THE COMMON GOOD REVISITED

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A SURVEY of the horizon of contemporary social ethics suggests that some moral questions are indeed perennial. The late 20th century—with its brave new technologies, frightful capacity for destruction, and growing web of political and economic interdependence—confronts the human race with ethical choices that are genuinely new. But in their efforts to address many of these new issues, a number of ethical thinkers have recently begun to debate the meaning and practical relevance of an idea that can be traced back to Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero. I mean the notion of the common good. This essay will highlight some of the most important discussions going on in social ethics today by viewing them from the perspective of this debate about the meaning of the common good.

First, some of the reasons why the question of the common good has re-emerged as a matter of serious moral argument will be outlined. Second, a theological argument for a pluralistic, analogical understanding of the common good will be outlined, an argument that draws on several themes present in Augustinian and Thomistic sources. Third, the possibility of reinterpreting the common-good tradition in a way that enables it to contribute to a nonindividualistic understanding of human rights will be explored.

This essay will present only a sketch of some current discussions of the common good. It will focus on a theoretical question that cuts across numerous practical ethical discussions: whether the idea of the common good is meaningful and usable at all in present historical circumstances. If this essay is able to clarify the state of this question within the framework of theological ethics, it will have achieved its purpose.

RE-EMERGENCE OF THE COMMON GOOD

The debate about the meaning and utility of the concept of the common good is unfolding on a number of levels in contemporary intellectual life.

Business and Economics

In some discussions of the future of American business and economic life the ethical category of the common good has surfaced in a variety of forms as an idea whose time has once again come. A recent interdisciplin-

ary study of the future of the American corporation sponsored by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences is a case in point. The editors of the volume that resulted from this extended investigation note that its chapters (written by different authors) are informed by different "visions" or models of society. The most basic difference is between approaches to the corporation informed by more individualistic and contractarian models of social life and those shaped by more "interactional communitarian" models.[1] These social visions are in turn correlated with different moral points of view concerning what constitutes the well-being of both corporations and the societies in which they operate. The contractarian approach expresses a preference for maximizing liberty and extending the scope of choice open to individuals. It also places great weight on the responsibilities of individuals as rational agents to determine what is truly in their own interest and in the interest of the corporation within which they operate. The communitarian vision stresses the need for co-operation and compromise "for the sake of some larger public interest or the common good." It recommends the design of social mechanisms that co-ordinate the activities of various participants in society as a whole so that they lead toward this common good.[2]

Since the highly regarded theological ethicist James Gustafson was one of the codirectors in this research project, it should not be surprising that ethical themes such as these are front and center throughout its results. What is noteworthy, however, is that the American Academy judged it important to select an ethicist as one of the people at the helm of this major study. This fact is surely a "sign of the times." It is also noteworthy that the study as a whole is premised on the recognition that the demands on the U.S. corporation today go well beyond the goal of economic efficiency. The "transition" presently occurring in American corporate life means that business-as-usual cannot be the order of the day. The question of the goals and purposes of corporate activity has been forced to the surface. Thus Gustafson and his coeditor John Meyer state that a central question in the entire study is "to whom and for what are corporations responsible?"[3]

The essays in the American Academy study show that little consensus exists on this central ethical question, but they also show that the disagreement between the individualist/contractarian and communitarian/common-good traditions of Western social morality has become

[1] John R. Meyer and James M. Gustafson, "Introduction," in Meyer and Gustafson, eds., *The U.S. Business Corporation: An Institution in Transition* (Cambridge: Ballinger, 1988) xiv.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

newly salient, perhaps more so than at any time since the dawn of modernity. To see this disagreement clearly, one need only compare the essay by Joseph L. Bower in the American Academy volume with one published by Michael Novak in another context. It is well known that Novak is a leading apologist for the institutions of democratic capitalism. He has argued, effectively I think, that these institutions demand intense co-operation among those who work within them if this work is to lead to success. Thus it is not accurate to say that democratic capitalism is entirely individualistic in its presuppositions about human nature. However, Novak argues that individuals rather than larger social institutions such as the government are in the best position to judge what will make for success and prosperity. The common good of society will be most likely to be achieved if all of society's members exercise their own practical intelligence to the maximum in the economic activities in which they are engaged. It is precisely the free market which enables them to do so. Novak maintains, further, that there is no way for persons to *know* what is good for society as a whole. This total common good is simply too complex a reality for anyone to identify. Efforts to direct activity in society toward such a common good will inevitably lead to imposition of some partial good or even some evil on its members. Thus the best path toward the common good is not one that proceeds by *intending* the good of society as a whole. Rather, the free-market institutions of democratic capitalism create the conditions in which an invisible hand will coordinate the pursuit of individual self-interest (rightly understood) in a way that maximizes the social good actually achieved.[4] Thus Novak's argument, though not individualistic in its anthropological presuppositions, endorses all those economic and social institutions characteristic of modernity that set the individual free from past social bonds and that were provided with theoretical warrants by thinkers such as John Locke and Adam Smith.

In the view of Joseph Bower, senior associate dean of the Harvard Business School, the matter is considerably more complex than Novak's argument presupposes. Bower argues that the modern corporation is a vastly different kind of thing than the small, entrepreneurial operation that was the focus of Adam Smith's analysis in 1776. This, of course, is hardly big news. But Bower maintains that the difference between an 18th-century factory and a large, late-20th-century corporation is not reflected in analyses like Novak's. Such a corporation is tied to the rest

[4] Michael Novak, "Free Persons and the Common Good," in Oliver F. Williams and John W. Houck, eds., *The Common Good and U.S. Capitalism* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1987) 222–43, at 237. Novak develops these ideas at greater length and, I think, with less plausibility in his forthcoming book *Free Persons and the Common Good.*

of society in a complex web of interdependence and reciprocal influence. Thus corporate decision-making not only influences the success of the company itself but also bears on the well-being of larger, interdependent communities. If they are to act responsibly and retain their legitimacy in the eyes of others, managers must pay careful attention to these interdependencies. In Bower's words,

managers must be careful to recognize when they are functioning in their traditional roles and when they are functioning as representatives or stewards for a group of economic and human assets that are part of the nation's economic and social potential. . . . [E]xecutives must develop a broad view of the national interest and then be sure that their companies' positions are consistent. An international view and an educated perspective on major national issues are important to their effectiveness in their new role.[5]

In other words, Bower is arguing that it is virtually impossible to determine what the goals and objectives of a successful corporation should be without attending carefully to the way they are connected to the larger goals of society as a whole. Contrary to Novak, some concept of the public interest or common good must be part of managerial planning. However, this is not easy to come by. "One critical ingredient that the business manager often lacks is a clear, easily articulated view of the effects of their companies or industries on the national interest."[6] One of the responsibilities of managers is to participate in the effort to identify social needs and the larger public good in a self-conscious way. Executives who fail to recognize this do so to the peril of their companies, themselves, and indeed the common good itself.

