FIDELISSIMUS DISCIPULUS EJUS: CHARLES DE KONINCK'S EXPOSITION OF AQUINAS' DOCTRINE ON THE COMMON GOOD[1]

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Charles De Koninck taught at Laval University in Quebec and wrote on virtually every subject that occupied the mind of St. Thomas: the Philosophy of Nature and of the Soul, Ethics and Politics, Metaphysics, Theology, even Mathematics. One of his most significant and lasting contributions to the *philosophia perennis* was his exposition of St. Thomas' doctrine of the common good. This paper aims to impart a clearer and more profound understanding of St. Thomas' doctrine of the common good with Charles De Koninck as our guide. To this end, I will

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[1]The title of this article is borrowed from a chapter of Charles De Koninck's essay *In Defense of St. Thomas*, and was originally a title given to Peter of Auvergne, a thirteenth century scholar and student of St. Thomas, by Ptolemy de Luca on account of his fidelity to the doctrine of St. Thomas. In our own time, where there is so much disagreement among those who call themselves Thomists, it seemed right to me that, in view of his complete fidelity to St. Thomas on the subject of the common good, this title might be said without hyperbole of De Koninck.

first expose some pitfalls that can impede our understanding of St. Thomas' doctrine; second, I will lay out some important distinctions which Charles De Koninck proposed as keys to understanding Aquinas' doctrine; and third, I will briefly identify some important ways that this doctrine contributes to Theology.

Some Difficulties

There are a number of difficulties which could impede a correct understanding of St. Thomas' doctrine on the common good. I will consider three which are particularly important.

The first difficulty facing those who want to understand St. Thomas' doctrine on the common good correctly is that St. Thomas himself never wrote a treatise dedicated to the common good as such. His discussions of the common good are spread piecemeal throughout his works in widely diverse contexts. Given the difficulty of the subject and the various and contradictory understandings of it even among those who claim to be disciples of St. Thomas, the modern student of St. Thomas may be left saying to himself: "Alas! if only St. Thomas had written a *Quaestio Disputata De Bono Communi*."[2]

The second difficulty faced by those attempting to attain to a scientific understanding of the common good is the wide latitude of meanings to which the phrase is susceptible.[3] Taken separately, both of the terms "common" and "good" are used in widely diverse senses: we speak of common sense and of the commonwealth, of good ice cream and good arguments. And so when these words are brought together the likelihood of

[2]It is of interest to note that one of St. Thomas' contemporaries, Remigio de Girolomi, did indeed write a treatise on the common good which includes a number of objections and replies.

[3]See G. Froelich, "The Equivocal Status of Bonum Commune," in *The New Scholasticism*, 63, Winter 1989, 38–57; and "On Common Goods" in *The Aquinas Review*, vol.15, 2008, 1–26.

confusion of meanings is not merely added, but multiplied. The highway system, children, world peace and God are all called common goods. Therefore, a large part of explaining St. Thomas' doctrine on the common good is making those distinctions necessary for an accurate understanding of the meaning or meanings St. Thomas had in mind in the different contexts in which he wrote.

A third difficulty encountered in coming to a distinct understanding of the common good is arriving at a sapiential perspective on the common good: that is, not only understanding the distinct meanings of common good, but ordering those meanings in such a way as to see which meaning or meanings are primary and of most interest to the wise man. The meaning of the common good in which St. Thomas was most interested, the sense which he identified as most profound and important in both Philosophy and Theology, is a meaning very far removed from our senses or imagination. It is therefore a meaning less known to us. And since the human mind habitually falls back upon better known meanings of words, we must constantly be on our guard not to confuse a better known meaning with the one we are seeking to treat here. Our task therefore is to order the meanings in such a way as to lead the mind from those pedestrian meanings of the expression, which are better known *quoad nos*, to that most intelligible and proper concept of the common good most relevant to wisdom.

As we shall see, it is precisely because Professor De Koninck was keenly aware of these three difficulties that he is such a valuable guide to understanding St. Thomas' doctrine on the common good.

