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The Thomistic Concept Of The Common Good

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THE THOMISTIC CONCEPT
OF THE
COMMON GOOD

by
James J. Lopach

A Thesis
Submitted to
The Department of Philosophy
Carroll College

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for Academic Honors
with the A. B. Degree in Philosophy

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This Thesis for the A. B. Degree has been approved for the Department of Philosophy by

[Signature]

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CHAPTER ONE

State of Question

As natural to man as any function of life, as natural as any manifestation of man's nature, has been the historical phenomenon of man coming together with man to organize into some type of society. This recognition by man of some inherent deficiency in his nature points to some form of social order. Aristotle's statement that man is by nature a political animal holds with great exactitude; man is a political animal because he is a rational animal, because reason requires development through character training, education and the cooperation of other men, and because society is thus indispensable to the accomplishment of human dignity.¹

On the basis of such a beginning it will be evident that to treat of man as just an individual without taking into account his relations to the political community, would be to mutilate human nature and to deal with an abstraction, not with man as he is in

his concrete existence. For there is not and never was a human individual independent of relations to a community. The nearest approach to the pure individual we have heard of was Adam, and of him it was said: It is not good for man to be alone.2

It is at the instigation of nature that man enters into society. Physically and psychologically he is adapted to social life. He is, moreover, morally necessitated to seek in his fellow men the assistance without which he cannot come to a full realization of the potentialities that are his. Of himself he cannot be adequately protected in the enjoyment of his natural gifts; he cannot procure the necessary means for the full development of his physical, intellectual, and moral life. It is in society and only in society, that man can become the king of creation. The natural end or purpose of society thus formed can be gathered from this natural necessity which brings society into being. It is to complement by concerted activity the individual efforts of the members in pursuance of their temporal welfare. That means the attaining of those external conditions in which every member may live a life of virtue.3

The nature of this society must be understood, for we must know whether it is proper to man, or can animals be said to exist in a society. Animal groups or colonies are called societies only in an improper sense. They are collective wholes constituted of mere individuals. Society in the proper sense, human society, is a society of persons. The social unit is the person.4

4Maritain, p. 37.
To get the right idea of human society, we must consider it as located in the analogical scale between the uncreated exemplar, the super-analogue of the concept of society, namely, the divine society, and, except in an improper and metaphysical sense, namely, animal society. Far below the society of men, below even the level of all society properly so-called, there is a "society" of material individuals which are not persons, which are so isolated, each within itself that they do not tend toward any communion and have no common good, but each is totally subservient to the proper good of the whole. Human society is located between these two; a society of persons who are material individuals, hence isolated each within itself but nonetheless requiring communion with one another as far as possible here below in anticipation of that perfect communion with one another and God in life eternal.5

By the very fact that each of us is a person and expresses himself to himself, each of us requires communication with other and the others in the order of knowledge and love. Personality of its essence, requires a dialogue in which souls really communicate.6

Having arrived at the notion that society is composed of persons, from this we can begin to view the end of society. There is a correlation between this notion of the person as social unit and

5 Maritain, p. 49.
6 Maritain, p. 31.
the notion of the common good as the end of the social whole. The common good is common because it is received in persons, each one of whom is as a mirror of the whole. It is a good received and communicated.\footnote{Maritain, p. 39.}

So far, the point has been established that man is by nature a political animal. For when we find man in his state of full development, we discover him to be a citizen, a member of a political community. With Aristotle, then, we shall be led to look on the political state as a creation of nature and as inseparable from human nature when that nature is in its best condition. And we shall expect to find in the individual who shares in this nature rights and duties that have in their origin the nature itself.\footnote{Hart, p. 11.}

We can begin to now look at the relationship between the citizens of the state and the state itself. Since man, by his nature, is a social animal, the state is inseparable from man. Thus, in viewing the end of the state, we will have an insight into this essential relationship.

It is the privilege and duty of man over and over again to ponder the end of the social institutions and forms that give shape to life. Life is a perpetually changing stream of noble and ignoble impulses, of love and hate, of ardent striving for justice and
recurring betrayal of spiritual values for material advantages. Thus the actual forms of social life are always in danger of being abused or of becoming obsolete or unfit to reach their objective ends and thus opposed to the very end which they ought to serve.

It is therefore, always necessary to measure the actual the actual forms in their historical working by the ideal philosophical end of these social forms. Moreover, this re-examination is needed to justify, before the human mind and the urge of freedom, the restricting bonds which these forms always carry.

Now, just this question in regard to the end of the state is, more than any other question, dependent on the philosophical background of him who tries to answer it. The basis for his answer is a complex one. It depends on his idea of man, of man's end in this earthly life and beyond. It is dependent on his ideas about the existence and nature of a universal order in human community, about life and the respective moral values to be realized or at least guaranteed by that order. It is the question of freedom and compulsion, of the rights of man and the extent of governmental authority, of individual initiative and superimposed governmental interference with this sphere of individual initiative. It is the question of the independence of the family and the religious community from the sovereign body politic. And lastly it becomes the problem of the existence and necessity of a real community of nations as the highest form of human social life.9

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Human society, as a necessary and actual existent, has an end, and this end is called the common good. What then, is the common good as an ideal? Ultimately it is the good life or happiness, for man desires not only to live, but also to live well he wants to realize completely all the exigencies in his nature. This ultimate good, although desired by each man as the perfection of his individual nature, can be called common because it is essentially the same for all men. Hence it is this exigency for happiness which leads to the existence and unity of the community, since it is only with man's integration into society that the full life can be attained. More proximately, then, the ideal common good will be the establishment, maintenance, and perfection of the objective common good as well as the personal possession of the full distributed good. According as the state tends toward or away from these goals, will it be a good or bad community.

