

Thomas R. Rourke versus The Neoconservatives¹

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The article conducts a detailed textual analysis of the arguments raised in Thomas Rourke's recent book, *A Conscience as Large as the World: Yves R. Simon Versus the Catholic Neoconservatives*. Rourke contends that Michael Novak, Richard John Neuhaus and George Weigel part company with the Catholic tradition by defending liberalism. Rourke seeks to demonstrate this through a comprehensive comparison of the neoconservative's corpus with the thought of Yves Simon. A detailed study of the relevant texts demonstrates that the book's best arguments are raised against positions which none of the neoconservatives have ever held. Ultimately, Rourke, while making an important contribution to Simon scholarship, fails to prove his thesis.

I. Introduction

Thomas R. Rourke's recent book, *A Conscience as Large as the World: Yves R. Simon Versus the Catholic Neoconservatives*,² is an ambitious undertaking. Rourke seeks to assess "contemporary Catholic neoconservative thought as exhibited in the writings of its principal expositors: Michael Novak, Richard John Neuhaus, and George Weigel . . . through a systematic comparison with [the work of] Yves R. Simon."³ A glance at the pages of Rourke's bibliography illustrates my point. The combined published corpus of Novak, Neuhaus, and Weigel is in the same league with the galactic output of a Ralph McInerny. Add to that the thirty books and many articles authored by Yves Simon and you get some sense of the Herculean task that Rourke has set out for himself.

Yves Simon, as Rourke says, was "one of the leaders of the twentieth-century Thomistic revival and one of the most profound Catholic writers in the field of political philosophy."⁴ Any student of Yves Simon's work knows from personal experience what Vukan Kuic said in his introduction to Simon's *A General Theory of Authority*:⁵ "In the pages which follow, there is some hard going. But that only proves that Yves Simon loved both truth and his students more than himself, and, considering the potential reward . . . the effort is well worth it."⁶ Rourke evidences a comprehensive and integrated understanding of Simon's work and, with this book, he has established himself as an important Simon scholar. We can only look forward to more work from him applying the wisdom of Yves Simon to the intellectual currents of our time.

There is much to be gained from a close reading of Rourke's book and, commendably, he expresses a fundamental concern for the poor in every chapter. Still, the primary question for a scholarly review of Rourke's book remains to be answered: do the arguments put forth by Rourke in *A Conscience as Large as the World* prove his thesis? Rourke contends that "there are fundamental and inherent dimensions of concepts such as the common good, authority, and freedom that render them incompatible with liberalism, even the nuanced version the neoconservatives advance" and that "in defending the liberal political economy the way they do . . . they part company with the Catholic tradition."⁷ In this paper I will examine the arguments put forth by Rourke in defense of his thesis. My primary purpose is not to offer an evaluation of the thought of the neoconservatives but rather to evaluate the merits of Rourke's arguments.

II. Practical Reason

After introducing the major elements of his project in the first chapter, Rourke's second chapter takes up the topic of practical reason, the first of four substantive areas in which he wishes to contrast the thought of Novak, Neuhaus, and Weigel to that of Yves Simon. The central question examined in chapter two is: To what extent does "the neoconservative appeal to practical reason . . . allow for politically relevant moral standards that are external to the social order?"⁸

Rourke begins with a description of the neoconservatives' understanding of practical reason and then offers a summary of Simon's writings on practical reason. In evaluating these two treatments of practical reason he first notes that there is a "broad similarity between the neoconservatives and Simon with respect to practical reason [in that] both acknowledge the centrality of the distinction between theoretical and practical reason."⁹ Rourke explains that "the process of theoretical reason terminates in a proposition, in the assertion of an intelligible necessity, while practical reason terminates in . . . action."¹⁰ These similarities aside, Rourke is mainly concerned with several important differences that emerge upon closer examination.

