

THE D'ARCY LECTURES 2021: COMMON GOOD: Theological, Philosophical, and Political Aspects

Lecture One: Theological and Philosophical Sources of the Common Good

The selected aspects of common goods will be viewed through three lenses of Aristotelian philosophy / Catholic Social Thought / Political Liberalism

Aim: to present and defend a philosophical and theological account of common good that is consistent with the position of the Catholic Church, but that is in danger of distortion at present.

The Challenge

The Church at the Vatican Council accepted the reality of pluralism and diversity. People of faith including those of us from the Catholic tradition have to hold in tension the following three realities:

- (1) First, our faith conviction that we humans have a common *telos*; there is an ultimate common good, or highest good, that is God, and the beatitude of life in God in the Resurrection.
- (2) Second, we must accept the fact that we as members of political communities do not all
 - (a) accept that there is or even could be a common *telos*, or
 - (b) if we do think there is a common *telos*, that we all agree on what it is, or
 - (c) if we do agree what it is, that we agree on its implications for practical life.
- (3) Third, we must face the challenge in the context of this plurality to make a common life seeking justice according to law, peace, and prosperity. John Rawls in *Political Liberalism*, spells out the nature of this challenge and its implications.

Why Aristotle?

'Common Good' as a political concept predates Christianity; it has philosophical ancestry Aristotle takes seriously the viewpoint of the ordinary citizen, and his questions are direct: how do you want to live? What kind of polity would you prefer to live in?

Good as the end of action; common goods as the end of action together, cooperation
The highest good (*summum bonum*) is the purpose of the highest form of cooperation
The political community is the highest form of human cooperation, and it regulates all other forms and their goods

The common good as heuristic concept: 'always more than'...

Two criteria for clarifying claimed candidates:

First: If the purpose of the political community, is to be a **common** good, then it could only be such if it does not systematically exclude any individual or any group of persons from a fair share in the good for the sake of which they cooperate.

Second: If the ultimate purpose is to be a common **good**, then it could only be such if it does not systematically exclude or denigrate any genuine dimension of the human good.

Gaudium et Spes (1965) and Catholic Social Thought

Common Good (not primarily as the ultimate and highest good but as) the set of means and conditions that enable persons and communities to achieve their ultimate good (fulfilment)

Requires: **Solidarity** and **Subsidiarity**

Pope Benedict: importance of both together

Conclusion

Comparison Aristotle and G&S on common good: comprehensive or restricted view

Parallels: Aristotle's two criteria; CST's two principles of solidarity and subsidiarity