Approaching an Understanding of the Common Good

Our first experience of goods, the first things to which we give the name "good," are sensible goods and the pleasures that

accompany them. Ice cream and warm hugs are good in this sense. We find that we have a natural desire to possess them and rest in them. As we grow and become aware of things beyond the realm of sense experience, we start to recognize that we also have a desire for these non-sensible things as well: we desire our parent's love and approval; we desire justice (children, even at a very young age, will insist that they be treated fairly); we desire to know the truth. These things are not the same kind of things as sensible goods, but since they too are objects of our desires, we give them the same name "good," but with the vague realization that they are not good in the same sense of the word. After some time, as we reflect more upon our experience of the world, we recognize that in all things there seem to be natural inclinations to act and be acted upon. Rocks tend downward. Plants tend to grow and reproduce. New life, seeds and embryos, tend to develop from the imperfect toward the perfect. We see that they tend toward determinate ends, and because those ends are like the objects of our desires, we call them "goods" as well. And so a new meaning of the word "good" comes to be, different, but related, to our original meaning. We say that it is good for a tree to bear fruit and even for a rock to be down. This final application of the term good is universal, and one could even say "metaphysical," since it is applied to all beings: it belongs to being, as being.

Bound up in our experience of these different but related goods is the experience of cause and effect. We notice that these goods are somehow a cause of the actions (and sometimes even the very being) of the things for which they are good. The good ice cream is a cause of my opening the freezer and scooping a heaping bowlful for myself after dinner. This is not to deny that sometimes goods can also be effects. But observe that even when we notice that some good is an effect, it is also a cause in a different way: The good music is an effect of the skill of the musician

who produces it, but it is also the reason why he acquires and employs his skill. Health is the effect of walking, but it can also be the cause for which someone walks. Natural things too appear to act for the sake of goods, as if the good is somehow a cause of the activities or being of natural things. Even if philosophers of nature and natural scientists disagree about whether the good really is a cause in nature, they all agree that it looks that way; and naturalists from Empedocles to Darwin and beyond have devised intricate theories to explain why these appearances are merely that: apparent but not real. So the idea that the good is somehow a cause, even among non-rational beings, is where we start: it is something very familiar to us.

Let this suffice for a first approach to the idea of that which is good. The good is what is desirable, the object of an intrinsic inclination. And it is somehow also experienced or perceived as a cause.

Key Distinctions

When St. Thomas spoke about a common good as opposed to a private good, what precisely did he mean by the terms "good" and "common"? Here is where Professor De Koninck serves as an invaluable guide. As I mentioned before, St. Thomas never wrote a systematic treatise on the common good. His texts are found scattered through dozens of works in various contexts. In his work, *On the Primacy of the Common Good: Against the Personalists*,[4] and in his subsequent polemic, *In Defense of St. Thomas*,[5] De Koninck brought together many of the most important texts of St. Thomas on this question. In these works, De Koninck makes a number of key distinctions

[4]In *The Aquinas Review*, Vol.4, No.1 (1997), 1–131; hereafter "PCG."
[5]In *The Aquinas Review*, Vol.4, No.1 (1997), 171–349; hereafter "DST."

(themselves found in St. Thomas) in order to lay out St. Thomas' doctrine clearly and in order. Here I shall focus on three key distinctions.

Distinction 1: Integral Whole vs. Universal Whole vs. Potential Whole

Since that which is common is universal and a kind of whole, one key distinction which De Koninck uses to interpret St. Thomas' doctrine on the common good is the distinction among the kinds of wholes. St. Thomas distinguishes three chief kinds of wholes and corresponding parts: the integral whole, the universal whole and the potential whole. Here is one text explaining the distinction:

> The division of the [angelic] hierarchies into orders is of a potestative whole into its potential parts, just as the soul is divided into its powers: and this whole is as if a medium between the universal whole and the integral whole. For the universal whole is in each of its parts according to essence and complete power, hence it is predicated equally of each of its parts. But the integral whole is not in each of its parts according either to essence or complete power, and therefore, it is in no way predicated of its parts. But the potential whole is present according to essence in each of its parts, but it is present according to complete power [only] in its highest part, since the superior power always has in itself more completely those things which are in the inferior powers.[6]

De Koninck is aware that of the three kinds of whole, the integral is best known, the universal second best known and the potential whole is least known to us. A sign of this is that St. Thomas explains the potential whole by means of the other two.

[6] *In II Sent.*, d.9, q.1, a.3, ad.1.

A simple example will illustrate the difference between an integral whole and a universal whole. A triangle can be considered as an integral whole which is composed of its parts, namely, its three sides. It can also be considered as a universal whole which is divided into the three species or kinds of triangle, namely, equilateral, isosceles and scalene. In the integral whole no part can be given the name of the whole, since no part is what the whole is. But in the case of a universal whole, each part is what the whole is: an equilateral triangle is as much a triangle as an isosceles triangle is.