Rourke believes that the "neoconservatives force the distinction between theoretical and practical reason to the point of concluding that practical reason is incompatible with theoretical reason, . . . [or in the terminology of Simon] the neoconservatives believe that practical reason involves the priority of judgment over concept in an absolute sense."¹¹ By "judgment" Rourke tells us that Simon does not mean just any judgment. It can only be the judgment "of a certain type of person, the one properly disposed by the virtue of practical wisdom."¹² By "concept" Simon means concepts which are morally laden and presuppose an antecedent judgment, for example: "taxation", "assassination", or "theft."¹³ Simon agrees with the neoconservatives that judgment has priority

over concept in practical matters but, unlike the neoconservatives, this priority "never involves the suspension of theoretical reason wherein concept enjoys priority over judgment."¹⁴ Simon states that:

. . . practical judgments were born of judgments about natural finalities, in which the law of concept over judgment fully obtains, for it is by the understanding of nature, by an exact expression of what a nature is and of what it tends to be, that we are led to judgments of finality. All we have to say, in terms of use, about the excellence of intellectual life derives from theoretical judgments of finality concerning human nature and its powers and functions. Clearly, these judgments of finality are themselves derived from apprehensions of natures, of essences, of whatnesses, and of the corresponding tendencies.¹⁵

To some extent, Rourke's use of Simon's judgment/concept distinction may be obscuring his argument. To rephrase the issue, Rourke reads Simon to hold that, although there is a real distinction between practical and theoretical reasoning, the first principles of practical reasoning are supplied by theoretical reasoning. Theoretical reasoning derives the first principles of practical reasoning from the natural law. Once theoretical reasoning has supplied practical reasoning with its first principles, then practical reasoning can apply those principles to concrete situations of human choice. As Rourke explains: "while the formulation of principles *qua* principles belongs to theoretical reason, practical reason recognizes that its judgment must be directed to the fulfillment of these principles."¹⁶

Rourke believes that, in contrast to Simon, the neoconservatives' use of practical reason "tends to jettison theoretical reason"¹⁷ and that by doing so they

. . . loose practical reason from its moorings in the realization of natural finalities. No longer guided by natural law or teleology, practical reason renounces its Aristotelian function as a virtue . . . and becomes the stalwart of what the neoconservatives refer to as democratic capitalism. . . . Practical reason's standard of evaluation becomes consumer satisfaction or, better, the satisfaction of that portion of the population that has the capacity to consume.¹⁸

Rourke admits that the neoconservatives do not "fully address the issue philosophically" but believes that from what they do say it is fair for us to conclude that they "reject the use of theoretical reasoning in practical matters."¹⁹ Rourke is moved to conclude that the neoconservatives, by not providing any "clear link between practical reason and God, . . . unwittingly undermine the sense of the importance of God in the social order."²⁰

In regard to Rourke's critique, two comments are in order. First, going to the various passages in the neoconservative corpus cited by Rourke, which lie primarily in the work of Novak, one gets a different impression of the

neoconservatives' understanding of practical wisdom than the interpretation Rourke puts forth. When Novak speaks of "practical intelligence"²¹ or "practical wisdom,"²² he seems to be speaking not primarily of the ancient distinction between practical and speculative reasoning on which Rourke focuses his critique, but of another crucial point made by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*²³ and commented on favorably by St. Thomas Aquinas in his *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*.²⁴ Aristotle states that:

. . . any discussion on matters of action cannot be more than an outline and it is bound to lack precision . . . one can demand of a discussion only what the subject matter permits, and there are no fixed data in matters concerning action and questions of what is beneficial, any more than there are in matters of health.²⁵ . . . Our discussion will be adequate if it achieves clarity within the limits of the subject matter. For precision cannot be expected in the treatment of all subjects alike, any more than it can be expected in all manufactured articles. . . . For a well-schooled man is one who searches for that degree of precision in each kind of study which the nature of the subject at hand admits.²⁶

This is the passage that Novak has in mind when he states that:

In the name of rationality, socialism misconstrues the nature of practical intelligence. . . [In] Socialism . . . from a few goals (which operate as premises) a planner can deduce practical directives, which in turn will guide every individual action. . . . But as . . . Aquinas (following Aristotle) stressed, there is more than one kind of rationality, and it is a sign of wisdom to choose the appropriate kind for each field of inquiry. In practical affairs . . . the appropriate form of rationality is prudence . . . not geometry.²⁷

Second, even if Rourke is correct in interpreting Novak, the validity of Simon's (and therefore of Rourke's) interpretation of Aquinas' and Aristotle's understanding of the distinction between practical and theoretical reasoning is called into question by a long line of contemporary Catholic scholarship dating back to a landmark article by Germain Grisez in 1965.²⁸ Grisez, frequently in collaboration with Joseph Boyle, Basil Cole, John Finnis, Robert Kennedy, Patrick Lee, William May, and others, has worked to combat the "scholastic natural-law theory."²⁹ Grisez explains that the scholastic natural-law theory "was developed by Francisco Suarez and became dominant in the seventeenth century. Though actually quite different from St. Thomas' understanding of natural law, many believed it to be his position."³⁰ Among the important confusions in the thought of Suarez is his account of the distinction between practical and theoretical reasoning. Grisez discovered that "St. Thomas"³¹ was careful to explain that practical conclusions always must be resolved into practical principles which are distinct from and irreducible to theoretical

ones."³² The first principles of practical reasoning are not inferred, in any way, from prior theoretical principles.³³ To attempt to do so is a formal, logical fallacy for, as Hume proposed (but also as Aquinas and Aristotle held), one cannot deduce an *ought* (a practical or moral principle) from an *is* (a theoretical truth).³⁴

