

---

---

Michael D. Torre

---

## Introduction: Reading between the Lines

---

---

Nineteen hundred eighty-eight marked three anniversaries: the 55th year since the French publication of *Freedom in the Modern World*; the 30th year since the appearance of the first volume of *The Idea of Freedom*; and the 20th year since work was completed for the posthumous publication of *Freedom of Choice*. The year also marked the 50th anniversary of their authors' first joint meeting, at a symposium held at the University of Notre Dame. It is most fitting, then, that the American Maritain Association should have returned to that university to celebrate and assess their achievement, then and now. This book is the result of that gathering.

The works' authors need no introduction and shall receive none. Perhaps a word is in order, however, regarding the order of the essays in this volume, as well as the implied conversation between them.

The authors are given in the title according to the genesis of their work (Simon's appearing in French the year before Adler set up his Institute for Philosophical Research). Their presentation is reversed in the book, however, to follow the order of logic and learning. The proper way to begin an examination of freedom is to approach it dialectically. We begin, then, with essays devoted to the work of Mortimer J. Adler. With the essays on Yves R. Simon, we move into concerns proper to the philosophy of man, ethics, and politics. These continue in the essays centered on Jacques Maritain, which conclude with considerations proper to metaphysics and natural theology. In the brief compass of our work, therefore, we have sought to do some measure of justice to the full range of issues raised by the idea and reality of freedom.

Our work is introduced by Donald Gallagher's recollections of these three philosophers. He reminds us that philosophy does not take place in an ideal realm, but is the work of men. In their case, it is the work of men who were *friends* and who stimulated and encouraged each other. Has not the greatest philosophy ever been the product of such a collaborative effort? (One thinks of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle or Albert, Bonaventure, and Thomas.) Gallagher also offers us a glimpse of these men and their in-

fluence upon American Thomism when in its formative stages: a glimpse particularly precious for those of us with little or no experience of them in the flesh. He thereby serves to remind us that philosophy is a living tradition, passed on from one generation to the next.

### I. Mortimer J. Adler

Fortunately for us, generations overlap. We were thus privileged to be addressed by Adler—himself a living tradition—who made his presence felt throughout the symposium. In his criticism of Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*, he urges a strictly dialectical approach to texts—as the one appropriate to undergraduate liberal education—and sharply distinguishes it from a doctrinal approach. Clearly, the nature and importance of a dialectical education still remain vital issues today. (For a contemporary effort to appropriate Adler's great books approach to learning, see Robert Royal's essay in the section on Maritain.) In his address, Adler also implies that modern, egalitarian democracy is the ideal and "only perfectly just" form of government. This view was not to go unchallenged. Indeed, whether Simon and Maritain themselves were unqualified supporters of modern democracy and its institutions, and—if so—whether they should have been, are questions that run through several of the later essays.

We begin, however, with the dialectical approach to freedom. Desmond FitzGerald gives us a rare inside look into how Adler's massive study was achieved, together with a summary of the main types of freedom it distinguished. As he notes, this book marked a turning point in Adler's career: at Maritain's urging, he then devoted his energies to presenting his own philosophical views. FitzGerald lists for us the fruits of this truly amazing period of creativity—one that, remarkably, is still going on. Perhaps, as FitzGerald intimates, Adler's achievement will finally rest even more upon his own philosophical work than upon the dialectical projects that occupied his earlier years.

With Otto Bird, we turn to the dialectical task. He gives us an elegant synopsis of how to go about constructing a dialectical controversy, using the idea of justice as a model. He thus helps us see precisely how to *use* the dialectical method that produced *The Idea of Freedom*. In his conclusion, Bird notes the Aristotelian parentage of this method, but also indicates the different way it is used by Adler and his associates: not to prepare a doctrinal exposition already envisioned, but accurately to present opposing positions. Such a groundclearing aims to further a better meeting of minds and a more reasonable debate than the history of philosophy has often witnessed.

And yet, as Ralph McInerny notes in his essay, for such an aim to suc-

ceed, philosophers must avail themselves of the dialectical work accomplished. Disquietingly few have. The state of the question established by Adler's work seems largely ignored. The scandal remains. McInerny wonders whether we would be justified in seeing Adler's dialectical pursuit as "quixotic," as an heroic effort that has failed, because the philosophical world did not take it seriously. Yet, like FitzGerald, McInerny also points to the present achievements of Adler's own philosophy, and calls *The Time of Our Lives* "better than anything else done on the subject in our day."

