

# THE CONCEPT OF THE COMMON GOOD IN THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF YVES SIMON

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**Abstract:** The concept of the common good occupies a central place in the political philosophy of Yves Simon. Drawing heavily from the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, Simon develops a nuanced understanding of political society that seeks to reconcile individual freedom with the collective welfare of the community. This study examines Simon's conception of the common good, its philosophical foundations, and its significance for contemporary political thought. It argues that Simon's understanding of the common good transcends purely utilitarian or collectivist interpretations by presenting it as a moral and social reality that enables the flourishing of both individuals and society as a whole.

The paper begins by exploring the intellectual influences that shaped Simon's political philosophy, particularly the works of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. It highlights Simon's conviction that political authority exists not merely to preserve order or protect individual rights but to promote the conditions necessary for the realization of human dignity and virtue. In this framework, the common good is understood as a shared good that can be enjoyed by all members of the political community without diminishing the freedom or well-being of any individual.

Furthermore, the study analyzes Simon's critique of modern individualism and totalitarianism. While rejecting the excessive emphasis on self-interest characteristic of liberal individualism, Simon equally opposes political systems that subordinate the person entirely to the state. Instead, he proposes a balanced vision in which the human person and the political community are mutually dependent. The common good thus serves as a principle of unity that harmonizes personal development with social responsibility.

The paper also investigates the practical implications of Simon's theory for democratic governance, civic participation, and social justice. It demonstrates how his conception of the common good provides an ethical foundation for political institutions and public policies aimed at fostering solidarity, cooperation, and human flourishing. In an era marked by political polarization, social fragmentation, and competing conceptions of the public interest, Simon's thought offers valuable insights into the relationship between individual rights and communal obligations.

Ultimately, this study concludes that Yves Simon's understanding of the common good remains a significant contribution to political philosophy, providing a compelling framework for addressing contemporary political and social challenges while preserving both personal dignity and the welfare of the community.

**Keywords:** Common Good, Yves Simon, Political Philosophy, Democracy, Human Dignity, Social Justice, Thomism, Political Community, Civic Responsibility, Aristotelian Tradition.

## Introduction

The concept of the Common Good (*Bonum Commune*) is traceable to the political thoughts of Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas. With these diverse origins of the concept, many shades of meaning have been attached to the term the common good. Given that the very concept of the common good has various moral and ethical connotations, some philosophers like Niccolo Machiavelli whose main intention is to separate morality from politics would normally not think that the concept of the common good should be given a serious treatment. However, scholars like Virginia Held and especially Yves R. Simon who is our major source of inspiration in this paper considers the common good as found at the heart of a thorough going political system. In this paper, we will argue that that Simon adequately reconciles the

difficulty of having particular goods coexist and compliment the common good. In effect, we will maintain that the stress on the common good does not interfere or violate the personal or individual goods. Also we are not going to maintain that the concept of the common good is an aggregate of the private goods like John Locke holds<sup>1</sup> or as Thomas Hobbes conceives as the "avoidance of a breach of the peace and the promotion of the security of man's person in his life and in the means of possessing life"<sup>2</sup>, or like Jeremy Bentham who sees the common good as the

<sup>1</sup> John Locke in Leo Strauss, *Natural Rights and History*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press 1949, 243.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *The Elements of Law: Natural and Politic*, London: Frank Cass & Co, Ltd, 1969, 188.

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sum of all the members who make up that community<sup>3</sup>, but we will maintain with Simon that the common good calls for communion in desire and action. This cannot be understood only in terms of material and individual interests. Rather because of the fact that the human being is a person, the concept of the common good has strong moral and spiritual undertones both as a reality (normative standards) and project, that is, an ideal to be pursued.

With Simon's consideration in mind, we will find out whether the Common Good is fundamentally opposed to personal goods? Is the Common Good basically a sum total of the private goods? Does the stress on the Common Good relegate the personal good to the background? We will consider the origins of the idea of the Common Good elaborated in ancient Greek and Medieval thoughts. The idea behind this snappy historico-philosophical survey is to anchor and indicate the sources of Simon's inspiration, which will help us to better establish Simon's originality and contributions. We will now turn to the origin of the concept of the Common Good. We will start with the classical and medieval sources.

