

## ON THE COMMON GOODS

*Dr. Gregory Froelich*

St. Thomas teaches that the first task of moral philosophy is to determine the character of the good to which human life is finally directed. It is therefore surprising that in the part of moral philosophy that for Thomas ranks first in dignity and authority, namely, politics, he seems to forgo careful discussion of the final good falling principally under its scope. This good, Thomas says at the beginning of his *Politics* commentary, is the highest and most perfect good in human affairs; it is the common good of political society, better and more divine than the good of only one person.<sup>1</sup>

But a reader of Thomas's political works will find nothing resembling a *Tractatus de bono communi*. Rather, St. Thomas usually refers to the common good within a particular context and assumes that the reader already has a grasp of its essential features. Contrast this to his ethical works, specifically the beginning parts of his *Ethics* commentary and of the *Summa Theologiae*, secunda pars, where he takes pains to show clearly and fully the nature of the ultimate good for an individual person.

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<sup>1</sup> *In octo libros Politicorum Aristotelis expositio* (Turin: Marietti, 1954), liber I, lect. 1, n. 11. See also *ibid.*, prooemium, n. 7.

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Why does there appear to be no treatment of the common good in his political writings parallel to the treatment of the individual's good in his ethical writings? Perhaps, as some have suggested, he thought that the matter was obvious and that he needed to do no more than echo an authoritative teaching that came to him through a rich tradition.<sup>2</sup> But on this assumption we can hardly explain why a pupil of St. Thomas, Fra Remigio de Girolami of Florence, felt obliged to distill his master's writings on the subject.<sup>3</sup> Why should he have wanted to belabor the obvious?

Nor on this assumption could we easily explain why in recent times those who have looked to St. Thomas with the common good in mind have presented anything but a uniform interpretation. Some have argued that the common good is good only to the extent that it serves as a means to one's own happiness, whereas others have argued the contrary, that is, that an individual's happiness is measured by the common good—that it is his highest good and nothing at all like a means.

Consider, on the one hand, the claims of no less a devoted student of St. Thomas than Fr. Walter Farrell:

With respect to the common good, it is necessary to reject as false all the passages in which St. Thomas declares that the common good is supreme in the natural, temporal order; or, if this is not a fair interpretation of all those texts in which St. Thomas says that the common good takes precedence over the individual good because the good of the whole is

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<sup>2</sup> I. Th. Eschmann, O.P., "A Thomistic Glossary on the Principle of the Preeminence of a Common Good," *Mediaeval Studies* 5 (1943) 123.

<sup>3</sup> *Tractatus de bono communi* is the title of the work. See R. Egenter, "Gemeinnutz vor Eigennutz, Die soziale Leitidee im Tractatus de bono communi des Fr. Remigius von Florenz," *Scholastik* 9 (1934) 79–92. For biographical remarks on Remigius see M. Grabmann, "Fra Remigio de' Girolami O. Pr., discepolo di S. Tommaso d'Aquino e maestro di Dante," *La scuola cattolica* 53 (1925) 267–281.

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greater than the good of its parts, then we must at least reject this false interpretation of what St. Thomas seems to say, even though it has prevailed among his commentators and followers to this day.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, Yves Simon argues:

That virtuous people, as a proper effect of their very virtue, love the common good and subordinate their choices to its requirements is an entirely unquestionable proposition.<sup>5</sup>

Even more difficult to understand is that notorious controversy that raged in the 1940's between Charles DeKoninck and Father Eschmann.<sup>6</sup> Each considered himself a Thomist, while accusing the other of taking positions fundamentally contrary to St. Thomas. DeKoninck argued that it was the clear doctrine of St. Thomas that the common good always enjoys preeminence over an individual's private good. Fr. Eschmann flatly denied this and claimed that the individual's own good ultimately transcends every common good.

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<sup>4</sup> "The Theory of Democracy," *The Thomist* 4, n. 2 (April 1942) 323–337.

<sup>5</sup> *Philosophy of Democratic Government* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 39.

<sup>6</sup> Fr. Eschmann began this battle with his vituperative response to DeKoninck's *De la primauté du bien commun*. Since he felt that DeKoninck was backhandedly attacking Maritain, he entitled his counterattack "In Defense of Jacques Maritain," published in *The Modern Schoolman* 22, n. 4 (May 1945) 183–208. DeKoninck replied with "In Defence of Saint Thomas," *Laval theologique et philosophique* 1, n. 2 (1945) 3–103. This response appears to have silenced Fr. Eschmann.

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However one decides who got the better of whom in this debate or in others like it over the years, one thing is clear. The notion of the common good is not an entirely simple matter. There is a remarkable ease with which the expression “common good” is taken to mean widely different things, whether legitimately or illegitimately. For example, DeKoninck finds that Fr. Eschmann equivocates upon the term “common” by confusing what is common logically, that is, in predication (“commune in praedicando”), with what is common in causation (“commune in causando”). When Fr. Eschmann does hit upon the sense which Thomas usually uses, that is, “commune in causando,” he nevertheless confuses the ways in which an agent and a final cause each can be common. But then it was Fr. Eschmann who said, “The Thomistic notion of common good is an analogical and very elusive notion.”<sup>7</sup> DeKoninck himself admits that St. Thomas uses the expression “bonum commune” in different senses and thus that there is a certain complexity in the subject itself.

In this essay I would like to present these several senses and then argue that there exists among them a particular ordering, somewhat like the ordering of the different analogical senses of “healthy.” And then finally I would like to suggest an aid to keeping in mind the ruling or principal sense of the common good that St. Thomas uses.

From just a cursory reading of St. Thomas’s writings one can detect a plurality of uses of the expression “bonum commune” and begin to compose an impressive inventory, including things as diverse as money, honor, victory, justice, peace, happiness, the perpetuation of the species, the order of the universe, the good convertible with being, God,

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<sup>7</sup> “In Defense of Jacques Maritain,” p. 198, n. 24.

