THE PERSON
AND THE
COMMON GOOD

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THE PERSON AND THE COMMON GOOD

second is by far the more difficult operation, and succeeds more rarely. Instead of the authentic person, exhibiting the mysterious visage of the Creator, a mask appears, the austere mask of the Pharisee.

It is the interior principle, namely, nature and grace, which matters most in the education and progress of the human being, just as it is an inner principle which matters most in organic growth. Our instruments are simply the aids; our art is but the servant and cooperator of this interior principle. The whole function of this art is to prune and to trim—operations in which both the individual and the person are interested—in such wise that, within the intimacy of the human being, the gravity of individuality diminishes and that of true personality and its generosity increases. Such an art, to be sure, is difficult.

THE PERSON AND SOCIETY

IN OUR treatment of the characteristic features of the person, we noted that personality tends by nature to communion. This frequently misunderstood point should be emphasized. For the person requires membership in a society in virtue both of its dignity and its needs. 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. A city worthy of the name is a city of human persons. The social unit is the person.

But why is it that the person, as person, seeks to live in society? It does so, first, because of its very perfections, as person, and its inner urge to the communications of knowledge and love which require relationship with other persons. In its
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radical generosity, the human person tends to overflow into social communications in response to the law of superabundance inscribed in the depths of being, life, intelligence and love. It does so secondly because of its needs or deficiencies, which derive from its material individuality. In this respect, unless it is integrated in a body of social communications, it cannot attain the fullness of its life and accomplishment. 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.

Here the question is not only of his material needs, of bread, clothes and shelter, for which man requires the help of his fellowmen, but also, and above all, of the help which he ought to be given to do the work of reason and virtue, which responds to the specific feature of his being. To reach a certain degree of elevation in knowledge as well as a certain degree of perfection in moral life, man needs an education and the help of other men. In this sense, 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.

There is a correlation between this notion of the person as social unit and the notion of the common good as the end of the social whole. They imply one another. The common good is common because it is received in persons, each one of whom is as a mirror of the whole. Among the bees, there is a public good, namely, the good functioning of the hive, but not a common good, that is, a good received and communicated.28 The end of society, therefore, is neither the individual good nor the collection of the in-

28 In an animal society, the individual is not a person; hence, has not the value of a moral "whole" and is not a subject of right. If the good of the whole profits the parts, as the good of the body profits its members, it does not in the sense that it is turned back or redistributed to them. It is merely in order that the whole itself might subsist and be better served that its parts are kept alive or maintained in good condition. Thus, they partake of the good of the whole but only as parts of the whole. Indeed, how could it be the good of the whole without thereby profiting the parts which compose the whole (except when it requires the sacrifice of this or that part which then spontaneously exposes itself to peril, as the hand to save the body, because by nature it loves the whole more than itself, cf. Cajetan, in I, 60, 5)? Such a good is a common good in a general and improperly social sense. It is not the formally social common good, with which we are con-
individual goods of each of the persons who constitute it. Such a conception would dissolve society as such to the advantage of its parts, and would amount to either a frankly anarchistic conception, or the old disguised anarchistic conception of individualistic materialism in which the whole function of the city is to safeguard the liberty of each; thus giving to the strong full freedom to oppress the weak.

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 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 concerned in this paper. It is common to the whole and to the parts only in an improper sense, for it does not profit the parts for themselves at the same time as for the whole according to the characteristic exigencies of a whole constituted of persons. It is rather the proper good of the whole—not foreign to the parts, to be sure, but benefiting them only for its own sake and the sake of the whole.

This kind of common good of an animal society is analogically a "bonum honestum" (reached materialiter et executive, sub directione Dei auctoris naturalis), but in its proper order, where the whole is composed of individuals who are not persons. The common good, formally social, of human society, in order to be truly common good and to attain, as common good, the character of "bonum honestum," implies redistribution to the persons as persons.