## I. The Classical and Medieval Notions of the Common Good

It is sometimes the case that certain expressions or phrases are so frequently used that we take for granted that we understand their real meaning. This is the case with words like the Common Good.<sup>4</sup> To better understand this term, we will turn to its classical and medieval meanings.

### I.I. Plato on the Common Good

In the *Laws*, Plato eliminates certain ends as not belonging to the common good of the city. He says the city cannot exist to benefit the ruler and his associates. If such a city exists it is not a polis but a "faction city" (*stasioteia*)<sup>5</sup>. In *The Republic*, he lays it down that the ruler should establish in this world the laws of the Beautiful, the Just and the Good<sup>6</sup> and that all education in the polis must be molding souls and controlling appetites<sup>7</sup>. In the *Laws*, Plato is consistent in identifying the common goods (Health, wealth, peace) and divine goods that is wisdom, temperance, justice and courage.<sup>8</sup> From an initial position of prosperity rule by a wise philosopher-king in the *Republic*, the common good is henceforth to be assured by just laws. Plato's contributions leads us to the Aristotelian considerations.

### I.II. Aristotelian intimations of the Common Good

Aristotle (348-322B.C) most often uses the expressions *sumpheron koinon* (Common Advantage) and only rarely *agathon koinon* (Common Good) to emphasize the fact that the good is good for someone and not just in the manner of a transcendent Platonic

good.<sup>9</sup> Having read Plato's *Laws* to which he specifically refers in Book II of the *Politics 1265a*-, he agrees with him that the pursuit of virtue is the common good. The end of the individual is the happy life in community, according to just laws.<sup>10</sup> Thus "any state that is truly so called and is not a state merely in name must pay attention to virtue<sup>11</sup>, that is why he also writes that it is more "godlike" (*theioteion*) to obtain and preserve the good of the whole community, for the individual is an integral part of the community.<sup>12</sup> The nature of the governing regime (*politeia*) of the polis determines its common good. Since the regime is the "form" of the city just as the soul is the form of the body.<sup>13</sup> It makes a difference to the common good whether the ruler knows and has wisdom (aristocracy) or whether he lacks it (tyranny, democracy, oligarchy).<sup>14</sup> Aristotle does not posit any conflict between the common advantage and particular goods because the common advantage includes the interests of particular citizens but between the common advantage and the private interests of those in power depending on the nature of the *politeia*.<sup>15</sup> For Aristotle, the reason why the common advantage does not conflict with the particular interests is because the common good is rooted in an account of human nature that characterizes man as a rational and political animal. In this light, it is understood from the Aristotelian articulations that one's development into a human person is to pursue happiness (*eudaimonia*), a life of rational actions which is made possible by a complex of relationships to other persons often structured as associations or communities for the pursuit of goods common to many persons.<sup>16</sup> That human beings are rational, means that they act for reasons. These reasons are not justifications but causes. The basic meaning of goods is that of something which is desirable. The discussions of these classical intimations of the common good take us to a brief consideration of Aquinas' idea of the common good.

### I.III. Aquinas on the Common Good

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) is mainly indebted to Aristotle and Augustine for his views on the common good. The difference between Aristotle and Aquinas on the common good is that for Aristotle, the common good does not transcend the temporal sphere. For Aquinas like for Augustine, society is ordained to the heavenly city and to God.<sup>17</sup> Talking about the common good in Aquinas, Gregory Froelich distinguishes three senses: Firstly, the common good refers to goods that are common by predication, that

<sup>3</sup> Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, New York, Hafner 1948, 3, I. IV-V.

<sup>4</sup> Yves R. Simon, *Freedom and Community* (ed.) Charles P. O'Donnell, New York, Fordham University Press 2001, x-xi.

<sup>5</sup> Plato, *Laws* 832b; See also 715b.