The moral *ought* cannot be derived from the *is* of theoretical truth -- for example of metaphysics and/or philosophical anthropology. Logically, of course, one can derive a moral *ought* from an *is*, whenever the *is* expresses a truth about reality which embodies a moral norm. Thus, from "This *is* the act an honest person would do," one can deduce "This act *ought* to be done." But from a set of theoretical premises, one cannot logically derive any practical truth, since sound reasoning does not introduce what is not in the premises. And the relationship of principles to conclusions is a logical one among propositions. Therefore, the ultimate principles of morality cannot be theoretical truths of metaphysics and/or philosophical anthropology.³⁵

If Novak "parts company with the Catholic tradition" for holding to this understanding of the relationship between practical and theoretical reasoning, as Rourke asserts, it would seem that he has for company many of the leading faithful Catholic scholars of our time. It would seem more accurate to say that Novak remains well within the "Catholic tradition" as it continues to develop and mature.

III. The Political System

In the third chapter, Rourke takes up the topic of the political system, the second substantive area in which he wishes to contrast the thought of Novak, Neuhaus, and Weigel to that of Yves Simon. Rourke begins his evaluation in this area by noting that Novak's efforts to develop the concept of the common good have made a "genuine contribution to the common-good tradition."³⁶ Rourke believes that Novak is correct in claiming that the common good of society can be realized in a diversity of ways, that there is no one unique set of policies that constitute the common good, and that, since the common good must always be open to new possibilities, "it is impossible to realize the material common good in any final sense."³⁷ However, these are something in the way of back-handed compliments in that Rourke also asserts that none of Novak's contributions really contradict any element of the traditional concept of the common good and that, "when [Novak's] new theory [of the common good] does genuinely diverge from the traditional theory, it is on shaky grounds."³⁸

Rourke claims that "one of the theoretical linchpins of Novak's argument is his insistence that the common good materially considered is unknown by any actor, including political authority"³⁹ and therefore "the common good

materially considered should not be willed by anyone."⁴⁰ Rourke further asserts that Novak "leaps to the unwarranted conclusion that . . . the intention of the material common good would necessarily threaten autonomy and the pursuit of personal excellence."⁴¹ These positions clearly contradict the Catholic understanding of the common good and are morally indefensible in that they would leave the poor or the weak at the mercy of the wealthy and the strong.

Fortunately for Michael Novak, he does not have to defend these positions because he does not hold them. None of these alleged positions of Novak is accompanied by an actual citation to something he has written or said. In fact, in the process of commenting favorably on Yves Simon's *Philosophy of Democratic Government*, Novak states in his book, *Free Persons and the Common Good*,⁴²

. . . precisely because not all citizens can know the full material content of the common good . . . there emerges a natural need for organs of national decision making; in short, for authorities of various types, responsible for exercises of expertise and power within a limited range. And, at some points, this veil of ignorance naturally requires the highest authority in the national community (executive or legislative or judicial, as appropriate) to make certain key decisions regarding [the] next practical steps forward.⁴³

Rourke further charges that, "in the end, the neoconservatives fall back on the liberal position that political authority has nothing essential to do with the preservation and promotion of the common good. Or better, the common good is reduced to being an instrument by which particular goods are pursued."⁴⁴ Again, this characterization, unsupported by any citation, is contradicted by a passage from Novak's *Free Persons and the Common Good*. Novak quotes with approval from Jacques Maritain's *The Person and the Common Good* a long list of items which "constitute the common good of a political society . . . [such as] a sound fiscal condition of the state and its military power; the body of just laws, good customs and wise institutions which provide the nation with its structure, . . . cultural treasures, . . . justice, friendship, [and] . . . virtue. . . . For these things all are, in a certain measure, communicable and so revert to each member."⁴⁵