the proper good of a whole which, like the species with respect to its individuals or the hive with respect to its bees, relates the parts to itself alone and sacrifices them to itself. It is the good human life of the multitude, of a multitude of persons; it is their communion in good living. It is therefore common to both the whole and the parts into which it flows back and which, in turn, must benefit from it. Unless it would vitiate itself, it implies and requires recognition of the fundamental rights of persons and those of the domestic society in which the persons are more primitively engaged than in the political society. It includes within itself as principal value, the highest access, compatible with the good of the whole, of the persons to their life of person and liberty of expansion, as well as to the communications of generosity consequent upon such expansion. If, as we intend to emphasize later, the common good of the city implies an intrinsic ordination to something which transcends it, it is because it requires, by its very essence and within its proper sphere, communication or redistribution to the persons who constitute society. It presupposes the persons and flows back upon them, and, in this sense, is achieved in them.
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 condition of the state and its 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 which is quite different from a simple collection of juxtaposed units. (Even in the mathematical order, as Aristotle points out, 6 is not the same as 3 + 3.) It includes the sum or sociological integration of all the civic conscience, political virtues and sense of right and liberty, of all the activity, material prosperity and spiritual riches, of unconsciously operative hereditary wisdom, of moral rectitude, justice, friendship, happiness, virtue and heroism in the individual lives of its members. For these things all are, in a certain measure, *communicable* and so revert to each member, helping him to perfect his life and liberty of person. They all constitute the good human life of the multitude.

Let us note in passing that 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 *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 of gangsters and murderers. For this reason, perfidy, 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 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.

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. Historical conditions and the still inferior development of humanity make difficult the full achievement of the end of social life. But the end to which it tends is to procure the common good of the multitude in such a way that the concrete person gains the greatest possible measure, compatible with the good of the whole, of real independence from the servitudes of nature. The economic guarantees of labor and capital, political rights, the moral virtues and the culture of the mind, all contribute to the realization of this independence.

A twofold observation is pertinent here. On the one hand, the common good of civil society implies that the whole man is engaged in it. Unlike a farmers' cooperative or a scientific association, which require the commitment of only part of the interests of the members, civil society requires the citizens to commit their lives, properties and honor. On the other hand, it should be noted that the idea of the "perfect society," to which the idea of the common good of political society is linked, has experienced many adventures in the course of history; it may even be doubted whether

it has ever been truly realized within the limits of any particular social group. Contemporary states are more remote from the ideal type of the "perfect society" than the city of Aristotle's day or the body politic in the time of Suarez. 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.

We have emphasized the sociability of the person and the properly human nature of the common good. We have seen that it is a good according to the requirements of justice; that it must flow back upon persons, and that it includes, as its principal value, the access of persons to their liberty of expansion.

We have not yet considered what might be termed the typical paradox of social life. Here again we shall find the distinction of the individual and the person. For this paradox results
from the fact, already noted, that each of us is in his entirety an individual and in his entirety a person.

At this point, a few metaphysical and also theological observations would help to assure the correct development of the discussion. Let us recall that the idea of person is an analogical idea which is realized fully and absolutely only in its supreme analogue, God, the Pure Act. Let us recall further that, for St. Thomas, the intelligible value of “whole,” “totality,” is indissolubly bound to that of person. It is a fundamental thesis of Thomism that the person as such is a whole. The concept of part is opposed to that of person. 29

To say, then, that society is a whole composed

29 In III Sent. d. 5, 3, 2. St. Thomas, in this text, refers to the human composite (human per se) and shows that, because it is only a part of the human being, the separated soul cannot be a person. To anyone whose knowledge of Thomism is sufficiently deep it is clear that the principle—the ratio of part is repugnant to that of personality—is an entirely general principle and is applied analogically depending on the case. Thus, John of St. Thomas shows, in speaking of the hypostatic union, which takes place in personae (Sum. Theol., III, 2, 2.), that God can be united to human nature only as person just as He can be united to human intelligence only as species intelligibils because in both cases He is united to them as term and as whole, not as part. (Summa Theol., De Incarnatione, Disput. IV, a. 1). The same principle must evidently come into play also—though under completely different conditions and following another line of application—when the notion of person is considered with respect to wholes which are no longer, like the human composite, substantial but have only an accidental unity, and are themselves composed of persons like the social whole.