<sup>6</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, (trs). Paul Storey in Plato: *The Collected Dialogues* (ed.) Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns Princeton; Princeton University Press 1996) 721. See also *The Republic* 484c-d

<sup>7</sup> George Klosko, *The Development of Plato's Political Theory* New York; Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1986) 101-113.

<sup>8</sup> Plato, *Laws* 631b-632d. See also 630c, 705d-706a, 707d; 763a).

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. Micheal A. Smith, *Human Dignity and the Common Good in the Aristotelian-Thomistic Tradition* (Queenston, Ontario: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995, 62-64.

<sup>10</sup> Aristotle, *The Politics*, 1179b31-1180a13.

<sup>11</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, (trs) H. Rackham (Cambridge Harvard University Press 1932) 205, 1280b5

<sup>12</sup> Micheal smith A. *Human Dignity and the Common Good in the Aristotelian-Thomistic Tradition*, Queenston, Ontario: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995, 59.

<sup>13</sup> Mary, M. Keys "Politics pointing Beyond the Polis and the Politeia: Aquinas on Natural Law and the Common Good" in *Natural Moral Law in Contemporary Society*, ed. Holger Zaborowski, Washington D.C, The Catholic University of America Press, 2010, 180.

<sup>14</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, 3,4.

<sup>15</sup> Smith, *Human Dignity and the Common Good in Aristotelian-Thomistic Tradition*, 59, 66.

<sup>16</sup> John Paul II, *Memory and identity, Conversations at the Dawn of millennium*, New York, Rizzoli, 2005, 41. 131.

<sup>17</sup> Smith, *Human Dignity and the Common Good in the Aristotelian-Thomistic Tradition*, 71-72; 81-82.

is things that are potentially and in the abstract good from anyone like food, money, exercise and knowledge. These are goods in the sense that certain characteristics are common to human beings and thus a part of human nature. Secondly, these are goods that are real but not abstract but actually owned by everyone although not enjoyed by anyone in particular unless distributed to them from a common stock at which point they become private. For example the government can own land which is for all the citizens. The government can now decide to distribute it to individuals in which case it becomes private land. The land is common in the sense of being a common stock but once distributed by the government, it becomes private property. The third sense, is that a thing can be common to real individual persons by causality. This is true of any cause which while remaining numerically one, extends to many effects.<sup>18</sup> The common good of a football team is victory and while victory is one, it is also victory for each particular footballer. So for Aquinas, the particular order of a team is also a common good in this sense. It is the complete internal order of a political community which like this order of the army is both one and is also good for each other.

In the light of the above, Aquinas proposes a new foundation for political virtues based on natural law.<sup>19</sup> For Aquinas, natural law reveals important truths about life and political actions and thus about the common good by making people aware of their citizenship in a universal community under God or the ethical requirements of human sociality.<sup>20</sup> Mary Keys points out that this is Aquinas<sup>21</sup> answer to the dichotomy between being a good citizen and being a good human being.<sup>22</sup>

In the classical and medieval periods, the stress on the place of human nature is pivotal. It is this nature that takes cognizance of man's basic worth. In the modern period, the stress shifts from nature to contracts. This is why for Thomas Hobbes, the state is not to fight for the common good but to cure man from his fallen brutish state. For Hobbes, the state is formed to defend citizens from the invasion of foreigners and the injuries of one another and thereby to secure them in such a sort as that by their industry and by their fruits of the earth, they may nourish themselves and live contentedly.<sup>23</sup> For John Locke (1632-1704), the common good is seen as an aggregation of private interest. For him, unlimited appropriations with no concern for the needs of others<sup>24</sup> is a good thing and by pursuing their selfish goals people automatically contribute to the common good.<sup>25</sup> For Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), it is futile to talk about the good of the community apart from that of the individuals who make it up.<sup>26</sup>

In the contemporary period, the concept of the common good is marked by confusion, a welter of opinions and the inability of

theorists to arrive at any kind of consensus. Even the terminology is the subject of quarrels. From Aristotle who speaks of "common advantage" to the common good in medieval times, there is a switch today to "public interest" or "general welfare" or "common interests" as meaning the same thing and uses them interchangeably. The above consideration were important to this study because they help us to better x-ray and evaluate Simon's take in the subject matter. At this point, we turn our attention to Simon's understanding of the common good.