Novak responds directly to this charge in the course of a debate with Rourke in the pages of *The Review of Politics*.⁴⁶ Novak states that "capitalism cannot thrive without a constitutional political order . . . rules, [and] laws."⁴⁷ Also essential to capitalism are such "public goods" entrusted to governmental authority, such as "roads, bridges, harbors, airports, sewage systems, sources of pure drinking water, . . . access to institutions of credit, [and] patent and copyright laws."⁴⁸ He concludes his response with the remark: "The view Rourke attributes to me is in fact repulsive to me."⁴⁹

Rourke's final arguments in this chapter concern the neoconservatives' understanding of freedom and equality. After noting that one of the neoconservatives, George Weigel, believes that there is an obligation to seek the truth, Rourke asks: "Yet, if he thinks there is a truth to be found, then why can this truth have no authority in political affairs? . . . Again, the answer lies in the acceptance [by the neoconservatives] of the liberal bias that the central threat to freedom lies with authority and publicly defined visions of the good life."⁵⁰ Rourke claims that the neoconservatives wish to avoid "a definition of freedom rooted in a common sense of the moral good" and that they have a "relatively passive political attitude toward the disquieting moral arbitrariness pervading public life in liberal societies."⁵¹ But one can judge for oneself as to whether this is really a fair description of their position based on the following representative quotations.

Novak, in his Templeton address entitled "Awakening from Nihilism," stresses that "there are two types of liberty: one . . . emotive, whimsical, proper to children; the other critical, sober, deliberate, responsible, and proper to adults. . . . Lord Acton put it this way: 'Liberty is not the freedom to do what you wish; it is the freedom to do what you ought' . . . Only humans enjoy the liberty to do what we ought to do--or alas, not to do it."⁵² Richard Neuhaus has written: "[t]he common good (emphatically a moral category!) therefore depends upon the vitality of the political and, above all, moral-cultural spheres."⁵³ And he quotes with approval the words of Rocco Buttiglione: "Nothing good can be done without freedom, but freedom is not the highest value in itself. Freedom is given to man in order to make possible the free obedience to truth and free gift of oneself in love."⁵⁴

It is unclear exactly what Rourke has in mind in the way of the practical application of his position. However, in arguing *against* "the liberal assumption of the neutral state that permits the individual [to] search for meaning and value [within] a set of ground rules"⁵⁵ and *for* the exercise of "practical wisdom" by "state" "authority" to promote a "substantive common good,"⁵⁶ he leaves us wondering if he is advocating a confessional state. More likely, he is proposing something more modest. Perhaps Rourke is advocating that

. . . religion and morality are not an alien intrusion upon our public life but the source and foundation of our pursuit of the common good . . . [and that our nation will] ultimately be judged not by [its] military might or economic wealth but by [its] fidelity to "the laws of nature and nature's God". . . . Liberty is not license but is 'ordered liberty'--liberty in response to moral truth. The great threat today is not from enemies abroad but from disordered liberty. . . . We must bring law and public policy into greater harmony with the "laws of nature and of nature's God."⁵⁷

In that case, he is really in agreement with Neuhaus, Novak, and Weigel as the above quote is from the text of a public statement signed by all three of the neoconservatives.

This chapter comes to a sharp end with Rourke charging that "the neoconservatives show themselves to be quite capable of clinging to ideological principle to the point of ignoring considerations as relevant as the perdurance of de facto segregation in the absence of de jure segregation."⁵⁸ These are strong words to use against the neoconservatives, particularly since Fr. Neuhaus has written: "It was a grace of my life to work personally with Dr. [Martin Luther] King for several years as a liaison between his Southern Christian Leadership Conference and other social movements of the time."⁵⁹ However, if by "clinging to ideological principle," Rourke means to criticize the neoconservatives for being opposed to race-based numerical quotas for government and corporate jobs, then it must be granted that he correctly understands their position on this point.

IV. The Economic System

In Chapter Four, Rourke critiques the neoconservatives' understanding of the economic system. Much of this chapter is spent redeploying the arguments from Chapter Three that have already been discussed. Of principal concern to Rourke is the way Novak characterizes the priority of common use over private ownership.