Cultural Criticism

Discussion of the need to recover an understanding of the common good has also emerged in what may broadly be called cultural criticism. This literature goes beyond the disagreement about the role of different social institutions dividing Bower and Novak, to the question of whether it is possible under contemporary historical and cultural conditions to identify the common good or the public interest at all. This question is the central theme of *Habits of the Heart* by Robert Bellah and his

[5] Joseph L. Bower, "The Managerial Estate," in Meyer and Gustafson, *The U.S. Business Corporation* 162–63. Bower's argument parallels John XXIII's discussion of increased social interdependence and the importance of conscious attention to the common good in *Mater et magistra*, nos. 59–67.

[6] "The Managerial Estate" 163.

coauthors.[7] The book has been widely discussed, and I do not intend to rehearse all this discussion here, but only to make one point that is important in this context. *Habits of the Heart* proposes to revive a strong commitment to the common good in American culture, while also retaining an equally strong commitment to modern freedoms and rights. Just how this is to be done remains incompletely specified.

The authors argue that the communitarian emphases contained both in the biblical religion of the early Puritan settlers of the United States and in the classical republican commitments of some of the founders and framers of American institutions have been nearly swamped by the rising tide of individualism associated with traditional styles of entrepreneurship and more recent therapeutic models of self-realization. A retrieval of the emphasis on community and the common good found in both the biblical and classical republican traditions is urgently needed if we are to grapple with the serious problems of public life in the late 20th century. However, *Habits of the Heart* is not by any means making a plea for a return to some putative premodern golden age. Individualistic concepts of self-realization emerged out of the struggle against arbitrary power, both the political power of the monarchs of the *ancien régime* and the economic power of the aristocracy. This defense of individual rights and freedoms was without doubt a kind of liberation movement. Bellah et al. recognize that it has made major moral contributions that they want to preserve. The problem is that when liberated and autonomous "selves" are cut loose from any links to the larger public good, society threatens to dissolve into anarchy or, alternatively, to congeal into a new form of authoritarian tyranny.[8] If citizens lack the vision and virtues needed to sustain a genuine human community, they will end up either in Hobbes's state of nature, where life is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short,"

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[7] Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1985). Nicholas Lash has said that no other recent writing has done as much to bring the communitarian criticism of contemporary culture to general attention ("The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism," in Charles H. Reynolds and Ralph V. Norman, eds., *Community in America: The Challenge of Habits of the Heart* [Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1988] 173–84, at 174). John F. Wilson judges that the book "is well on its way to being accepted as a major analysis and representation of the American paideia in the late twentieth century" (review of *Habits of the Heart*, in *Religious Studies Review* 14 [1988] 304–16, at 304). This book and this issue of *RSR* contain some of the most thoughtful responses to *Habits*.

[8] The diagnosis is stark: "There is a widespread feeling that the promise of the modern era is slipping away from us. A movement of enlightenment and liberation that was to have freed us from superstition and tyranny has led in the twentieth century to a world in which ideological fanaticism and political oppression have reached extremes unknown in previous history" (*Habits* 277).

or governed by Hobbes's sovereign Leviathan.[9]

This grim outcome is not the future the authors of *Habits* are fore-casting, or at least not what they are hoping for. They do not believe that the commitment to the common good of the community has been entirely obliterated in contemporary American culture. Rather, their field research with four groups of middle-class Americans leads them to the conclusion that we have lost the ability to speak to one another in a public way about public moral goods even though we retain some sense of the importance of these goods. The problem, then, is a question of retrieving the languages and traditions of the common good that are latent in our cultural memory for explicit, public use. We do not need to reinvent the language of community and the idea of the common good, but rather to make it usable again. And making it usable again calls not simply for retrieval of past traditions, but also for an attitude of suspicion toward the oppressive power these traditions have certainly exhibited in the past as well as hospitality to new meanings of community and the common good opened up by experience of other traditions and cultures.[10]

An example of the need to employ a hermeneutics of suspicion toward the common-good tradition has been provided by Jean Bethke Elshtain's response to *Habits of the Heart*. She points to the "dark underside" of certain aspects of the communitarian tradition in Western political thought. The "civic virtue" that has in fact historically moved people and nations to action has one glaring problem: it has frequently been "armed."[11] From Sparta, to Rousseau, to Machiavelli, to the post-World War I United States, there has been a notable tendency to identify the common good with military victory, and *virtù* with military valor. Any retrieval of this tradition will have to be strongly on guard against reviving these negative aspects or, worse, reinforcing the temptation of contemporary American culture to define itself through opposition to other nations or peoples.

[9] See Hobbes, *Leviathan, Parts I and II*, with an Introduction by Herbert W. Schneider (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958) 107 and 143.

[10] The language of retrieval, suspicion, and hospitality is borrowed from Thomas Ogletree, who himself draws on a broad range of literature in the area of hermeneutics and sociology of knowledge. See Ogletree, *Hospitality to the Stranger: Dimensions of Moral Understanding* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) chap. 4. Margaret A. Farley outlines a parallel hermeneutical approach in "Feminist Consciousness and the Interpretation of Scripture," in Letty M. Russell, ed., *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985) 41–51. I have developed my own reflections on this matter in "Fundamental Theology and the Christian Moral Life," in Leo J. O'Donovan and T. Howland Sanks, eds., *Faithful Witness: Foundations of Theology for Today's Church* (New York: Crossroad, forthcoming).

[11] Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Citizenship and Armed Civic Virtue: Some Critical Questions on the Commitment to Public Life," in Reynolds and Norman, *Community in America* 47–55, at 50.

This latter danger is highlighted by John Wilson and Barbara Hargrove. They point out that the traditions invoked by *Habits of the Heart* are neither inclusive of all those traditions that have in fact shaped American culture nor explicit in dealing with new influences that are reshaping it.[12] A hermeneutics of "hospitality" to submerged traditions from our past—of Native Americans, blacks, women, and the populist movements that seem far from classical republicanism—and to new traditions being freshly encountered today will be essential to the development of a vision of community that avoids the twin shoals of bellicosity and isolationism.