of persons is to say that society is a whole composed of wholes. Taken in its full sense, this expression leads us directly to the society of the Divine Persons (for the idea of society is also an analogical idea). In the Divine Trinity, there is a whole, the divine Essence, which is the common good of the three subsisting Relations. With respect to this whole, the Three who compose the trinitarian society are by no means parts, since they are perfectly identical to it. They are three wholes who are the Whole. “Among created things,” St. Thomas writes, “one is part of two, and two of three (as one man is part of two men, and two men of three). But it is not thus in God. For the Father is as much as the whole Trinity.” 30

We must be aware here of the irremediable deficiency of our language. Since our idea of society originates in and, as far as modes of conceptualization are concerned, is bound to our experience, the only possible way for us to express the fact that persons live in society is to say that they are parts of, or compose, society. But can it be said, except quite improperly, that the Divine Persons “are parts of” or “compose” the uncreated society? Here, precisely, where we are confronted

with the society par excellence, a society of pure persons, our language is irremediably deficient. Let us keep in mind this essential point, which is the proper difficulty of and the key to the precisions to follow, namely that, if the person of itself requires “to be part of” society, or “to be a member of society,” this in no wise means that it must be in society in the way in which a part is in a whole and treated in society as a part in a whole. On the contrary, the person, as person, requires to be treated as a whole in society.

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, except in an improper and metaphorical sense, namely, animal society. Infinitely above the city of men, there is a society of pure Persons, who are at the summit of individuality, but without the shadow of individuation by matter (or even by a form, distinct from the act of existence). Each one is in the other through an infinite communion, the common good of which is strictly and absolutely the proper good of each, since it is that which each person is and their

very act of existing. 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. The terrestrial common good of such a society is, on the one hand, superior to the proper good of each member but flows back upon each. On the other hand, it sustains in each that movement by which it strives toward its own eternal good and the transcendent Whole; the same movement by which each goes beyond the order in which the common good of the terrestrial city is constituted.

The person as such is a whole, an open and generous whole. In truth, if human society were

\[31 Sum. Theol., I, 42, 5.\]

\[32 In the formally social sense specified above pp. 39-40.\]
a society of pure persons, the good of society and the good of each person would be one and the same good. But man is very far from being a pure person; the human person is the person of a poor material individual, of an animal born more helpless than any other animal. Though the person as such is an independent whole and that which is noblest in all of nature, nonetheless the human person is at the lowest degree of personality—naked and miserable, indigent and full of wants. When it enters into society with its kind, therefore, it happens that, by reason of its deficiencies—evidences of its condition as an individual in the species—the human person is present as part of a whole which is greater and better than its parts, and of which the common good is worth more than the good of each part. Yet, because of personality as such and the perfections which it implies as an independent and open whole, the human person requires membership in society. Whence, as previously noted, it is essential to the good of the social whole to flow back in some fashion upon the person of each member. It is the human person who enters into society; as an individual, it enters society as a part whose proper good is inferior to the good of the whole (of the whole constituted of persons). But the good of the whole is what it is, and so superior to the private good, only if it benefits the individual persons, is redistributed to them and respects their dignity.

On the other hand, 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, the human person, as a spiritual totality referred to the transcendent whole, surpasses and is superior to all temporal societies. From this point of view, or if you will, in respect to things which are not Caesar’s both society itself 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. There is nothing higher than the immortal soul, save God. With respect to the eternal destiny of the soul, society exists for each person and is subordinated to it.

We have just stated that the common good is
what it is only if it is redistributed to persons. Let us now add a consideration which is derived from the same principle but goes farther, namely, that the common good of the city or of civilization—an essentially human common good in which the whole of man is engaged—does not preserve its true nature unless it respects that which surpasses it, unless it is subordinated, not as a pure means, but as an ineradicable end, to the order of eternal goods and the supra-temporal values from which human life is suspended.