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and even children.<sup>8</sup> It would be curious to think of these all as individual instances of the same kind of thing. Certainly St. Thomas could not have in mind the same idea of “bonum commune” when he applies it to happiness (a quality of the human soul) and to the order of the universe (a relation) and to children (substances). In fact, its equivocalness rivals that of “ens,” since its two components are themselves notoriously equivocal.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> MONEY, HONOR: *In decem libros Ethicorum Aristotelis ad Nicomachum expositio* (Turin: Marietti, 1964), liber V, lect. 4, n. 927. VICTORY: *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio* (Turin: Marietti, 1977), lect. 2, n. 1303. JUSTICE: *Summa Theologiae* (Turin: Marietti, 1948–1950) IaIIae, q. 19, a. 10; *In IX Ethic.*, lect. 6, n. 1839. Peace: ST IaIIae, q. 96, a. 3 ad 1; *De regimine principum* (Turin: Marietti, 1973), c. 2. HAPPINESS: *Summa contra gentiles* (Rome: Desclée, 1934) III, 39; ST IaIIae, q. 3, a. 2 ad 2. PERPETUATION OF THE SPECIES: *Quaestiones Quodlibetales* (Paris: Lethiellieux, 1926) I, q. 4, a. 3 [8] ad 3; *Quaestiones disputatae* (Turin: Marietti, 1965), de malo, q. 15, a. 2 ad 12. THE ORDER OF THE UNIVERSE: *De substantiis separatis* (Turin: Marietti, 1973), c. 12, n. 113; *In XII Meta.*, lect. 12. THE GOOD CONVERTIBLE WITH BEING: ST Ia, q. 17, a. 4 ad 2; ST IaIIae, q. 55, a. 4 ad 2. GOD: ST Ia, q. 60, a. 1 ad 5; ST IaIIae, q. 100, a. 9; ST IIaIIae, q. 26, a. 3. CHILDREN: *In VIII Ethic.*, lect. 12, n. 1724; *Super IV Sententiarum* (Paris: Lethiellieux, 1929–1947), d. 33, q. 2, a. 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Commune*. The plasticity of this term is seldom remarked. St. Thomas uses it to describe a certain type of place, tool, measure, prayer, object of sense, sense faculty, cause, name, dispensation, law, end, nature, essence, form, opinion, genus, truth the list goes on. See R. DeFerrari’s *A Lexicon of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, 1948), under *commune*. With such a diversity of objects *commune* can hardly retain one meaning, and so St. Thomas distinguishes several senses.

The most fundamental distinction seems to be between *communis secundum rem* and *communis secundum rationem* (ST Ia, q. 13, a. 9; ST Ia, q. 39, a. 4 ad 3; *In VII Meta.*, lect. 13, n. 6). Whatever is one and the same numerically while belonging to many is common *secundum rem*, as the Lyceum, a place common to the many who meet there. On the other hand, whatever belongs to many but whose unity depends upon an abstraction from them is common *secundum rationem*, as the genus animal or man, which is common insofar as the intellect abstracts it from many individual animals or men.

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Are we to think that St. Thomas was unaware of this complexity? As I hope to show, he was aware and in fact accounted for it. I will argue that there are three senses: the good common as a predicate, and the good common as a cause, the latter being divided into the good common as an ultimate end and the good common as a means.

*Bonum Commune in Praedicando*

In answering an objection in the *Primae Secundae* of the *Summa Theologiae*, St. Thomas shows that a proper understanding of the common good depends upon how the word “common” is taken. The article asks whether all law is ordered to the common good. The second objection answers negatively, arguing that every law must be ordered to some particular good.

Law directs man to action. But human acts are in the particular. Therefore, law also is ordered to a particular good.

*[L]ex dirigit hominem ad agendum. Sed actus humani sunt in particularibus. Ergo et lex ad aliquod particulare bonum ordinatur.*<sup>10</sup>

We are left to draw the conclusion that, since the common is opposed to the particular, law cannot be ordered to the common good. St. Thomas responds,

Actions are indeed in the particular, but the particular can be referred to the common good, common not in the way

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*Bonum.* St. Thomas divides the good into three general categories: *honestum*, *utile* and *delectabile* (ST Ia, q. 5, a. 6). Each is desirable and the term of the appetite, *perfectivum alterius*, but in different ways, so that the term *bonum* is applied analogously. In addition, we speak of a good man, meaning that he is perfect, not perfective. This sense also has its own divisions *bonum per se* and *bonum secundum quid* (ibid.). We shall see in the course of this study that these distinctions are crucial in understanding the common good.

<sup>10</sup> ST IIaIIae, q. 90, a. 2 ad 2.

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a genus or species is common, but in the way a final cause is common—which is why the common good is also called the common end.

*Ad secundum dicendum quod operationes quidem sunt in particularibus: sed illa particularia referri possunt ad bonum commune, non quidem communitate generis vel speciei, sed communitate causae finalis, secundum quod bonum commune dicitur finis communis.*<sup>11</sup>

St. Thomas does not take issue with either premise of the opposing argument nor even with its conclusion, if “particular good” is understood in opposition to the good common “in the way a genus or species is common.” Rather, St. Thomas has recalled for the objector another conception of “common good,” namely, the good common “in the way a final cause is common.” This is not opposed to “particular good” in the sense taken in the objection. It is both a common and a particular good.

Now “genus” and “species” refer to the properties which accrue to something insofar as it is known. They are common, as Thomas argues repeatedly, by predication. For example, the species “man” is a common name, not a proper name restricted to one individual, such as the name Socrates. We name as we know, and since our knowledge abstracts from individual characteristics and grasps the essential features of things, language reflects this in such words as common names. There is in fact no individual substance that corresponds to a word like “man”.<sup>12</sup> Ev-

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> *In VII Meta.*, lect. 13, n. 6: “Animal commune vel homo communis non est aliqua substantia in rerum natura. Sed hanc communitatem habet forma animalis vel hominis secundum quod est in intellectu, qui unam formam accipit ut multis communem, in quantum abstrahit eam ab omnibus individuans.” And ST Ia, q. 39, a. 4 ad 3: [U]nitas autem sive communitas humanae naturae non est secundum rem, sed solum secun-

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ery man is individual. “Man” is common only because it can be understood and predicated of each human person. Human nature is common to all men in the same way. We do not share the same nature as we share a room or a friend. It is not something numerically one of which each of us has a part. Any universality attributed to human nature comes solely from our ability to predicate “having a human nature” or “man” of all men, and not from anything intrinsic to it.<sup>13</sup>