It should be noted that although the ideal common good does not have actual being, yet its force as a motive is a very real force. Society is a group of men united in common action, and action implies the presence of an end or reason for acting. But this end must be first known by the reason and then sought by the will. And the will, as we know, seeks only real or realizable being; it cannot be moved by the fanciful or the completely unattainable. And although the end may have only ideal existence in the mind, yet this concept has come from reality and it is this prior reality which the will really desires. So the united action of society
implies necessarily a common end and this end is something real. Hence the necessity and reality of the common good.

The common good in our day is certainly not just the common good of the nation and has not yet succeeded in becoming the common good of the civilized world community. It tends, however, unmistakably towards the latter. For this reason it would seem appropriate to consider the common good of a state or nation as merely an area, among many similar areas, in which the common good of the whole civilized society achieves greater density.

In this context and understanding of common good as the end of human society, we will begin to look at different approaches and philosophies of the common good, based, as was mentioned, on the philosophical background of the one interpreting. The basis of these distinctions will be the various views on the relationship between the individual and the state, the nature of the individual and the nature of the state.

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11 Maritain, p. 45.
CHAPTER TWO

Other Interpretations of the Common Good

Historical instances of opposition between the individual and the state we may indeed find, but we need not think of them as of nature's making. They are sufficiently accounted for by the self-centeredness of some individuals who are forgetful of their dependence on the community, or on the unwarranted pretensions of those who represent the authority of the state. But we cannot admit any natural antithesis without going back to a philosophy of individualism with all its theoretical and practical difficulties. ¹²

The political theories of such men as Hobbes, Rousseau and Locke, who identify the natural man with the primitive rather than with the fully developed man, fit the idea of such an opposition. For them the state is not a creation of nature, but a human convention, the result of man's taking thought for his welfare when nature had left him so unprovided. Man made the state and presumably could unmake it if he was willing to go back to his primitive condition of nature with the limitations that condition of nature

¹² Hart, p. 12.
would involve. Man made the state to help him out of his difficulties in getting along with his fellowman, but like so many of his contrivances it may be found on prolonged experience to be an obstacle to his happiness. In this way of thinking man is not fulfilling his nature when he comes into the state, but rather taking refuge in the political community from the difficulty of living in his individual self-sufficiency among other individuals equally self-sufficient. For the individual in such a state rights and duties are not natural, but contractual, and their possession is based on the original social compact on which the state was founded.13

The state is not a new reality but a nominalist statement of the fact that the individuals have agreed to live in certain social relations, exclusively in order to promote their individual purposes and ends as individuals, not as members of a qualitatively different status politicus. As the state is nothing more than a free and arbitrary network of relations between individuals without an objective reality or true essence beyond these actual relations, thus what is called the common good is only a name for the sum of the private, particular goods of all individuals. It is not objective and qualitatively different reality. The state has only a service value and is consequently a utilitarian institution exclusively for the interests of the individuals as inherently self-sufficient beings.14

13 Hart, p. 12.

14 Rommen, p. 314.
It is founded by the individuals merely to further their interests as individuals. Therefore what is called the common good is not really distinguishable from the mere sum of the particular goods of the individuals. The individuals are the only reality. The individual is fundamentally autonomous and self-sufficient. Anything beyond his individual existence can be only of service character, can be only dependent means subjectively valuable for the individual. In the view of liberal individualism, the individual citizen appears as essentially self-sufficient and perfect. He agrees to live in a political community only so far as his individual purposes are thereby served. Any binding restrictions seem still to be necessary are regarded as a loss of freedom, and are expected, through progress, gradually to disappear. They typical individualist believes in the final overcoming of any form of society that demands any kind of sacrifice of his individual, subjective interests and any restrictions of his liberty. The individual remains a social monad in Leibnitz' sense. Man is per accidens, not only by intrinsic nature, a social being and a political being. Consequently the common good, which is presumable the end of the state as a specific form of social being, has no objective value or independent reality. What is called common good is merely a distributive sum of the interests and private goods of the individuals. 15

15 Rommen, p. 315.
Hobbes concludes that the normal condition of human life is one of unceasing conflict, of a fiercely competitive struggle for power and prestige, and of war of every man against every man. In this prepolitical state of nature, the individual has the freedom to do anything which appears to him as necessary for his own preservation and security. In this state of nature, there are no legal or moral laws to govern human behavior.\(^\text{16}\)

Hobbes employs his mechanistic philosophy to generate a counter-motivation that will drive men into political society. The passion and the reason supply the necessary impetus and the means of emerging from the primitive state of anarchy. The fear of death and the desire for commodious living incline men to seek peace, since war is a constant threat to the life and material possessions of the individual. Reason therefore dictates that man should seek peace and follow it. This is the first and fundamental law of nature.\(^\text{17}\)

The natural law for Hobbes is something quite different from what it had been for his predecessors. What he refers to as natural law is merely a set of materialistic principles for developing a workable society out of the actions and interactions of human individuals.\(^\text{18}\)


\(^{17}\) Schmandt, p. 236.

