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# "The World in Its Human Involvement": Francis Slade and the Appropriation of Classical Philosophy

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“The World in Its Human Involvement”:  
Francis Slade and the Appropriation of Classical Philosophy

Introduction by Daniel P. Maher

“‘The World in Its Human Involvement’: Francis Slade and the Appropriation of Classical Philosophy,” *Perspectives on Political Science* 45 (2016): 1–3. Introduction to a symposium on Francis Slade; articles by Robert Sokolowski, Mary M. Bolan, Herbert E. Hartmann, Alan Udoff, and Ann Hartle. DOI: 10.1080/10457097.2015.1024573

**“For Hobbes, friendship is terrible.”**

**“Where Aristotle said *the city exists by nature*, the canonical versions of modern political philosophy say *the state exists by reason*.”**

**“Ends exist independently of our willing them. . . . Purposes take their origin from our willing them.”**

**“Aristotle’s real prince, not one in name only, is a prince by nature. Machiavelli’s Hiero is a real prince, but not a natural one. Aristotle’s natural prince is for Machiavelli an ‘imagined prince.’”**

**“Manifestation of form is what philosophical writing is principally about.”**

The papers comprising this symposium present to the readers of this journal an introduction to the work of Francis Slade. Some introduction seems necessary due to the disproportion between the small company of people fortunate enough to have discovered Slade and the great esteem they have for him. He deserves to be better known, and this symposium brings together five papers composed in his honor by people who are his friends, students, and/or colleagues. Because most of the contributors to this symposium have written papers that could well serve as introductions to Slade’s thought, it seems appropriate to undertake here the more limited task of introducing the symposium itself.

This symposium has its immediate origin in a panel honoring Professor Slade at the 2014 Meeting of the American Catholic Philosophical Association (ACPA) in Washington, DC.

Brother Owen Sadlier, OSF, a colleague and friend of Slade’s for many years, first suggested

such a panel and was indispensably involved in coordinating the panel itself. Without Sadlier's guidance and encouragement, the panel and this symposium would not have come to be. Once the initial planning was underway, it proved more difficult to limit the participants to a manageable number than it did to find people willing to write papers for the occasion. And this brings to light the true origin of the panel and this symposium: the extraordinary thought of Francis Slade.

In 1998 Professor Emeritus Slade retired from St. Francis College (Brooklyn), where he began teaching in 1956 after taking degrees at The Catholic University of America (CUA) and then the University of Notre Dame. Despite the length of his teaching career and his many presentations at the American Maritain Association, his published writings are (to date) relatively few, and thus one could be forgiven for not being familiar with them. People affiliated with CUA have enjoyed some advantages in discovering Slade. For decades now in his published work and his teaching Robert Sokolowski has pointed to Slade with respect and admiration. Among the acknowledgements in his most recent book, Sokolowski writes, "I am particularly grateful to Francis Slade for his guidance in philosophy, now and in the past, and I recall our friendship with Thomas Prufer."<sup>1</sup> Prufer was a friend of Slade's from their youth in Staunton, Virginia, and a colleague of Sokolowski's at CUA for some thirty years. The extremely suggestive formula "guidance in philosophy" recalls Prufer's own dedication of his book to Slade:

This book is dedicated to Frank Slade.  
What is best in it I owe to him.  
In the fifty years I have known him,  
I have learned from him what it is to be  
friend, philosopher, Catholic.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Sokolowski, *Phenomenology of the Human Person* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), ix.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Prufer, *Recapitulations: Essays in Philosophy* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1993), v.

At once formal and deeply personal, these private words set down in public constitute open invitations to seek out Slade's work.