The Catholic Church has long taught that the Seventh Commandment, "You shall not steal,"⁶⁰ not only forbids unjustly taking the goods of one's neighbor but, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*⁶¹ states, also "requires respect for the universal destination of goods and respect for the right of private property."⁶² While "the goods of creation are destined for the whole human race," private property is necessary to "assure the security of [our] lives" not only from "poverty" but also "violence." Private property guarantees the "freedom and the dignity of persons," allows persons to meet their own "basic needs," and allows "for a natural solidarity to develop between men."⁶³

Rourke gives the following description of Novak's position on private property:

Novak characterizes this doctrine as saying that private property is the means and common use is the end. To put this in terms of the distinction between form and matter of the common good, we can say that, for Novak, common use is clearly an expression of the form of the common good. However, the attempt to materialize it is fraught with unresolvable difficulties resulting from differences that arise with respect to how common use can best be brought about. . . . Novak's solution is to suggest that the market system is the best means to promote common use.⁶⁴

Rourke then repeats a substantial part of his critique of Novak's new concept of the common good, adding that, because of the way in which Novak understands the common good, "the universal destination of goods no longer serves as a real, independent standard by which to evaluate the liberal economy."⁶⁵ "Failures to achieve the universal destination of goods are simply assumed to be the failure to implement liberalism."⁶⁶

Rourke's argument raises several difficulties. First, one simply cannot conflate the philosophical distinctions of form/matter and means/end. Second, Rourke's disagreements with Novak over the common good are of questionable relevance for evaluating Novak's position on private property. Novak himself does not mention the common good in the pages cited by Rourke.⁶⁷ Instead Novak concentrates on the various arguments put forth by St. Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologica* in answer to the question, "Whether it is lawful for a man to possess a thing as his own?"⁶⁸ Novak appears to adopt Aquinas' position as his own.

Although Rourke asserts that "the universal destination of goods no longer serves as a . . . standard to evaluate the liberal economy;"⁶⁹ this is precisely the standard both Novak and Aquinas apply. After quoting from three of Aquinas' arguments, Novak summarizes: "If men were angels, the common ownership of the means of production might work, but human experience has taught us that private property is a practical necessity. Having learned these lessons again under 'real existing socialism,' Pope John Paul II has taken pains to spell out St. Thomas' reasoning anew. . . . Nowadays, the resource-rich [former] Soviet Union is a living lesson in the fate of a nation that abandons private property."⁷⁰

In addition to these theoretical concerns, Rourke raises serious questions about the neoconservatives' understanding of capitalism.⁷¹ He believes that "the neoconservatives effectively remove the entire economic sphere from the common good"⁷² and ignore the need for government action to protect against "unequal exchange and illusory services."⁷³ It also seems that the neoconservatives "leave the needy to chance" in that, while it is "acceptable to promote . . . private, mediating institutions, . . . it is altogether different . . . to fail to take responsibility when private associations in fact do not meet existing needs."⁷⁴ Rourke's questions are answered in the following quotation from a document co-authored by Novak:

A just solicitude for the common good and a proper respect for law at times impels the political system to intervene in the economic system. . . . The political system has many wholly legitimate and important economic roles, including care for the truly needy . . . the young, the elderly, the disabled, those visited by sudden misfortune, and many others [who] are permanently or for a time unable to work. In a good society, the moral system and the political system must come to the assistance of such persons in ways the

economic system alone cannot, . . . particularly in its welfare functions, as a last resort, the state is an indispensable institution of the good of society.⁷⁵

What are we to make of Rourke's critique of capitalism in this chapter? If Rourke is claiming that, in the light of Catholic social thought, serious work needs to be done to reform capitalist practices and empower the poor, then he will not get any argument from the neoconservatives. However, if Rourke believes that democratic capitalism as practiced in the United States is, at its very core, a flawed economic system and unredeemable, then the burden is on him to propose an alternative which will better raise up the poor. We know from history that the existing alternatives, such as a socialist regime, a communist regime, or a typical third world regime, will not do this. Should Rourke succeed in this task, and he just may be the person to do it, he will make an important contribution to Catholic social thought which the neo-conservatives will only be able to admire.