## II. Simon on the Common Good

At this stage, the basic questions which impose themselves are: What are Simon's contribution to concept of the common good? As we pursue this, we should note that Simon did not write a treatise on the common good but rather treated it in a number of works like *The Philosophy of democratic Governments* as the occasion presented itself and within the context of other questions. He examines the idea within the context of civil society, of authority and of Laws. When we bring together what he says in his works, we can begin to piece together the elements constitutive of the common good and its place in his philosophy as a whole. Let us turn our attention to some important observations he makes on the idea of the common good, before considering his understanding of the common good.

### II.I. Two misconceptions of the common good

It is good we start his consideration of the common good from two counterfeits of the common good which he mentions. He begins his treatment of the common good with these two erroneous ideas in *A General Theory of Authority and the Tradition of natural Law: A Philosophical Reflection*.

#### II.I.I. Common good as external to man

Concerning the first false notion of the common good, Simon says that the most frequent (misconception) is the myth of the common good as external to man.<sup>27</sup> Here the common good is represented as something external to the members of the state and the examples that Simon uses is that of a pyramid of Egypt.<sup>28</sup> For him, this represents the temptation of political leaders who conceive of the human community after the pattern of perfection supplied by a beautiful artwork. To explain what he means, Simon says

The myth which accompanies the common good with the perfection of a work of art and thus represents it as something nonhuman is constantly strengthened by the assumption that society, or at least the temporal, as distinct from the spiritual society, is concerned only with external actions, such as digging, orderly conduct in the street, marching and retreating according to orders, paying taxes, fulfilling contracts, etc. Political society in this view, would have nothing to do with what goes on in the heart of man.<sup>29</sup>

At this point one may ask, what is the relationship between a work of art and the idea of the common good? To this, Simon says it is completely irrelevant to the idea of the common good. Whereas an art work is good as something to be admired, whereas its captivates the imagination of the politician because of its joy, they get in

<sup>18</sup> George Froelich "The Equivocal Status of *Bonum Commune*" *The New Scholastics*, 63, (1989), 48.

<sup>19</sup> Mary Keys, *Politics Pointing Beyond the Polis and the politeia; Aquinas on Natural Law and the Common Good*, 185.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>21</sup> Aquinas *Summa Theologiae*, I, II q. 113a.1. See also I, II, q. 94a.2 see also Keys 184.

<sup>22</sup> Keys, *Politics Pointing Beyond the Polis and the politeia; Aquinas on Natural Law and the Common Good*, 185.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* ed. Micheal Oakes Hott, New York, Macmillan Publishing Company 1962, 132

<sup>24</sup> Leo Strauss, *Natural Rights and History*, 243.

<sup>25</sup> Benestad, *Church, State and Society*, 25.

<sup>26</sup> Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, New York, Hafner, 1948, 3. I, IV-V

<sup>27</sup> Simon, *The Tradition of Natural Law*, 92.

<sup>28</sup> Simon, *A General Theory of Authority*, 27.

<sup>29</sup> Simon, *The Tradition of Natural Law*, 95

creating and managing something as difficult as man<sup>30</sup>, it has nothing to do with the following passage:

In all domains of art whether relative to beauty or not, there is perfection if the thing worked out is perfect, and the good of man is completely irrelevant. Gauguin probably would not produce his admirable paintings if he had not deserted his family; his desertion was bad for his people and for himself but did not affect the quality of his painting.<sup>31</sup>

This idea of the common good sees man as something to be manipulated. Equally, the idea of the common good here is presented in material terms. However, social and political life and therefore the common good is not made up of just such facts as “men engaged in digging a canal, clearing a jungle, building a railroad (and) the reclaiming of swamp land.”<sup>32</sup>

The idea of a common good as a beautiful work of art is false because of neglects the fact that immanent actions or action of the spirit are constitutive of the common good. Simon gives the example of prisoners watching a play in a common hall. Whereas there is silent watching when they are by themselves, since they are together, there is communion of interest in what they are watching. They now express suspense, pity and admonition together. The important part of community life takes place in the heart of man.