Slade has published papers on a number of interrelated topics, such as the nature of political rule, sovereignty, Enlightenment, and the difference between ancient and modern political forms (see the bibliography below). In several places, he develops the fundamental distinction between *ends* and *purposes* with such clarity and power that it becomes hard to see how it can have been overlooked, distorted, and otherwise denied for so long by so many.<sup>3</sup> Slade's handling of this distinction epitomizes his ability to reopen and enliven distinctions you thought you already knew quite well. His essays engage theology, history, poetry, literary criticism, and occasionally such unlikely sources as the film *The Outlaw Josey Wales*. The fresh and surprising connections he makes with philosophy are never superficial or merely clever; they are forceful and penetrating. Slade concentrates on political matters, especially modern political philosophy in its distinction from classical political philosophy, which permits him to illuminate the essential character of modern reason and of philosophy simply. He uses the history of philosophy to recover philosophy "in its natural givenness, the givenness in which the possibility of philosophy is encountered as a dimension of human nature."<sup>4</sup> Philosophy thus understood is freed from the modern absorption in ruling and freed for contemplation as the fulfillment and perfection of man. Slade does not simply repeat or restore ancient philosophy; he recovers and appropriates the classical conception of philosophy as a natural human possibility.

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<sup>3</sup> In a recent paper Alasdair MacIntyre has recognized Slade's work and drawn substantially from it on this theme. See "Ends and Endings," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 88 (2014): 807–21.

<sup>4</sup> Francis Slade, "A Virginia Boyhood//The Philosophic Voice," unpublished paper commemorating Thomas Pruffer, given at The Catholic University of America on March 21, 2003.

Slade's writing is characterized especially by two features. First, his writing aims at "manifestation of form," which means that he brings essential distinctions precisely into focus, typically by drawing contrasts that clarify and stimulate further thinking. He does not merely delineate concepts in isolation. Rather, he articulates the most primary distinctions, which in turn shed light on, for example, the essential character of modernity, political philosophy, or particular philosophers. His writing displays and encourages thinking by patiently turning things over in thought, formulating and reformulating matters, revealing and savoring the limiting contours of form. Second, Slade moves effortlessly between detailed attention to primary texts and comprehensive appraisals of whole books, authors, and eras in philosophy. He does not burden the reader with the tedious spadework of exegesis, but not because he has neglected it; indeed, his more general statements bear the unmistakable signs of direct and deep familiarity with the intricacies of his sources. He has a gift for drawing complex issues together and, without oversimplifying, reducing them to a scale fit for comprehension. Such writing is an invaluable spur to one's thinking. The epigraphs to this introduction give some taste of his style, and the papers that follow illustrate it more fully.

I will conclude these introductory remarks by offering some explanation of the phrase "The World in Its Human Involvement," which is quoted in the title of this symposium. This same title was used for the ACPA panel held in Slade's honor. The phrase comes from his unpublished paper, "Socrates: The Nature of Philosophical Inquiry."

The Socratic search for wisdom is an interrogation of "the human things," *ta anthrôpina*, the things which are because man is there. Socrates seeks knowledge of "the first things," but not in the manner of the *phusikoi* who go to the world as it lies beyond any human involvement. The world in its human involvement, the way it appears humanly to man, enunciates itself as *doxa*. *Doxa* is a being-with-others, the perfected form of which is the city (*Republic* 515c1–2). Man in his humanness is with others in the city through speech. The Socratic inquiry is in the city.

This clarifies the nature of Slade's own concentration on political things, which is not a confinement to political things. The world is given first in opinion, the divergent opinions about all things spoken within the city, and the inquiry into what is first in itself cannot leave home, as it were, and dispense with its specifically human beginnings simply because it aspires to understand what lies beyond the city. Philosophy remains the *human* effort to know the world. Within the city and in its difference from political excellence, philosophy comes to light as the highest human possibility.

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Francis Slade's friends, colleagues, and students of various kinds speak of him with great admiration and affection. Many would have accepted invitations to participate in a symposium in his honor. The first four contributors identified below also delivered papers at the ACPA panel on 12 October 2014, where Professor Slade was in attendance although he did not give a paper. Ann Hartle was unable to attend, but graciously agreed to compose a paper for this symposium.

Robert Sokolowski is the Elizabeth Breckenridge Caldwell Professor of Philosophy at The Catholic University of America. His paper develops three themes that mark Slade as a distinctive and original thinker: the analysis of ends and purposes; the focus on the constructed character of modern political form; and, from his unpublished work, the distinction between medieval transformation of classical thought by Augustine and modern rejection of the tradition by Machiavelli.