Because he holds that things common in predication have this less than real existence, the objector denies that the common good has any bearing in human affairs. St. Thomas agrees with him up to a point, as his response indicates. Just what that point is he makes clearer in commenting upon *Ethics* I.6, where Aristotle reluctantly takes Plato to task for claiming that the true human good exists separately in the realm of the Ideas. St. Thomas argues that the good common in predication and also Plato’s notion of the absolute good can never be goals of human activities, and hence that neither has a place in morals.<sup>14</sup> For, he says, it is manifest that the common or separate good is not something man is able to make or do. Plato’s

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dum considerationem. And *Q.D. de pot.*, q. 7, a. 4 ad 1: [S]pecies non est aliquid unum numero pluribus commune, sed ratione solum.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *De ente et essentia* (Turin: Marietti, 1973), c. 3, n. 18.

<sup>14</sup> *In I Ethic.*, lect. 8, nn. 97, 98: “Quaerimus enim felicitatem, quae ist finis humanorum actuum. Finis autem hominis, vel est ipsa eius operatio, vel est aliqua res exterior. Quae quidem potest esse finis hominis, vel quia est operata, sicut domus est finis aedificationis, vel quia est possessa sicut res quae venit in usum. Manifestum est autem, quod illud bonum commune vel separatum non potest esse ipsa hominis operatio, nec etiam est aliquid per hominem factum. Nec etiam videtur aliquid ab homine possessum sicut possidentur res quae veniunt in usum huius vitae. Unde manifestum est, quod illud bonum commune vel separatum non est bonum humanum, quod nunc quaerimus.”

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good exists in the untouchable realm of the Ideas, and the good common according to predication *as such* has no real existence. But human happiness either consists in an activity itself or is the product of an activity. Therefore, the Platonic good and this kind of common good are not human goods.

What exactly counts as a good common in predication? Health, temperance, and knowledge are goods realized in individuals, but they take on a universal character in the intellect. What really exist are many individual habits of health, temperance, and knowledge. As a genus health does not enjoy real individual existence. Likewise, happiness is an activity belonging to an individual and as such would appear to be a purely personal good.<sup>15</sup> To say that all men desire happiness is not of course to say that they all desire one and the very same thing. They each want their own happiness, and most even have varying notions of what that consists in. If happiness has any widespread community it is that of predication at a very general level. All such goods then are common by predication, in the same way that human nature is common to all men.<sup>16</sup>

Now health, courage, temperance, and happiness doubtless fall into the class of human goods, but not insofar as they are common in predication. Men desire to possess them in their individual souls. To seek after a good precisely as it is common in predication is a fruitless search after a good that can never belong to anyone. For if it

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, lect. 10, n. 130: “[F]elicitas est operatio propria hominis secundum virtutem in vita perfecta.” We will, however, see that what belongs to someone as his *own* is not necessarily his *alone*. An individual’s happy activity is in the final account the individual’s *and* his friends.

<sup>16</sup> At the most general and abstract level of predication there is the common good convertible with being and truth. Cf. ST Ia, q. 17, a. 4 ad 2; ST IaIIae, q. 55, a. 4 ad 2.

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was an object of desire it would have to be viewed as a good numerically one and thus existing over and above the particular goods to which it corresponds. But then it would be no one's good.<sup>17</sup> No one could say, "This is my good," but at best, "This is humanity's good," as though humanity were a proper name. For something common in this way could only belong to something like a reified genus, and not to anyone in particular. So when St. Thomas says, as he does, that happiness is a common good that all men can attain,<sup>18</sup> he is not suggesting that man's final end exists over and above his own happy activity. By describing it as common, he is indicating that everyone has the same kind of final end, namely, happiness. But it is not each one's end insofar as it is common. The good common in predication excludes the individual good, just as the universal excludes the particular.

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<sup>17</sup> DeKoninck has expressed well the absurdity involved in this: "Dès lors, le bien commun n'est pas un bien qui ne serait pas le bien des particuliers, et qui ne serait que le bien de la collectivité envisagée comme une sorte de singulier. Dans ce cas, il serait commun par accident seulement, il serait proprement singulier, ou, sil l'on veut, il différerait du bien singulier des particuliers en ce qu'il serait *nullius*" (*De la primauté*, p. 9)

"Thus the common good is not a good other than the good of the particulars, a good which is merely the good of the collectivity looked upon as a kind of singular. In that case, it would be common only accidentally; properly speaking it would be singular, or if you wish, it would differ from the singular by being *nullius*." (*On the Primacy of the Common Good. Aquinas Review*, vol. 4, p. 17.)

<sup>18</sup> SCG III, c. 39: "Felicitas autem est finis humanae speciei: cum omnes homines ipsam naturaliter desiderent. Felicitas igitur est quoddam commune bonum possibile provenire omnibus hominibus, nisi accidat aliquibus impedimentum quo sint orbatī." See also ST IaIIae, q. 3, a. 2 ad 2. In the same way St. Thomas seems to speak of the virtue of justice as a common good. *De commendatione et partitione sacrae scripturae* (Turin: Marietti, 1975), part 2, n. 1207: "[I]ustitia, qua est bonum commune, cuius exemplum ponitur in Paralipomenis, in quo totius populi status describitur qui per iustitiam gubernatur."

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*Bonum Commune in Causando*

But there is a way a good can be common and in that very same respect belong to the individual. As we have already seen Thomas point out, something can be called common either as a predicate or as a cause.<sup>19</sup> This second way belongs to a cause which while remaining numerically one extends to many effects. The sun, for example, is the common source of light and warmth for numerous things. Unlike something common by predication, it is common precisely as it is individual. Now the good is a cause as that for the sake of which, as an end or goal. But since a particular good can be the end of many, as victory is for an army, we may also speak of a good common causally. The common goal which the Greeks had in facing the Persians at Thermopylae was victory. Each had as his end one and the same thing a victory against this enemy, here and now—not a general notion, which could never by itself direct the particular actions of any army.<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps the most vivid example of this kind of common good is children. They are, St. Thomas argues, one of the three goods of marriage, along with fidelity and the sacra-

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<sup>19</sup> St. Thomas makes the same distinction at a more general level in *Q.D. de Verit.* q. 7, a. 6 ad 7: “Dicitur enim dupliciter aliquid commune. Uno modo per consecutionem vel praedicationem; quando, scilicet, aliquod unum invenitur in multis secundum unam rationem. . . . Alio modo per modum causae, sicut causa quae, una numero manens, ad plures effectus se extendit.”