### **III.II. Common good as aggregate of the individual or particular interests**

The second idea is the idea that the common good is a means to the good of the individual or an aggregation of individual or particular interests. In this light, he cites Harold Laski when he writes, “the surrender we make is a surrender not for the sake of the society regarded as something other than its members but exactly and precisely for men and women whose totality is conveniently summarized in a collective and abstract noun.”<sup>33</sup> Laski stresses that the collection is an aggregate of the individual. This is why he maintains that the totality is summarized in the collective. At this point the question is what is the problem with individualism? An assessment of those who conceive the common good in this sense would have to acknowledge that this position is not completely without merit. It is understandable that some scholars should be extremely cautious of endorsing a common good independent of that of the citizens in the light of recent history. The quest for a classless society as evidenced in various shades of totalitarianism, the modern version of Plato’s transcendent state has led to awful crimes and a denial of individual rights that is still fresh in our memories. The problem with individualism is the egotistic connotation. It conceives the society almost only in terms of what is useful for the individual. Simon says that the philosophy of individuals implies that whatever is called common is merely useful, that things common are but means and that the character of ends belongs exclusively to the individual.<sup>34</sup>

From this it is clear that if society exists for the sake of satisfying desires, it would be a recipe for grabbing everything for

oneself and chaos. In this light, Clarke E. Cochran says in the politics of interest, there is no public to possess an interest, let alone any criteria according to which an interest, moral or political worth might be assessed.<sup>35</sup> At this point after considering the counterfeit of the idea of the idea of the common good as presented by Simon, suffice it to turn to his take on the common good.

### **IV. Simon on the Common Good**

At this point, Simon goes to define what he means by the common good. He says the common good calls for common action. It is the activity of achieving something in common.<sup>36</sup> It calls for common action and a common desire. In this light, when there is no common good in the hearts of the members of the community to hold them together, the community has long fallen apart and is dead. Simon describes the common good in the following words:

In order that a good be common, it does not suffice that it should concern, in some way, several persons; it is necessary that it be of such a nature as to cause, among those who pursue it and in so far as they pursue it, as common life of desire and action. Whenever the good interesting several persons or groups causes such common life, it is a genuine common good... if, on the other hand, a good interesting several does not call for a common life of desire and action... it is the sum of particular goods.<sup>37</sup>

The common should cause a common life of desire and action. When this concerns several persons, then it is a common genuine good. For Simon, three things make a good a genuine common good: these include collective causality, for a good to be considered a genuine good, the actions should be traced to the community and not simply to individuals or parts. Equally the good should be shared by others. This implies according to Simon my knowing what the others know and desire the same object and want it to be effected by the action of our community. John Searle refers to this sort of phenomenon as collective intentionality and asks how it is possible. It is possible not by summing up the intentions of many individuals but by the presence of what he calls “we-intentions” that is the individuals who make of the community all think that “we believe” or “we intend” some goal.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore there must be communication amongst the members that reinforce the goals and existence of the community. This is what Simon calls “communion causing communication” and which include many symbols and practices e.g. flags, songs, ceremonies, parades etc. the presence of such things indicate that the body in question wishes to be a community with a genuine common good and not merely a partnership instrumental to partners. At this juncture, it is important that we turn our attention to the treatment of the qualities of the common good as Simon considers.

### **V. Qualities of the common Good**

#### **V.I. Distributability**

Simon holds that if the common good is not to be confiscated by individuals, it calls for constant distribution to society’s members. This quality for Simon is the biggest antidote to

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 93

<sup>31</sup> Simon, *The Tradition of Natural Law*, 95

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Harold Laski, *Liberty in the Modern State*, New York, The Vikings Press 1949, 39.