Another example can be used to explain the difference between a potential whole and the other kinds of whole. Color can be divided into its various species, such as blue, white, yellow, green, red, etc. In this case, color is considered as a universal whole and its various species, all of which are themselves colors, are its universal parts. But it is also true that the color white has the ability to produce the other colors, such as when white light is passed through a prism, the various colors of the spectrum appear. In this case, white is a potential whole which includes the various colors of the spectrum as its parts since it has the ability to produce those colors. Notice how different this is from the universal whole, since none of those particular colors of the spectrum produced by white are themselves white, even though they are somehow contained by and in white.

As I mentioned before, we have a tendency to fall back upon meanings of terms that are better known to us. And thus we should expect that the less known senses of the term "whole" will sometimes be confused with the better known senses of the term "whole." An interesting example of this is found in the Platonic dialogue *Parmenides*. There the young Socrates attempts to defend his doctrine of universals against the objections of the older, wiser Parmenides. At one point in the dialogue,

Parmenides tricks Socrates into confusing the universal whole with the integral whole:

> [Parmenides:] "Do you think the whole idea, being one, is in each of its many participants, or what?"
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> "Yes, for what prevents it from being in them, Parmenides?" said Socrates.
>
> "Then while it is one and the same, the whole of it would be in many separate individuals at once, and thus it would be separate from itself."
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> "No," he replied, "for it might be like day, which is one and the same, is in many places at once, and yet is not separated from itself; so each idea, though one and the same, might be in all its participants at once."
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> "That," said he, "is very neat, Socrates; you make one to be in many places at once, just as if you should spread a sail over many persons and then should say it was one and all of it was over many. Is that not about what you mean?"
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> "Perhaps it is," said Socrates.
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> "Would the whole sail be over each person, or a particular part over each?"
>
> "A part over each."
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> "Then," said he, "the ideas themselves, Socrates, are divisible into parts, and the objects which partake of them would partake of a part, and in each of them there would not be the whole, but only a part of each idea."
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> "So it appears."[7]

The young Socrates, unacquainted with the distinct meanings of whole and part, falls back upon a better known sense of the word whole, after which he finds himself in a maze of contradictions.

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[7] *Parmenides*, 131b–c, H.N. Fowler translation, Loeb Classical Library 167 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 213.

It is not surprising, therefore, that when there is talk of the common good, what comes first to mind is a kind of aggregate or sum of private goods. Indeed, this is one legitimate sense of the expression (for example, St. Thomas speaks of this kind of common good in relation to distributive justice[8]). But it is not the most profound or metaphysically important sense of common good. The sense of common good that we are after is that which is most of all the perfection of beings, especially persons, and which is the foundation for societies of persons. Explaining why the common good is not an aggregate or sum total of singular goods, De Koninck says:

> The common good is greater not because it includes the singular good of all the singulars. In that case, it would not have the unity of the common good which comes from a certain kind of universality in the latter, but would merely be a collection, and only materially better than the singular good.[9]

The good which is the foundation of society, on the other hand, is common as a perfective cause: one whose essence belongs to each member of the society.

> The common good is not a good other than the good of the particulars, a good which is merely a 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...But when we distinguish the common good from the particular good, we do not mean thereby that it is not the good of the particulars; if it were not, then it would not be truly common.[10]

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[8]See, for example, *S.T.*, II–II, q.61, a.1, ad.1.
[9]PCG, 16.
[10]PCG, 17.

Confusion of a good which is common as a collection and a good which is common as a cause perfecting the particulars to which it is communicated can result in serious errors. De Koninck identifies totalitarianism as one of these errors:

> In totalitarian regimes, the common good is singularized, and it is opposed as a more powerful singular to the singulars which are purely and simply subjected. The common good loses its distinctive character; it becomes alien. It becomes subordinate to this monster of modern invention which is called the State…[11]

Also to be avoided is the confusion of the common good as a cause, which is a potential whole, with the good common only according to predication.[12] The name "good" can be said of many individuals, and this is to be common, or universal, in predication. This is an instance of a universal whole. On the other hand, the good can be a real, determinate being and a universal cause in things. This is an instance of a potential or potestative whole. The good which is universal in predication is less distinct and determinate than the specific goods receiving the universal name "good." In contrast, the good which is a cause and a potestative whole is the reason for the determination and specificity in the goods it causes. For example, the good of victory determines completely the order and movements of all the parts of the army. These orders and movements are themselves certain intermediate goods caused by the determinate victory toward which they are ordained: each one is chosen only to the extent that it seems to lead to the good of victory.