The authors of *Habits of the Heart* are aware of the complexity and delicacy of this unfinished task:

Modern individualism seems to be producing a way of life that is neither individually nor socially viable, yet a return to traditional forms would be to return to intolerable discrimination and oppression. The question, then, is whether the older civic and biblical traditions have the capacity to reformulate themselves while simultaneously remaining faithful to their own deepest insights.[13]

In my judgment, Bellah et al. raise exactly the right question here. Their hopeful answer, which I share, is clearly "yes": such reformulation within a critical framework of continuity is possible. But they do not tell us in detail what the outcome might look like. Their citation from Matthew Arnold provides a slightly clichéd but nonetheless poignant image of where we stand: "Wandering between two worlds, one dead/The other powerless to be born."[14] More work needs to be done on such a reformulation if the common good is to become once again a usable word in our moral vocabulary and a reality in our social life.

Moral and Political Philosophy

A number of thinkers in moral philosophy and political theory are engaged in high intellectual argument about the desirability and possibility of just this kind of revival and recasting of the common-good tradition. This debate is both rich and technical. An adequate summary of all its dimensions is impossible here, but it will be useful to indicate

[12] Hargrove's review appears along with Wilson's and that of Julian Hartt in the issue of *RSR* cited in n. 7 above.
[13] *Habits* 144.
[14] Arnold, "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" (1855), cited in *Habits* 277.

one of them briefly.[15]

The issue has been stated clearly by Ronald Dworkin in his discussion of what it means for a government to treat its citizens as equals. Dworkin argues that this question can be answered in two fundamentally different and opposed ways. The first rests on the conviction that equal treatment of citizens demands that "political decisions must be, so far as possible, independent of any particular conception of the good life."[16] Such a stand of "neutrality" is a necessary element in treating people equally because different persons in fact hold divergent understandings of the full human good. To favor one conception of the good over another is thus to favor some persons over others and to fail to treat them equally. The second response to the question of the meaning of equal treatment argues that it cannot be independent of some concept of the human good or the good life. "Treating a person as an equal means treating him the way the good or truly wise person would wish to be treated. Good government consists in fostering or at least recognizing good lives."[17]

The first response to this question, which Dworkin himself strongly advocates, is the presupposition of classical liberal politics. The second harks back to Aristotle's insistence that "a state exists for the sake of a good life, and not for life only. . . . Political society exists for the sake of noble actions, and not of mere companionship."[18] It reflects the communitarian tradition which Bellah and philosophers such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Michael Sandel believe needs urgently to be recovered today. MacIntyre and Sandel have argued that the ability of people to identify just what is "good" or "noble" is dependent on their being part of a community with a shared tradition, a *paideia* through which they are educated in virtue. But this is just what we do not have in contemporary society. So these communitarian critics of liberalism end up with a diagnosis that is notably more stark than Bellah's. In MacIntyre's frequently quoted phrase, "the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for quite some time."[19]

Thus the idea of the common good is problematic for both liberals like Dworkin and John Rawls and for communitarians like MacIntyre and

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[15] I have discussed some of the issues at slightly greater length in "Liberalism, Communitarianism, and the Bishops' Pastoral Letter on the Economy." *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1987) 19–40, and in *Justice, Peace and Human Rights: American Catholic Social Ethics in a Pluralistic World* (New York: Crossroad, 1988) 71–83.

[16] Ronald Dworkin, *A Matter of Principle* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ., 1985) 191.

[17] Ibid.

[18] *Politics* 1280b, 6–7, 1281a, 3–4, tr. in Richard McKeon, ed., *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: Random House, 1941) 1188–89.

[19] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1981) 245.

Sandel. For the liberals, the brute fact of the pluralism of contemporary society means that any attempt to secure a single vision of the good society will lead to tyranny and oppression.[20] Therefore they jettison the attempt to secure it and relegate the effort to elaborate and live out an understanding of the full human good to the private sphere. The public moral life of society is to be governed not by comprehensive visions of the meaning of life, but by "the virtues of tolerance and being ready to meet others halfway, and the virtue of reasonableness and the sense of fairness."[21] Though Rawls is surely right when he remarks that these are no mean virtues, one can legitimately ask whether it is possible to sustain a society over the long run when they are the sole basis of its public culture. Rawls argues that this is possible; MacIntyre denies it. On this point I, along with much of the Christian tradition, am inclined to agree with MacIntyre. But MacIntyre, at least in *After Virtue,* offers no hope that a larger vision of *public* life can be regained and no expectation that virtues with more substantive content than tolerance and fair play can have *public* impact in our society.[22] With regret the MacIntyre of *After Virtue* in effect bids the common good adieu as a concept that has unfortunately become unusable in modern public and political life.

How is one to assess these discussions? They indicate, first, that the *question* of the meaning and possible usefulness of the idea of the common good has become a very live one in a number of diverse literatures today. They also show that this question concerns the most fundamental bases of economic, social, and political institutions, as well as the deepest core of cultural and intellectual life. The question that is very much an open one is whether the idea of the common good is a useful or a dangerous one. I am fully convinced that it is both useful and necessary. John Courtney Murray, former editor of this journal and surely its most distinguished regular contributor, put the matter this way: "Whether we like it or not, we are living in a religiously pluralist society at a time of spiritual crisis; and the alternatives are the discovery of social unity, or

[20] Rawls states: "This diversity of doctrines—the fact of pluralism—is not a mere historical condition that will soon pass away; it is, I believe, a permanent feature of the public culture of modern democracies. . . . A public and workable agreement on a single and general comprehensive conception [of the good] could be maintained only by the oppressive use of state power" ("The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus," *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 7 [1987] 1–25, at 4).

[21] Ibid. 17.

[22] This description of MacIntyre's stance needs to be qualified somewhat in light of his more recent book, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1988). Nevertheless, the most recent MacIntyre remains vague about the political implications of his more developed theory.

destruction."[23] Murray's efforts to discover a basis for a social unity that was respectful of freedom in the midst of pluralism is exactly the problem contemporary discussions of the common good have once again brought front and center. Murray approached this task in a way that was fully informed by the secular scholarship of his time. But he did it above all as a theologian in dialogue with these other fields of humanistic inquiry. His example suggests that we might well learn something about how to make some contribution to the present debate about the common good by turning to traditions of explicitly theological discourse on this topic.