<sup>34</sup> Simon, *A General Theory of Authority*, 68

<sup>35</sup> Cochran, “Yves R. Simon and the “Common Good”, A Note on the Concept, 229.

<sup>36</sup> Simon, *A General Theory of Authority*, 27

<sup>37</sup> Simon, *Philosophy of Democratic Government*, 49.

<sup>38</sup> John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, New York, The Free Press 1995, 23-26

individualism. When the common good therefore leaks out of society for the exclusive use of a few, they are denatured and become by that very fact private goods.<sup>39</sup> In the same regard, Simon also writes "...Because society does not exist except in individuals (connected by definite relations), the good of the society demands by nature and not by accident, a constant distribution to individuals."<sup>40</sup> Simon stresses that a genuine common good must be distributable. Simon and Maritain are on one head. In this regard, Maritain writes

The end of the society is the good of the community, of the social body..., the common good of the city is neither the mere collection of private goods, nor the proper good of a whole which, like the hive with respect to its bees relates the parts to itself alone and sacrifices them to itself. It is the good human life of the multitude, of the multitude of persons, it is their communion in good living. It is therefore common to both the whole and the parts into which it flows back. It requires by its very essence... redistribution to the persons who constitute society.<sup>41</sup>

Maritain argues that the good of the whole is superior to the private good only if it benefits the individual persons, is redistributed to them and respects their dignity.<sup>42</sup> The importance of distributability cannot be gainsaid since it strengthens both the community spirit and the individual. A winner takes it all society destroys itself by distorting the common good. That a common good or the common demands distributability belongs to its essence and a common good or the common good that does not possess this essential quality is not a common good or the common good.

## V.II. Spiritual Element

Besides the question of redistribution in the above quote from Maritain, he also mentions the fact of the benefits to persons respect for their dignity which Simon deals with at various points in his own work and which might summarize as the spiritual element by arguing that the common good is rational. But he goes further to demonstrate that this rationality is not based on reasoning alone but on affective communion. This is the full meaning of the idea of the common desire and is necessary if common action is to be fruitful and stable. For instances, the family would cease to exist as a community if each member did not judge it opportune to stay in a particular house. Just as a factory could not operate if a fixed schedule was not observed by the personnel.<sup>43</sup>

But this is not the only sense in which the spiritual and moral are integral to the common good. The very essence of the common good is eminently a spiritual good. It is often believed erroneously Simon says that while the physical and the material needs of the body such as the search for food and security are better satisfied through collaboration among men "the goods of the spirit are altogether individual and that their pursuit in an entirely individual concern. Thus human life would be split into a part socialized by material needs and a nobler part distinguished both by spirituality and individual independence"<sup>44</sup> Simon disperses of this construct by pointing to the role of society in the passing on of and growth in

knowledge, and the fact that people, as a fact of who are ready to give of their talents to human society and sacrifice for it.<sup>45</sup> We are wont to pursue and benefits from the spiritual as community. A common good is not just attained in any transitive action or communication but in common aversion to evils in dedication of lives to what is held to be right and good, and in common fidelity to plans for a better society and a better world.<sup>46</sup> We will turn our attention now to discuss the relationship between the individual and the common

## VI. The individual and the Common Good

We have to explain the relationship between the individual good and the common good. In other words how are we to reconcile the common good with the particular good which one might legitimately choose in contingent circumstances, since Simon accepts that conflicts can between these even in a society of virtuous people.<sup>47</sup> Simon gives the example of a wife who would be in the right if she did all in her power to save her husband justly condemned to death for a serious crime, whereas as the common good called for capital punishment. Her personal god would dictate that she should support her husband.<sup>48</sup> Clarke E. Cochran adds the example of the building of a huge highway, a common good, which might require that an individual concerned here would be right to defend his personal good. In fact Simon says that "particular goods be properly defended by particular persons matters greatly for the common good itself"<sup>49</sup>

In working out an answer to the question of conflicts between the particular good and the common good, Virginia Held proposes the elaboration of an ethical road map to be fleshed out in the future by specialists of moral philosophy. Simon's resolution of the problem in a mosaic that can only be discerned through a close reading of his works. We are convinced it involves proper working out of the following relationships.