<sup>20</sup> All armies everywhere have that in mind, but are led to action only by recognizing the possibility of a particular victory, which in fact can come about only through many single victories of individual soldiers. “Militaris enim pervenit ad victoriam totius exercitus, quae est quoddam bonum commune ex singularibus victoriis huius et illius” (*In VII Metaphysic.*, lect. 7, n. 1303).

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ment.<sup>21</sup> For the sake of begetting and educating children man and woman unite in marriage and order their combined efforts. They share the same end, just as soldiers share victory as a goal. No child is the exclusive possession of either the mother or father, nor does the responsibility of his welfare fall to only one of them. This is why childless couples are more prone to separation, “for children are a common good of both, namely of the husband and wife, whose union is for the sake of offspring. But what is common binds and sustains friendship.”<sup>22</sup> The child then is a common good set off from the parents’ private good but not from their individual good. They each can say “This is my child” and “This is our child” without contradiction.

St. Thomas refers to several other common goods that fall under the same division. The order of an army, for example, is a common good.<sup>23</sup> Order is the form of an army, making a swarm of men into a single force, as the form of the body makes a heterogeneous mass into a living organism. But since order is the form of the whole army, it is common to all the parts. Each soldier owes his ability to engage effectively in battle in large measure to

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<sup>21</sup> *IV Sent.*, d. 31, q. 1, a. 2. Also *IV Sent.*, d. 19, q. 2, a. 3 ad 4: “[M]atrimonium principaliter ordinatur ad bonum commune ratione principalis finis, qui est bonum prolis.”

<sup>22</sup> *In Ethic.*, lect. 12, n. 1724: “Et inde est quod steriles, quae scilicet carent prole, citius ab invicem separantur. Fiebat enim apud antiquos separatio matrimonii sterilitatis causa. Et huiusmodi ratio est, quia filii sunt commune bonum amborum, scilicet viri et uxoris, quorum coniunctio est propter prolem. Illud autem quod est commune continet et conservat amicitiam, quae etiam, ut supra dictum est, in communicatione consistit.”

<sup>23</sup> ST IaIIae, q. 9, a. 1: “[D]ux exercitus, qui intendit bonum commune, scilicet ordinem totius exercitus, movet suo imperio aliquem ex tribunis, qui intendit ordinem unius aciei.” Cf. *In XII Metaphysic.*, lect. 12, nn. 2630–2631; *Q.D. de caritate*, a. 4 ad 2.

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the order of the whole. In fact, his duties as a soldier are defined by his particular station in the whole. His and every one of his comrades' good is found in the good of that whole, a common good unopposed to the individual's good.

Along the same lines the order of the created universe is a common good.<sup>24</sup> St. Thomas means by the order of the universe something much more profound than what we call the chain of life, though even here distinction and order are manifestly goods common to every species. For Thomas the order of the universe consists in a line of dominion extending from the lowest material creatures to spiritual substances such as the angels. Its purpose is to mirror the divine nature as far as a creature can.

The perfection of each and every caused thing is to become like its cause. For those things that come to be according to nature reach their perfection when they have become like their parent. Even artificial things are made perfect by attaining to the form of the art.

*Uniuscuiusque enim effectus perfectio in hoc consistit quod suae causae assimiletur. Quod enim secundum naturam generatur, tunc perfectum est quando contingit ad similitudinem generantis. Artificialia etiam per hoc perfecta redduntur quod artis formam consequuntur.*<sup>25</sup>

Now since God exceeds infinitely every one of his creatures, so that what is in Him simply and unified is found in them compositely and variously, none alone adequately reflects the divine nature.<sup>26</sup> But through an ordered mul-

<sup>24</sup> *De substantiis separatis*, c. 12: “[B]onum universi est bonum ordinis, sicut bonum exercitus. . . . Optimum autem in rerum universitate est bonum ordinis: hoc enim est bonum commune, cetera vero sunt singularia bona.” Also *Q.D. de spirit. creaturis*, q.un., a. 8; SCG II, cc. 42, 44.

<sup>25</sup> *De subst. sep.*, c. 12.

<sup>26</sup> SCG II, c. 45: “Sed perfectam Dei similitudinem non possunt consequi

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tiplicity and variety creation can accomplish what the individual cannot. It is similar to the way that a caribou herd is, at least in principle, immortal, even though its members are not. Creation as an ordered whole imitates more perfectly than any single creature what is in God *simpliciter et unite*. To the extent that a creature shares in this order it thereby shares in this divine imitation, wherein lies its perfection. In other words, as a part of a whole, the creature finds its perfection in the order of the universe, a good common *as a final cause*.

Now any good, insofar as it is an end, can be described in either of two ways, namely, as extrinsic or as intrinsic.<sup>27</sup> An end is extrinsic if it exists separately from what seeks it, like a traveler’s destination. On the other hand, there is an end which exists within that whose end it is. Form is the end of generation or alteration in this way. It is a good intrinsic to what it forms.

The good common as a final cause poses no exception to this division. For the order of the army, to take our first example, is present within the army, just as the end in generation, that is, the form, exists within what is gen-

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res creatae secundum unam solam speciem creaturae: quia, cum causa excedat effectum, quod est in causa simpliciter et unite, in effectu invenitur composite et multipliciter, nisi effectus pertingat ad speciem causae: quod in proposito dici non potest, non enim creatura posset esse Deo aequalis. Oportuit igitur esse multipliciter et varietatem in rebus creatis, ad hoc quod inveniretur in eis Dei similitudo perfecta secundum modum suum.”