GOD AND THE COMMON GOOD

MacIntyre's invocation of the image of barbarians who have been "governing us for quite some time" provides a helpful point of entry for the theologian into the current debates. It echoes a central theme in one of the greatest theological discussions of social and political life in the Christian tradition, St. Augustine's *The City of God.*

Augustinian Perspectives

The City of God was written against the background of the barbarian invasion of the Roman Empire, in response to the charge that the growth of Christianity was the cause of the decline and fall of pagan Rome. Indeed, as Augustine lay dying in 430, his city of Hippo was under siege by the Vandals. His writings are marked by a deep sensitivity to the fragility and incompleteness of the political order and the dangers which beset it as a result of human arrogance, the *libido dominandi.* Both historical circumstances and deep theological insight into human psychology gave Augustine a right to be at least as pessimistic about politics as is MacIntyre. Augustine's thought on the possibilities of politics, however, is considerably more complex than a stance of unrelieved pessimism. One aspect of this thought in particular can help us interpret our own rather precarious political situation.

I mean his justly famous discussion of the meaning of the term *res publica,* which can be variously translated as the commonweal, the common good, a commonwealth, civil affairs, or simply a republic. In response to the charge that the expansion of Christianity brought the downfall of the Republic, Augustine took the sensible approach of asking about the conditions that must be present for a republic or a "people" to exist at all. His discussion of this basic question can help shed light from the Christian tradition on the meaning of the common good in the current context.

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[23] Murray, "Intercredal Co-operation: Its Theory and Its Organization," *TS* 4 (1943) 257–86, at 274.

To answer his question, Augustine turned to a definition supplied by Cicero approximately 50 years before the birth of Jesus Christ: "a people is not any collection of human beings brought together in any sort of way, but an assemblage of people in large numbers associated in agreement with respect to justice and a partnership for the common good."[24]

Using this definition as its standard, Book 2 of *The City of God* makes two observations about the so-called republic of Rome. The first of these was an argument from history. Speaking of Rome as it existed half a century before the advent of Christianity, Cicero had already concluded that "it is through our own faults, not by accident, that we retain only the form of the commonwealth, but have long since lost its substance."[25] Cicero's arguments for this sober conclusion were that the common commitment to the ways of justice had decayed at Rome to the point where these ways were no longer practiced and in fact no longer even known among the citizens. Lacking virtuous citizens, schooled in the ways of justice and eager to put them into practice, no governmental structure or set of customs will be "sufficient to found or to preserve. . . a commonwealth whose dominion extends so far and wide."[26] This analysis by Cicero enabled Augustine to argue that it was not Christian meddling in politics that brought Rome to its knees. To use MacIntyre's language anachronistically, Rome fell because it possessed but "simulacra of morality"—it had "lost [its] comprehension, both theoretical and practical," of virtue and the common good.[27] Cicero and Augustine, therefore, developed historical analyses of Rome's decline that were markedly similar to MacIntyre's diagnosis of the moral state of contemporary Western cultures such as that of the United States.

Second, Augustine raised a fundamental theological challenge to the very possibility that Rome had ever been a true republic at all, even in the earlier heroic period before the decline lamented by Cicero. According to Cicero's definition, there will be no republic when the people lack a moral consensus joining them in association through "agreement with respect to justice and partnership for the common good." Augustine argued, however, that de facto consensus on a concept of justice is necessary but not sufficient to create a true commonweal. To create a genuine commonweal, this social and cultural agreement among the multitude must be centered on what is truly just, truly the common good. Augustine noted the classic formula that justice means rendering to all

[24] Cicero, *De re publica* 1, 25, 39 (LCL 213; Cambridge: Harvard Univ., 1970). This definition is cited in *The City of God* 2, 21.

[25] *De re publica* 5, 1, 2.

[26] Ibid. 5, 1, 1.

[27] MacIntyre, *After Virtue* 2.

persons what is due them. As a Christian theologian, he further asserted that justice calls for rendering to God what is due to God, i.e. worship and love. Thus a true commonweal is an assembly of people united in the worship and love of the one true God rather than idols. In addition, the people must be bound together by a love whereby each citizen loves his neighbor as he loves himself, since that is what Christian faith tells us is due to the neighbor.[28] A true commonweal is a people bound together by faith in Christ, love of God and the neighbor in God, and obedience to the moral exigencies of the gospel. Thus the only republic that embodies Cicero's definition truly and fully is the one Augustine calls the City of God—the Jerusalem whose cornerstone is Christ and whose animating principle is the Holy Spirit of God's love and grace. Thomas Aquinas was in full agreement with this stringently theological understanding of the common good. For Thomas, the full common good is God's own self. Human beings achieve their ultimate fulfilment, their good, only by being united with God, a union that unites them to one another and indeed with the whole created order. "God's own goodness . . . is the good of the whole universe."[29] There could hardly be a more theocentric definition of the foundation of the moral life. Everything human beings are to do, in both personal and social life, is directed to one end: union with the God who is their maker and redeemer.

Such a high theological definition of the full good of human society is precisely the sort of thing that liberals such as Dworkin and Rawls dread might be imposed upon everyone—believer and unbeliever alike—even by force of arms, should the social balance of power permit this. On the other hand, this exclusively theological definition of the good can easily lead believers to reject any effort to find common ground with those outside the community of faith as compromise at best and a work of Satan at worst. In either of these scenarios the possibility of Christian political humanism is denied, and the idea of a *common* good of a pluralistic society undermined.

This is not, however, where Augustine left the matter in his discussion of the relation between Christianity and the Roman Republic. It was his deepest conviction that human fulfilment would only be achieved in the communion of saints in the City of God. To make civil society the bearer of all one's hopes for happiness and justice is a form of idolatry. Augustine's rejection of the Greco-Roman ideal of the good of the polis or

[28] *The City of God* 19, 23.
[29] *Summa theologiae* 1–2, q. 19, a. 10.

civitas as the highest human good "marks the end of classical thought."[30]

This Augustinian insistence on the transcendence of the City of God desacralizes politics. It has recently been appealed to by several theologians who wish to provide Christian warrant for a form of politics that has lower expectations about the pursuit of the full human good through political means. For example, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger explicitly appeals to Augustine in arguing that an authentically Christian approach to the political order should be based on ethics understood as a rational undertaking, not on a religious vision of the kingdom of God. "The New Testament is aware of political ethics but not of political theology."[31] Ratzinger argues that an overtheologized approach to politics is a sort of false messianism and quickly leads to fanaticism and tyranny. It is rooted in an inability to come to terms with the imperfection and imperfectability of worldly existence. Thus any effort to pursue the absolute good of God and God's kingdom through political means becomes the enemy of the lesser goods that are in fact achievable in the polis. Though Ratzinger makes numerous highly critical remarks about the liberalism of the Enlightenment, he is at one with many contemporary Anglo-American liberal theorists in advocating a "thin theory" of the political good, to borrow John Rawls's phrase.

