



SIMON, Yves René, *The Road to Vichy, 1918-1938*

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Yves R. SIMON, *The Road to Vichy, 1918–1938*, revised edition, translated by James A. Corbett and George J. McMorrow, introduction by John Hellman, Washington, D.C., University Press of America, 1988, 212 pages (21.5 × 13 cm).

Simon's impassioned account of the twists and turns of thought which led France to the disaster of 1940, written from the safety of Notre Dame, Indiana with the facts fresh in his mind, and first published in 1942 is, even on its surface, an intriguing socio-political document. It is more interesting still with John Hellman's new introduction. Hellman reveals the soul-searching of the philosopher in exile whose political hopes had foundered and whose physical limitations forced him to the sidelines.

Simon described himself as a disciple of Jacques Maritain and claimed to be the "only *sans culotte*" who, since 1922, had committed himself to Maritain's philosophy. There was a Proudhonist streak to Simon's thought, and it was the Maritain of *L'Humanisme intégral* who moved him most. Within that context he was an orthodox Thomist. He was troubled that it proved possible to be a Thomist and still be swept away by the ideas of Vichy. Indeed, Maritain is quoted by Hellman as describing Réginald Marie Garrigou-Lagrange who, for many people, was the incarnation of Thomist orthodoxy, as "valiantly fighting for Vichy". After 1940, the problem was to find out what had gone wrong, and then to try to relate the Vichy disaster to its philosophical underpinnings.

Most of this book is dedicated to the question of what went wrong. The philosophical underpinnings turn up clearly only in the last two chapters, and then they are not completely exposed. But the hints, together with Hellman's introduction (which draws on Simon's correspondence and other sources), begin to give us an idea of the issues.

In 1940 at least Simon sought the explanation in a pattern of ideas. In the 1920s he himself had taken part in the attempt to persuade the French that the Germans were not essentially evil. He was opposed by the traditional French right wing, a political grouping which included many, though by no means all, French Catholics. In the 1930s Simon was trying to persuade his countrymen to mobilize against the Nazi threat. He was opposed by exactly the people who had earlier been appalled by every attempt at friendship with the Germans.

Simon ascribes the initial hostility to Germans in general to a misguided kind of nationalism. The French failure to respond to the Nazis he ascribes above all to the principle that "my enemies' enemies are my friends". The Catholic right opposed communism and so did the Nazis in Germany and the fascists in Italy and Spain. There seemed to be a common cause.

But how could people with strong (and often well-thought-out) ideological positions be taken in by such simplicities? The answer which Simon gives has to do with French history. The anticlerical turn which the French Revolution took and the responses of the church over 140 years created a situation in which churchmen commonly opposed the ideals of the Revolution and democrats opposed religion. Simon could see that the connection between the egalitarian and democratic ideals of the French revolution and serious Christian doctrine was one of natural harmony not contradiction, but the accidents of history had impressed the

opposition on the French mind in a way which could not be quickly overcome by philosophers like Maritain. Nor, in Simon's view, was the anticlerical left in any position to do better. It could govern but it could only do so by adopting bland and ultimately empty policies around which men and women of very different aims and outlooks could temporarily assemble themselves.

If one looks at political life in France in the 1930s one may suspect ideological bankruptcy, but in fact French intellectual life was unusually healthy. In philosophy the men of the hour — Bergson, Brunschvicg, Maritain and Lavelle amongst them — could stand comparison with those of any other period of modern French thought and those waiting in the wings — Sartre, Simone Weil, and Merleau-Ponty, for instance — could surely stand considerable scrutiny. There were even interesting dark horses like Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. For all the impression Simon gives of the shambles of French intellectual life as it bore on politics, Simon predicted in his last chapter that future thinkers would one day discover the real value of the philosophies of the period. Two things were lacking in the 1930s: enough time for political rethinking to become effective and a current of persuasive philosophical argument which could unite the intellectual community. The 20 years between the two world wars were simply not enough.

Simon constantly laments the divisions amongst French Catholics, though apart from some examination of the behavioural peculiarities of the Action Française movement, he does not provide very much detail. Clearly, a few Catholics were still dreaming of a monarchy and others saw their religion as an opportunity to protect a social order which continued their class privileges. Many more, evidently, were preoccupied by the danger to their religious practice and daily life which was posed by communism. It was fear and not the hope of what might be obtained by the kinds of relations with the church which Mussolini and Franco had developed which provoked sympathy for French Catholicism's "enemies' enemies".

Simon's text does not, however, express the outrage which Hellman reports (from Simon's correspondence with Maritain) that both he and Maritain felt at people like Garrigou-Lagrange. Garrigou-Lagrange had seemingly signed up St. Thomas under the Vichy banner, thereby bringing into disrepute the very ideas which Simon and Maritain hoped to use to bring sanity to the world. Hellman reports that Simon and Maritain believed that the sickness had spread to America and they "agreed that a pernicious tone of anti-Semitism had even crept into the pages of the *Modern Schoolman*".

