

JACQUES MARITAIN ON COMMON GOOD- A PHILOSOPHICAL CRITICAL APPRAISAL

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Abstract

*Two major theses underlie Maritain's position in *The Person and The Common Good*: First that the society is not a mere collection of individuals; but an ontological whole, and secondly, that as persons, humans are not part of, but wholes within society. In the light of these, Maritain evaluates and criticizes three major approaches to the common good: individualism, communism, and totalitarianism, and proposes an alternative which provides for a philosophical foundation for liberal democracy. While he criticizes the liberal conception of the common good, he insists that the common good must be "common to both the whole [society] and the parts [the persons] into which it flows back and which, in turn, must benefit from it. This paper takes a holistic look at Maritain's political and ethical views on his concept of the common good with a view to asserting that the inconsistency of Maritain to Thomistic account of the common good arises from the fact that Maritain asserted rights to the human person prior to his involvement to the political community.*

Introduction

The quest for a good life and the basis for human flourishing have proved a matter of perennial debates and controversies. Philosophers, theologians, lawyers, politicians, the public and even the church have arrived at distinct understandings about what the common good entails, how it should be balanced against individual goods, and if and by whom it should be enforced. Though there are many critics of the notion of the common good, it has survived as a meaningful concept and continues to serve as a very significant organizing principle of civic and political life. Such famous and classical philosophers like Plato, Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas were loud enough on the importance of the common good and how it can be achieved. The general and principal idea of the concept of common good rest on the justification that human beings are essentially sociable and therefore need human contact, hence human beings are found in communities as their natural habitat. Given the desirability of common good in human essence and existence, the

pertinent question here is: what actually is common good and how can it be determined? For Smith, the “determination of the best way to serve each other, however, is tied to social issues and the issues of the times” (Smith 1958:2). This is to say that the concept of common good changes with social conditions and political issues. In addition to changing social and political issues, evolving spiritual views and the manner in which we organize ourselves in a changing political community also affect its operations throughout the centuries (Collins 1945:107). The concept of the common good is, therefore, determined in large part by the social, political, spiritual and even the system of government operational in the given society.

It then follows that the social and political conditions of the given time determines, to a large extent, the direction and movement of the principle and concept of common good. Thus, an examination of the evolution of thought regarding the common good can be helpful in understanding its dynamic quality and operation.

General Concept of Common Good

The ancient Greek philosophers have a robust understanding of the concept and practice of the common good. In the Greek-city-state, the idea of the “polis” was the place where citizens made decisions about self-governance and their life in common for the sake of noble actions, not just for companionship. The polis or political society was not necessarily a geographic location, but an association of citizens where the exercise of the public virtue of citizenship was achieved. The common good was understood as seeking the “general welfare” of the polis. “The good”, for Plato was objective, defined as that which “every soul pursues and for the sake of which it does everything.” (Plato 1968: 185) Arriving at knowledge of the good within a community would create unity, which is “the greatest blessing for a state.” In this conception there is no tension between the private and public good, as individuals are thought to attain happiness (a private good) through the pursuit of justice (a public good).

Aristotle also emphasizes the priority of the state over the individual person. He defines the good as “. . . that at which all things aim” (Aristotle 1980). The definition implies that goodness is a goal, and that its achievement requires action. He went on to distinguish between ultimate goods (the good desired in themselves and are not pursued as a means to further ends); and proximate goods (the good pursued only because they contribute towards some end which we consider to be good in itself). The proximate goods are goods only insofar as they contribute to some ultimate good. Therefore, in ancient Greece, Plato and Aristotle emphasize the priority of society over man. In his *Nicomachean Ethics* (1049b8-11), Aristotle says:

For even if the end is the same for a single man and for a state, that of the state seems at all events something greater and more complete whether to attain or to preserve; though it is worthwhile to attain the end merely for one man, it is finer and more godlike to attain it for a nation or for city states. (McKeon 936).

Charles M. Sherover elucidates this view of the priority of society thus: “Society is the means by which individuals come to see themselves as those whom it has nurtured and developed . . .” (Sherover 1989:14). All things were believed to aim at the good, but the good of the community [*koinonia*] was of utmost importance. Aristotle, in virtual accord with Plato, saw the common good as a final cause, an end in itself. The common good was happiness, which is predicated on the community.