Gilbert Meilaender has carried this Augustinian defense of liberalism a step further than Ratzinger. Meilaender rejects the individualism of much liberal thought. Thus he argues that the function of government is not the protection of the freedom of self-interested individuals to pursue their private goals. At the same time, like Ratzinger, he is theologically and politically convinced that the political sphere cannot become a community of fraternal solidarity without becoming oppressive. Rather, Meilaender seeks to combine a recognition of the importance of community with limited expectations about the communitarian possibilities of the political sphere. He does this by arguing that the purpose of the political sphere is to "foster *private, social* bonds—to make space in life for families, friendships, clubs, faiths, neighborhoods."[32] In this vision,

[30] For a succinct discussion of these themes in Augustine's political theology, see P. R. L. Brown, "Political Society," in R. A. Markus, ed., *Augustine: A Collection of Essays* (New York: Doubleday, 1972) 311–29, esp. 323. Compare Augustine's transcendent vision of the *civitas Dei* with Aristotle's affirmation of the primacy of the political: "If all communities aim at some good, the state or political community, which is the highest of all, and which embraces all the rest, aims at good in a greater degree than any other, and at the highest good" (*Politics* 1252a, 3–6 [ed. McKeon 1127]).

[31] Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics: New Essays in Ecclesiology* (New York: Crossroad, 1988) 216.

[32] Gilbert Meilaender, *The Limits of Love: Some Theological Explorations* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State Univ., 1987) 140.

therefore, not only is politics desacralized, but "faiths" are privatized. Meilaender does argue that one of the roles of the political community is to promote virtuous behavior among its citizens. But he notes that this means promoting a diversity of virtues and a variety of life styles. Otherwise paternalism results.

This is a very perplexing conclusion. What does it mean to *promote* a diversity of virtues and life styles? To *permit* such diversity is the standard program of liberal politics. If the government is to move from a neutral stance that permits persons to define their own vision of the virtuous life to promoting some finite number of possible life styles, it must have some criterion by which to determine which these will be. In other words, Meilaender cannot opt for pure political neutrality toward the good life and still maintain that politics should be in the business of promoting virtue of some sort in the private sphere.

In fact, Meilaender has impaled himself on the horns of a false dilemma. This dilemma arises because of his one-sided handling of the admittedly complex question of the relationship between the *civitas Dei* and the *civitas terrena* in Augustine.[33] Despite Augustine's clear rejection of the classical conviction that the good of the polis is the *summum bonum*, he nevertheless realized that it would be somehow absurd to insist that all societies and states that lack the full faith and love of the City of God are not cities at all. Thus he revised Cicero and proposed a "more feasible" definition of a commonweal in order to be able to acknowledge that "a republic of a certain kind"[34] might exist short of the City of God. His revised definition of a *res publica* goes as follows: "a people is an assemblage of reasonable beings bound together by a common agreement as to the objects of their love."[35] Following this definition, the quality of the life of a people will be directly proportional to the qualities of the loves they share in common. Societies united by great and noble loves and dedicated to high standards of justice will be superior to those with lower goals and cultural values. Thus, in its heroic early period, Rome could be counted a republic even though it lacked Christian faith and failed to worship the one God. When, however, it ceased to share any common bonds of concord, it burst asunder and ceased to be a commonwealth.

[33] For very useful recent discussions of this question, see Eugene TeSelle, "The Civic Vision in Augustine's *City of God,*" *Thought* 62 (1987) 268–80, and idem, "Toward an Augustinian Politics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 16 (1988) 87–108. I have previously discussed the importance of the distinctions TeSelle makes on this question for current debates in political ethics and theology in "Notes on Moral Theology: 1987," *TS* 49 (1988) 67–150, at 79–80. My reading of Augustine has been influenced by TeSelle.

[34] *The City of God* 2, 21.

[35] Ibid. 19, 24.

This redefinition of the meaning of the commonweal is more than conceptual sleight of hand on Augustine's part. It manifests his deep sensitivity to the ambiguities and tensions of political, ecclesiastical, and indeed all terrestrial existence. Augustine does not identify civil society with Babylon or the *civitas terrena*. Nor does he identify the Church with the heavenly Jerusalem or the *civitas Dei*. Elements of the City of God can be found in all dimensions of civil society (including Meilander's "families, friendships, clubs, ... neighborhoods") and in the political community as well. This will be true to the extent that genuine concern for the neighbor rather than *amor sui* and *libido dominandi* is present in each of these spheres. By the same token, the evils of sin, pride, and domination can be found among those who make up the Church. Within history the two cities are intermingled and interpenetrating, wheat and tares growing together.[36]

The interpenetration of the two cities in all zones of human life means that the Christian vision of the full human good—the kingdom of God— is no less relevant to the political sphere than it is to the life of the family or other forms of relationship. The full human good—the common good understood in its theological depth—cannot be realized in any one of these zones, including the Church. As Jeffrey Stout has pointed out, Meilaender is justly concerned about the dangers of totalitarianism if the quest for communal solidarity becomes entirely politicized. But is is also true that every form of human community is marked in some measure by sin, and none of the types of community in which persons relate to each other, whether political, familial, or ecclesial, can embody the full communion of the kingdom of God. This does not mean, however, that the good of the polis is no concern of those who recognize they have here no lasting city. Stout argues that the truth of Augustinianism is that "no sphere [of historical existence] can rightly occupy the position of be-all-and-end-all in our lives without throwing the rest out of proper proportion—neither vocation, nor family, nor voluntary association, nor private projects, nor politics." Rather, each of these spheres is a domain in which members of society find "some part of their identity," including that part that follows from being "citizens of a republic dedicated to the common

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[36] As Augustine put it in a sermon on Ps 51: "Let us not therefore despair of the citizens of the kingdom of heaven when we see them engaged in ... something terrestrial in a terrestrial republic; nor again let us forthwith congratulate all men whom we see engaged in celestial matters, for even the sons of pestilence sit sometimes on the seat of Moses.... The former amid earthly things lift up their hearts to heaven; the latter amid heavenly words trail their hearts on the earth. But there will come a time of winnowing when they will be separated, the one from the other, with the greatest care" (*Enarrationes in psalmos* 51, 6 [CCL 39, 627]; tr. Erich Przywara, ed., *An Augustine Synthesis* [New York: Sheed and Ward, 1936] 270–71).

good."[37] I would add that it also means that the communion of the kingdom of God can have proleptic, though incomplete, anticipations in the political sphere. An accurate reading of Augustine leads neither to the totalitarianism tendencies Ratzinger believes lurk in the recesses of "political theology" nor to the minimalist politics of Meilaender. A third alternative exists.