Simon leaves his readers with the assurance that his own political principles are not open to this kind of corruption, but he did not at that moment of history dig back into the writings of St. Thomas to expose the basic issues. Hellman raises the question of the real political meaning of Thomism without explicitly answering it.

Does it have an answer? In 1940 Simon published his Marquette University Aquinas Lecture as *The Nature and Function of Authority*. As far as he could in a rather small compass, he distinguished real authority from anarchy and tyranny. Thomism he believed could sustain a social order which was not oppressive. His later book, *General Theory of Authority*, however, was not published until 1962, the year after his death.

In it he tried to associate the claims of authority with the notion of the common good, and his views have a good deal in common with those of Charles De Koninck who, not long after Simon wrote his *Road to Vichy*, was beginning work on his *Primauté du bien commun* (1943) which dug deeply into the texts of St. Thomas in the hope of an answer.

De Koninck and Simon corresponded quite extensively and, in De Koninck's book, we can see the roots of some of the troubles of the 1930s in a way which illumines both the book under review and Simon's later work. De Koninck emphasises that there is an egalitarian and democratic kernel to Thomistic political thought which takes its roots in two propositions: One

is the equal and ultimate value of all human persons. The other is the notion that God means us to act freely since he means, as St. Thomas says, to save us by our own free will. At the same time, however, the individual is bound by a common good which compels him to seek not simply his own well being and not, certainly, the development of his own "personality", but the balanced well-being of the whole of creation, each element of which has a function in the divine plan. There is thus a fine balance. One is entitled to one's freedom, for it is free action which ultimately counts. But we need a social order which makes it possible to exercise this freedom constructively and not one which encourages mere license. What is more, of course, since human beings have been vouchsafed a measure of revelation as well as a measure of reason and since the church is the bearer of that revelation, church government is not wholly accounted for by the democracy of natural reason. In producing a simplified and securely "intelligible" St. Thomas, thinkers like Garrigou-Lagrange tended to blunt these distinctions, conceding too much to the wrong kind of authority and confusing the legitimate demands of the common good with the agencies through which this good might be expressed.

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Jean GRONDIN, *Le tournant dans la pensée de Martin Heidegger*, Coll. « Épiméthée », Paris, P.U.F., 1987, 136 pages (21.5 × 15 cm).

Le livre de Jean Grondin représente une contribution de très grande valeur à la question controversée de la *Kehre* dans l'œuvre de Martin Heidegger. Bien que cette question ait été amplement débattue, au point de lasser Heidegger lui-même, J.G. soutient qu'elle « n'a à peu près jamais été abordée d'une façon qui soit philologiquement et philosophiquement satisfaisante » (p. 12). L'auteur compte y remédier en dissociant la question du tournant de celle de l'évolution de la pensée de Heidegger. La fécondité de son point de vue se révèle dans les résultats qu'il obtient. Mais on peut d'emblée soupçonner les limites d'une telle approche, surtout dans le cas de Heidegger.

La complexité de la *Kehre*, que le français « tournant » traduit le mieux, laissant indéterminé l'angle du virage opéré par le chemin de pensée de Heidegger (p. 11), nous est d'abord livrée en un « premier parcours philologique » (chap. 1). L'examen minutieux de la « Lettre sur l'humanisme », de la « Lettre à Richardson », et de la conférence « De l'essence de la vérité », trois documents où Heidegger fait explicitement mention du tournant, fournit de précieux renseignements, non sans montrer un certain fouillis dû à Heidegger lui-même. J.G., à la manière d'un détective, accumule les pièces à conviction : 1) Heidegger situe lui-même le tournant vers 1937 ; 2) le tournant a trait à la *Sachverhalt* (p. 24), que J.G. traduit par « la relation à la chose ». Le tournant n'est donc pas seulement, ni même en premier lieu, un événement biographique, mais un tournant « objectif » ou thématique (*sachlich*). 3) Le tournant n'est pas une modification du point de vue de « Être et temps ». Voilà qui surprend, mais qui s'explique en partie par ce qui suit : 4) le tournant, selon la « Lettre sur l'humanisme », a lieu dans la section « Temps et être », troisième section de la première partie de *Être et temps*, mais celle-ci n'a jamais été publiée. Heidegger invoque un échec de la pensée de ce tournant, dû principalement à la « langue de la métaphysique » que *Être et temps*, présument, parlait toujours, malgré son projet (resté lettre morte) de « destruction de l'ontologie ». J.G. baptise cette « version officielle » (p. 24) du tournant de « Être et temps » à « Temps et être » : tournant « onto-chronique ». Il faut croire ce tournant prévu dans l'architecture même de *Être et temps*, donc bien avant 1937. Heidegger indique dans les lettres à Beaufret et à Richardson que des indices sur la pensée du tournant