The ancient Roman philosophers Cicero (1966) share some of Aristotle’s position that a commonwealth or social order emerges from the social spirit of people who make the commonwealth their “property,” which is established on the principles of “respect for justice” and “partnership for the common good. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the highest form of

community was not the political community, but the communion of all people under God. The common good clearly was immensely important to the early Christians, but then recognition of its importance came not from guardians or governing bodies of society as before, rather, a desire for the common good emanated from within the individual. The book of Acts of the Apostles confirms this thus:

And all who shared the faith owned everything in common; they sold their goods and possessions and distributed the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed (Acts 2: 44-45).

According to Battaglia, these followers of Jesus, who were later called Christians, placed a high value on the common good of its members with a distribution of goods determined by need. A desire for the common good emanated from within the individual. Humankind's desires, interests, and aptitudes now had priority over society, and humankind willfully chose to use them for the benefit of society (Battaglia 2005:2).

In the medieval era, Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine combined classical notions of the common good with the Judeo-Christian concept of person created in the image of God. In his *City of God*, Augustine takes up Cicero's definition of a republic as a people joined by their pursuit of the common good and specifies the content of that good from a Christian perspective. Augustine built on the Greek understanding of "polis" but insisted that the full and complete realization of common good of the "polis" exists only partially here in the earthly realm, and only completely with and in God in the eternal realm. The common good takes on a divine understanding in addition to a political one. Still on the same footings, Thomas Aquinas maintains a similar theological conception of the common good: "God's own goodness ... is the good of the whole universe." According to him, government qualifies as a tyranny when "it is not directed to the common good, but to the private good" (Aquinas 1972:107). Aquinas further clarified that the ultimate good that is sought is not anything to be achieved on earth but is only achieved in the fullness of life in God. Novak says this characteristic of God, now understood to be in man, meant that man could never be a means to the end of a common good. Instead government must exist, or be the means; to allow people to reach their fulfillment of union with God (Novak 1989: 26-28). Concern for the common good therefore is not merely a political aim, but has a divine aim and therefore transcends the limits of human political rulers.

Catholic social teaching embodies two themes: that of the dignity of the human person with certain inalienable rights and the common good, which perfects society. To pursue the common good without recognizing the rights of persons is impossible. At the dawn of the Enlightenment period in about the 17th/18th centuries, a new emphasis was placed on human reason and scientific investigation. Scholars brought, among others, the ideas of freedom, liberty, equality, and individual rights to the intellectual fore. These ideas and their influence gradually shaped the social teaching on common good at this period which later formed the focus or centerpiece of Maritain's critique of the then conception of common good. Maritain seeks to chart a middle course between Plato and Aristotle and other scholars who took an extreme dimension of common good to emphasize the priority of the society in the determination of the common good on the one hand and the enlightenment scholars who placed priority on freedom, liberty and equity and individual right to emphasize the priority of the individual in the determination of common good.

An understanding of the linkage between the common good and freedom for human rights and insight came largely through the work of Jacques Maritain in the 1940's recognizing that the person in society needed secure protection to exist and thrive in society. Thus, this essay seeks a critical investigation into the thought of Jacques Maritain on common good. However, apart from

the various perspectives observed above on the concept of common good, it is the position of this critical essay that common good is not readily given to human perception and understanding, and while some may argue that it is discoverable through human a priori reasoning, it is actually transcendental. Hence, humans can be said to easily recognize their “will”, their “interest”, whether common and public, or private and personal, but neither the “will” nor the “interest” can be equated with the “good” of a person or group of persons. Therefore, in our every day action, we know our will and interest before acting, but our real good has to prove itself after our action when our action in its consequences prove to be our real good. In this regard, we can say that common good of a given society is somewhat spiritual and enigmatic and as such transcendental as it goes beyond human capacity for rational apriority, speculation or conjecture. In religious parlance, we can know our will as we will things, but only God knows our “good”, for not all we will turns out to be our good for sometimes all we ever wanted turn out to be against our good though they remain our will. Our actions in pursuit of our good need time to prove to be our good or otherwise our evil, meaning our good is a consequentialist concept or phenomenon. Finally, what actually ought to be our real good seems a pertinent question here. Simply put, our good ought to be that which serves our essence optimally or what naturally puts us in good stead as humans, that is, what makes us full and complete or integral humans; and common good, on the other hand, is what is essentially good and common to our human essence.