\(^{18}\) Schmandt, p. 237.
Since the individual is inclined to seek peace for his own preservation and since reason dictates that orderly living is not possible so long as the state of nature persists, men must obviously seek some arrangement that will remove them from their primitive condition. Men can assure their self-preservation only if they are willing to covenant with each other to give up their absolute natural right to all things. Hobbes points out that men cannot be relied on to keep his covenants without some external sanction — that of force. The only solution is to create a common or public authority with sufficient coercive power to compel adherence to the social covenant. Such an authority can be established if each individual, in consideration of others doing likewise, transfers his natural right of liberty to a beneficiary who is not a party to the contract. 19

Hobbes's social contract is made by individuals who are naturally solitary and antisocial. Hobbes's theory of the social compact seems to suggest that men have no natural interests in common. The efficient cause of the state is the individual wills contracting singly with each other. Not consent, but submission of the wills of all to the will of one, creates civil society. 20

Despite his absolutist tendencies, Hobbes is a forerunner of modern individualism. His basic premise that the common good is not a natural end for men but merely a pure figment of the imagination haunted political philosophy for more than two centuries. His individualism found political expression in the doctrine of the social contract, a doctrine based on the intellectual recognition by isolated individuals that they would personally gain

19 Schmandt, p. 233.
20 Schmandt, p. 239.
through some form of association. 21

The liberal state is certainly far from the perfect political community of St. Thomas and in its workings it falls short of the complete and self-sufficing life which Aristotle thought the state was for. But a state administered on the principles of liberalism is for the most part the only state we have known, and finding ourselves in the atmosphere of liberal thinking we have been in danger of trying to fit such a state into the categories Aristotle and St. Thomas designed for an entirely different kind of community. For the common good which Aristotle thought of as the complete and self-sufficient life and St. Thomas did not hesitate to call more divine than any individual good, has been narrowed down in the concept of the liberal state to a kind of unmolestedness in the pursuit of selfish aims. 22

Another opinion current today among many economists would make the common good "the greatest good of the greatest number". This view is a heritage from the utilitarians of the past century. On its face, utilitarianism appears to be a strictly egoistic doctrine. Why talk of the interests of the community, Bentham asks, unless we know what is the interest of the individual. A thing is said to promote the interest or to be for the interest of an individual when it tends to add to the sum total of his pleasures; or what

21 Schmandt, p. 244.

22 Hart, p. 17.
comes to the same thing, to diminish the sum total of his pains.
The community is merely a fictitious body composed of the individual persons who are its members. The interest of society is therefore nothing more than the sum of the interests of the several members who compose it. Yet the utilitarian formula of the greatest happiness of the greatest number implies that it is as much an individual’s duty to give pleasure to others as to seek it for himself. Or to express it in less positive terms, that which gives pleasure to one person is good so long as it does not diminish the happiness of other persons more. Bentham’s ethical hedonism means in reality that no man can attain his own greatest happiness unless all other men do the same. We do well to further the interests of others in the hope that they in turn will advance ours. Hence an individual must seek other men’s pleasures as a means to his own.

Bentham contends that the greatest happiness principle can be achieved in practice by totaling up individual pleasures and pains. An action may then be said to confirm to the principle of utility when the tendency it has to augment the happiness of the community is greater than any it has to diminish it. The balance sheet of pleasure and pain can serve as a policy-making guide to those charged with the governance of the community.  

Bentham’s version of the common good leaves at least one important question unanswered. Upon which side of the equation is the heavier stress to be placed: on happiness or number? Is an act of government which brings a high degree of pleasure to a few and some

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23 Schmandt, p. 336.
discomfort to the many to be preferred to an act which brings a modest degree of happiness to many but great pain to a few? A formula which merely adds up pleasures and pains can furnish no answer to this dilemma. The greatest happiness principle may be highly commendable as an expression of admiration and hope, but as an operative social formula it has little to offer.²⁴

Although the Utilitarians were rationalists, they insisted that they were not philosophers. To them "philosopher" was a term of disparagement, for philosophy was concerned with vaporous theory, with fuzzy thinking, with fantastic meanderings of the uncontrolled imagination. The very language of philosophy drove Bentham to desperation. "The sumnum bonum -- the sovereign good --," he asks, "what is it?"²⁵

Another political philosopher who takes a stand differing from the traditional outlook on the common good is Machiavelli, the author of The Prince. In the Graeco-Medieval concept of the common good, two basic elements are present: the good must be for the commonalty, not for the benefit of the ruler or for any particular individual; and what is good for the community is that which is rooted in and measured by the natural law, not that which is based on the arbitrary will of man. Machiavelli accepts the first attribute but rejects the second. He insists that the political ruler must not act for his own advantage but for that of the people. At the same time he determines the validity of the prince's action not by any moral standard, but by the pragmatic test of success measured in terms of stabilizing and preserving political power. ²⁴ Schmandt, p. 337.

If everything that is successful is good morally speaking, Machiavelli's differences with the main stream of Western thought would not be great; but the inconsistency of trying to equate success with goodness is too patent. Traditionally, goodness or badness is a matter to be determined in the light of the natural and divine law. By rejecting this standard, Machiavelli severs the notion of the common good from its ancient and moral source. He maintains that if a ruler acts out of love for his country and is successful, his efforts are in the interest of the common good. The traditionalist insists that simply because a ruler acts in behalf of the people, it does not necessarily follow that his acts are good; all that can be said is that they fulfill the element of commonalty.  