This intrinsic subordination refers above all to the supernatural beatitude to which the human person is directly ordained. It is also and already related—a fact which a philosopher cannot ignore—to everything which of itself transcends political society, because all such things belong to the order of the absolute.\footnote{In this sense—because there do exist supra-temporal goods of the natural order (as, for example, the contemplative life as conceived by Aristotle)—it is perfectly true to say with Mortimer Adler and the Rev. Walter Farrell that the natural happiness of the human being transcends in certain essential elements the political common good (cf. Walter Farrell, O.F., "Person and the Common Good in a Democracy," Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, Volume XX, December 27 and 28, 1945). These supra-temporal natural goods, by reason of which, even in the natural order, the human person transcends the State, are refracted imperfectly and diminishingly, in accordance with a certain social-temporal participation, in the political common good itself. (It is much the same with the supernatural virtues of the saints in so far as they add to the moral patrimony and glory of their temporal fatherland.) But of themselves, they are related to the order of civilization, and even more to the order of what, farther on, we call the community of minds. They are integrated in the common good of civilization (and this is "temporal" in contrast to the "spiritual" or supernatural order of the kingdom of God, but its highest natural values are "supra-temporal" or of the absolute order) and they arise directly out of the common good of the community of minds. Yet both the common good of civilization and that of the community of minds are themselves subordinated to the supernatural common good.}

natural law, the rule of justice and the requirements of fraternal love; the life of the spirit and all that which, in us, is a natural beginning of contemplation; the immaterial dignity of the truth, in all domains and all degrees however humble they may be, of theoretical knowledge, and the immaterial dignity of beauty, both of which are nobler than the things of common life and which, if curbed by it, never fail to avenge themselves. In the measure that human society attempts to free itself from this subordination and proclaim itself the supreme good, in the very same measure it perverts its own nature and that of the common good—in the same measure it destroys the common good. The common good of political society is an "honest good." But it is a practical good, and not the absolute good which, as we noted in the beginning, is the supreme
object of the theoretical intellect. The common good of civil life is an ultimate end, but an ultimate end in a relative sense and in a certain order. It is lost if it is closed within itself, for, of its very nature, it is intended to favor the higher ends of the human person. The human person's vocation to goods which transcend it is embodied in the essence of the common good. To ignore these truths is to sin at the same time and by the same token against both the human person and the common good.

When, against social pressures, the human person upholds right, justice, fraternal charity, when it raises itself above social life to enter into the solitary life of the spirit, when it deserts the banquets of common life, to feed upon the transcendentals, when, seeming to forget the city, it fastens to the adamantine objectivity of beauty and truth, when it pays obeisance to God rather than to men, in these very acts it still serves the common good of the city and in an eminent fashion.

And 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 accordance with justice, it still loves its own soul, in accordance with the order of charity, more than the city and the common good of the city.

We see, then, that the true conception of political life is neither exclusively personalist nor exclusively communal. As we wrote many years ago, it is both personalist and communal in such a way that these two terms call for and imply one another. Hence, there is nothing more illusory than to pose the problem of the person and the common good in terms of opposition. In reality, it is posed in terms of reciprocal subordination and mutual implication.

Thus it is in the nature of things that man, as part of society, should be ordained to the common good and the common work for which the members of the city are assembled. It is in the nature of things that he should, as the need arises, renounce activities which are nobler in themselves than those of the body politic for the salvation of the community. It is also in the nature of things that social life should impose numerous restraints and sacrifices upon his life as a person, considered as a part of the whole. But in the

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measure that these sacrifices and restraints are required and accepted in the name of justice and amity, they raise higher the spiritual level of the person. “Man finds himself by subordinating himself to the group, and the group attains its goal only by serving man and by realizing that man has secrets which escape the group and a vocation which the group does not encompass.”

And when, as we just noted, man freely accepts death, not as an enslaved fanatic or blind victim, but as a man and a citizen, for the sake of his people and his country, in that very act of extraordinary virtue, he affirms at the same time the supreme independence of the person in relation to the things of this world. In losing itself, in a temporal sense, for the sake of the city, the person sacrifices itself, in the most real and complete fashion. Yet the person is not defeated. The city still serves it because the soul of man is immortal and because the sacrifice gives grace one more chance.

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 first pre-

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35 Ibid., p. 32.

36 For this reason, Christ could say of Judas: “It were better for him, if that man had not been born.” (Matt., 26, 24.) Of course the act of existing never ceases to be per se good and desirable; but per accidens it ceases to be so when it fails completely and lacks everything to which it is ordained. Cf. Sum. Theol., 1, 5, 2, ad 3.
Indeed cheap. Only yesterday, across the Rhine, we saw to what atrocities a purely biological conception of society can lead. The destruction of human lives, which were believed to have become a burden on the community, was not only permitted, but even extolled.