We can call this alternative a pluralistic-analogical understanding of the meaning of the common good. The Augustinian reasoning just reviewed shows why pursuit of the common good demands full respect for the many different forms of interrelationship and community in which human beings achieve their good in history. Thus the temporal common good—the common good that is achievable in history—is a pluralistic ensemble of goods. None of these goods may be absolutized or allowed to dominate all the others.[38] Each has a place within the framework of social existence, but this place cannot be determined by appealing to some absolute standard of goodness. For this absolute is the heavenly Jerusalem, the City of God whose full realization transcends history. Thus Augustine's thought provides a theological basis for affirming that the political domain has the potential to become a partial embodiment of the full human good. This opens up the possibility of a form of politics that seeks communitarian purposes. At the same time, the fact that politics can only hope to achieve part of the full human good means that it must necessarily be a pluralistic form of politics. And to the extent that it is pluralistic, it must respect many of the values and institutions of the liberal tradition.

Thomistic Contributions

The complementarity of communitarian and liberal conceptions of social morality can also be probed further from a Thomistic perspective on the analogical nature of the common good. Jacques Maritain developed such a perspective in the 1940s, especially in his tightly argued *The Person and the Common Good*. Maritain's position can be called personalist communitarianism, for its central anthropological affirmation is "that personality tends by nature to communion."[39] Human beings are by nature ordained to life in society, to life in relation to other persons. This is so for two reasons. First, it is the result of the fact that the

[37] Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics after Babel: The Languages of Morals and Their Discontents* (Boston: Beacon, 1988) 235.

[38] This is the central thesis of Michael Walzer's *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

[39] *The Person and the Common Good* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1966 [original 1946]) 47.

positive realization and fulfilment of personality is achieved only through knowledge and love of other persons. Personal existence is existence in relationship to other persons. Subpersonal beings, in contrast, can only exist in spacial juxtaposition to each other. They cannot form communities, but only physical collectivities. The capacity for community, therefore, is a positive perfection of personality. For this reason, the dignity of persons can be realized only in community, and genuine community can exist only where the dignity of persons is secured. Personhood and community are mutually implicating realities. Second, human beings are social for a negative reason as well. As finite and limited persons, human beings have needs and deficiencies as well as positive capacities for relationship. They need other persons and the larger society in order to thrive or even to exist at all. These needs are for material goods such as food and shelter; but they are also for higher goods such as moral and intellectual education. And on the most fundamental level, human beings need God both to sustain their very existence and as the fulfilment of their capacity for relationship.

This twofold foundation of human sociality was the basis of Maritain's (and St. Thomas') understanding of the analogical nature of the common good. The central theological root of Maritain's discussion of the relation between the person and the common good is that "the idea of the person is an analogical idea which is realized fully and absolutely only in its supreme analogue, God."[40] He maintained that the fact that persons are essentially relational beings has its supreme exemplification in the reality of the Trinity, the fact that God is not a monad but a communion of "subsistent relations."[41] To the extent that a being is personal, it will be a being-in-relation-to-other-persons. To borrow Martin Buber's language to interpret Maritain, the good of persons exists "between" persons in the relations that make them who they are. The mutual implication of personality and relationality has its highest exemplification in God's own being. Thus, to properly understand human society, we must see it as located on "an analogical scale" between the perfect society of persons that is the Trinity and that which is not a society in the proper sense at all, but only in a metaphorical sense, i.e. animal society. In the society of persons that is the Trinity, "each one is in the other through an infinite communion."[42] Nonhuman animals have no such capacity for

[40] Ibid. 56.

[41] For a very useful discussion of this theme in St. Thomas, see Catherine M. LaCugna, "The Relational God: Aquinas and Beyond," *TS* 46 (1985) 647–63.

[42] *The Person and the Common Good* 58. Here Maritain cites Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1, 42, 5. The 1966 edition of *The Person and the Common Good* (n. 39 above) omits several lines of the text on this page. To clarify the meaning of the text, consult the excerpts in

communion, and in this sense have no common good properly speaking. The historical existence of human beings stands in an intermediate position between these two analogues: "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."[43]

This analogical framework opens up a number of useful perspectives on the ethical and political meaning of the common good. Like Augustine's analysis, it implies that the full common good exists only in the communion of all persons with God and with one another in God. This demands the rejection of any theory that makes the good of the polis the highest good or that grants absolute sovereignty to the state. It is thoroughly antitotalitarian. Human beings are destined to a good which is beyond both civil society and the state. Both society and the state have an obligation to respect this transcendence of the human person. Thus the theological framework of Maritain's discussion of the common good leads immediately to a theological warrant for many liberal values and institutions. Maritain, however, carefully distinguished his personalist interpretation of these values from individualism. The freedom and dignity of persons are achieved in communal relationship with other persons, not in isolation. Thus respect for this freedom and dignity calls for respect for the many forms of relationship in which persons can participate: friendships, families, voluntary associations, civil society, and the human community as a whole. Each of these relationships realizes a part of the terrestrial common good. Each is analogous to the ultimate common good: the union of human beings with God and with one another in God.

THE COMMON GOOD AND HUMAN RIGHTS

These theological reflections suggest that Jeffrey Stout may be correct when he argues that the time has come "to move altogether beyond the debates between those called communitarians and liberals."[44] Stout has written that critics of contemporary society and culture such as MacIntyre and Bellah are right in attempting to retrieve ideas of public virtue and the common good as antidotes to some of the more threatening aspects of the present situation. But he is much less suspicious of the liberal emphasis on rights than is MacIntyre. He believes that the

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Joseph W. Evans and Leo R. Ward, eds., *The Social and Political Philosophy of Jacques Maritain: Selected Readings* (New York: Scribner's, 1955) 86.

[43] Ibid. 59.