The most notorious error today, however, is that of the totalitarian's creed, which in theory would identify the common good solely with the good of the whole, but which in reality equates it with nothing more than the perpetuation in power of a dominating and exploiting elite. The totalitarian, whether he proceeds as a naturalistic philosopher or as an avowed atheist, will recognize no good above and beyond the state. The good of the state will be for him the highest good and the measure of all other goods. All the goods of the individual, then, will lie within the state and

26 Schmandt, p. 198.
be measured by the good of the state. There will be no room for any rights of the individual against the state. In the face of the highest good man has duties only and not rights. With regard to the other members of the community the individual may have rights, but he will possess these not independently of the state, but rather as derived from it.27

In this opposing view to individualism, the individual and his objective ends are completely submerged in society or state and in its ends. The individuals are mere marionettes in the service of impersonal powers of economic productive relations or of a mystical and irrational spirit of the nation revealed in a deified leader for ends and purposes that are utterly foreign to the individual. All socialisms say in one way or another: the individual is nothing, the nation, the party, the proletariat is all. But still they have that same Messianic complex, as has liberal individualism, namely, that in the end, that dreadful institution, the state, will wither away and a new paradisaeic millennium of freedom will appear; a state of freedom where everyone gets what is due to him and what he individually and subjectively wants.28

Under totalitarianism individual rights and liberties are destroyed; the ruling power is supreme and unlimited in its functioning; there is only one political party tolerated; nothing outside of the state, without direct reference to the state, has foundation or

27 Hart, p. 17.

28 Rommen, p. 316.
worth. But since God is "outside the state" according to Christian philosophy, God and inalienable rights become meaningless in a totalitarian regime. "Everything is in the State" means just that for the advocates of the system: authority arises with the state and party; rights are state granted and, by that fact, state-evoked arbitrarily. The family has state purposes to perform. The individual is completely the instrument of the state and the state powers are limited by nothing; they are claimed to be absolute. Law becomes, not an effective directive to man's goal and perfection and a protection of natural rights, but a means to the concentration of immense power. Law has no religious and ethical basis because religion and God are non-existent in totalitarian philosophy for the state or party is the ultimate end of man's existence.29

Liberalism has become sorely discredited in our modern age and the future would seem to belong to a Catholic political philosophy or to some form of totalitarianism. Now both of these have something in common. Each in its way is authoritarian and each stands for discipline and obedience. Each offers in the name of the common good something that is larger than the good of any individual and can therefore command the respect of the individual and win his obedience. St. Thomas tells us that in the state every part is ordained to the whole as the imperfect to the perfect, and adds that the individual man is a part of the perfect community, leaving us to draw the obvious conclusion that the individual man is ordained to the community. It might be contended that St. Thomas absorbs the individual in the community as much as a totalitarian

does. If we reflect that the common good is the provision of nature — and therefore ultimately of God — for the good of the individual, would it not be monstrous to suppose that the individual had the freedom to pursue his own ends regardless of the common good?

Some Catholic writers, not wishing to deny the subordination of the individual to the community, but looking at the same time for some ground on which to assure him a share of personal liberty, have thought to find the way out through the distinction they make between individual and person. With the aid of this distinction they find it possible to think of the individual as bound and the person as free. This approach will be considered in the final section of this paper.

But besides this distinction, a higher and more ultimate approach is possible. Though the whole is the end of the part and the community the end of the individual, yet beyond the whole is a further end to which the whole is directed and beyond the community a further end for the individual man. Man's ultimate end is the principle of his freedom in the community. This is what St. Thomas tells us when he is explaining the universe as a whole of parts and the ends of the whole and the parts. Beyond the whole man is an extrinsic end, namely to enjoy God. So it is with the universe and its parts: each creature is for its proper act; the lower creatures are for the higher; all creatures are for the perfection of the whole universe. But over and above this the universe
is for an extrinsic end, which is God, and this end the rational creature attains in a special way by knowing and loving God. Without this ultimate reference to God it is not possible to rescue the individual man from total immersion in the community. On a plane of pure naturalism the community is the highest good, and man is necessarily subjected to the highest good.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{30} Hart, p. 21.
CHAPTER III
Thomistic Concept of Common Good

In this final section of the paper we will look at St. Thomas' concept of the common good. St. Thomas is chosen because he provides the most exemplary expression of the traditional wisdom of Western morality and rightly bears the name "Universal Doctor" of Christendom.31

Mention has been made that an attempt to prevent the theoretical submergence of the part into the whole has been to distinguish between personality and individuality. Jacques Maritain has made this distinction basic in his presentation of the common good.

In the history of Western thought there are at least a dozen personalist doctrines, which at times, have nothing more in common that the term person. Some tend toward dictatorship while others toward anarchy. A principle concern of Thomistic personalism is to avoid both excesses. Thomistic personalism stresses the metaphysical distinction between individuality and personality.

Maritain states that the human person is ordained directly to God as its absolute ultimate end. Its direct ordination to God transcends every created common good — both the common good of the political society and the intrinsic common good of the universe. It is to this essential concern for asserting and safeguarding the ordination, direct and personal, of each human soul to God that the principal points of doctrine, lying at the very heart of Thomism, are attached.32

In contrast with Pascal's statement that "the self is detestable", St. Thomas states the "the person is that which is most noble and most perfect in all of nature". This nobleness must be kept in mind, for on such a note is the doctrine of the common good based.