V. The Moral-Cultural System

In Chapter Five, the final substantive chapter of his book, Rourke turns his attention to the neoconservative's moral-cultural system and makes four principal arguments. His first concern is that:

Novak's understanding of the free person does not . . . genuinely get beyond a liberal, utilitarian perspective for two reasons. First, Novak's "communitarian individual" . . . is communitarian through voluntary relations . . . [while according to] the Christian understanding, the person is ontologically communal . . . prior to any choice. Second, the Christian understanding of the person recognizes the ontological presence of Christ in all persons. . . . Novak's definition of the person . . . lacks this reference to Christ."⁷⁶ [The neoconservatives' understanding of the person creates] a culture where economic concerns are central [and where relationships are entered into] largely on the basis of calculation.⁷⁷

Again, a few representative passages from the neoconservative corpus can help to put Rourke's concerns to rest. Novak agrees that human persons are created by God as ontologically communal. He states that:

. . . the ultimate ground of the dignity of the human person has two parts: the unalienable responsibility of each person . . . and also the final destination of each [person] in the full insight and love of communion with God. This dignity is at once personal and communal.⁷⁸ Moreover the person is not solitary. . . . It is an error to define the individual without reference to God. . . . The person is *theophanous*: a shining-through of God's life in history, created by God for union with God.⁷⁹

Also, Neuhaus writes, "Our activity as economic man, *homo economicus*, is not the main thing in most of our lives. And for that we can be grateful. But . . . in Christian teaching, this dimension of life, too, should be brought under the lordship of Christ."⁸⁰ Rather than relations based on calculative self-interest, Neuhaus explains that for Christians, "love for the poor is not optional."⁸¹

Second, Rourke questions the neoconservatives' belief that our nation's moral problems are problems of our moral-cultural system. He asks, "Why not say that the economic system is a factor corrupting the moral-cultural system?"⁸² He believes the neoconservatives neither seriously address nor answer this question because they are "apologists for the business class."⁸³ Further, he finds an "implicit ethnocentrism" in the writings of all the "neoconservatives" but believes the problem is most severe in the writings of Novak.⁸⁴ Rourke, in reference to Novak's book *This Hemisphere of Liberty*, states that:

Novak apparently finds nothing unusual in proposing to Latin Americans that their philosophy was in fact written by Adam Smith, James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and other Anglo-Saxon thinkers, with some room for Tocqueville. Perhaps Novak simply thinks that Latin Americans have no authors of their own worth considering except for a few contemporary writers who happen to agree with him.⁸⁵

This argument is somewhat surprising coming from Rourke who just five pages before wrote:

Simon finds it fitting that different peoples and nations fulfill particular dimensions of the good to which human communities should be dedicated. For example, although much can be said for the historical achievements of the Anglo-Saxon peoples, Simon asks, "But who would say that the historical calling of the . . . Spanish-speaking peoples . . . is the same as that of the Anglo-Saxons? . . . Yet it would not be the role of philosophy to deny the unique historical callings of different people."⁸⁶

Rather than labeling the neoconservatives as "ethnocentric," it is more congruent with the above argument to merely recognize, as it seems Simon would, that it may have been the "vocation of a particular people," the Anglo-Saxons, "due to the contingencies of history," to display "a special dedication" to certain "aspects of universal truth and justice," that being the development of economic theory and the study of the causes of the wealth of nations.⁸⁷

As for the origins of the materialism and selfishness which plague the world, Neuhaus writes: "'The market made me do it' becomes another version of 'The devil made me do it.' When. . . [Pope] John Paul criticizes the 'consumerism' of developed societies, he is not criticizing the market, *he is*

criticizing us."⁸⁸ Then Neuhaus quotes directly from John Paul's explanation for the social decadence of the consumer society:⁸⁹

The economy in fact is only one aspect and one dimension of the whole of human activity. If economic life is absolutized, if the production and consumption of goods becomes the center of social life and society's only value . . . the reason is to be found not so much in the economic system itself as in the fact that the entire socio-cultural system, by ignoring the ethical and religious dimension, has been weakened.⁹⁰

Rourke's third criticism is that the neoconservatives have dissented from the Church's social teachings in the past, read *Centesimus Annus* selectively and in isolation from the preceding tradition, and ignored the differences between "the principles that the Pope supports and capitalism as it actually exists."⁹¹ At least in regard to the charge of reading selectively, Rourke substantially proves his argument against one of the neoconservatives, Richard Neuhaus. Neuhaus momentarily confuses his own writing style with John Paul II's when he characterizes one passage of *Centesimus Annus* as having "all the appearances of a throwaway line" and that it is "most likely a vestigial rhetorical fragment that somehow wandered into the text."⁹² In the passage in question, John Paul II teaches that providing the poor with realistic opportunities "may mean making important changes in established lifestyles, in order to limit the waste of environmental and human resources thus enabling every individual and all the peoples of the earth to have a sufficient share of these resources."⁹³ To what extent this solitary example evidences more serious problems in Neuhaus' work is an open question.

