

# POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY: A THOMISTIC DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACY

SEMINAR SYLLABUS

[SUMMER 2023]



## DESCRIPTION

In the middle of the Twentieth Century, the University of Chicago published several monumental works in contemporary political thought, most notably: Jacques Maritain's *Man and the State*, Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*, Leo Strauss' *Natural Right and History*, Eric Voegelin's *New Science of Politics*, and Yves Simon's *Philosophy of Democratic Government*. Out of all these great works, Simon's stands as the definitive defense of contemporary democracy on a Thomistic basis. Of course, Maritain (Simon's mentor) is likewise remembered for his own vision of a Christian democracy (a vision which Simon shares) which he also defended according to Thomistic principles. The key difference, however, between the approach of Maritain and Simon was that while Maritain's work is a faithful application of Aquinas' political thought, it does not have the same degree of care as Simon's in showing exactly where these principles are located in the Thomistic corpus. Simon's work, in contrast to Maritain's own in defense of democracy, is far more systematic in approach, approximating more the scholastic style which served as the foundation for both philosophers. Thus, we propose for this seminar a detailed look at Simon's defense of democracy (primarily through his *Philosophy of Democratic Government*), revisiting the work with the purpose of exploring how Simon's insights can address our current era.



## METHOD

The seminar is 8 weeks long, with one recorded lecture and one discussion session each week. Each discussion session is structured around a reading from Yves Simon (primarily). Two of the lectures will cover Jacques Maritain and Patrick Deneen to provide context for our discussion regarding Simon's thought on Democracy. Participants are expected to have read the assigned reading and listened to the lecture prior to the session, so that they may engage in a semi-structured discussion directed and moderated by the instructor.

## READING

The primary texts for this seminar will be made available online through Teams, with information given on how to buy the full works in print if one were so inclined. The main works to be used will be Jacques Maritain's *Christianity and Democracy*, Yves Simon's *Philosophy of Democratic Government*, Patrick Deneen's *Why Liberalism Failed*, and the *Yves Simon Reader* that was published recently by Notre Dame press in 2021.

## LECTURE

Each week there will also be a 20-40+ minute audio lecture, posted to Teams at the beginning of the week. This lecture will be based upon the assigned reading, but will also stray into related topics, or may use the reading as a launching point for addressing some related issue (perhaps one more general, or perhaps one more specific). The primary (but not sole) purpose of these lectures is to help clarify some of the more difficult concepts and arguments contained within the reading, as well as to raise specific questions that should help structure and guide our discussion sessions.

There *may* be accompanying visual aids (not necessarily) in order to provide some clarity as to textual points, but one *should* be able, in most cases, to simply listen to the lecture (and perhaps consult the visual aids later). This should allow more flexibility: making the lectures suitable accompaniment for a commute, while doing chores, going for a run, etc.

## DISCUSSION

The heart of the seminar is the discussion session (**Saturdays at 4:00 to 5:15 pm ET**): where all the thoughts emergent and encountered throughout the week—via the reading, lecture, and on-going conversations in the Teams channel—are brought into explicit conversation. This allows us to attempt a concerted effort at bringing resolution to our difficulties, and—failing such a resolution—to direct our inquiry further.

Each discussion session will begin with a brief synopsis of the week's material and a focusing on whichever aspects of that material seem most pressing. Beyond the direction provided by the instructor, participants are encouraged to bring their own concerns explicitly into view and to engage with the instructor and one another in civil debate and collective inquiry.

## AUDITS OR COMPLETES

All Lyceum Institute seminar participants will be able to either *audit* the seminar or *complete* the seminar. To complete the seminar, the participant **must** submit an essay of 2000+ words pertaining to the subject. This essay may be evaluated for publication in *Reality* and will be included in each Lyceum Institute member's profile, along with the mark of auditing or completing.

## SESSION SCHEDULE

June 3	Introduction Lecture: Christianity and Democracy Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Jacques Maritain, <i>Christianity and Democracy</i>, pages 3 to 63.</li></ul>
June 10	Philosophy of Democratic Government, Chapter 1 Lecture: General Theory of Government Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Yves Simon, <i>Philosophy of Democratic Government</i>, pages 1 to 71.</li></ul>

June 17	<p>Philosophy of Democratic Government, Chapter 2</p> <p>Lecture: Democratic Freedom</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yves Simon, <i>Philosophy of Democratic Government</i>, pages 72 to 143.</li> </ul>
June 24	<p>Philosophy of Democratic Government, Chapter 3</p> <p>Lecture: Sovereignty in Democracy</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yves Simon, <i>Philosophy of Democratic Government</i>, pages 144 to 194.</li> </ul>
July 1	BREAK
July 8	<p>Philosophy of Democratic Government, Chapter 4</p> <p>Lecture: Democratic Equality</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yves Simon, <i>Philosophy of Democratic Government</i>, pages 195 to 259.</li> </ul>
July 15	<p>Philosophy of Democratic Government, Chapter 5</p> <p>Lecture: Democracy and Technology</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yves Simon, <i>Philosophy of Democratic Government</i>, pages 260 to 321.</li> </ul>
July 22	<p>Contemporary Catholic Objections to Democracy</p> <p>Lecture: The Failure of Liberalism</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Patrick Deneen, <i>Why Liberalism Failed</i>, pages 1 to 42; pages 179 to 198.</li> </ul>
July 29	<p>Conclusions</p> <p>Lecture: Freedom, Nature, Community, and Democracy</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Yves Simon Reader</i>, pages 134 to 148; pages 267 to 284; pages 289 to 298; pages 399 to 414; pages 433 to 446.</li> </ul>