The human being is caught between two poles: a material pole, which, in reality does not concern the true person but rather the shadow of personality or what in the strict sense, is called individuality, and a spiritual pole, which does concern true personality. In man, as in all other corporeal beings, individuality has its first ontological roots in matter. In each of us, individuality, being that which excludes from oneself all that other men are, could be described as the narrowness of the ego, forever eager to grasp for itself. As an individual, each of us is a fragment of a species, a part of the universe, a unique point in the immense web of cosmic, ethnical, historical, forces and influences — and bound by their laws. Each of us is subject to the determinism of the physical world. Nonetheless, each of us is also a person and, as such, is not controlled by the stars. Our whole being subsists in virtue of the subsistence of the

32 Maritain, p. 6.
spiritual soul which is in us a principle of creative unity, independence and liberty.33

One exists endowed with a spiritual existence which is capable of super-existing by way of knowledge and of love thanks to the operations of the intellect and the will. We might observe in passing, that the sheer fact of existing is neither the supreme good nor any one of the absolute goods to which the person as such is ordained. It is, however, the pre-requisite condition of the person's ordination to these goods.34

Unlike the concept of the individuality of corporeal things, the concept of personality is related not to matter but to the deepest and highest dimensions of being. Personality is the subsistence of the spiritual soul communicated to the human composite. It is within the secret depths of our ontological structure, a source of dynamic unity, of unification from within.35

The deepest layer of the human person's dignity consists in its property of resembling God — not in a general way after the manner of all creatures, but in a proper way. It is the image of God. For God is a spirit and the human person proceeds from Him in having as principle of life a spiritual soul capable of loving, knowing and of being uplifted by grace to participation in the very life of God so that, in the end, it might know and love Him as He knows and loves Himself.36

33 Maritain, p. 28.
34 Ibid., p. 34.
35 Ibid., p. 31.
36 Ibid., p. 32.
The individual and person do not exist separately in reality. One and the same reality is, in a certain sense an individual, and, in another sense, a person. Our whole being is an individual by reason of that in us which derives from matter, and a person by reason of that in us which derives from spirit.\(^{37}\)

When, in our action, the individual aspect of our being is given preponderance, evil will arise. If the development occurs in the direction of material individuality, it will be orientated towards the detestable ego whose law is to grasp or absorb for itself. Thus man will be truly a person only in so far as the life of the spirit and of liberty reigns over that of the senses and passions.

The person requires membership in a society in virtue both of its dignity and its needs. The person seeks to live in society because of its very perfections, as person, and its inner urge to communicate knowledge and love which requires relationship with other persons. It seeks society because of its needs or deficiencies, which derive from its material individuality. Society appears, therefore, to provide the human person with just those conditions of existence and development which it needs. It is not by itself alone that it reaches its plenitude but by receiving essential goods from society.\(^{38}\)

The end of society is the good of the community, of the social body. But if the good of the social body is not understood to be a common good of human persons, just as the social body itself is

\(^{37}\) Maritain, p. 33.

\(^{38}\) Ibid., p. 38.
a whole of human persons. This conception also would lead to other errors of a totalitarian type. The common good of the city is neither the mere collection of private goods, nor the proper good of a whole.\textsuperscript{39}

The human person, because it is ordained to the absolute and is summoned to a destiny beyond time, or, in other words, because of the highest requirements of personality as such, it is superior to all temporal societies. From this point of view, both society and its common good are indirectly subordinated to the perfect accomplishment of the person and its supra-temporal aspirations as to an end of another order -- an end which transcends them.

A single human soul is worth more than the whole universe of material goods. With respect to the eternal destiny of the soul, society exists for each person and is subordinated to it.\textsuperscript{40}

The person, even though he in some way transcends the order of the state, cannot remove himself from the state. Though the person as such is a totality, the material individual, or the person as a material individual, is a part of the state. Whereas the person, as person or totality, requires that the common good of the temporal society flow back over it, and even transcends the temporal society by its ordination to the transcendent whole, yet

\textsuperscript{39} Maritain, p. 40.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., p. 51.
the person still remains, as an individual or part, inferior and
subordinated to the whole and must, as an organ of the whole, serve
the common work.\textsuperscript{41}

Man is a part of and inferior to the political community by
reason of the things in and of him which, due as they are to the
deficiencies of material individuality, depend in their very essence
upon political society and which in turn may be used as means to
promote the temporal good of the society.

On the other hand, by reason of the things in and of man,
which are derived from the ordination of personality as such to the
absolute and which thus depend in their essence on something higher
than the political community and so concern properly the supra-tem-
poral accomplishment of the person as person, man excels the polit­
ical community.\textsuperscript{42}

The person as an individual is necessarily bound, by constraint
if need be, to serve the community and the common good since the
former is excelled by the latter as the part by the whole. But
when the person sacrifices to the common good of the city that which
is dearest to it, suffers torture and gives its life for the city,
in these very acts because it wills what is good and acts in accord­
ance with justice, it still loves its own soul, in accordance with

\textsuperscript{41}Maritain, p. 60.

\textsuperscript{42}Ibid., p. 64.
the order of charity, more than the city and the common good of the city.

But the common good directs itself to persons in a two-fold way: first, in so far as the persons are engaged in the social order, the common good by its essence must flow back over or redistribute itself to them; second, in so far as the persons transcend the social order and are directly ordained to the transcendent whole, the common good by its essence must favor their progress toward the absolute goods which transcend political society. From the first point of view we have the law of redistribution of the common good to the parts of society because these parts are persons. From the second point of view we have the law of transcendence by which the transcendence of the person over society is manifested.