### i. Distinctive between the individual and the person.

Clarke E. Cochran writes that this is an extremely important classical metaphysical distinction which underlies Simon's thinking on the question of the common good. Whereas Simon does not go into a detailed analysis of the distinction in the way that Maritain does, it is clear that he has his friends work, *The person and the Common Good* in mind. In fact, he specifically cites this work in his article "Common Good and Common Action".<sup>50</sup>

### ii. Individual good (interest) and personal good or relationships the particular good.

The term particular good, private good, individual good can confuse us if we are not particularly attentive to their use. The particular good may be private or functional (special).<sup>51</sup> As private, it refers to the good of a subject and as functional to the good of an agency such as the good of the advertising department of a company. The particular may also be individual or personal.

<sup>39</sup> Simon, *The Tradition of Natural Law*, 98-100

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>41</sup> Maritain, *The Person and the common Good*, 40-41.

<sup>42</sup> Cfr. Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Simon, *A General Theory of Authority*, 32.

<sup>44</sup> Simon, *A General Theory of Authority*, 32

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 24-26

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 125-126

<sup>47</sup> Simon, *Philosophy of Democratic Government*, 26.

<sup>48</sup> Cfr. 41-42

<sup>49</sup> Simon, *Philosophy of Democratic Government*, 41.

<sup>50</sup> Simon "Common Good and Common Action", *Review of Metaphysics*, 22(1960) 202-244.

<sup>51</sup> Simon, *Philosophy of Democratic Government* 56.

When Simon talks of individual goods, he means goods of a material nature such as income, health and occupation. These are the same as interests. Personal goods on the other hand refers to the soul and would include rationality, freedom, charity, the life of virtue and one's relationship to God.<sup>52</sup> This is consonant with and a follow up of Maritain's distinction between the individual and the person. For Simon (as for Maritain) whereas the individual as a member of a species and shows himself a possessing virtually limitless possibilities for goodness and an adherence to the truth. The person is autonomous in the way an individual is not.<sup>53</sup> For Simon, individual goods are service to personal goods. Thus regarding what Simon thinks about priority between individual goods and personal goods. Cochran writes that "personal good are of higher value than individual goods for individual goods are essentially means to personal goods."<sup>54</sup> The above takes us to a much more profound distinction between individual Goods and the common Good.

### **iii. Relationship between the individual good and the Common Good**

In the same way as individual goods are supposed to be of service to personal goods and cede precedence to personal goods, they are called upon to give way to the common good when so demanded by legitimate authority. This is in line with Simon who writes: "Insofar as the individual has the character of a part, the principle of the primacy of the whole signifies not only that the common good is greater, but also that the private good may have to be sacrificed to the greater good of the community."<sup>55</sup>

For Simon, the common good which includes elements of a spiritual nature clearly takes pride of place over individual goods which are of a material nature. Even when a common good is material like the provision of roads and portable water, it is also more important than an individual good because the common good is the good of the whole community and thus of a higher value.<sup>56</sup> The person performing his individual goods must formally interiorize the goods of the society to which he belongs if he will remain a good citizen and promote them before his own, if there is divergence from his own. Such action, therefore, demands virtue on the part of the individual.

