the preparation for human action, for prudent human action, required more than the science of philosophy.

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