Jacques Maritain on Social nature of Man and Common Good

Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) was a French philosopher and political thinker, and one of the principal exponents of Thomism in the twentieth century. After a suicide pact was thwarted by reflecting on the philosophical teachings of Henri Bergson, and by the influence of the writer Léon Bloy, both Maritain and his wife Raïssa Oumansoff converted to Catholicism in 1906. Disillusioned by the then spiritual aridity of French intellectual life, and moved by the traumatic events of the twentieth century, Maritain set about to undertake philosophy in an Aristotelian-Thomistic framework, supplemented by his Catholic religious beliefs (Battaglia: 2005:1). This is not to say that his catholic identity limited his prominence to parochial circle, for he was a philosopher with broad intellectual insight with profound mark of originality (Nebraska 2007:155)

In Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, for Maritain, human person is by nature a social being (Maritain 1947:60). The point is that the human person cannot exist, qua human, without relationships with his fellow human beings. One's fellows are, as it were, indispensable to one's dignity as a person. But Maritain is careful to distinguish the social life of man from that of other social creatures, as, for example, that of bees (Maritain 1947:49-50). According to him, there is among bees a common interest, vis-à-vis the well-functioning of the hive, but unlike men, bees lack a conception of a common good. In Maritain's thought, the distinguishing feature of man's sociality is his ability to pursue a common good together with his fellows in a political society. But the question is: what is Maritain's notion of the common good, and how is it different from the common interest the bees have in the well-functioning of the hive or from the common interest men may have in a well-functioning society?

Writing after World War II, Maritain believes that the concept of the human person and the pursuit of the common good have been misunderstood by the then system of government. To restore what he saw as the proper balance between the individual human person and the common good of the society, Maritain returned to the teachings of Thomas Aquinas in which man was made in God's image and in the supreme good as being in union with God. Maritain recognizes

the need to separate the dignity of the individual human being from the dangers of the primacy of the isolated individual and the promotion of the private good. The common good, for Maritain, is “the good human life of the multitude, and their communion in good living” (Maritain 1947:50). In large part, Maritain was responding to the threats posed to the dignity of the human person by the then three forms of states [the bourgeois liberal state, the communist state, and the totalitarian state] that existed during the first half of the twentieth century and their conception of common good as the aggregate collections of individual goods, which he likened to the common interest the bees and individual person have in the society. For Maritain, the essential feature of the common good is that it can be “received and communicated.” A person communicates these goods to others, and others likewise communicate these goods to him, for clearly human goods are such that they must be shared with others. Maritain sees the conception of common good proposed and practiced by these states as unacceptable and proposes an alternative approach which would lead to the realization of society’s end or telos, in line with liberal democracy and which will equally do justice to the dignity of the human person. Wallace succinctly puts it thus:

Maritain hoped for a “personalist” democracy that would curb individualism without being totalitarian, advocate human rights vehemently as integral to the common good, and promote human freedom in conjunction with virtue. (Wallace 1999: 128)

Two major themes seem to guide Maritain’s assessment of the three approaches to the common good. The first is that society is not a mere collection of individuals; it is an ontological whole. The second thesis is that, as persons, human beings are not parts of society; they are wholes within society. According to Maritain, “The concept of part is opposed to that of person. To say, then, that society is a whole composed of persons is to say that society is a whole composed of wholes.” (Maritain 1947:56-7). It is in the light of the foregoing two theses that Maritain proceeds to evaluate each of the three approaches. According to individualism, society is an artifact created by humans for the exclusive purpose of serving their individual needs (Maritain 1947:92). Hence, qua society’s *telos*, the common good is, for the individualists, nothing but the collection of the particular goods of each individual (Maritain 1947:92). The American legal culture is situated within this category. Thus, Maritain concluded that “bourgeois liberalism with its ambition to ground everything in the unchecked initiative of the individual, conceived as a little God,” (Maritain 1947: 91-92) was a threat to the dignity of the human person and the common good. Maritain states that the emphasis on individualism at the expense of community results in “the tragic isolation of each one in his or her own selfishness or helplessness” (Maritain 1947: 92-93).