### **iv. The relationship between personal good and the common good**

Simon acknowledges that there are conflicts at times between the personal and the common good. We have already seen the case of a wife who has to defend her husband condemned to death for committing a crime. In this case, it is legitimate for the wife to choose the personal good of her family which is threatened by the proposed execution of her husband because as Simon says, she wills the common good formally but her personal good materially<sup>57</sup> that is she supports the general common good of her society, yet is materially committed to the welfare of her family which is a part of the common good. Elsewhere, Simon gives another example,

drawn from the universal dominion of God. He points out that even if by some special revelation which was absolutely certain, God told me that my father would die tomorrow, it would still be my responsibility to continue to do everything in my power to save his life.<sup>58</sup> Simon argues that even if the common good takes precedence formally, it demands that personal goods be defended in this way.<sup>59</sup> But it is not always that the common good takes precedence formally. This is the case in question when the good concerns the supernatural order. For Simon, the common good enjoys primacy over the private good of the individual when both are of the same order<sup>60</sup>, which is in accord with Maritain who says that just as the human person, as a spiritual totality referred to the transcend whole surpasses and is superior to all temporal societies...as single human soul is worth more than the whole universe of material goods".<sup>61</sup>

## **Conclusion**

For Clarke E. Cochran, Simon's philosophy of the common good as advanced above fails to resolve two questions: aspects of the complicated relationship between the particular good and the common: and the question as to whether the common good can be captured in a given policy and thus be attainable or whether it is in an ideal and can therefore, only be aspired to but not achieved.

As far as the first drawback is concerned, Cochran accepts all that Simon says about the common good. We have sought to outline the different facets of this relationship above. He returns to the dictum that the fact of persons pursuing their particular goods is necessary for a proper understanding of the common good itself. But he points to the fact that an individual who occupies public office might sometimes have to decide on an issue in which he is an interested party. Simon he rightly says, works out the following principle to resolve such cases: as a private person, he must will the common good formally and his own particular good materially. as a public person, he must be concerned with both the form and the matter of the common good.<sup>62</sup> However the question that arises may be framed thus: even if Simon says he must pursue his good materially, how far can he go as a public servant without the two goods colliding or entering into conflict at some point? Cochran thinks that Simon neglects to fully account for a resolution of such inevitable conflict. Cochran expresses his second concern, a problem which he sees also in Maritain, thus

Does Simon consider the common good to be a normative standard by which the life of a political society is to be oriented and judged but which can never be fully actualized or does he consider it to be a policy or a set of policies or a particular set of social realities which, when actualized, constitute the whole of the common good.<sup>63</sup>

While admitting that Simon generally sees the common good as ideal to be aimed at, Cochran thinks he fudges and confuses the issue by sometimes referring to common good being procured and pursued implying that they are attainable. the problem here is more apparent than real since an ideal has to be pursued and can be

<sup>52</sup> Cochran, "Yves R. Simon and The Common Good": A Note on the Concept 233.

<sup>53</sup> Simon, *A General Theory of Authority*, 67-74

<sup>54</sup> Cochran, "Yves R. Simon and The Common Good": A Note on the Concept 233.

<sup>55</sup> Simon, *The Tradition of Natural Law*, 91.

<sup>56</sup> Cochran "Yves R. Simon and "The Common Good": A Note on the Concept 233

<sup>57</sup> Simon, *Philosophy of democratic Government*, 41-42

<sup>58</sup> Cfr. *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Simon, *The Tradition of Natural Law*, 107.

<sup>61</sup> Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, 51.

<sup>62</sup> Cochran, "Yves R. Simon and the Common Good": A Note on the Concept, 235.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

procured in steps that move progressively towards it, even it, it can never be completely attained by human beings who are subject to sin. It can in fact be attained in keeping with the particular circumstances of the moment.

This in our estimation is the sum of Simon's resolution of the conundrum posed by Held when she questions whether in unitary conceptions of the public interest can ever be successfully reconciled with justifiable individual interests. Simon's answer consists in a series of metaphysical distinctions in which—without neglect of the material good—virtue, rationality, the spiritual order, and the good of the soul. Ultimately speaking, it is a masterfully bringing together of the insights of Plato, Aristotle, Thomas and Jacques Maritain. It disqualifies the idea of the common good understood either as a coming together of individual interests or ideas or as corresponding with the general will affirming instead the unitary conception, if certain factors, especially the preeminence of ethical values problem relative to the meaning of the common good... deserves to be treated with elaborate instruments.

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