Rourke's final argument concerns what he sees as the neoconservatives' "commitment to liberalism's version of cultural pluralism and the freedom to reject moral truth" which prevents them from calling for a Christian culture.⁹⁴ It is difficult to know what to make of this criticism. Is Rourke calling for a society where there is no freedom to reject the truth or for the elimination of cultural pluralism? Should governmental authority be used to promote transcendent moral and religious truths? Yves Simon, for all his respect for authority, answers the last question in the negative. Simon states that:

Promoting the order of truth in the social life . . . is the highest function of the civil community. It is not a function which admits of bureaucratic methods. . . . From this consideration it may follow that problems of truth often call for a sharp distinction between the state and the civil, or temporal, society. . . . When a function is directly exercised by the state . . . it is inevitably exposed to what is damaging in bureaucracy. We can reasonably conclude that in most cases the loftier problems of truth . . . should not directly concern the state apparatus. . . . The state . . . will discharge its duty best by concerning itself indirectly with such things as the maintenance and promotion of transcendent

truth. Bureaucracy should deal with problems that are not so lofty and do not pertain so directly to the deep life of our souls."⁹⁵

VI. Conclusion

In *A Conscience as Large as the World*, Thomas Rourke offers us a comprehensive critique of the thought of the Catholic neoconservatives in contrast to the philosophy of Yves Simon. What are we to make of Rourke's critique? Although Rourke has not proved his thesis that "in defending the liberal political economy the way they do [the neoconservatives] part company with the Catholic tradition,"⁹⁶ he has produced an important book which advances Simon scholarship.

As Rourke notes, Michael Novak draws explicitly and extensively on the work of Yves Simon and Simon's teacher and colleague Jacques Maritain in formulating his own understanding of the common good.⁹⁷ Novak wrote *Free Persons and the Common Good*⁹⁸ in honor of the fortieth anniversary of Maritain's *The Person and the Common Good* and, least there be any doubt about his devotion to Maritain, the dedication of the book reads "In Homage to Jacques Maritain." Further, the book's index lists no fewer than twelve entries under Simon's name⁹⁹ and the final portion of the book gives an extended, favorable treatment of Simon's *Philosophy of Democratic Government*.

The evident disagreement between Rourke and Novak in interpreting the work of Simon is just that, an interpretative disagreement. What we have here then may be taken as a sign of the coming of age of Simon scholarship. Certainly Simon's work is deep enough to support multiple interpretations. Rather than see Novak's work in opposition to the Catholic tradition, as Rourke does, the debate can more fairly be characterized as an interpretative disagreement over the implications of Yves Simon's thought for our present day world. Likewise, a similar analysis can be applied to the thought of Neuhaus and Weigel. Although they may have a different interpretation of the liberal tradition than Rourke, this hardly places them outside the Catholic tradition. The disagreements here involve matters of prudence, not dogmas of the faith.

Rourke obviously has the talent to make important contributions to the Catholic project of reforming the political, economic, and moral-cultural systems of the United States. Such reforms would move these institutions into greater conformity with both the natural law and the Church's preferential option for the poor. In this Catholic project, although their methods and prudential judgments might differ, Rourke, Neuhaus, Weigel, and Novak stand as close allies in contrast to the rest of the American political spectrum.

Notes

1. This article was substantially improved through the assistance of Dina C. Barron.
2. Thomas R. Rourke, *A Conscience as Large as the World: Yves R. Simon versus the Catholic Neoconservatives* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997).
3. *Ibid.*, ix.
4. Rourke, *Conscience*, ix.
5. Yves R. Simon, *A General Theory of Authority* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980).
6. *Ibid.*, 12.
7. Rourke, *Conscience*, xi-xii.
8. *Ibid.*, 32.
9. *Ibid.*, 53.
10. *Ibid.*, 42.
11. *Ibid.*, 53.
12. *Ibid.*, 46.
13. *Ibid.*, 45.
14. *Ibid.*, 53.
15. Yves Simon, *The Tradition of Natural Law* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992), 67; cited in Rourke, *Conscience*, 49.
16. Rourke, *Conscience*, 58.
17. *Ibid.*, 53.
18. *Ibid.*, 64.
19. *Ibid.*, 53.
20. *Ibid.*, 60.
21. Michael Novak, *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: The Free Press, 1993), 46.
22. Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982), 96.
23. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Ostwald (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1962).
24. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. C. I. Litzinger (Notre Dame: Dumb Ox Books, 1993), 11, 88-9.
25. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 35; (1104a1-5).
26. *Ibid.*, 5; (1094b12-25).
27. Novak, *Catholic Ethic*, 46.
28. Germain Grisez, "The First Principle of Practical Reason," *Natural Law Forum* 10(1965): 168-201.
29. Germain Grisez, *Christian Moral Principles* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983), 104.
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Summa Theologica*, 1, q. 79, a.12; 1-2, q. 94, a.2; 2-2, q.47,a. 6.
32. Grisez, *Christian Moral Principles*, 122.
33. See, Robert P. George, *Making Men Moral* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 13.
34. See, John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 47.

