

Marley asked Ebenezer Scrooge: Is not mankind a Christian's business?

The Whig party lasted only a few years after Clay's death, probably because too many Whigs capitulated on slavery. In contrast, Democrats were as unflinchingly dedicated to the pro-slavery platform during Clay's time as they are to the pro-abortion agenda today. The present day Republican vacillation on abortion is readily apparent by the fact that though Republicans make up a slight majority in the United States Senate, on October 21, 1999 that body affirmed, in a first-ever non-binding resolution, the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision that legalized abortion. Republican ambivalence on abortion is reminiscent of Whig equivocation on slavery, and one wonders if the Republican party will go the way of the Whig party and the dinosaur.

If the issue of slavery brought out the limits of Clay's statesmanship, the crisis of nullification revealed the serious statesman in him. Clay realized that Calhoun's theory of nullification, which held that any one state is constitutionally authorized to set aside a law made by the national government if that state considers the law unconstitutional, "embodied the spirit of despotism," as Shankman puts it, insofar as it made "the will of one state superior to that of the people as a whole" (70). The despotic spirit is still with us but in different forms. Approximately sixty years ago, the United States Supreme Court created a novel constitutional category called "civil liberties." Under this conception of liberty, an individual who might find offensive the public expression of widely held communal religious beliefs, is permitted to trump, and thereby to prohibit, the expression of those beliefs in the public square. While some Americans in Clay's time supposed that the will of a single state trumped that of the people as a whole, today an even greater number of our fellow citizens are given the green light by the judiciary to behave as if the will of an individual is superior to that of the majority of the community.

-John Stack

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#### *Notes*

1. Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 124.

2. Quoted from *The Life and Speeches of the Hon. Henry Clay*, ed. Daniel Mallory (New York: Barnes and Burr, 1860), vol. 2, p. 609.

3. *Ibid.*

**Philosopher at Work: Essays by Yves R. Simon. Ed. by Anthony O. Simon. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999. 240 pp. \$22.95 Softcover.**

This publication is a compilation of several short articles that first appeared in academic journals and books. Although Simon gained most of his reputation

in the field of political thought, this compilation concentrates on his scholarship in other areas of philosophy, specifically the metaphysics of knowledge. Even though the publication of these articles spans almost twenty years and covers a wide range of topics, from the rationality of Christian faith to the problem of understanding sensation, there are two overarching themes that unite the articles. First, the assumption of a radical conflict between different methods of understanding, such as positive science and metaphysics, is artificial. Instead, the various articles discuss how in the quest for knowledge, truth, or understanding, these methods can be complementary. Second, the philosopher's calling, the search for the knowledge of truth, can be better understood when one inquires into the being or metaphysics of knowledge. Simon argues that philosophy is not the pursuit of satisfied intellect; it is related to our knowledge of both physical and human nature. Ultimately, for Simon, what unites all knowledge from the cognition of physical experience to the abstraction of this knowledge through philosophy is the glimpse, however briefly and imperfectly, of the first absolute.

The first four articles in this compilation deal with topics most applicable to social and political thought. They are also the most accessible to novices and deal with subject matter appealing to the broadest audience. The first article, "The Philosopher's Calling," inquires into the role of contemplation in a culture that equates knowledge with demonstrative certainty and control over nature. The remaining articles build on this foundation. The second article, "The Concept of Work," addresses the question: what kind of an activity is contemplation. This second article is the most engaging and relevant to political thought. Ironically considering the title, Simon argues that contemplation is not "work" in the true meaning of the term, since it is a motionless activity with no usefulness outside itself. Yet, contemplation need not be in opposition to work that concerns human mastery over physical nature, whether it is the archetype of work, human labor, or technical thinking. For Simon, the control over physical nature is a good thing, but it begs the question as to whether it is the best possible thing.

The following two articles, "Maritain's Philosophy of the Sciences" and "The Rationality of the Christian Faith," question the limitations of the quest for demonstrative certainty. The article on the philosophy of science examines the reduction of positivistic thinking in terms of mathematical measurement. The article on Christian faith, the most directly theological discussion in the compilation, also discusses the limitations of demonstrative certainty to addressing the knowledge of faith. Simon masterfully explains how the inability of theology to fit into a system of demonstrative certainty reveals not a deficiency in the rationality of faith, but within the rationality of certainty.

The subsequent three articles on sensation, mathematical abstraction and order in analogical sets fit into the overall theme of the compilation by

addressing the metaphysical question of what is this knowledge to which philosophers are called. Although the book is intended to be an introduction to Simon's thought, even for beginners, the material in these articles is much more difficult and abstract. For the initiated reader or beginner who perseveres the often difficult vocabulary and concepts of the metaphysics of knowledge, Simon presents a comprehensive and thorough examination. These articles encompass the thought of philosophers ranging from the Epicureans and Aristotle to St. Thomas, Descartes, Auguste Comte and Bertrand Russell.

The longest and most difficult article in the compilation, "An Essay on Sensation," is a detailed journey through various philosophical explanations of physical experience. Simon emphasizes the complexity of sensation and the difficulty of positing sense experience as a guarantee of truthfulness, both in a science which relies on physical measurement and a first acquaintance with the absolute. Simon emphasizes the crucial difference between sensing an object and imaging, understanding or constructing it. The next two articles elucidate this complicated distinction with a discussion of mathematical abstraction and analogical sets. The article on mathematical abstraction discusses various philosophers' perceptions of the physical world or physics, mathematics and logical thought. Simon continues this discussion of the relation between the physical world and abstraction in the next article on analogical order. By analogical, Simon means the Greek analogia or proportion. To order something, through mathematics or analogy, is to abstract or pull out similar things from what is different. Such ordering moves the mind to ever-improved knowledge and clarity, but more importantly for Simon it is vital to knowledge of perfection and of God.

The final article, "To Be and To Know," brings the reader full circle back to an explication of the philosopher's true calling; Simon reiterates the distinction between an intellectual who seeks honor and self-satisfaction in clever logical systems and the philosopher who seeks only to know. The circular nature of the compilation reveals both the scope and depth of Simon's scholarship and the careful selection of articles by the editor. Throughout this short publication, Simon identifies limitations of the modern understanding of knowledge and skillfully reunites his readers with examples of alternatives. Although the complexity of certain topics may be beyond the capacity of novice readers, this compilation provides inspiration to those beginning the quest for knowledge and an admonition to the intellectual who has become jaded along the way.

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