<sup>27</sup> *In XII Meta.*, lect. 12, n. 2627: “Bonum enim, secundum quod est finis alicuius, est duplex. Est enim finis extrinsecus ab eo quod est ad finem, sicut se dicimus locum esse finem eius quod movetur ad locum. Est etiam finis intra, sicut forma finis generationis et alterationis, et forma iam adeptae, est quoddam bonum intrinsecum eius, cuius est forma. Forma autem alicuius totius, quod est unum per ordinationem quamdam partium, est ordo ipsius: unde relinquitur quod sit bonum eius.” See also *In I Sent.*, d. 44, q. 1, a. 2; *Q.D. de caritate*, q.un., a. 4 ad 2.

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erated. Order, the form of a complex whole, is an intrinsic common good. On the other hand, the order within an army is for the sake of victory, which is the principal intention of the one in command. In fact as an end victory belongs to him more than to those he commands. A sign of this is that the greater part of honor is bestowed upon the leader of a victorious company. He receives the special accolades, the pride of place in the triumph, the laurels. He also receives the lion's share of blame for failure. Hence St. Thomas says that the extrinsic good of an army coincides with the good of the leader, for it is through him, as the cause of its organization, that victory is gained.<sup>28</sup>

The same holds for the good of the whole created universe. Order is its intrinsic common good, but since it exists to reflect the divine perfection and goodness it has as its extrinsic common good God Himself. Each creature desires as its own perfection to mirror the divine nature, accomplishing this most perfectly as a part of the whole created order. Both order and God are goods for the individual creature, in the same way that the intrinsic and extrinsic goods of a whole are goods for each part.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *In XII Meta.*, lect. 12, n. 2630: "Sicut videmus in exercitu: nam bonum exercitus est et in ipso ordine exercitus, et in duce, qui exercitui praesidet: sed magis est bonum exercitus in duce, quam in ordine: quia finis potior est in bonitate his quae sunt ad finem: ordo autem exercitus est propter bonum ducis adimplendum, scilicet ducis voluntatem in victoriae consecutionem; non autem e converso, bonum ducis est propter bonum ordinis." See also ST Ia, q. 103, a. 2 ad 3.

<sup>29</sup> ST Ia, q. 103, a. 2 ad 3: "[F]inis quidem universi est aliquod bonum in ipso existens, scilicet ordo ipsius universi: hoc autem bonum non est ultimus finis, sed ordinatur ad bonum extrinsecum ut ad ultimum finem; sicut etiam ordo exercitus ordinatur ad ducem, ut dicitur in XII Meta-phys." See also ST Ia, q. 65, a. 2.

Notice in question 103 that the second objection is taken from the same

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Among these divisions where does the political common good fall? Is it an intrinsic or extrinsic common good, or perhaps neither of these? Though St. Thomas never explicitly says, it is not difficult to know how he would answer. For the common good is the good of the whole community.<sup>30</sup> But since the political community is an ordered whole, not an organic whole or a disordered pile,<sup>31</sup> its good consists in the preservation and tranquility of its order. Such a good is not taken in opposition to the good of a single man, for it is as a part of that order that

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passage of the *Ethics* where Aristotle and, as we have seen, St. Thomas in his commentary argued that a separate and common (in praedicando) good as such falls outside the class of human goods. The objector has extended the argument to include every kind of extrinsic good insofar as it is an end: “Praeterea, Philosophus dicit, I Ethic., quod finium quidam sunt operationes, quidam opera, idest operata. Sed nihil extrinsecum a toto universo potest esse operatum: operatio autem est in ipsis operantibus. Ergo nihil extrinsecum potest esse finis gubernationis rerum.”

Here is St. Thomas’s reply: “Ad secundum dicendum quod Philosophus loquitur de finibus artium, quarum quaedam habent pro finibus operationes ipsas, sicut citharistae finis est citharizare; quaedam vero habent pro fine quoddam operatum, sicut aedificatoris finis non est aedificare, sed domus. Contingit autem aliquid extrinsecum esse finem non solum sicut operatum, sed etiam sicut possessum seu habitum, vel etiam sicut repraesentatum: sicut se dicamus quod Hercules est finis imaginis, quae fit ad eum repraesentandum. Sic igitur potest dici quod bonum extrinsecum a toto universo est finis gubernationis rerum sicut habitum et repraesentatum: quia ad hoc unaquaeque res tendit, ut participet ipsum, et assimiletur ei, quantum potest.”

<sup>30</sup> *In X Ethic.*, lect. 1, n. 1953; SCG III, c. 80; *Q.D. de caritate*, q.un., a. 2; ST IIaIIae, q. 58, a. 5.

<sup>31</sup> *In I Ethic.*, lect. 1, n. 5: “Sciendum est autem, quod hoc totum, quod est civilis multitudo, vel domestica familia, habet solam unitatem ordinis, secundum quam non est aliquid simpliciter unum.” ST IIaIIae, q. 58, a. 7 ad 2: “Ad secundum dicendum quod bonum commune civitatis et bonum singulare unius personae non differunt solum secundum multum et paucum, sed secundum formalem differentiam: alia enim est ratio boni communis et boni singularis, sicut et alia est ratio totius et partis.”

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man finds his highest natural perfection. As St. Thomas argues,<sup>32</sup> only as a member of a civil order is man within the reach of the virtues, which once attained make him the best of animals. Outside of the civil order, without justice and law, man becomes the worst of animals, since being armed with reason he can turn even the virtues to the worst ends. The political order, then, is a good for each citizen belonging to it. It is an intrinsic common good. This is the end of law, the first concern of the just ruler, the good to which all citizens order their virtuous actions, a good in the class of *bonum honestum*, choiceworthy for its own sake. Just as all the soldiers of an army seek to promote its order, as a common end, so the citizenry seeks to promote the order proper to the political community. But the difference is that, whereas victory is a means to attaining peace, the political order is an end in itself. It is in fact man's highest natural end and for that reason takes precedence over his personal or private good.

*Bona Communia*

There are goods, however, that are not ends in themselves but means to ends, and we may expect that this distinction entails yet another type of common good. St.

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<sup>32</sup> *In I Politic.*, lect. 1, nn. 40, 41: “Ille autem qui primo instituit civitatem, fuit causa hominibus maximorum bonorum.