35. Grisez, Boyle and Finnis, "Practical Principles, Moral Truth, and Ultimate Ends," *The American Journal of Jurisprudence* 32 (1987), 101-2.
36. Rourke, *Conscience*, 111.
37. *Ibid.*, 115.
38. *Ibid.*, 114.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*, 118.
41. *Ibid.*, 121.
42. Michael Novak, *Free Persons and the Common Good* (Lanham: Madison Books, 1989).
43. *Ibid.*, 183-4.
44. Rourke, *Conscience*, 121.
45. Michael Novak, *Free Persons*, 181.
46. Michael Novak, "A 'Catholic Whig' Replies," *The Review of Politics* 58, no. 2 (Spring, 1996): 259-64.
47. *Ibid.*, 264.
48. *Ibid.*
49. *Ibid.*
50. Rourke, *Conscience*, 125.
51. *Ibid.*, 126.
52. Novak, "A 'Catholic Whig' Replies," 262-3.
53. Richard John Neuhaus, *Doing Well and Doing Good* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 59.
54. *Ibid.*, 169.
55. Rourke, *Conscience*, 124.
56. *Ibid.*, 127-8.
57. "We Hold These Truths," *First Things* 76 (October, 1997), 51-4.
58. Rourke, *Conscience*, 131.
59. Neuhaus, *Doing Well*, 6.
60. Ex. 20:15; Deut. 5:19; Mt. 19:18.
61. This discussion is drawn from, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), 577-582; CCC 2401-2406.
62. *The Catechism*, 577; CCC 2401-2402.
63. *Ibid.*
64. Rourke, *Conscience*, 174.
65. Rourke shifts, without explanation, from a discussion of Novak's defense of private property to the "liberal economy." In the process he either simply changes subjects or is equating the two for purposes of this discussion. For purposes of my argument, I presume the latter.
66. Rourke, *Conscience*, 176.
67. *Ibid.*, 190, note 1; 195, note 86; both citing Novak, *Catholic Ethic*, 149-51.
68. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 66, art. 2. (In the notes of *Catholic Ethic* Novak mistakenly cites this passage, in two notes, as "*Summa Theologica*, I-II, q.66, art. 2.")
69. Rourke, *Conscience*, 176.
70. Novak, *Catholic Ethic*, 150-51.

71. Rourke, *Conscience*, 178.
72. Ibid., 177.
73. Ibid., 165-69, 187, 184.
74. Ibid., 182.
75. Lay Commission on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy, *Toward the Future* (New York: Lay Commission, 1984), 11, 32-33. Cited in Novak, *Catholic Ethic*, 217.
76. Rourke, *Conscience*, 231.
77. Ibid.
78. Novak, *Free Persons*, 31-32.
79. Ibid., 35.
80. Neuhaus, *Doing Well*, 25.
81. Ibid., 210.
82. Rourke, *Conscience*, 234.
83. Ibid.
84. Ibid., 235.
85. Ibid.
86. Ibid., 230-31. The passage Rourke quotes is from Yves Simon's *The Tradition of Natural Law* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992), 26.
87. Yves Simon, *The Tradition*, 26.
88. Neuhaus, *Doing Well*, 206.
89. Ibid. I have enlarged the portion of the encyclical cited here for purposes of clarity.
90. *Centesimus Annus*, #39.
91. Rourke, *Conscience*, 236-37.
92. Neuhaus, *Doing Well*, 224; commenting on *Centesimus Annus*, #52.
93. *Centesimus Annus*, #52.
94. Rourke, *Conscience*, 238.
95. Yves Simon, *A General Theory of Authority* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), 129-30.
96. Rourke, *Conscience*, xi-xii.
97. Ibid., 73-74.
98. Michael Novak, *Free Persons and the Common Good* (Lanham: Madison Books, 1989).
99. Ibid., 227.