By means of this distinction of individuality from personality we have lifted the person out of a complete dependence on society, that is, we have orientated the person to a good which transcends the secular good of society alone. Having thus located the common good in its proper context, we can begin to describe the common good in its essential aspects. We can begin to analyze the meaning of the common good by discussing the meaning of the terms "common" and "good".

A good is anything which completes or perfects us, for example food. Whether desired or achieved, a good will be either human, that is possessed and enjoyed as an intrinsic perfection of man's rational nature, for example, the moral and intellectual virtues; or useful, that is, one which serves as a means to the

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43 Maritain, p. 54.

44 Ibid., p. 66.
possession of a human good, for example, all the economic goods such as food or money. Human goods are further divided into immanent goods, which are enjoyed by us as perfections of our own nature, as knowledge; and secondly, social goods, which are enjoyed as perfections of someone else through the judgment of love which is the sympathetic expansion of our being to union with another. An example of this type of good is friendship.

The term common apples in general to a unity in which many participate. As applied to good it has two meanings. A good is essentially common when it is shared in the same way a nature is shared. Although a nature actually exists only as an individual nature, yet it is essentially the same as many other natures, all of which therefore, can be said to be essentially common. It is in this way too that happiness can be said to be the essential common good; for although happiness can exist only as a possession of this one person, yet its constitution will be essentially the same for all men, since it is the ultimate perfection of natures specifically the same. But a good may have another type of commonness which a nature cannot have, and this is existential commonness. A nature cannot have this kind of commonness because John's nature is numerically the nature of John only, not of any other person; so also with his visibility and all his other specific perfections. Although these are specifically similar in all

Cox, p. 54.
men, they are actually and existentially possessions of only this one man. A good, however, is not so limited in its scope of actual existence; it may have a common as well as an individual actuality. This commonness of existence simply means that it exists as a good for more than one person, for example, a friend can be a friend for several persons.

Obviously, most of the goods which were enumerated above do not qualify for such commonness of existence, for both the useful and human immanent goods as achieved cannot actually be possessions of many persons, but only of this one person. Hence the only created good which can be considered for this commonness of existence is the human separate type of good. This can exist as an actual perfection for many persons because it is not as such a perfection for any one of them. It is a good which can be loved and desired by many persons, but enjoyed or possessed as such by no one of them exclusively. It therefore has a common existence as a good for each and all of those desiring and loving it. Such a common good is the state, since as a unity of order resulting from the concerted action of its many citizens acting for a common end, it has an existence separate from any one of its citizens; hence it can act as the common good to be desired and loved by all. The state community, therefore,
is the existentially common good. This separate common good either as desired or achieved we shall call the objective common good, or simply and unqualifiedly the common good.

For the moment, viewing the state community as the common good, we can take cognizance of Pope John's definition of the common good. He says that it is necessary that public authorities have a correct understanding of the common good. This embraces the sum total of those conditions of social living, whereby men are enabled more fully and more readily to achieve their own perfection. Thus, even though the common good is considered on a material level, it has for its end the perfection of the person which transcends this same material realm.

Considering the common good on the national level, the following points are relevant and must be considered. The points listed by the Holy Father are:

to provide employment for as many workers as possible;
to take care lest privileged groups arise among the workers themselves; to maintain a balance between wages and prices; to make accessible the goods and services for a better life to as many persons as possible; either to eliminate or keep within bounds the inequalities that exist between different sectors of the economy — that is, between agriculture, industry and services; to balance properly any increases in output with advances in services provided to citizens, especially by public authority; to adjust, as far as possible, the means of production to the progress of science and technology; finally

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47 Cox, p. 55.

to ensure that the advantages of a more humane way of existence not merely subserve the present generation but have regard for future generations as well. As regards the common good of human society as a whole, the following conditions should be fulfilled: that the competitive striving of peoples to increase output be free of bad faith; that harmony in economic affairs and a friendly and beneficial co-operation be fostered; and, finally, that effective aid be given in developing the economically underdeveloped nations.49

The good of society then is a temporal good, an external good, a good common to all — to be shared in by all — and to be attained through the common efforts of all who make up society, complementing individual need. That good is expressed in the words "public peace and prosperity". Such being its nature, its relation to the personal end of the individual members is clear. Being temporal, it is subordinate to that personal end which is eternal; being external it is subordinate to the internal good of virtue; being common to all, it is to be acquired by the combined efforts of all; it subordinates to itself individual good of the same order, external and temporal, yet is subordinate in this same order to the individual good of all members taken together.50

Man's end is not wholly subordinated to the state and the ends of the state and of man really coincide. Human life is possible only in the framework of the state; from this fact the political

49 Pope John XXIII, p. 25.

50 Drummond, p. 13.
authority derives dignity and majesty. True as it is that man is not a slave of the state, just as true is it that the state is not a servant of the individual citizen. Therefore the sacrifice of the individual citizen's property, of his rights, and even of his life in defense of the state is justifiable, when we agree that the end of the state, the common good, is superior quantitatively and qualitatively to the life and property of the individual citizen as such. How otherwise could we relegate to the state the *jus vitae ac necis*, the right of conscription, the authority to send the soldier-citizen into war? This is an inescapable conclusion from the fact that the end of the state is not identical with the end of the private citizen or any sum of them. It is true, as we shall see, that normally there occurs a coincidence: The common good of the state and the private good of the citizens are interdependent: normally the common good and the citizens' private good cannot widely diverge; they converge so strongly that we rightly speak of a coincidence.51

The relation between the common good and the structure and function of public authority is an intrinsic connection. The moral order which needs public authority in order to promote the common good in human society requires also that the authority be effective

51 Rommen, p. 308.
in attaining that end. This demands that the organs through which the authority is formed becomes operative and pursues its ends, must be composed and act in such a manner as to be capable of bringing to realization the new meaning which the common good is taking on in the historical evolution of the human family.\textsuperscript{52}

Because this bond is an intrinsic one, the state is considered a servant to the individual. The state does not exist above and over its citizens. It is not a substance. It exists only in its citizens, by them and with them. The sum of the individuals is the matter of the state whereas the form is the moral and expressed in its laws, customs, and political constitutional organization.