John Van Doren, in his illuminating comparison of Adler and Matthew Arnold, raises a similar question. Like Arnold, Adler has attempted to place his entire discipline on firm ground, by clarifying "the ideas on which it stakes its claims." Such an effort supposes a reasonable audience, one that will appreciate the work achieved. Yet Adler himself has been unremittingly critical of established academe, of "the professors." Van Doren ends by pointing to this anomaly, of finding "such trust in reason on the part of a man who finds so little of it going on about him." Is Adler unduly optimistic in what he expects from his "truly democratic system" of education?

For his part, George Anastaplo judges Adler to have overestimated the virtues of modern democracy and underestimated its classical critique. He argues that modern egalitarianism renders the democrat insensitive to natural differences among men; and he questions the improved awareness of justice attributed to modern sensibilities. Is the common man as wise as Adler sometimes leads one to believe, or were not the ancients more correct in judging the opinions of the many to be as likely wrong as right? If so, one should not expect from them (*inter alia*) a just appreciation of that rarity, the true philosopher. Perhaps this would in part explain the lukewarm reception accorded Adler's own dialectical project.

Anastaplo here extends his criticism to Simon's views as well. A similar tack is taken on Simon by John Hittinger, and a contrasting one by Joseph Califano, in the essays devoted to Maritain. Their pieces also contribute to our interpretation of Simon's thought.

## II. Yves R. Simon

Turning to those essays devoted entirely to Simon, we begin with Catherine Green's careful analysis of the basis for man's freedom of choice, as Simon expounds it. In particular, she highlights for us two of his most valuable distinctions: between habit and *habitus* and between the passive indetermination of indecision and the active one proper to free choice. She indicates how, for Simon, man's natural desire for the comprehensive good endows him with a "surplus actuality," through which he can deter-

mine himself to one good over another and consciously seek it as a means to his final end. These distinctions remove some of the misunderstandings that have so often stood in the way of a convincing defense of man's freedom.

S. Iniobong Udoidem's essay should be read in tandem with Green's, for he applies a similar analysis of freedom to the social sphere. From it, we can see that the requirements of true law and the common good, far from limiting an individual's freedom, actually empower and support him. The superdetermination and autonomy proper to freedom is in fact perfected through man's internalization of law. For that man is most free and self-governing who recognizes and accepts the exigencies of his being, and hence directs himself to goods that will truly fulfill him. Thus, in invoking the authority of its laws and demanding obedience to them, a just society does not bind its citizens, but directs them towards activity that will truly liberate. Whatever may be the fact of social reality, in theory there is no opposition between law and liberty.

The relation between our first two essays pertains also to our next pair: the second applies to the political realm an idea first worked out as it bears upon the individual. In his article, Robert J. Mulvaney shows that Simon recovers a proper appreciation for the ancient virtue of *phronesis* or *prudentia*: a virtue that has been degraded by the modern concept of "prudence" as a technique for getting on in the world. He reveals how sensitive Simon was to the difference between theoretical and practical knowledge: one signalled by the fact that practical thought ends not in an idea but in an *external action*. Again, practical truth is finally determined not by conformity to a state of affairs, grasped through a rational deduction, but by conformity to right appetite. Thus, the possession of virtue is essential if one is to go beyond the probabilities of practical deliberation to terminate it surely in a right decision. Simon here fights against the prevalent intellectualism of modernity, and returns us to a just recognition of the true union of moral and intellectual virtue in practical reasoning.

For her part, Marianne Mahoney argues that only an elaboration of true prudence, along the lines laid down by Simon, can ground a public philosophy that will safeguard the full range of human goods. She criticizes the "justice-dominant" theories of contemporary thinkers such as Rawls, Gewirth, and Nozick; given the unity of the moral good, unless the virtues of temperance and courage are properly defended, justice itself will be undermined. She questions, furthermore, the sharp public-private distinction drawn by theorists of liberal democracy; insofar as this suggests the existence of two separate realms, it is a false dichotomy, and fails to do justice to those "sub-regime" communities (e.g., the family) between the individual and the state. She argues that Simon's theory looks very

good in comparison to the fare offered up by contemporary political theorists. For it is precisely the role of prudence to discern and defend the full range of human goods and to give due weight to the particular and the common good. In an age marked by relativism and moral uncertainty, only a public philosophy based on prudence can protect the legitimate rights of the common good from being eroded in the name of individual autonomy and the toleration of individual differences.