In reality, the privilege connected with the dignity of the person is inalienable, and human life involves a sacred right. Whether to rid society of a useless member or for raison d'état, it is a crime to kill an innocent man. It is a crime to doom a prisoner to death in order to test some drugs which may save thousands of the sick. The social body does have the right, in a just war, to oblige its citizens to expose their lives in combat. It does not have the right to demand more than this risk, or to decree the death of a man for the salvation of the city. When it is a question of special missions in which men go to certain or almost certain death, volunteers are called for. This fact is itself an additional testimony to the right of the human person to life. Even in these extreme cases, something still bears witness to the transcendent value of human life in so far as it is the life of a person. The person can be obligated in conscience and, if necessary even constrained, to expose its life, but never can it be branded like an animal for the slaughterhouse. It is still as master of itself and by an act of virtue that it faces death. Apart from these ultimate demands of its dignity, it remains true that the person is duty-bound, in justice, to risk its own existence for the salvation of the whole when the whole is imperilled. It is so bound precisely because, as an individual, the person is in its entirety a part of the community from which, in a certain fashion, it has received all that it is. But it is thus obliged only because the terrestrial common good itself includes supra-human values and is indirectly related to the absolutely ultimate end of man. "If the common good of human society were uniquely and exclusively a sum of temporal advantages and achievements, like the common good—not really common but totalitarian—of an apiary or anthill, it would surely be nonsensical to sacrifice the life of a human person for it. Thus war, which pushes to the extreme limit the subordination of the individual person to the temporal community, at the same time attests the supra-temporal implications and supra-social finalities that this subordination presupposes. It can be seen, on the other
hand, that, by reason of their very nature, the totalitarian states—the very states that devour human lives in the name of the nation—lose, as such, the right to ask of a man that he sacrifice his life for them.”

In short, though the person as such is a totality, the material individual, or the person as a material individual, is a part. 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 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.

Two texts of St. Thomas, which supplement and balance one another, can guide us to a deeper penetration of these ideas. “Each individual person,” St. Thomas writes, “is related to the entire community as the part to the whole.”

37 De Bergson à Thomas D’Aquin, pp. 148-149.
38 Sum. Theol., II-II, 64, 2. Elsewhere too: “For, since one man is a part of the community, each man, in all that he is and has, belongs to the community; just as a part, in all that it is, belongs to the whole.” I-II, 96, 4. “The person is compared to the community as a part to the whole.” II-II, 61, 1. “The whole of man is directed as to his end to the whole of the community of which he is a part.” II-II, 65, 1.

From this point of view and in this respect, that is because it is by reason of certain of its proper conditions a part of society, the person is in its entirety engaged in and ordained to the common good of society.

But let us add at once that, although man in his entirety is engaged as a part of political society (since he may have to give his life for it), he is not a part of political society by reason of his entire self and all that is in him. On the contrary, by reason of certain things in him, man in his entirety is elevated above political society. St. Thomas’ second text that completes and balances the first is pertinent here; “Man is not ordained to the body politic according to all that he is and has.”

There is an enormous difference between this statement: “Man, by reason of certain things which are in him, is in his entirety engaged as a part of political society” and this other statement: “Man is part of political society by reason of himself as a whole and by reason of all that is in him.” The first one is true, and the second one is false. Here lie both the difficulty and the solution.