Mary M. Bolan has written a dissertation on the thought of Francis Slade at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas (Angelicum) and, at this writing, is just a few weeks from her doctoral defense. Her paper explores Slade's analysis of modern philosophy and shows how *reason understood as rule* lies at the basis of the modern ideal subjects, namely, Machiavelli's prince, Descartes's *cogito*, and Mill's disinterested and benevolent spectator.

Herbert E. Hartmann is Clinical Assistant Professor in the School of Philosophy at The Catholic University of America. His paper is an exposition of Slade's understanding of political form, especially the new or modern political form as a construction of reason, where the rule of the sovereign is, in Slade's formula, "tyranny transformed."

Alan Udoff is Professor in Philosophy and Religious Studies at St. Francis College (Brooklyn). In contrast to the other essays in this symposium, which examine Slade's work directly, this paper addressing the legacy of Leo Strauss pays tribute to Slade's influence as a teacher. Udoff's mature reflections on Strauss had their first beginnings when he was a student at St. Francis College in Slade's course on political philosophy.

Ann Hartle is Professor of Philosophy at Emory University. Her paper outlines Slade's analysis of the momentous issues at stake in Machiavelli's rejection of contemplative philosophy as weak in favor of a new mode of reason as effective and autonomous rule.

With the publication of this symposium, we hope to draw increased attention to Francis Slade. Just below this introduction is a bibliography of his published papers, three of which are immediately accessible on the Internet. Also, Mary Bolan is working closely with Professor Slade to edit a volume of his papers, including previously unpublished work. Work on that project is well advanced and should be completed quickly once an agreement with a publisher has been reached. The papers in this symposium point to Slade's own writings. Those writings

point not to Slade himself but to the forms of things, that is, to the intelligibility of the world.

Precisely for this reason, he tends not so much to influence one's thinking as to form one's mind.

#### Published Works of Francis X. Slade

- “Constitutional Rule and Political Philosophy.” *Contemporary Philosophy* XVI, no. 2 (1994): 1–3.
- “Rule as Sovereignty: The Universal and Homogeneous State.” In *The Truthful and the Good: Essays in Honor of Robert Sokolowski*, edited by John J. Drummond and James G. Hart, 159–80. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996.
- “Catholicism as a Paradigm of the Political?” Review of *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, by Carl Schmitt, translated by G. L. Ulmen. *Telos* 29, no. 3 (1996): 113–22.
- “Ends and Purposes.” In *Final Causality in Nature and Human Affairs*, edited by Richard F. Hasting, 83–85. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997.
- “Was Ist Aufklärung? Notes on Maritain, Rorty, and Bloom, with Thanks but No Apologies to Immanuel Kant.” In *The Common Things: Essays on Thomism and Education*, edited by Daniel McInerney, 48–68. Mishawaka, IN: American Maritain Association, 1999. Distributed by The Catholic University of America Press. Online: <http://maritain.nd.edu/ama/McInerney/McInerney04.pdf>.
- “On the Ontological Priority of Ends and Its Relevance to the Narrative Arts.” In *Beauty, Art, and the Polis*, edited by Alice Ramos, 58–69. Mishawaka, IN: American Maritain Association, 2000. Distributed by The Catholic University of America Press. Online: <http://maritain.nd.edu/ama/Ramos/Ramos05.pdf>.
- “Rule and Argument in Political Philosophy.” In *Ethics and Theological Disclosures*, edited by Guy Mansini, O.S.B., and James G. Hart, 149–61. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003.
- “John Stuart Mill’s Deontological Hedonism.” In *Maritain and America*, edited by Christopher Cullen, S.J., and Joseph Allan Clair, 73–95. Mishawaka, IN: American Maritain Association, 2009. Distributed by The Catholic University of America Press. Online: <http://maritain.nd.edu/ama/America/America105.pdf>.
- “Two Versions of Political Philosophy: Teleology and the Conceptual Genesis of the Modern State.” In *Natural Moral Law in Contemporary Society*, edited by Holger Zaborowski, 235–63. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010.