“Homo enim est optimum animalium si perficiatur in eo virtus, ad quam habet inclinationem naturalem. Sed si sit sine lege et iustitia, homo est pessimum omnium animalium. . . . Quia iniustitia tanto est saevior, quanto plura habeat arma, idest adiumenta ad male faciendum. . . . “Sed homo reducitur ad iustitiam per ordinem civilem: quod patet ex hoc, quod eodem nomine apud graecos nominatur ordo civilis communitatis, et iudicium iustitiae, scilicet *diki*.” Hence justice, as the civil order of the community, is itself a common good *per modum causae*. See ST IaIIae, q. 19, a. 10; ST IaIIae, q. 96, a. 3; ST IIaIIae, q. 33, a. 6; *In IX Ethic.*, lect. 6, n. 1839.

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Thomas speaks of a third kind of common good in connection with distributive justice.<sup>33</sup> This species of justice, he argues, helps to maintain the order of the community as a whole by providing proportional distribution of the common goods.<sup>34</sup> “Thus, in distributive justice a greater amount of the common goods is given to whomever has a greater role in the community.”<sup>35</sup> What should strike us here in these texts is St. Thomas’s almost consistent favoring of the plural “bona communia”<sup>36</sup> to the singular. It is the first indication that the meaning of the common good has shifted from the sense of a final end shared by many. In fact, these common goods are meant to be distributed among the citizens for their private use, whether they are honor, money, or anything else in the class of exterior goods.<sup>37</sup> Before distribution such goods are part of the common stock and belong to no one in particular, but after distribution they are private goods. The water, for example, in the city reservoir is neither mine nor yours except indeterminately. But once it flows through my tap

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<sup>33</sup> ST IIaIIae, q. 61, a. 1; *In V Ethic.*, lects. 4, 6.

<sup>34</sup> ST IIaIIae, q. 61, a. 1: “Alius ordo attenditur totius ad partes: et huic ordini assimilatur ordo eius quod est commune ad singulas personas. Quem quidem ordinem dirigit iustitia distributiva, quae est distributiva communium secundum proportionalitatem.” *In V Ethic.*, lect. 4, n. 927: “Et dicit, quod una species [iustitiae], et similiter iusti, quod secundum ipsam dicitur, est illa, quae consistit in distributionibus aliquorum communium, quae sunt dividenda inter eos qui communicant civili communicatione.”

<sup>35</sup> ST IIaIIae, q. 61, a. 2: “Et ideo in distributiva iustitia tanto plus alicui de bonis communibus datur quanto illa persona maiorem principalitatem habet in communitate.”

<sup>36</sup> See esp. ST IIaIIae, q. 61, a. 1 ad 1, 2, 3; *ibid.*, a. 2; *In V Ethic.*, lect. 4, n. 935; *ibid.*, lect. 6, n. 949.

<sup>37</sup> *In V Ethic.*, lect. 4, n. 927: “Et dicit, quod una species [iustitiae] . . . est illa, quae consistit in distributionibus aliquorum communium . . . sive sit honor, sive sit pecunia, vel quicquid aliud ad bona exteriora pertinens, vel etiam ad mala; sicut labor, expensae et similia.”

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it is mine.

These common goods, therefore, are not necessarily common. Convention or law makes them common only to ensure their distribution as the welfare of the community demands. In fact, every type of thing which can be exchanged in commutative justice, that is, any private good, can also be doled out in distributive justice.<sup>38</sup> Money, food, water, and the like, are not confined to the common stock. Nor is every street or reservoir public. Such things are made common to the extent that it serves the political order. Hence, they are not common ends, but more like common means, necessary for the common good of the community.<sup>39</sup>

Let this suffice then as a rough and ready outline of the various notions of *bonum commune* involved in St. Thomas's writings. In sum, there are three: the good predicably common, the good causally common, and, as a kind

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<sup>38</sup> ST IIaIIae, q. 61, a. 3: "Nam et res distribui possunt a communi in singulos, et commutari de uno in alium; et etiam est quaedam distributio laboriosorum operum, et recompensatio."

<sup>39</sup> Cf. ST IIaIIae, q. 61, a. 1, obj. 1 and ad 1. John Finnis makes the same distinction: "The common good, which is the object of all justice and which all reasonable life in community must respect and favour, is not to be confused with the common stock, or the common enterprises, that are among the means of realizing the common good" (*Natural Law and Natural Rights*, p. 168). "The common good which is the object(ive) of all justice logically cannot be distributed" (p. 194). On this point he has followed the Dominican P. D. Dognin: "Il faut soigneusement distinguer les 'biens communs', qui sont des moyens, du 'bien commun', qui est une fin; ou, si l'on veut, distinguer le bien commun dans son acception matérielle, du bien commun dans son acception formelle. En tant que fin, le 'bien commun' ne peut évidemment pas être distribué" ("La justice particulière comporte-t-elle deux espèces?" *Rev. Thom.* 65 (1965), p. 403). But Fr. Delos, on whom Finnis relies for his third definition of the common good, makes no such distinction in his gloss on the Summa (*Somme Théologique*, La Justice (2a 2ae, Questions 57–62), pp. 204–209).

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d of adjunct to the second, the common goods of utility.  
e These three are bound together in the political commu-  
f nity, for every person attains happiness (a good predicably  
g common) only as a part of the civil order (a good causally  
h common), which is maintained by a just distribution of  
i the common goods of utility.

j It is surprising that most who have sought guidance  
k from St. Thomas on the common good have ignored these  
l distinctions and relations between the various notions of  
m the common good.<sup>40</sup> They cannot plead that such distinc-  
n tions are outmoded and irrelevant to political philosophy.  
o What St. Thomas calls common goods, at least in the do-  
p main of politics, so do we. Do we not think that happi-  
q ness, health, justice, peace, and public utilities are common  
r goods in one way or another? The task then of anyone  
s wishing a firmer grasp of the political common good must  
t be to distinguish the different senses, relate them to each  
u other, and determine whether one has preeminence over  
v the others. Without accomplishing this there is no hope

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r <sup>40</sup> Finnis is a notable exception. In *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (pp.  
s 155–156) he offers a threefold division of the common good: 1) the seven  
t basic values (life, knowledge, play, aesthetic experience, friendship, reli-  
u gion and freedom in practical reasonableness) which are good for any  
v and every person; 2) each basic value, which can be participated in by  
w an inexhaustible number of persons in an inexhaustible variety of ways  
x or on an inexhaustible variety of occasions; 3) a set of conditions which  
y enables the members of a community to attain for themselves reasonable  
z objectives. But he fails to show exactly how these senses differ. Briefly, the  
first two types of common goods are common in praedicando, whereas  
the last is common in causando. Though Finnis settles on the third type  
for his working notion of the common good, he nevertheless sees it as  
ordered to bringing about the common good in the first and second senses  
(Ibid., p. 156), which if they are common only in praedicando are in reality  
private goods. Notice that he derives these definitions from the French  
commentators on St. Thomas, for example, J. T. Delos (p. 160).