39 “Man is not ordained to the body politic according to all that he is and has.” Sum. Theol., I-II, 21, 4, ad 3. “But all that man is, and can, and has, must be referred to God.” Ibid.
of the problem. Anarchical individualism denies that man, by reason of certain things which are in him, is engaged in his entirety as a part of political society. Totalitarianism asserts that man is a part of political society by reason of himself as a whole and by reason of all that is in him ("all in the state, nothing against the state, nothing outside of the state"). The truth is that man is engaged in his entirety—but not by reason of his whole self—as a part of political society, a part ordained to the good of the society. In the same way, a good philosopher is engaged in his entirety in philosophy, but not by reason of all the functions and all the finalities of his being. He is engaged in his entirety in philosophy by reason of the special function and special finality of the intellect in him. A good runner engages the whole of himself in the race but not by reason of all the functions or all the finalities of his being. He engages the whole of himself in the race, but by reason of the neuromuscular machinery in him, not by reason of his knowledge of the Bible, for example, or of astronomy. The human person is engaged in its entirety as a part of political society, but not by reason of everything that is in it and everything that belongs to it. By reason of other things which are in the person, it is also in its entirety above political society. For in the person there are some things—and they are the most important and sacred ones—which transcend political society and draw man in his entirety above political society—the very same whole man who, by reason of another category of things, is a part of political society. By reason of certain relations to the common life which concern our whole being, we are a part of the state; but by reason of other relations (likewise of interest to our whole being) to things more important than the common life, there are goods and values in us which are neither by nor for the state, which are outside of the state.

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. In this sense, a mathematician has learned mathematics by reason of the educational institutions that social life alone makes possible. This progressive formation, which is received from others and is a proof of the limi-
tations of the individual, depends upon the community. Consequently, the community can in given circumstances, require the mathematician to serve the social group by teaching mathematics.

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-temporal accomplishment of the person as person, man excels the political community. Thus mathematical truths do not depend upon the social community, but concern the order of the absolute goods of the person as such. The community will never have the right to require the mathematician to hold as true some one mathematical system rather than any other, or to teach such mathematics as is deemed to be more in conformity with the law of the social group (because they are, for instance, “Aryan” mathematics or “Marxist-Leninist” mathematics. . . .) 40

Man is constituted a person, made for God and life eternal, before he is constituted a part of the

40 Cf. The Rights of Man and Natural Law, p. 17.
concern, as such, only justice, which is essentially impersonal because it is measured on things, and does not make acceptance of persons.

From the above considerations, we can draw two conclusions. The first concerns the mutual relations of the person and society. To characterize these relations, we might make use of the following formulae: just as the person requires society both on account of its abundance or as a person, and on account of its poverty or as an individual, so the common good, by its very essence, directs itself to the persons as persons and directs the persons as individuals to itself. It 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 directed 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.

The second conclusion concerns the state of tension and conflict which is inherent in human society. Social life is naturally ordained—in the way in which we have tried to describe—to the good and the freedom of the person. And yet there is in this very same social life a natural tendency to enslave and diminish the person in the measure that society considers the person as a part and as a mere material individual. “When ever I have been among men,” Seneca wrote, “I have come back less a man.”

The person as person insists on serving the community and the common good freely. It insists on this while tending toward its own fullness, while transcending itself and the community in its movement toward the transcendent Whole. The person as an individual is necessarily bound, by constraint if need be, to serve the community and the common good since it is excelled by them as the part by the whole.

This paradox, this tension, and this conflict are something natural and inevitable. Their solution is not static but dynamic. For, in this way, a
double movement is generated—a movement far more profound than the dialectical movement to which the Marxists appeal. The first of these movements is a dearly bought and ceaselessly hampered movement of the societies themselves as they develop in time. It is like a thrust—due above all to the energies of the spirit and of freedom—across an ebb-tide in which the corruption, which belabors us, ceaselessly appears. For insofar as it advances, this movement tends to realize gradually, in social life itself, man’s aspiration to be treated as a person in the whole, or, if you will, as a whole and not as a part. To us this is a very abstract but exact expression of the ideal to which, from their inception, modern democracies have been aspiring, but which their philosophy of life has vitiated. This ideal, the complete realization of which cannot be expected here below, is an upper limit drawing to itself the ascending part of history. It calls for an heroic philosophy of life fastened to absolute and spiritual values. It can be gradually realized only by the development of law, of a kind of sacred sense of justice and honor, and by the development of civic amity. For justice and right, by imposing their law upon man as upon a moral agent and by appealing to reason and free will, concern, as such, personality; they transform into a relation between two wholes—the whole of the individual person and the social whole—that which otherwise would be no more than the pure subordination of the part to the whole. And love, by assuming voluntarily that which would otherwise be servitude, transfigures it into liberty and a free gift.  