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[11]PCG, 66. One thinks immediately of the *Leviathan* of Hobbes, which De Koninck most certainly had in mind as he wrote this passage.

[12]On this distinction see R. McArthur, "Universal *in Praedicando*, Universal *in Causando*," *Laval Théologique et Philosophique*, XVIII, n.1, (1962), 59–95.

The common good which, according to De Koninck, is of most interest to the wise man, that good which is the foundation for the society of rational beings and the whole order of the universe, is a good common as a cause and potential whole,[13] taking potential here in the sense of an active power. As St. Thomas teaches:

> Something can be called common in two ways. In one way through predication. But in this way the common is not the same in number in the diverse instances…The other way is something common according to participation of one and the same thing according to number. And this community is most of all able to be found in those things which pertain to the soul, since through it there is reached that which is the good common to all things, namely God.[14]

Distinction 2: The Good as Efficient Cause and the Good as Final Cause

Another key distinction is between the good understood as final cause and the good understood as efficient cause.[15] De Koninck begins "The Primacy of the Common Good" with these lines: "The good is what all things desire insofar as they desire their perfection. Therefore, the good has a notion of a final cause."[16] Later, in his work *In Defense of St. Thomas*, De Koninck adds further: "It should be clear that the most

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[13]See, for example, DST, 233.

[14]*In IV Sent.*, d.49, q.1, a.1, qc. 1, obj.3 & ad3. Also see S.C.G., III, c.17.

[15]Beginning in 1992, with an article published by W.N. Clarke ("Person, Being and St. Thomas," *Communio* 19), a series of debates emerged on this issue, including contributions by D.L. Schindler, S.Long, G.A. Blair and B.T. Blankenhorn. For a summary of the debate see B.T. Blankenhorn, "The Good as Self-Diffusive in Thomas Aquinas" *Angelicum*, LXXIX, n.4 (2002): p.803–837.

[16]PCG, 14.

proper and profound meaning of the term 'good' is *perfectivum alterius per modum finis*."[17] The good is not any cause, but the final cause which is perfective of the thing for which it is good.

To take an example, knowledge is a good for man. But the good which is knowledge can cause in two ways. On the one hand, a person having knowledge can teach someone else and produce knowledge in that other person. This is to diffuse itself as an efficient cause in virtue of the possession of a form (i.e., the quality of knowledge). On the other hand, the good which is knowledge can also diffuse itself as a final cause, as something attractive to another. This happens, for instance, when a man sees knowledge as something desirable, so that he applies himself to study, investigation and contemplation in order to gain that knowledge which he desires. The knowledge here is not a form by which an agent acts on him, but rather it is an end which he desires as something perfective of him.

Let us look in greater detail at this distinction. De Koninck brings forth two texts of St. Thomas which are especially important in understanding the distinction between the good as final cause and the good as efficient cause. The first is taken from the *Summa Contra Gentiles*:

> The communication of being (*esse*) and goodness proceeds from goodness. Which indeed is clear both from the nature itself of the good, and from its notion. For naturally the good of any one thing is its act and perfection. Moreover, anything acts from this: that it is in act. Furthermore, by acting it pours out being (*esse*) and goodness into other things. Hence, also it is a sign of perfection of something that it is able to produce its like: as is clear from the Philosopher in the fourth book of the Meteorology. But the notion of the good is from this: that

[17]DST, 253.

> it is desirable. This is the end, which also moves an agent to acting. Because of which the good is said to be diffusive of itself and of being (*esse*).[18]

In this text the good is considered under two aspects, its nature and its notion or definition (*ratio*). According to its nature a good thing is something in act, and it therefore has the capacity to move other things from potency to act as an efficient cause. According to its proper notion or definition, however, the good is something desirable. Under this latter formality, the good is a cause in another mode. St. Thomas makes this clear in a second text from his *De Veritate*:

> When it is said that the good is diffusive according to its notion, diffusion is not to be understood as it implies the operation of an efficient cause, but as it implies the relationship of a final cause. And such a diffusion is not by the mediation of some superadded power. Moreover, the good signifies the diffusion of a final cause, and not of an agent cause: first since an efficient [cause], insofar as it is such, is not the measure and perfection of a thing, but rather its beginning, and then since the effect participates in the efficient cause according to assimilation of form only, but a thing obtains the end according to its whole being (*esse*), and the notion of the good consists in this.[19]

Here St. Thomas carefully distinguishes what is meant by the self-diffusion of the good as final cause from the self-diffusion of an efficient cause. While implying that the notion of self-diffusion is more apparent to us in the case of efficient cause, he nevertheless denies that all self-diffusion of causes is reduced to a kind of efficient causality. More than this, he even indicates

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[18]S.C.G., I, c. 37.

[19]*De Veritate*, q.21, a.1, ad 4.

that the more profound sense of self-diffusion is attributed to the good as final cause, for the good brings the *whole* being to its *whole* perfection.

In summary, it can be said that the good, as something in act (which every good thing is), diffuses itself by way of efficient and exemplar causality.[20] It can even be said that this is the sense of diffusion which is better known to us. This explains why we tend to fall back upon this sense in which the good is a cause.[21] De Koninck was aware of this and was careful to keep in mind that the good, considered precisely *as good*, diffuses itself not as an efficient cause, but by way of final causality.[22]

For De Koninck, the failure of many modern philosophers to account correctly for the relationship between the person and society results from a failure to approach the problem from the perspective of final causality:

> Instead of discussing the problem in terms of "person" and "society," I approach it in the fundamental terms of "proper good" and "common good." Ultimately, person and society are not to be judged by what they *are* absolutely, but by what is their perfection, *i.e.*, by what

[20]See *S.T.*, Ia, q.19, a.2, c.

[21]This seems to have been the cause of one of the more serious errors of Fr. Eschmann, to whom De Koninck was responding in this article.

[22]Upon close examination it becomes apparent that these two modalities of self-diffusion of the good have a determinate order to each other. The reason for this is that final causality and efficient causality have a determinate order to each other. The final cause is the cause of the causality of the efficient cause. If the good were not diffusive as good (*i.e.*, by way of final causality), it would not be diffusive as something actual (*i.e.*, by way of efficient causality), for the very inclination which is correlated to the good in the subject which desires the good is the principle of acting in that subject. Without this inclination, without some determinate end, the agent would have no reason to act one way rather than another, and so it would not act at all. Moreover, by being drawn closer to the end which is its good, a being becomes more and more actual, and hence, more and more capable of acting upon others by way of efficient causality.

> is their good; that is the only way in which Aristotle and St. Thomas ever discussed this problem. To look upon the absolute comparison of the person and society as the most basic consideration is distinctly modern. It is also distinctly modern to accord absolute priority to the subject…[23]

Distinction 3: The Good Perfecting the Speculative Intellect vs. the Good Perfecting the Practical Intellect

The third distinction which De Koninck lays out is the distinction between the good as perfective of the rational creature in the speculative order and the good as perfecting the rational creature in the practical order. De Koninck understands St. Thomas to teach that in the speculative order and the order of separated substances the primacy of the common good has its truest application. Here is the text of St. Thomas, with the objection first, followed by his response.

> It appears that beatitude consists more in an act of the practical intellect than of the speculative intellect. For to the degree that some good is more common, so much more is it divine, as is clear in the first book of the *Ethics*. But the good of the speculative intellect singularly belongs to him who beholds, while the good of the practical intellect is able to be common to many. Therefore, beatitude consists more in the practical intellect than in the speculative intellect.

And now for the response:

> To the first objection it ought to be said that the good to which the speculative intellect is united through cognition is more common than the good to which the practical intellect is united, inasmuch as the speculative

[23]De Koninck, DST, 319.

> intellect is more separated from the particular than the practical intellect, whose cognition is perfected in an operation which consists in singulars.[24]

De Koninck comments:

> St. Thomas avoids distinguishing the major ("Quanto aliquod bonum est communius, tanto est divinius") [To the degree that a good is more common, so much more is it divine]. On the contrary, he shows that the *dictum authenticum* applies more perfectly to the good of the speculative intellect than to that of the practical. And we must note carefully that St. Thomas calls "communius," not the good which consists in the *act* of the speculative intellect, but the "bonum *cui* intellectus speculativus *conjungitur* per cognitionem," [the good to which the speculative intellect is united through cognition] and this is objective beatitude. The good of the speculative intellect as such is more common because it is formally more abstract, more separated from the singularity of the operable which involves potentiality, and hence, more communicable.[25]