From this standpoint the state, as distinguished from the whole of the individual citizens and their families, is a servant. Its end, the common good, can be realized only by enabling the citizens to fulfill their ultimate and transcendent end, the salvation of their souls, in pursuing their secular task in peace and security and in mutual help. Therefore it is not true that under all circumstances the end of the state must prevail in case of conflict. The state normally cannot demand every sacrifice. There exist genuine limits to the sacrifices of the citizens for the common good, and the acknowledgment of such limits distinguishes the Christian idea from the paganism of the totalitarian state. In

a genuine conflict between the natural law and the positive law of the state, the natural law prevails. In a genuine conflict between the salvation of man's soul and a positive demand of the state, the salvation of the soul prevails. Besides these qualitative conflicts we have what we may call the quantitative conflicts.

Even a just war may not be continued if it would mean the destruction of, let us say, seventy-per cent of the male population. For what is then the state, when there are no more citizens? Furthermore, because the end of the state is relative, never can there be demanded from all the citizens the renunciation of their basic rights of family life, of their freedom to direct the education of their children, to fulfill their religious obligations. For it is precisely unable them to live up to these individual rights and duties all together in the peace and security of communal life, that the state is produced.\(^3\)

We must now consider the relationship of the common good to the positive law of the state. It is clear that as subject to the exigencies of the human good in general, human law must never command precepts violatory of the natural law. The common good is never located outside the human good. The good of the state is unthinkable if it impedes or destroys the good of man: the natural

\(^3\)\textit{Rommel}, p. 309.
law, the needs of man's nature, rules all human conduct. Hence before a piece of legislation can be projected as useful for the common good it must fulfill one or the other of two conditions: either it must be useful for the human good — that is, commanded by the natural law — or it must deal with amoral matter.\[^{54}\]

Since human law is designed to help men lead the best possible lives, its end is ethical; that it operate is a demand of the natural law — to "do the good" men must live under the guidance of man-made laws. Human law is not, however, all of the natural law; called into being as an instrument for the building of the social order, it has as its immediate end not any good, but the unity of that order the common good; it fosters the growth of virtue within men's souls only through the medium of creating and maintaining the common good.\[^{55}\]

Hence if there be precepts of justice and virtue that are not directly related to the common good, they will be outside the jurisdiction of human law. The general end of human law is then the human good; and its specific end, the special aspect of the human good to which it is devoted, is the common good. In philosophical terminology, its material object is the good; its formal object, the common good.\[^{56}\]


\[^{55}\]Ibid., p. 115.

\[^{56}\]Pope John XXIII, Pacem in Terris, p. 115.
The common good, besides being considered as the necessary material advantages in this temporal life, must also be considered as an ethical good. Thus that which constitutes the common good of political society is not only: the collection of public commodities and services — the roads, ports, schools, etc., which the organization of common life presupposes; a sound fiscal policy and military power; the body of just laws, good customs and wise institutions, which provide the nation with its structure; the heritage of its great historical remembrances, its symbols and its glories, its living traditions and cultural treasures. The common good includes all of these and something much more besides — something more profound, more concrete and more human. For it includes also, and above all, the whole sum itself of these; a sum of which is quite different from a simple collection of juxtaposed units.\(^\text{57}\)

\[\text{\textit{The common good is not only a system of advantages and utilities but also a rectitude of life, an end, good in itself or, as the ancients expressed it, a \textit{bonum honestum}. For, on the one hand, to assure the existence of the multitude is something morally good in itself; on the other hand, the existence, thus assured, must be the just and morally good existence of the community. Only on condition that it is according to justice and moral goodness is the common good what it is, namely, the good of a people and a city, rather than of a mob or gangsters and murders. For this reason, the scorn of treaties and the sworn oath, political assassination and unjust war, even though they be useful to a government and procure some fleeting advantages for the}}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{57} Maritain, p. 42.}\]
peoples who make use of them, tend by their nature as political acts — acts involving in some degree the common action — to the destruction of the common good. 58

The common good is something ethically good. Included in it, as an essential element, is the maximum possible development, here and now, of the persons making up the united multitude to the end of forming a people, organized not by force alone, but by justice. 59

The unity of the common good must now be considered, for we have been speaking of the common good and not of common goods. It might be wondered why the members seek one and same existential common good. The answer is simply that they have natures essentially the same, and therefore the good or perfection of these natures, both in its final stage (happiness) and intermediate stage (common good), will be essentially the same good for all men. Consequently, one common existential good — based on a nature essentially the same for all — will suffice. The common good has a singular designation because like man's nature and his happiness, which is the perfection of this nature, the common good will have an order of goods, in which the lower or secondary goods serve the higher or primary goods. Hence the common good, like happiness, is an order-good, giving disposition and unity, and therefore added effectiveness to its constituent goods. 60

