
The English translation of this brilliant gloss on Aristotle's ethics could not have appeared at a more needed time. Whether the Anglo-American ethical theorists will pay this little jewel of ethical writing the attention it deserves is another matter. At all events, Simon's analysis of moral knowledge, especially as it operates in the concrete situation as "practically practical knowledge," sheds much light on several problems that bedevil contemporary ethics, especially the areas known as practical ethics and action theory. For example, it would greatly complement works like Nancy Vogler's *Reasonably Vicious*, which wrestle, often brilliantly, as in Vogler's case, with the problem of reconciling desire with calculative reason. The trouble with those efforts is their failure to grasp the uniqueness of reason as it operates in the concrete situation to make moral choices. Instead they suppose that the application of reason in such instances is simply an application of theoretical reason. One result of that assumption is the creation of a dichotomy between desire and the calculative reason needed for choice in ethics. The assumption leads to the view that desire cannot be subjected to rational critique because it is not produced by reason. It also leads to the conclusion that desire cannot be labeled "moral" or "immoral" since one simply desires what one desires and thus cannot be held responsible for it. Although happily free from that assumption, and in fact offering us a brilliant disposal of it, Vogler nevertheless cannot understand why Aquinas and the other medieval thinkers claimed that immoral choices were irrational. On the contrary, she sees no reason why the appellation "irrational" is applied to immoral choices if they consistently fulfill one's goals.

Other contemporary writers on ethics, like Richard Joyce and the late Bernard Williams, offer us a "moral error" theory, which holds that ethical statements are false: claiming to make statements about the real world, they are, in fact, fictions that have turned out to be useful in daily life.

One suspects that the vast majority of ethicists today think and write in the shadow of Cartesian rationalism. For example, when advocates of "moral error" theory claim that ethical statements are assertions about the world as seen in terms of *oughts* and *duties* and are, on that count, erroneous, one has the sense that they assume a correspondence between thought and external things that properly belongs to speculative, not practical, reason. But, as Simon writes, "[t]he proper principle of practical knowledge is not the
object of knowledge (the true or formal cause), but the object of desire (the good or final cause); it follows that desire, which plays no intrinsic role in the constitution of theoretical knowledge, will play an essential role in the constitution of practical knowledge." Practical knowledge does not achieve the perfection of knowledge, which perfection is necessary truth. The reason it falls short of the mark is that action in the situation confronts us with concrete particulars, and that is the realm of the contingent, not the necessary. Thus the perfection and truth of practical intelligence has to do with the act of directing. The act of directing attains infallible truth only when it conforms to the just will.

If one makes conformity of thought and thing, rather than conformity to the just will, the standard of practical intelligence, then it makes sense that one might suppose, with Vogler, that a life of choices, though immoral, that nevertheless consistently lead one to obtain the desired objects, need not be characterized as irrational. But Simon points out that the perfection of practical intelligence has distinctive rules of rationality. First, the desired goal must be worthy of a human being, a requirement that can be fulfilled only by the presence in the agent of moral virtues, to wit, justice, fortitude and temperance. Second, choosing the proper means to the desired end requires the virtue of prudence since the variables that beset every concrete situation frequently cloud deliberations about how best to attain the end. One who is regularly feckless about how one attains desired objects clearly lacks the moral virtues and therefore cannot be said to act rationally since there is no conformity of passions and appetites with the just will.

Each of the ten succinct chapters sparkles with Simon's lucid prose and acuity. For example, Chapter 3, "Intelligence, the Pupil of Love," brilliantly shows the importance of affective connaturality in the exercise of the virtue of prudence. In scientific thought the justification for judgment follows from previously confirmed knowledge. In prudential decisions, however, the inclination of desire is what justifies judgment; hence, the chapter's title. The love of moral virtue confers on the agent an insight into the right course of action that intelligence by itself cannot attain: "One who acts out of the instinct of virtue, knowing nothing of moral science, senses that it is repugnant to his nature to act otherwise, and this is sufficient for him." Such a one possesses virtue as an active force within him, so that the law that regulates his desire is the very law of the virtue in question. Another example, Chapter 7, "Practically Practical Science," defends Maritain's coining of a term that is apparently redundant but actually justified as a means of distinguishing the difference between practical science—disquisitions about ethical theory—and moral choice in the concrete situation. Because a chasm separates understanding a theory from acting morally, the chapter is apropos of what contemporary ethicists need to rediscover.
Besides Simon's brilliant exposition, the book is worth the reading just for the footnote discussions and cited texts. On top of it all, Ralph McInerny has provided a precise and engaging rendering of the original French text.

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