[44] *Ethics after Babel* 220.

language of rights is compatible with talk of virtue and the common good.[45] In this regard Stout is in accord with Pope John XXIII, who combined these two moral languages when he wrote that "it is agreed that in our time the common good is chiefly guaranteed when personal rights and duties are maintained."[46] Similarly, Maritain had earlier argued: "Under pain of being itself denatured," the common good of civil society "implies and demands the recognition of the fundamental rights of the person."[47]

Is this sort of talk indicative of the kind of "reformulation" of the common-good tradition that Bellah thinks is needed, or is it simply conceptual confusion? I believe that it holds promise of leading to the necessary reformulation. Realizing this hope, however, calls for a development of the common-good tradition along the pluralist-analogical lines just sketched, and for a reconceptualization of the standard liberal account of human rights.

Here again Maritain is helpful. Just as personality and community are mutually implicating, the notion of human rights and that of the common good are mutually implicated as well. Rights are not simply claims to pursue private interests or to be left alone. Rather, they are claims to share in the common good of civil society, a good which is less than the full communion of the kingdom of God but analogous to it. The common good of civil society is that measure of the communion of persons that is achievable in history. Therefore the common good demands the establishment of those conditions which are necessary for persons to be able to enter into this social union. These are the social, political, economic, and cultural conditions that make it possible for persons to participate in the life of the community to a degree that respects at least the most basic demands of their personhood.

A Communitarian Interpretation of Liberal Rights

This understanding of the relation between the common good and human rights can be expressed in the words used by the Catholic bishops of the United States. The bishops defined human rights as "the minimum conditions for life in community."[48] Such a definition cuts through the false opposition between the person and the common good in exactly the same way that Maritain's theology, ethics, and politics sought to do. It

[45] Ibid. 225.

[46] *Pacem in terris*, no. 60.

[47] Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy & The Rights of Man and Natural Law* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986) 94 (originally published in French, 1943 and 1942).

[48] National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy* (Washington: D.C.: N.C.C.B., 1986) no. 79, section title.

can be contrasted with the classical liberal account of the meaning and foundation of rights. This account identifies rights with certain negative freedoms that are protected against coercion or interference by others. Rights seen this way are immunities, defenses against the intrusions that other persons or the government might try to make into the individual's zone of freedom. They are like the fence posts that define the territory or turf that no one may enter without the owner's consent. Within that space a person is free to worship her own God, speak and publish her ideas, associate with whomever she cares to, buy and sell what she will, and own whatever she can acquire in economic exchanges others freely enter into with her. It is the duty of the government to respect this zone of freedom for the citizens it has been established to protect. Should the magistrate have to intervene against a person's freedom in order to protect the freedom of another, it may only do so to the extent necessary and according to a duly established process of law.

These negative immunities remain important in the revised conception of rights needed today. However, one can question whether individualistic presuppositions are able to account for their full importance. Securing these rights unleashed an enormous amount of creative activity at the beginning of modern Western history. They led to the establishment of democratic governments. The intense economic activity they made possible created wealth that raised the standard of living to a level that far surpassed what previous generations had thought possible. The contribution of these political and economic freedoms to human well-being has been great indeed, and it would be foolish to try to repeal what was achieved in the name of the common good. Though the civil and political rights of the liberal tradition may encourage an individualistic orientation, as its critics point out, one must also acknowledge its significant contribution to the quality of life of whole societies. At least some elements of the common good of a modern society would be impossible without the protection of these rights.

Because of these significant societal results, it is doubtful that the conceptualization of the liberal rights of freedom of speech, worship, assembly, etc. as strictly negative immunities protecting a zone of privacy really does justice to their moral and social importance. For example, my right to freedom of speech is not important to me because it guarantees my freedom to sit in my office muttering to myself about the importance of the idea of the commonweal. Freedom of speech is important because it enables me to try to convince others of ideas that I think make a difference to the way we live together in society. Repressive governments do not shut down newspapers simply because they do not like the ideas that are being printed. They shut them down because they are afraid

these ideas might lead people to try to take power away from the generals or the party apparatchiks who run these governments. Freedom of religion is important so that I might follow Jesus' advice: "when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (Mt 6:6). But it is also important so that Christians can follow another of Jesus' instructions: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19–20). As the Second Vatican Council observed, religious freedom means that persons or groups are not to be coerced to act in a way that is contrary to their beliefs. But it also means that religious people should be free to seek "to show the special value of their doctrine in what concerns the organization of society and the inspiration of the whole of human activity."[49]

In other words, all these freedoms have a positive as well as a negative meaning. They are not only immunities from interference by others. They are also empowerments that enable those who exercise them to be active participants in the life of the various communities to which they belong. This way of understanding human rights has been well developed by the American moral philosopher Alan Gewirth. Gewirth states his central thesis this way:

Human rights are of supreme importance, and are central to all other moral considerations, because they are rights to the necessary conditions of human action, i.e. those conditions that must be fulfilled if human action is to be possible either at all or with general chances of success in achieving the purposes for which human beings act.[50]

Gewirth, in other words, presses beneath the frequently drawn distinction between positive and negative rights to a more fundamental quality of all rights: they protect the possibility of human agency.

Such protection of agency is so crucial from a moral point of view because there can be no moral life at all where there are no agents. Gewirth argues that it is precisely this agency that is the metaphysical and moral basis of human dignity. It is what distinguishes human beings from things and nonrational animals. With the advent of agency the moral sphere comes into existence. If persons are to be treated as moral beings possessing moral worth, therefore, the necessary conditions of their agency must be respected and secured. To determine what rights people have, then, calls for analysis of just what these conditions of

[49] Vatican Council II, Declaration on Religious Freedom (*Dignitatis humanae*), nos. 2 and 4.
[50] Alan Gewirth, *Human Rights: Essays on Justification and Applications* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1982) 3.

agency are.

Gewirth argues that these conditions fall into two broad categories: freedom and well-being. Freedom is clearly a necessary condition of agency; it is part of the very meaning of a human act that it is something done in freedom rather than something passively undergone. The way the classic civil and political rights of liberal democracies protect freedom has both negative and positive aspects. They protect it negatively by guaranteeing that its exercise will not be interfered with by other persons or the state. They also secure freedom positively in a double sense. First, human rights must be actively protected by the government. Securing civil and political rights calls for more than noninterference with a freedom that exists provided no one attacks it. Securing civil liberties as guaranteed human rights implies the creation of the entire apparatus of constitutional government.[51] This involves the enormous historical project of building the institutions of democracy, some of which cost a good deal of money and all of which make high demands on the intelligence and character of those who would build them. Sometimes it can cost them their blood. Second, these civil and political liberties are positive in the sense that they enable citizens "to participate freely and actively in the political process."[52] A free society is one in which people actively share in governing themselves rather than simply being the passive objects of paternalistic or dictatorial authority.