The individualistic approach to common good is unacceptable to Maritain for at least two reasons. First, Maritain seems to argue that, individualism fails to do justice to the holistic nature of society enunciated by the first thesis (that society is not a mere collection of individuals; it is an ontological whole). Because it is an ontological whole, society, in Maritain’s view, has a *telos* irreducible to the goods of its constituents. Hence, he seems to think that, by identifying society’s *telos* with its constituents’ goods, individualism denies society an irreducible *telos* and, by doing so, robs it of its holistic nature. By identifying society’s *telos* with the collection of the particular goods of its individuals, society “would dissolve to the advantage of its parts, ...” (Maritain 1947:50).

According to Ogilvie-Ellis (2013), for Maritain:

If a person’s actions follow the bent of material individualism, his development will be oriented to the ego with intent to grasp for itself. But, if development occurs in the direction of spiritual personality, man will

be oriented towards the generous self of the heroes and saints. Thus man will be truly a person only in so far as the life of the spirit and of liberty reigns over that of the senses and passions (Maritain 1947:44-45).

Maritain recognizes individualism as an evil because he understands that the human being, who is an individual, is simultaneously a member of the human community. For him, a constitutive element of being human is the “inner urge to the communications of knowledge and love, which require relationship with other persons” (Maritain 1947:57). In plain terms, Maritain advances the basic position that the human person and the community are not in conflict with one another because their vital interests are complementary rather than contradictory. Maritain insists thus:

There is a correlation between this notion of the person as a 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 a mirror of the whole.... 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 (Maritain 1947:50).

Person for Maritain is a community being, a being with others in which his good is common with others. In these words, as Maritain points out the rights of the individual human person and the interests of the community are compatible, harmonious, and inextricably related. For Maritain, the expansion of each person’s rights needs the community. In isolation, each is cut off from the others, and the solitary person is alone and must fend for self. However, when in community, the individual person can rely on the generous support of others to be more, and not less, of a human being. On another note, Maritain seems to contend that individualism undermines what he takes to be a duty entailed by the second thesis; “the duty” to treat the person as a whole. Commenting on the second thesis which involves treating a person as a whole in a whole [society] which is also compatible with Kantian principles, Kalumba asserts:

“The person, as person, requires to be treated as a whole in society”... “Whole”, in the sense it is used in *PCG*, is not only opposed to “part”, but also carries the Kantian sense of “end”; the sense of a being which ought to be cared for its own sake. So, as a whole, i.e., as an end, a person, in Maritain's view, ought to be cared for not only for the sake of society, but also for his/her own sake. This is the essence of “the duty” to treat the person as a whole (Kalumba 1993:95).

The human society is for Maritain an artificial construct, to which persons are bound mechanically — the exact opposite of community! (Maritain 1947:92-93, 101) So, instead of prescribing a genuine prerequisite for the person's pursuit of his/her good, individualism, in Maritain's view, prescribes a counterfeit. In Maritain's view, totalitarianism models society after the “biological and animal” kind of whole in which the constituent elements are mere parts; parts which are totally subservient to the whole (Maritain 1947:50-51). Yuengert captured this picture thus:

Maritain (1948), in light of both the failed and ongoing totalitarian experiments of his day, highlighted the tension between the dignity of the person and the practical demands of the common good. This tension is captured in the question, “Does

society exist for the person or the person for society?" Totalitarian societies had, in the name of the common good, subordinated the person to the state, and in the process degraded the person (Yuengert 2001:4).

Maritain finds the totalitarian model and their account of common good unacceptable on two counts. First, it is obviously in direct conflict with his second thesis. Second, it constitutes an outright violation of "the duty" to treat the person as a whole. For Maritain, a person ought to be cared for not merely for the sake of society but also for his/her own sake. As we have noted, this constitutes the essence of "the duty" to treat the person as a whole. But, in the totalitarian model, the person is totally subordinated to society and its *goals*. Contrary to the said "duty", s/he cannot be said to be cared for his/her own sake. S/he is cared for, if ever, solely as a means for the attainment of society's overarching goals to which s/he is totally subordinated

Smith notes that totalitarian regimes of the time focused on the economic good, but Maritain, seeing the abuses of these regimes, focused on the political common good. These abuses, Smith wrote, caused Maritain to make a distinction between the State and the political community and evoke the common good in the political order (Smith 1958: iv). Maritain refers to the state as "an administrative apparatus designed to serve the community," and the political community is composed of persons (Nebraska 2007:157). Maritain continues thus, "the State may even set itself against the good of the whole community and become a super-individual". In response to this "super individual" state, Maritain explains that man is a whole; society is a whole of wholes, and the common good of society cannot sacrifice its parts to itself. Rather, "it [the common good] is therefore common to both the whole and parts into which it flows back and which, in turn, must benefit from it" (Maritain 1947:51).