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[24]*In IV Sent.*, d.49, q.1, a.1, qc. 3, obj.1 & ad1. St. Thomas goes on in his response to make further precisions which do not, however, alter the first observation he made in the beginning of his response. He adds: "But this is true, that the attainment of the end to which the speculative intellect arrives, inasmuch as it is such, is proper to the one attaining; but the attainment of the end which the practical intellect intends is able to be proper and common, inasmuch as through the practical intellect someone directs both himself and others to the end, as is clear in the ruler of a multitude. But someone, from the fact that he beholds, is himself singularly directed unto the end of speculation. However, the end itself of the speculative intellect surpasses the good of the practical intellect as much as its singular attainment exceeds the common attainment of the good of the practical intellect. And therefore, the most perfect beatitude consists in the speculative intellect." This part of the response overcomes the fallacy of transgressing genera or orders of good. For it is true that a private good of a higher order may be preferable to a common good of a lower order.
[25]De Koninck, DST, 312.

If one considers the dictum "The more common a good is, the more divine it is," accepting "good" here to mean that which is perfective of another as an object and end, then the dictum holds more perfectly in the speculative order since the notion of diffusion and communicability can be more perfectly applied to that which is more separated from matter and particulars. So the common good in this most profound sense extends even beyond the moral sciences: it is a cause which extends to being as such. The words of Aristotle at the beginning of his *Metaphysics* are to the point:

> The supreme science, and superior to any subordinate science, is the one which knows that for the sake of which each thing must be done. And this is the good in each case, and in general the highest good in the whole of nature…it is this science which must investigate the first principles and causes, and the good, or final cause, is one of the causes.[26]

I think this is a point on which the eminent Thomist Jacques Maritain was in error. According to Maritain, the good of the speculative order, as opposed to a good of the practical order, is not a common good in the strict sense.[27] Maritain

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[26]*Metaphysics*, Book A, ch.2: 982b5–10. This text comes at the end of an argument in which Aristotle reasons from a nominal definition of wisdom (the best kind of knowledge) to an essential definition of wisdom (the knowledge of the first and most universal cause or causes). And since the final cause is the cause of the causality of the other genera of causes, Aristotle ultimately concludes in this text that wisdom is most of all a knowledge of that good which is the ultimate cause of being as such.

[27]Maritain argues that not only is the principle "the common good is more divine than the private good" to be understood analogously but also that its primary analogate is found in its application to human society and human goods. He asserts that St. Thomas gives this *dictum authenticum* "its full value in strictly social matters." (Jacques Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*

seems to fall back upon a more known sense of the term "good" which prevents him from appreciating the full amplitude and import of the common good: a good which is not only the foundation for every society of rational beings, men and angels, but is absolutely first in the whole order of causes.[28]

Some Applications to the Science of Theology

It is not difficult to see the importance of this doctrine on the common good for the science of theology. The goodness of God is the ultimate explanatory principle of all His works, both of nature and grace. Moreover, the whole of moral theology in particular begins and ends with a consideration of God as our beatitude. De Koninck makes clear that, for St. Thomas, the object of this beatitude is formally attained as a common good

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(New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947), pp.19–20.) Maritain applies the same principle later in the same work where he states: "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." (Ibid., p.73).

[28]It seems to me that the explanation for Maritain's particular reading of St. Thomas on this point stems from an approach to metaphysics which tends to ignore the role of essences and causality in favor of being. While, according to St. Thomas, being *qua* being is the subject-genus of metaphysics and while the distinction between *esse* and essence is fundamental for St. Thomas, there is much more to a science than its subject. Neither is being the most fundamental consideration for every metaphysical problem. Indeed, for St. Thomas metaphysics is first of all wisdom, and wisdom has to do with the first causes, especially the final cause since it is the first among causes. A metaphysical approach which restricts itself to the consideration of being and the *actus essendi*, which pertains properly to the consideration of formal causality, is impoverished precisely because it cannot account for the whole of reality, from pure act to pure potency.

in the line of final causality.[29] This explains why the theological virtue of charity necessarily has a social dimension: we are to love God precisely as He is communicable to others.