David Koyzis continues the argument begun in Mahoney's article. In particular, he shows how Simon's defense of the full range of human goods allows him to occupy a middle position between the predominant modern tendencies of individualism and collectivism. For example, his nuanced view of the different types and functions of authority in securing the common good permits him to defend political authority without becoming authoritarian. Again, his recognition of communal goods narrower than those of the state undergirds his defense of the principle of "subsidiarity." His vision of a healthy society is one in which individuals engage creatively in the activities of diverse sub-communities. Notable here is Koyzis' insistence that Simon primarily defends the "political" regime of Aristotle and the "mixed" regime of Aquinas. He sees that the modern democratic state can itself become tyrannical, and thus he "is at pains to emphasize the value of nondemocratic elements" within it. Does this not suggest that there is a real difference in Adler's and Simon's assessment of modern democracy? . . . and that perhaps Anastaplo's remarks are better aimed at the former than the latter?

For any political philosophy to be complete, it must come to grips with economic realities. As Ralph Nelson's essay demonstrates, Simon sought to do so from the beginning of his philosophical career. Not surprisingly, we again find him charting a middle course between modern positions; in this case, the views of economic liberalism and state socialism. With the former, we find him arguing that property "functions as a support of freedom" and a protection "against governmental arbitrariness." On the other hand, the development of modern technical culture under the free enterprise system has led to the formation of a working class that merely executes the designs of others. Unable to participate in the direction of his labor, the worker becomes a mere operative, a person "deprived of free expansion." Simon therefore defends the necessity of labor unions to secure workers' freedom of autonomy. Yet Nelson sees Simon as wishing to go further, to create structures through which workers can participate in the direction of their labor: a development that seems to be occurring today in European workers' movements. Simon saw this development not only as directly furthering freedom in the workplace, but also as developing the virtue of self-governance, thereby benefitting the worker's entire social

and moral life. Nelson concludes by urging that we now need to apply Simon's principles to the changed conditions of agriculture.

Finally, John Gueguen compares Simon's views on work with those of John Paul II in his encyclical *On Human Work*. The striking thing here is the numerous correspondences between them, even though one is nourished on Aristotelian philosophy and contemporary experience, while the other develops primarily from a meditation on Scripture. In particular, both men share a sense of the high dignity of work. Both see work as being *for man*, as developing and expressing his humanity; for this reason, they both defend the good of private ownership. Yet both also see work as creating fellowship and solidarity among men; thus, both see it as deformed when reduced to a mere item of merchandise. Again, Gueguen sees John Paul as substantially agreeing with Simon's views over against those Josef Pieper develops in *Leisure, The Basis of Culture*: work in its full range of activities, not leisure, is its truer basis. In conclusion, Gueguen notes a difference in the way the two men treat the mysterious "irksomeness" of work. Simon sees the onerous character of work as not essential to it; John Paul, however, accepting that this condition exists in man's fallen state, sees it as an opportunity to develop courage and to participate in the Cross of Christ. We see here how practical philosophy finally arrives at a mystery that can be grasped only if one passes beyond it.

In reading these essays, one cannot fail, I think, to be struck both by the extraordinary depth and breadth of Simon's practical philosophy, and by its contemporaneity. Now that its full riches are being made accessible through translations and posthumous publications, it is beginning to be given the attention it so obviously deserves. One can only hope that this renaissance of Simonian scholarship will continue to flourish.

### III. Jacques Maritain

The essays centered on Jacques Maritain break into four pairs. The first three discuss matters of political philosophy. (As befit the title of our symposium, we predominately discussed *political* freedom.) In each case, there is a discernible tension between the two essays. Our final pair turns to the higher reaches of metaphysics and to God, from whom all created liberty flows.

We begin with essays on the philosophy of education. Through his original research on the Ecole Nationale des Cadres d'Uriage, John Hellman offers us a fascinating look at an attempt to develop an educational program in Vichy during World War II. He implicitly raises this troubling question: to what extent was Maritain truly responsible for engendering its rather authoritarian educational philosophy? Certainly, the men of Uriage saw themselves as following the lead of Maritain. And, as

Hellman reminds us, Maritain had supplied them with much ammunition against modern individualism and “bourgeois man.”<sup>1</sup> Did Maritain’s Thomism, and his call for a “new Christendom,” help undermine the defense of modern democracy when faced with fascism? Here and in his introduction to *The Road to Vichy* (which should be read as a companion-piece to this essay), Hellman indicates that Simon was himself willing to pose this question. He sees Simon, and then Maritain, shifting to a positive defense of modern democracy in light of the Vichy experience, which saw many of their former friends become compromised by their acquiescence to the Vichy regime.