The second movement is, so to speak, a vertical movement of the life of the persons themselves in the midst of social life. It arises out of the difference in altitude between the level where the person has the center of its life as a person and the level where it is constituted as a part of a social community. Because of this difference in level, the person demands society and always tends to go beyond it, “until, at last, it enters into a society of pure persons, that is, into the society of Divine Persons, which overwhelms it with the gift of ...
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incredibly more than that to which it could of its own nature properly aspire. From the family group (which is more fundamental than the State because it touches upon the generic difference of the human being) man passes into civil society (which touches upon the specific difference) where he feels the need of clubs and fellowships that will interest his intellectual and moral life. These he enters of his own free choice; they assist the soul in its efforts to ascend to a higher level. In the end these also fail to satisfy—the soul is cramped and forced to go beyond them. Above the level of civil society, man crosses the threshold of supernatural reality and enters into a society that is the mystical body of an incarnate God—a society, the proper office of which is to lead him to his spiritual perfection and his full liberty of autonomy, to his eternal welfare. The Church is at once Desert and City.43 Within her precincts, she nourishes human personality on a divine food and leads it away from the crowds at the circumference, where the soul finds contentment in life among men, towards the deeper solitude at the center, where it finds its highest contentment in life among the divine per-

43 Cf. H. Clerissac, Le Mystère de l'Eglise, Chap. VI.

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sons. At last, in the vision in which the intellect apprehends the Divine Essence, the person is more than ever lost in the life of the Church, but the common good of the Church is now unveiled and the human being, exalted by supernatural power to share as a pure personality in the Uncreated Society of the Divine Persons, enters into the Kingdom of God and the Light of Glory. Strive not, ye men, to socialize the life of the spirit. It tends of its own nature to live in society and finds its fulfillment only there.” 44

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 and already alluded to at the beginning of this essay; 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. 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, as explained above, 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 or transgression, which we have 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, so that the *dictum authenticum* of Aristotle is verified anew, under altogether different conditions, and on an altogether different plane.

Thus in the natural order there is a community of minds in as much as minds communicate in the love of truth and beauty, in the life and work of knowledge, art and poetry, and in the highest values of culture. However, this community does not succeed in constituting itself as a society in the proper sense of the word, the kingdom of minds, as Leibnitz put it. We could speak of its common good only in an analogical sense. In fact, the common good of the intellects can be understood in two ways: in the first way, it is truth and beauty themselves, through the enjoyment of which minds receive a certain natural irradiation or participation of the Uncreated Truth and Beauty or of the separated common good. This common good of the intellects is obviously superior to the personal act by which each intellect conquers a fragment of it; but it is not a social good, a common good in the strict sense. This common good of the intellects is the immensity of the supra-temporal object, to some aspect of which, each adheres in solitude.

In the second way, the common good of the intellects is the intelligible treasure of culture in which minds communicate with one another. This treasure of culture, in relation to which minds accomplish a common work, more or less perfectly flows back over each of them. In this sense, it is undoubtedly a schema of social or common good in the strict sense—without an organized social body—and in a certain way, *extensive et diffusive*, it is something better than the proper good of each. From the point of view of extension, or from the point of view of the multiplicity by which the
diverse aspects of the search for truth are manifested, it is better to have Plato, Aristotle, Kant and St. Thomas, than to have St. Thomas alone, even though, personally, we would be willing to dispense with all the others for St. Thomas. It is better to have Ruysbroeck and the pseudo-Dionysius, Gertrude and Catherine of Sienna, St. Theresa and St. John of the Cross than to have St. John of the Cross alone. But, absolutely speaking, the communion in which each mind enters, in a personal and solitary fashion, with truth through theoretical knowledge, and with God through contemplation, is better than the treasures of communicable culture which minds receive from one another. Thus the law of transcendence still holds with regard to the community of minds, as it does with regard to every human community. The person will still emerge above the community of minds and demand more, at least so long as the community in which it is engaged is not the supernatural society whose life is the communicated life of God—the Church herself, whose good is the same as the person’s. There, in the community of the saints, the person no longer tends to emerge above the community and pass into a better society, for it is in the Church herself that its participation in the divine life is accomplished. Here, it is more than ever true that in different respects the person is for the community and the community is for the person. For there is for the Church a common work, which is continued redemption, to which each is ordained as the part to the work of the whole. But this common work is itself ordained to the personal good of each, to the union of each with God Himself, and to the application of the redeeming blood to each as a single person.