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of avoiding the confusion to which equivocation naturally gives birth.

We have already seen what kind of common good St. Thomas places foremost in political matters. It is a good common in causality, namely, the just order of a political community. This is the individual citizen's highest good and hence holds sway over all other political goods. It is not an alien good, that is, either a personal good of our neighbor or the sum total of proper goods. St. Thomas explicitly dismisses both of these conceptions of the common good as false,<sup>41</sup> for in either case the individual is ordered to a good not his own. No opposition exists between the common good which is the end of the political community and the individual's good, unless by the individual's good we mean his private good. But when a private good is sought after by more than one, and is to that extent a goal common to many, it occasions envy and dissension rather than fellowship.<sup>42</sup> If everyone's good were coextensive with his private good life would indeed be solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. In such a myopic view of the good the common good could be common only by predication.

### *Two Difficulties*

If in fact St. Thomas is referring principally to the or-

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<sup>41</sup> Respectively, ST IIaIIae, q. 58, a. 9 ad 3: “[B]onum commune est finis singularum personarum in communitate existentium, sicut bonum totius finis est cuiuslibet partium. Bonum autem unius personae singularis non est finis alterius.” And ST IIaIIae, q. 58, a. 7 ad 2: “[B]onum commune civitatis et bonum singulare unius personae non differunt solum secundum multum et paucum, sed secundum formalem differentiam: alia enim est ratio boni communis et boni singularis, sicut et alia est ratio totius et partis.”

<sup>42</sup> See ST IaIIae, q. 27, a. 3.

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der of the political community when he discusses the political common good, why do many of those who look to St. Thomas for help in this matter choose to ignore his oft-repeated statement that the common good ranks above the private good? They admit that it is a very necessary means and that therefore it can legitimately require a citizen to forgo certain advantages, but ultimately, they say, the individual's personal happiness reigns supreme.<sup>43</sup> How then, they ask, can the common good be man's highest good? This position is not without its force, for it is not clear how the common good relates to an individual's own happiness. Since St. Thomas says that the common good is man's highest good, happiness must be measured by one's participation in it. But Thomas also argues that happiness consists principally in virtue, which exists only in individuals and is common only logically, *in praedicationdo*. Socrates and Plato do not share the numerically same virtue of justice. As virtue is an unshared good, so happiness would seem to be. DeKoninck seems to say as much about Aristotle's notion of happiness, which St. Thomas accepts. "Aristotle's *eudaimonia* is formal felicity and hence a purely personal good. When this is called common, the community is one of predication."<sup>44</sup> If this is true then it is difficult to see just how the common good is man's highest good. How can a common good be a principal constituent of a purely personal good? It seems contradictory. Hence, several natural law theorists opt to pass over statements of St. Thomas where he clearly argues for the primacy of the common good and instead consider it a means, albeit a most necessary and important

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<sup>43</sup> I am referring primarily to Finnis and Henry Veatch in *Human Rights, Fact or Fancy?*

<sup>44</sup> "In Defense of St. Thomas," p. 69, n. 1.

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d means, to achieve the personal happiness of each citizen.

e There is another difficulty that may lie behind a refusal  
f to affirm the primacy of the common good. The common  
g good is the good of an ordered whole, a multitude of men  
h having come together for the good life. Such a whole con-  
i sists in the collaboration of individuals in performing just  
j and prudent actions. Civil order is not a mere matter of  
k arrangement of parts, like the order of chess pieces, but  
l rather a coordination of activities conducive to the welfare  
m of each citizen. Even so, because it is common, it seems  
n less of a good for an individual than, say, his personal  
o virtues. The common good does not belong to him in his  
p individuality. It belongs primarily to the whole multitude  
q and secondarily to the part. For this reason the common  
r good appears almost not to be his own, even though it is  
s indispensable for his happiness. To prefer it above his per-  
t sonal good would be something like enslavement.<sup>45</sup> Hence  
u many have argued that the common good serves only as  
v a means to one's individual happiness. This seems to find  
w confirmation in the wellhonored remark that the city ex-  
x ists for man and not man for the city.<sup>46</sup>

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*The Role of Friendship*

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t In the face of these difficulties the nature of the common  
u good does not seem obvious. St. Thomas himself recog-  
v nized its obscurity. Almost always when he mentions the

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<sup>45</sup> Simon has expressed well the fear that lurks behind the modern de-  
y nial of the primacy of the common good (*A General Theory of Authority*,  
z p. 27): "As soon as it is suggested that the purpose of human effort lies  
in an achievement placed beyond the individual's good, a suspicion arises  
that human substance may be ultimately dedicated to things as external  
to man as the pyramids of Egypt."

<sup>46</sup> "Civitas homini, non homo civitati existit." Pope Pius XI, *Divini Re-  
demptoris* (March 19, 1937), n. 29.

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common good he makes use of a didactic aid *manuductio*. A general discussion of *manuductio* is found in the first part of the *Summa Theologiae*.<sup>47</sup> There Thomas lists several ways in which a teacher can lead a student by the hand, that is, carefully, slowly, proportioning the argument to the student’s abilities. He does this by presenting the student examples from sense experience, similitudes, opposites and other things of this kind “whereby the mind of the learner is led by the hand to the knowledge of an unknown truth.”<sup>48</sup> We are all familiar with the way St. Thomas uses examples of art in his physical treatises. On the basis of a similarity between art and nature, he argues that the principles of natural substances are three in number and that nature acts for an end. Again, on the basis of an opposition between art and nature he is able to clarify the difference between accidental and substantial changes.