This doctrine on the common good also is crucial for formulating a correct understanding of the Church in relation to her members. The Church has as her principle of unity that very same good which is the beatitude of all her members. Unlike temporal societies, the end to which membership in the Church is ordained is our ultimate end. For this reason membership in the Church touches us even at the level of our conscience: the Church has from Christ an authority even in those areas most intimate to our persons. For this reason also, membership in the Church can never be coerced: all the children of the Church must be free.

The doctrine of the common good is so universal in its application that failure to understand the nature of the primacy

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[29]This is something that Fr. Eschmann failed to understand, and it resulted in serious errors. Fr. Eschmann, as De Koninck points out, has understood *bonum universale in causando* to refer only to causes in the line of efficient and exemplary causality, the causality by which God causes goodness in others. He failed to recognize or understand the many texts where St. Thomas shows that, most properly, *bonum universale in causando* refers to a common good in the line of final cause. As a consequence, Fr. Eschmann concludes that our participation in the divine goodness is not by way of final causality. Moreover, according to Fr. Eschmann, God is not formally a common good for beatified souls, but a private, personal good. But if this is so, the goodness of the beatified soul will be formally the same as God's goodness so that the divine goodness is wholly communicated to the beatified soul. That is to say, the beatified creature becomes as good as God Himself! And hence, it would be false to say that God should be loved more than the saints, or that we ought to love ourselves or the saints for God's sake. It is not difficult to see the harm which comes from such an error. Germain Grisez carries the consequences of this error further, arguing at one point that "strictly speaking, God is not the ultimate end toward which we should direct our lives." (Germaine Grisez, from *The Restless-Heart Blunder*, 2005 Aquinas Lecture, Center for Thomistic Studies, University of St. Thomas, Houston, Texas, p. 13.)

of the common good in relation to private goods in the same order can result in the obfuscation of even the clearest doctrines of the Church. When the private good of individual souls is held up as the ultimate good and end for which God acts, traditional doctrines like the existence of hell, the necessity for baptism or membership in the Church for salvation, and the doctrine of predestination become all but impossible to understand. According to this mistaken view, there is nothing better than the salvation of an individual soul, so that a loving God could never have a reason for permitting a soul to be lost. Hence, salvation is automatically assured no matter whether one keeps the commandments or not, is baptized or not, is a member of the Church or not. But if there is a common good of the elect which is a greater good than any individual's private salvation, and if this surpassing good is what God primarily loves and acts to bring about, all of these traditional doctrines of the Church make sense.

In a rather striking text illustrating this point, St. Thomas calls attention to an error by Origen in which he concluded that angels and human souls were the same in species:

> Origen, wanting to avoid the errors of ancient heretics who had attributed the diversity of things to diverse principles introducing the diversity of good and evil, posited that the diversity of all things had proceeded from free will. For he said that God made all rational creatures equal from the beginning, and that some, by adhering to God, made progress in better things by way of their clinging to God; but certain others, receding from God by their own free will, fell into worse things, to the degree that they departed from God. And therefore, certain of them were incorporated into the heavenly bodies, certain others into human bodies, and certain others were perverted even to the wickedness of the demons. Nevertheless, all were uniform from their creation in the

> beginning. But it can be seen how in respect to this position, Origen attended to the good of singular creatures, overlooking the consideration of the whole. Yet a wise architect not only considers the good of this part or that part in the disposition of the parts, but much more the good of the whole. Hence, a builder does not make all parts of the house equally precious, but more and less according as it befits the good disposition of the house.[30]

It is not by accident that Origen also held that hell was not eternal. Both errors follow necessarily from the position that the ultimate good in the universe is the private good of the singular parts of the universe.

Conclusion

This brief survey of St. Thomas' teaching on the common good, a survey guided by Professor De Koninck, not only manifests that there are several analogous meanings of the expression "common good," but also manifests that there is a primary meaning which, though least known to us, has the fullest notion of common good. It is most perfectly common because it is communicable in the highest degree: to being as such. It most fully has the notion of goodness because it is most of all perfective, bringing the whole being of each thing to its perfection in the mode of an end. It is this primary meaning of the common good that has significance far beyond the boundaries of ethics or political science. It is a metaphysical concept of the greatest importance that even touches upon and is of greatest service in theology. For the object sought by the wise man in first philosophy is the first and most universal cause of all beings. And this cause is a good, a good that, precisely as common, is the highest beatitude of all rational creatures and the ultimate reason for being of all things.

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[30] *Disputed Questions on the Soul*, a.7, c.