Social and Economic Rights

With this analysis of the simultaneously negative and positive nature of the classic liberal rights as background, Gewirth goes on to affirm that respect for and protection of human agency calls for the guarantee of the basic conditions of well-being, the so-called social and economic rights to goods such as nutrition, housing, education, and employment. These rights also have both negative and positive aspects. The negative aspect rules out stealing the last loaf of bread from a person who is starving. It means not preventing relief organizations from getting food to a region of an African nation suffering from famine because the inhabitants of that region are political adversaries. It means not discriminating against blacks or women in ways that prevent them from obtaining the jobs and education which they need and of which they are capable.

These social and economic rights also have a twofold positive dimension. First, respect for these rights means that individuals and society as

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[51] For a parallel argument on how the securing of civil and political rights calls for positive action and institution-building, see Henry Shue, *Basic Rights: Subsistence, Affluence, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ., 1980) 37–40.

[52] Gewirth, *Human Rights* 63.

a whole have obligations to take the positive steps necessary to assure that all persons obtain the nutrition, housing, and employment necessary if they are to live minimally decent and active lives. Some of these steps will take the form of direct acts of assistance by one person to another. Others will be indirect, such as the creation of the social and economic institutions needed to secure these rights in a stable way for all over time.

Second, these social and economic rights call for enabling persons to express their agency through positive participation in the life of society. As Gewirth notes, the point of affirming these rights is not to reinforce or increase patterns of dependence, but rather to enable people to become genuine agents, free from domination by others.[53] For example, the protection of rights to well-being is not simply a matter of assuring that all persons are minimally fed and housed. When individuals and societies have the resources to do this, it is surely required. But respect for human agency demands more than this. It requires that people not only be maintained alive, but alive as active agents of their own well-being, e.g. through being able to get a job with adequate pay and decent working conditions. Gewirth's emphasis on this link between active rather than passive content of the social and economic rights to well-being is well placed. It has important implications for the way public policies that seek to secure these rights should be designed.

Nevertheless, despite the value of Gewirth's analysis of rights as conditions of agency, he does not sufficiently stress the communitarian dimension of this agency. It is here that the communitarian critics of the liberal theory of rights have an indispensable contribution to make. Contrary to Gewirth's continuing adherence to a Kantian notion of agency as autonomy, human agency is made possible and sustained only through communal relationships. Human freedom is not the same as divine freedom. Though it is creative, it cannot create anything from nothing. Before acting, it must be acted upon: by parents in childhood, by teachers in school, by employers who decide whom to hire, by publishers and readers who decide whose poems to pay attention to, and by the culture and social institutions that form the context of one's life. In all these contexts the moral task is to enable persons who are initially acted upon to become an originating source of human activity, not to keep them passive or dependent. This means enabling them to share actively in the life of society in its multiple dimensions and to participate in the common good of society understood in a pluralistic way.

Indeed, the whole point of an ethics of human rights is to specify the

[53] Ibid. 5.

minimal civil, political, social, economic, and cultural conditions that must be present to support and protect such agency. But it is false to imagine that the goal is a free and active person completely independent of any need for other persons or society itself. The biblical story of the Exodus remains revelatory of the fundamental moral basis of human existence: liberation is *from* bondage *into* community—into a community of persons who are both free and coresponsible for one another's fates. This biblical insight has strong parallels in the common-good tradition in authors such as Aristotle, Cicero, and Thomas Aquinas. The interconnection between freedom and relationality is being freshly analyzed in our time by feminist psychologists like Carol Gilligan and feminist Christian ethicists like Margaret Farley.[54] It has a major contribution to make to the way we understand the meaning of human rights in an ever more interdependent world.

CONCLUSION

These perspectives, I believe, illuminate a pathway to the goal toward which *Habits of the Heart* would urge American culture and politics to strive today, i.e. the recovery of the republican tradition of the common good which simultaneously frees that tradition of its sometimes repressive tendencies. From Augustine one can draw principles that support the legitimacy, indeed the necessity, of institutional pluralism. None of the concrete forms of human community in history, be they familial, associational, economic, political, or religious, are capable of embodying the *summum bonum*, the full human good. Only the kingdom of God can do that. This theological affirmation has a political correlate. None of these historical forms of community can exhaust the temporal, this-worldly common good either. The historically achievable common good will demand that the pluriformity of human community be respected, and such respect should be institutionalized politically, legally, and economically.[55] From the Thomist tradition as represented by Maritain one can draw communitarian substance to fill these pluralist forms. The analogical concept of the common good suggests that these diverse forms of community do not cease to be community because they fall short of the full communion of persons with God and one another that is the kingdom

[54] Gilligan's contribution to this discussion is carefully explored in Eva Feder Kittay and Diana T. Meyers, eds., *Women and Moral Theory* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1987); Farley's analysis is developed in a paper as yet unpublished, "Obligating Features of Personhood."

[55] Paul E. Sigmund has shown that this defense of institutional pluralism was also a theme in Maritain's writings. See his "Maritain on Politics," in Deal W. Hudson and Matthew J. Mancini, *Understanding Maritain: Philosopher and Friend* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer Univ., 1987) 160–62.

of God. They remain zones where persons achieve their partial but very real fulfilment, a fulfilment that is essentially achieved only in community. The analogical concept of the common good also provides warrant for such distinctively modern ideas as human rights, while recasting the idea of rights in a more communitarian way. Sustaining a social order governed by a pluralist-analogical understanding of the common good and human rights will call both for significant social change and for a renewal of public virtue. Social and even institutional change will be needed if all persons are to become active participants in the common good politically, economically, and culturally. It is necessary if the full range of rights is to be secured for all. Similarly, a renewal of public virtue is necessary if the positive content of the rights and freedoms of a democratic society is to be realized more adequately.

It is hoped that this essay has shown that communitarian objectives such as these are not opposed to the achievements of modernity but rather will help sustain and expand these achievements in the circumstances of today's increased interdependence. The question that remains open is whether such a synthesis will be carried out in social practice. There are reasons to be hopeful and reasons not to be in our culture. And that, I think, is the most important way to formulate the state of the question regarding the common good today.