58 Maritain, p. 43.
59 Ibid, p. 44.
60 Cox, p. 55.
This fact about the common good being an order is important; for as an order its principle and ordinary function is the direction and unification of the goods ordered, not their attainment. More concretely expressed, this ordering of social goods should be the totality of those social conditions and pre-requisites which make possible to the members the fulfillment of their life and culture tasks by free and personal action. In a word, this unity of order provides its members with the opportunity of becoming virtuous, especially by providing for the exercise of the social virtues. Whether man avails himself of this opportunity is a personal responsibility, since ultimately only the individual will is the productive cause of moral virtue and happiness.\(^{61}\)

It will be fitting to close our consideration of the common good, by discussing the common good as a relative value, that is, by viewing it in a hierarchy of values. The nature of the common good is seen more clearly when this good is contrasted with individual goods. The difference between these goods is not a mere quantitative one, with the individual good being the good of one and the common good being but the sum of many individual goods. This distinction is rather a qualitative one, with the objective common good representing more than a mere collection of individual goods, since it has the additional and distinctive note of order. This

\(^{61}\) Cox, p. 59.
is but another way of saying that the objective common good is the perfection of a common accidental existent, namely the community; whereas the individual good is the perfection of an individual substantial existent, namely a single person. Therefore, there is a formal difference between these two goods.

Now the relationship between these two goods is best seen in a further division of the individual goods. When the individual good is taken to mean the possession by an individual of an accidental perfection, for example, a more sufficient income, then such a good is subordinate to the common good; for the latter is an essential good, and the accidental is always subordinate to the essential. When however the term individual good is taken to mean an essential good enjoyed by the individual, such as happiness and its immanent human goods, then there can be no necessary subordination of such goods to the common good on the grounds of essentiality. The relationship between the common good and such an individual but essential good as happiness must therefore be made on the basis of means and end. Thus the common good will be subordinate to happiness, both in the material-formal order as a constituent means and in the efficient order as an external and productive cause. And even with regard to the components of

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62 Cox, p. 59.
happiness — for example health and necessary property — the common good cannot demand the sacrifice of these goods because they are as necessary for happiness as the commonweal itself.\footnote{Cox, p. 60.}

It will be noted that these considerations enable us to understand in its true sense the statement of Aristotle, so often repeated by St. Thomas; the good of the city is more noble, more divine than that of the individual. Here, as on so many other points, Aristotle has expressed a remarkably pure principle whose significance could be penetrated only by eyes more illuminated than those of the pagan wisdom.\footnote{Maritain, p. 71.}

This principle must be understood in a very precisely formal way; in the very same line of values in which the person is a part in relation to the social whole. Then it is clear that the good of the community, the authentic and true common good, is superior to the good of the individual person in the order of terrestrial values according to which the person is a part of the community. But these values are not equal to the dignity and destiny of the person. By reason of the law of transcendence, which has been described, the person is raised to a higher level than the level at which it is but a part; at this level, the good of the person is the more elevated. However, at this higher level, it is still a part, but of a higher community.\footnote{Tbid., p. 72.}
Finally, we will consider this last step in the hierarchy of values. This is the higher level of existence which the person alone is capable of attaining. To some philosophers, this is the true common good.

We know that each intellectual substance is made, first, for God, the separated common good of the universe, and second, for the perfection of the order of the universe (not only as the universe of bodies but also as the universe of spirits), and third, for itself, that is, for the action by which it perfects itself and accomplishes its destiny.  

The beatific vision is the supremely personal act by which the soul, transcending absolutely every sort of created common good, enters into the very bliss of God and draws its life from the uncreated Good, the divine essence itself, the uncreated common Good of the three Divine Persons. The soul is filled with God. It is in society with God. With Him, it possesses a common good, the divine Good Itself.

Because of it, another society is formed -- the society of the multitude of blessed souls, each of which on its own account beholds the divine essence and enjoys the same uncreated Good. They love mutually in God. The uncreated common good, in which they all participate constitutes the common good of the celestial city in which they are congregated.

Here in the intentional identification of each soul with the

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66 Maritain, p. 11.
67 Ibid., p. 12.
68 Ibid., p. 13.
divine essence, the law of the primacy of the common good over the personal good comes to an end in a certain sense. And it comes to an end here precisely because the personal good is at that moment the common good. 69

And yet, the common good, strictly speaking, as the end of human society, is not an absolute value. It remains in the sphere of the secular life and is viewed from the ultimate end of the human person and from the final purpose of all creation. Hence it is a relative end; its place is not on the principle of the Christian hierarchy of values. Man's end is beyond the world. His last end, the salvation of his soul, is transcendent, and that institution which furthers this last end is therefore beyond the end of the state. The common good has to deal with the extra-secular felicity, yet by this the end of the state and the state itself are not degraded. The state and the common good in the sphere of nature belong to the order of creation and thus are in themselves, in so far as they participate in the end of all creatures, the glory of God. The state and the common good are not the whole of morality; they are parts of that hierarchy of moral values which culminates in God. Therefore religion with its divinely instituted form, the Church, is beyond the state, and the common good of the religious community is different from the common good of the state, just as both

69 Maritain, p. 79.
communities are independent and sovereign in their respective orders. Thus the profound meaning of assigning this relative value to the end of the state is not a depreciation of the moral nature and value of the state. On the contrary, this insertion of the end of the state into the supereminent moral order gives to the state a moral dignity as a servant to the external, transcendental end of man.70

70 Rommen, p. 311.
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