When speaking of the political common good, Saint Thomas often compares it to the good of a living body. In virtue of the similarity between these two goods he is able to manifest the disposition a citizen should have toward the common good. Each good is the good of a whole. Hence, just as a body part is placed at risk for the good of the whole body, as when the hand shields the head from a blow, so a citizen should be willing to risk his own goods, even his life, when the life of the political community is at stake. At the same time, the difference between the two also serves to clarify the nature of the political common good. For whereas in the organic body, no part acts on its own power—we do not say, for ex-

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<sup>47</sup> Q. 117, a. 1.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.: “. . . ex quibus intellectus addiscentis manuducitur in cognitionem veritatis ignotae.”

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ample, that the ear listens but that a person listens *with* his ears—in a political community each member is the principal of his own actions, which he seeks to coordinate with others if he wishes to gain happiness.

What I would suggest is an investigation of Thomas's notion of the political common good in the light of his notion of friendship. There are three reasons why a consideration of friendship helps to make the common good more accessible. First, there exists a similarity between friendship and the common good. Second, as in the relation between art and nature, there also exists an opposition between the two. Third, friendship is in the relevant respects more easily comprehended than the common good. Allow me to justify briefly each of these.

i) At a general level there is little difficulty in seeing some connection between friendship and the common good, as St. Thomas presents them. Commenting upon the beginning of the *Ethics*, book eight, Thomas says that Aristotle gives six reasons why friendship must be studied in moral philosophy.<sup>49</sup> The fourth reason, Thomas says, is based on the fact that friendship preserves political communities. A sign of this is that legislators seek to maintain friendship among the citizens even more than justice. The reason, as Thomas says later,<sup>50</sup> is that friends desire common things, unlike wicked men, who value above all their own private goods, eschewing common goods, such as justice, and thus creating dissension within the community. There is therefore a causal relation between friendship and the political common good, insofar as friendship preserves the com-

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<sup>49</sup> *In VIII Ethic.*, lect. 1.

<sup>50</sup> *In IX Ethic.*, lect. 9, n. 1839.

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munity’s unity, order, and peace, all of which St. Thomas calls common goods.

They also are similar. For in every friendship some common good unites the friends. In a friendship of utility, like a business association, each friend desires the collaboration because it brings him some profit. But in a friendship of pleasure and especially in a friendship of virtue the collaboration is desired for its own sake. The thrust of *Ethics* IX.9 and Thomas’s commentary thereon is that a friendship of virtue consists principally in living together and sharing in the conversation and thought appropriate to good men. Thus, this kind of friendship, this form of coordination of virtuous activity in which each friend shares, is itself a common good. Likewise, the political community is essentially the coordination of the citizens’ activities, such that in and by that coordination they find their full, natural perfection. Since the political community is something in which every citizen shares, it itself is a common good. Hence the similarity.

ii) In one respect, however, friendship and the common good are opposed to each other. St. Thomas succinctly describes the difference in the course of his treatment of charity in the *Summa Theologiae*.<sup>51</sup> The relevant article asks whether man must out of charity love God more than himself. It has already been established that charity should be thought of as a kind of friendship between God and man. Thus, the first objection takes Aristotle’s notion of friendship to deny that man can, let alone must, love God more than himself. It begins by quoting Aristotle. “Friendly actions toward another arise from friendly ac-

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<sup>51</sup> IIaIIae, q. 26, a. 3. See also John of St. Thomas, *Cursus Philosophicus* (Turin: Marietti, 1948), tom. III, p. 87a.

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tions toward oneself.”<sup>52</sup> But, it goes on, since the cause is greater than its effect, the friendship a man has toward himself is greater than any other friendship he has. Therefore, man loves himself more than God.

St. Thomas’s response interests us most. He does not deny Aristotle’s statement, but he does argue that it should not be taken to apply to every kind of friendship. The Philosopher, he says, speaks of friendly actions toward another in whom the good which is the object of friendship is found according to a particular mode. He does not speak of friendly actions toward another in whom the good is found according to the nature of a whole. Now St. Thomas has just argued in the body of this article that God is a common good for man on both natural and supernatural levels, and as such man is related to Him as a part to its whole. To illustrate this relation Thomas likens it to the relation and disposition a citizen should have toward the common good of the community. The love man should have for God is similar to the love man should have for the community. So we may expect that the love in the kind of friendship which Aristotle speaks about differs specifically from the love that citizens bear to the common good.

iii) The difference and similarity between friendship and the common good can serve to manifest the latter only if the nature of the other is clearer to us, otherwise it is a case of *obscurum per obscurius*. Though Thomas never explicitly states that friendship is more knowable to us, there are several reasons for thinking that it is at least not inconsistent with what he teaches. First, friendship is closer to

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<sup>52</sup> “Dicit enim Philosophus, in IX Ethic., quod amicabilia quae sunt ad alterum veniunt ex amicabilibus quae sunt ad seipsum.”

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our experience than the political common good and more readily available for reflection. Most of our waking hours are spent in different kinds of associations with others, from friendships of utility to the more noble and worthwhile friendship of virtue. Indeed, everyday life forces us almost constantly to consider the manner in which we act toward others. However, it seems that our attention is brought to the political common good only in extraordinary times. It is more remote from our experience and less available for reflection. Second, in relation to friendship the common good is much more complex. It involves numerous aspects of human relations, of which friendship is just one. A consideration of the common good would seem to include necessarily considerations of justice, law, obligation, authority, economics, etc. Third, in moral philosophy ethics precedes politics, as the more known precedes the less known. But the study of friendship belongs to ethics. Therefore, it would seem to be more easily grasped than the common good.

Thus, I suggest that a consideration of friendship can serve in a similar way that the consideration of a living body does in elucidating the nature of the common good. For, as the relation between an organic whole to its parts illustrates how the good of the whole is the good of each part, so also friendship illustrates how coordination of virtuous lives is an ultimate end of human life. But I will leave this as only a suggestion, having established, I hope, that there is a need for an aid in understanding the political common good and that such an aid is readily found in the works of Aristotle and St. Thomas.