Thus, since the three approaches to the common good do not do justice to Maritain's society goals, the two requirements, i.e. the two alternative approaches, are what Maritain has in mind when he insists that the common good should be "common to both the whole [society] and the parts [the individuals] into which it flows back and which, in turn, must benefit from it (Maritain 1947:51). On another note, Maritain sees communism as "a kind of economic theocracy;" (Maritain 1947:96). He takes it to be committed to the view that appropriate control of the productive process is the key to everything socially desirable. This view in Maritain's opinion has constrained communism to reduce society's principal work (society's *goals*) to that of controlling the productive process. This reduction, Maritain urges, has blinded communism to the goods of the person; those requirements which are necessary for the individual to pursue his/her good as a person (Maritain 1947:94). But, as we have seen, Maritain takes provision of these requirements to be part of "the duty" to treat the person as a whole. In his view then, communism neglects an essential aspect of this "duty". This is the main reason why he considers it unacceptable.

Evaluation of Maritain's Concept of Common Good

In evaluating Maritain's concept of Common good, two veritable frameworks come to the mind and such are social and political thoughts, the human person and the common good. Maritain claims to have derived his understanding of both from Thomas Aquinas, though the extent this is true remains debatable. Within that framework of contemporary discourse, some commentators - for the most part, the Catholics who are sympathetic to communitarianism - have claimed that Jacques Maritain's theory of the natural rights of the human person is a liberal aberration that is in conflict with his otherwise communitarian political philosophy. Of course, the most promising point of contact between Maritain and contemporary liberalism is his affirmation of human rights.

Philosophically, Maritain wrote and spoke throughout the 1940s and 1950s on behalf of human rights. Personally, he was centrally involved in the drafting of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights of 1948. Thus, from the point of view of Maritain's philosophy of the common good and the natural right of persons, some scholars have claimed that Jacques Maritain's theory of the natural rights of the human person is a liberal aberration that is in conflict with his otherwise communitarian political philosophy. This claim can be substantiated with both Crosson and Alasdair Macintyre arguments that Maritain sought to synthesize two inherently incompatible political doctrines. According to them, such liberal concepts as freedom and human rights are "at theoretical level in serious tension, if not inconsistency, with his overall communitarian framework (Watkins Mcinerny, 151). Therefore, they conclude that Maritain is not faithful to Thomas Aquinas' doctrine of the common good and that he remained unfaithful in Aquinas' theory of natural law when he maintained that rights exist prior to community bonds, i.e., that he assigned rights to persons before identifying their social and historical context and the role they played in their communal setting. This is to say that Maritain's support for human rights, normally understood as a liberal concept is a departure from such contemporary principle of communitarianism.

It is important to note however that the question of part/whole relations and the individual/person distinction provides the cornerstone for Maritain's consideration of the common good. The central question taken up by those who are engaged in this debate was whether the human person superseded the common good. Thomas Osborne observes that "even though Maritain's precise understanding of the relationship between the individual and common good was never clear, one view that can be attributed to him is that the person has an ontological priority over the common good" (Osborne 2008:76). Though Maritain maintains and insists on the compatible and complementary roles the society and the individual person have towards the other, in an attempt to restore the dignity of the human person, Maritain accorded an ontological priority to the human person. According to him, while one's private good as an individual is subordinate to the (temporal) common good of the political community, as a person with supernatural end, one's "spiritual good" is superior to society – and this is something all political community must recognize. Maritain affirmed this in his doctrine of personalism, but other Thomists, most notably Charles De Koninck, held that Aquinas maintained the priority of the common good. In keeping with Maritain, De Koninck emphasizes that the human being is a person who is directly ordered to God, but draws our attention to the fact that for Thomas, God is the common good of the universe. According to De Koninck, Aquinas is saying that humans are only partially ordered to the political common good because the political common good is not the ultimate end of human beings. The ultimate end is God, who is the common good of the universe. The citizen is only partially ordered to the common good because there is a further common good. The common good of the political community is not the ultimate end of human life, but neither is it incomplete in the way that the common good of a family or trade group is. In other words, the political common good is not the best and highest because there is a higher common good, not a higher individual good. Therefore, De Koninck argues that Maritain's political philosophy is sliding into individualism.