Yet this rather dark picture should be set beside Robert Royal’s piece. For he also attempts to construct an educational program inspired by Maritain’s writings, and it looks nothing like Uriage! Admittedly, his is a creative and original effort, yet its point of departure lies in a reading of Maritain. (For this reason, it is put in this section, even though its central discussion of the great books makes it equally relevant to Adlerian concerns.) Furthermore, several of his key references are to *Education at the Crossroads*, which Maritain worked out as Uriage was establishing its own program. Even more telling is the central place Royal assigns *intuition* in the creative process and in the re-creative encounter that describes true education. This emphasis on intuition is quintessential Maritain, a hallmark of his writings from first to last. It contrasts sharply with the regimented discipline of Uriage. True, Royal himself sees the necessity of authority to establish an educational canon. Yet surely he is close to Maritain’s own educational philosophy in insisting that a true canon is one hospitable to any modern work capable of “better understanding and enriching human life”: a view requiring a style of authority different from that found at Uriage.

This first pair of essays raises the question of Maritain’s final assessment of modern democracy: the topic of our next pair. Michael Novak presents the later Maritain (of *Reflections on America*) as a wholehearted supporter of American democracy. He groups him with John Courtney Murray, S.J., as a defender of the “American Proposition”: the assertion, in Murray’s words, that just government is founded “on a certain body of objective truth, universal in its import, accessible to human reason, definable,

---

<sup>1</sup>Hellman had earlier detailed this assault in “The Humanism of Jacques Maritain,” his contribution to *Understanding Maritain: Philosopher and Friend*, ed. Deal W. Hudson and Matthew J. Mancini (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), 117–31.

defensible." Thus, as Murray again argues, underlying American government is the belief in "the tradition of natural law as the basis of a free and ordered political life." Maritain, himself a great defender of that tradition, came to see this, and hence became a defender of the American form of democracy. Its founding documents secured God-given human rights and rendered possible a practical cooperation among men of diverse conviction. Novak presses upon us Maritain's challenge to articulate "the ideology of this American civilization," and himself offers an eloquent defense of it, including the economic creativity and enterprise so typical of the American experiment.

Yet, on this last point at least, it may be wondered whether Novak's thought quite reflects that of Maritain. For, as Matthew Mancini points out in his brilliant discussion of Maritain's final essay—"A Society without Money"—he always was an outspoken opponent of modern capitalism. True, it is principally the practice of capitalism and not its theory that Maritain condemns. Yet how not see that condemnation as including within its sweep the American pursuit of the almighty dollar? Would not Maritain see the economic enterprise that Novak lauds as at best equivocal: under the bewitchment of the "magical sign" of money? Furthermore, as Mancini points out, Maritain really condemns the theory of capitalism as well. For he is unswerving in his condemnation of loaning money on interest: an economic practice essential to modern finance capitalism. To Maritain's eye, the Church's medieval condemnation of usury was set "at the threshold of modern times like a burning interrogatory as to the lawfulness of its economy." His positive judgments of modern democracy are balanced by this negative judgment on its dominant economic structure.

Did Maritain really think, then, that there had been a progress in moral and political sensibility in modern times? And are his views on this subject beyond criticism? Our next pair of essays answers these questions rather differently.

For Joseph Califano, Maritain (and Simon) has "a balanced and fertile view of human progress," one that avoids both the false optimism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the debilitating pessimism of the twentieth. Their philosophy of history grants that man's moral insight does mature over time, yet this progress always runs the risk of misuse and deformation. Califano cites the women's rights movement as a good instance: a just recognition that women must not be treated as property or as less than adults has become tied to an unjust demand for absolute power over the unborn. Thus do good and evil advance together in history. Such a guarded optimism (or "authentic pessimism") is completely opposed to the simplistic ideologies of our day. It counsels a constant vigilance over current events, knowing full well that "what has been won



by sweat and blood can easily be lost," and that each generation must struggle to preserve and advance the cause of liberty, justice, and truth.

John Hittinger approaches the subject from a different angle: the egalitarian principle in modern democracy. He shows that Maritain opposes both false claims to absolute superiority (e.g., as made for Aryans by the Nazis) and the doctrinaire denial of natural inequalities (common to the levelling spirit of modern egalitarianism). If, by their common humanity and natural sociability, men are fundamentally equal, that same sociability requires social differentiation and inevitable inequalities. Yet, Maritain subordinates these latter to the principle of equality: they must never obscure the foundational equality of men, nor must they impede the progress in social equality that is the aim of any just society. Maritain appears to leave this future progress open-ended. Here (in a way that echoes Anastaplo's remarks on Adler), Hittinger criticizes Maritain for failing to acknowledge sufficiently the "presence of intrinsic limitations" on political progress. His prospects for democratic achievement are too optimistic. Unless the real differences and inequalities among men are frankly faced and given value, his own egalitarianism dooms modern citizens to being discontent at the equality that eludes them and too ready to grant excessive power to the state to remedy their situation. Hittinger thinks the same criticism, albeit to a lesser degree, can be made of Simon. And he interestingly contrasts their work with the more conservative political ideas of Aurel Kolnai. Hittinger, then, does not agree with Califano that Maritain (or Simon) has found the perfect mean between optimism and pessimism.