On the one hand, the proper good of the person as a person is achieved in the union of grace and charity with God, with the Uncreated Good, which is the Common Good of the Church—a transcendent common good which no longer is a practical good to be realized, but the subsisting good to which to adhere—above all human good and all communications of created goods found in the Church. In this sense, Francis de Vitoria wrote: “In the corporeal organism, the natural part exists directly for the whole. But in the Church, each man exists only for God and himself, at least directly and principally, because
neither grace nor faith, nor hope, nor any other supernatural formality resides immediately in the entire community as in its subject." 49

On the other hand, the proper good of the person, as an individual, that is, as a part of the created whole of which the head is the Incarnate Word, is inferior not only to the divine common Good of this whole, but also to the collection of human goods and of the communications of created goods which derive in this whole from its union of grace with the uncreated Good.

Thus, if we consider this grand City as living in its entirety upon a common good which is the very life of God, communicated to the multitude of the just and seeking out the errant, then each stone is for the city. But if we consider each stone as living itself, in its personal participation in this common good, upon the very life of God that is communicated, or as sought after personally by God, who wills to communicate His own life to it,

49 "Besides, in the body, a natural part exists absolutely for the sake of the whole; in the Church, individual men exist for the sake of God and for themselves alone. Their private good is not ordained to the good of the whole at least formally or principally. As neither grace, nor faith, nor hope, nor any other supernatural forms reside immediately in the whole community, neither does the spiritual power, which is equally or even more supernatural," De potestate Ecclesiae, II, 5. Cf. Genito, Relaciones del Maestro Fray Francisco de Vitoria, Madrid, 1934, t. II, p. 117.

then it is toward each one that all the goods of the city converge to flow back in the measure of his capacity to receive of their plenitude. In this sense, the city is for each stone. It is for each of God's saints, St. Thomas writes, that it is spoken in Matthew: "He shall place him over all His goods." 50 And of each, St. John of the Cross writes: "Mine are the heavens and mine the earth, mine are all men, the just and the wicked; the angels are mine and the Mother of God, all things are mine; God Himself is mine and for me. What then dost thou demand and after what dost thou seek, oh my soul? For thine is all of this, and all of this is for thee." 51

Finally, in the beatific vision, through the intuition of the divine essence, each blessed soul becomes God, in an intentional way, as Cajetan says, and thus enters into the uncreated society of the Divine Persons. The proper eternal good of each, in the degree that its vision grasps it, is the common Good itself of the Divine Persons. Each beholds but does not "comprehend" it, for it still exceeds infinitely the capacity of each. And each one loves it more than itself. Further, be-

50 Saint Thomas, Expos. in Ep. ad Rom., c. 8, lect. 6.
51 Saint John of the Cross, Avisos y Sentencias (ms. d'Andujar), Sdh. IV, p. 293.
cause there is a multitude of blessed souls which partake of the same uncreated Good, this Good actually becomes the common Good of both the Divine Persons and the Church of Heaven. Being God Himself, it is of course *more divine* than the act, entitatively considered, by which each created member of the heavenly community, according to the degree of its vision, takes possession of its personal good, (which, be it noted, is more really the good of the created person since it excels it infinitely). But in what sense might the personal good, of which each soul thus takes possession, be inferior to this common good? They are identical; the personal good is also God Himself. In relation to the divine service and the divine praise, each soul is a part of the community of the blessed. In relation to the object of the vision, there is no longer a question of being a part but of being identified with the Whole in this society of the blessed, the common object of which is better only because it is, for the multitude of the members, the same object in which each one shares, though in different degrees, as a whole identified with the Whole. Here, in the intentional identification of each soul with the 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. “The personal good of each of the blessed is *as divine* as the separated common Good of the entire universe: it is *identically* this very same Good, spiritually possessed.”

*In another sense, this law always holds: in the sense that the infinite communicability of the incomprehensible Essence forever transcends the communication which, through its vision, the creature receives of it.*