In line with the above criticism, Thomas Osborne (2008) observes that Maritain's failure to remain faithful to Aquinas' doctrine of the common good rest on his failure to distinguish between complete and incomplete communities. According to him, one way of distinguishing between the different common goods is by distinguishing between the common goods of incomplete and complete communities. Following Aristotle, Osborne claims that Aquinas thinks that the political unit is a complete community with a common good which is greater than that of

its members. Aristotle and Thomas contrast these complete communities with local communities which are not self-sufficient, such as households and villages. This self-sufficiency helps to create a political community which is concerned not with particular practices, but with the good life as a whole. The political community's concern with living well makes it into a community whose common good is greater than the individual or private good of its members. Osborne claims that the individual dies for this political community because he recognizes that such a community's common good is better and should be loved more than his own good (Osborne 2005, 73–94).

Another objection worthy of note to Maritain's conception of common good is with the possibility of its attainment. Maritain accorded an ontological priority to the human person over the common good because he believes that as human person with supernatural end, one's "spiritual good" is superior to society – and this is something all political community must recognize and by extension we must also include the traditional local community and their relationship that exist between them in the attainment of the "common good/common interest and or public interest. In traditional African society, the community constitutes the point of orientation for almost all human activities and determination of human life. The community comes first before its member and members of given communities have disproportionately more rights than outsiders. Within this context, the African grasps the human person as belonging to a group. The community becomes the rallying ground for the defense of the common good which could also legitimize the fact that members can forfeit their interest and right should it conflict with those of the community itself. This, by extension, could relate to what Innocent Asouzu calls *ibuanyidanda* – the capacity of the mind to be aware of its sharing a common complementary horizon with other units and missing links within a given framework, in the process of which authentic idea of being and human action emerge (Asouzu 352). This also includes such ideas as *Ujammah*, *Ubuntu*, *communaucracy*, *solidarity*, *African Brotherhood* etc, which could be subsumed under the deeper concept of communalism. However, despite this, there is a near lack of clear consciousness with regard to a higher ontological legitimizing principle that binds all human persons and that seek for a global common good. The essence of this is that common good that is truly common is not achievable here on earth. It is a transcendental essence that is not within the reach of humans and I believe Aquinas understood it thus, but Maritain conceives of it to be attainable here on earth.

Conclusion

Writing after World War II, Maritain in his *The Person and the common Good* sets out to restore the dignity of the human person and to reposition it within the context of the society from the background and perspective of the social and political philosophy of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. He recognizes the need to separate the dignity of the human person from the dangers of the primacy of the isolated individual and the promotion of the private good, occasioned by the then systems of government and their conceptions of common good as the aggregate collection of individual goods in the society. Maritain insists and maintains that when the society is seen as a mechanical artifacts created by humans for the exclusive purpose of serving their individual need; legitimizing totalitarian government, the common good of the society takes priority over that of the human person in the society. Hence the individual is seen as a part in relation to the whole. Thus, he maintains that society is not a mere collection of individuals; it is an ontological whole and that as persons, human beings are not parts of society; they are wholes within whole [society]. Thus, Maritain insists that the common good should be "common to both the whole [society] and the parts [the individuals] into which it flows back and which, in turn, must benefit from it.

On a very critical note however, while he tries to maintain a reciprocal and complementary balance between the society and the human person, Maritain is said to be inconsistent with Aristotelian-Thomistic conception of the common good. According to De Koninck, while Aquinas maintains the ontological priority of the political community whose concern is the wellbeing of the individual in the community, Maritain maintains an ontological priority of the person over the common good. This according to him is from his inability to distinguish between complete and incomplete community. However, despite the criticism against his concept of the person and the common good, Maritain was able to stem the tide of the time in his response to the then three approaches to the common good.

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