The contrasting views of the last six essays—all of which essentially involve Maritain's approach to modernity—indicate how rich his thought is, how difficult it is to capture whole or place in a neat category. At root, the question remains whether Maritain has fully succeeded in transposing Thomas' social thought to the modern world. Certainly, the issues raised above will continue to be debated, no doubt as early as the 1989 symposium on Maritain's 1939 lecture, *The Twilight of Civilization*.

Despite Maritain's constant attention to the political realities of his day, his mind was instinctively metaphysical, and he ever sought to root his thought in the first principles of reality. It is fitting, then, that we should conclude our entire discussion of freedom with two essays on its ultimate foundations.

Raymond Dennehy helps us face up to this apparent difficulty in Maritain's doctrine on freedom: since man's terminal freedom (of independence and "exultation") requires internalizing the moral law, it looks

as though man only achieves this freedom at the expense of his individuality. The common moral law appears opposed to the unique self. In a closely reasoned argument developing the implications of the identity of being and unity, Dennehy shows the opposite to be true. He reminds us of Aquinas' dictum that "the higher a nature, the more intimate to that nature is the activity that flows from it"; that is, the higher the nature, the more its action comes from its interiority, expresses its uniqueness. (Contrast the reflex actions of a plant—proceeding automatically from outside stimuli, and common to the entire species—with the deliberate movements of a man—neither automatic nor common.) In God, this identity of being and action is complete: His action comes entirely from Himself and expresses who He uniquely is. And man, in seeking to internalize the moral law, is in fact seeking to participate more in the being of its author; that is, he is seeking to become his own "unique, concrete embodiment of that law." Man's freedom of exultation not only possesses a plenitude of being; but that very plenitude grounds its expression in a way unique to each person. Contrary to appearances, then, following the moral law does not oppose but furthers man's desire to be his unique self.

My own work, rather than creatively developing a particular insight of Maritain, seeks to synthesize the doctrine on freedom common to all three of our philosophers. Seeing their careful distinctions helps us sort out some of the pseudo-problems that have plagued discussions of man's freedom before God. In particular, I observe that freedom of choice and freedom of spirit (Maritain's freedom of exultation) have diverse foundations: man's inclination to the comprehensive good and to the moral good. If one is attentive to this, as Maritain is, one can go beyond the Molinist-Bañezian controversy that has plagued Catholic philosophers since the early seventeenth century. For, with the Dominicans, one should hold that man chooses the moral good only because God inclines him towards it; but, with the Jesuits, one should grant that man is free to turn from that motion. Put differently, the perfection of spiritual freedom does not require that one be able to turn from God's inclination; but the state of fallible freedom that is our earthly lot does bring with it that terrible possibility. And this raises the great, existential question of freedom, one implicit to every choice we make: whether to place our final end in God or ourselves. For, however illusory its goodness may be, the possibility of being the first cause of our own destiny remains attractive. Indeed, it exercises an attraction beyond our power to resist for long. We need an aid beyond ourselves. Philosophy, at its limit, requires that it be surpassed. Part of Maritain's greatness in philosophy lies in his ever calling our attention to this truth.

Finally, Donald Gallagher's 1987 telegram to the American and Canadian Maritain Associations is included, as an appendix. Regrettably,

it missed inclusion in our previous volume.<sup>2</sup> In his address, Gallagher urges us to go forward in our work, in the confidence that we can produce something of lasting importance. Perhaps it is not too pretentious to see the two volumes now published as advancing us a little way towards that goal.

Several people helped with this volume. In particular, my thanks to Tony Simon, for his constant insistence upon quality; to Mike Aquilina, for generously volunteering to proofread the text; to Donald Gallagher, for helping to cover the book's cost; and especially to Mike Mollerus, for his incisive editorial suggestions and the professional quality of his typesetting. The book is better, in numerous small ways, for all their work. The defects that remain are to be laid at my door.

---

<sup>2</sup>John F.X. Knasas, ed., *Jacques Maritain: The Man and His Metaphysics*, (American Maritain Association, 1988).