

Distinguishing between Different Kinds of Good according to Aquinas

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In identifying the range of goods which together properly constitute the goods that we seek as human beings or which we should seek as human beings, again the basic principle is one which necessarily works from the form or the nature which approximately designates what it means for us to be human beings.¹ However, in conjunction with a more proximate principle which works from modifications of desire or appetite which specify or which point to different values or different virtues which we can choose as human beings as a proximate means for regulating ourselves (by how we regulate our human appetites and desires in terms of ends and objectives that now become more specific for us),² on the one hand, as an initial point of departure, it has to be admitted that “there is not one good to which all tend.”³ The human notion of good is to be distinguished from a reductionist notion of it which defines the good solely as the correlative of a purely private, biological form of existence.⁴ In an obvious and even startling contrast, the human good encompasses a wide variety of meanings which do not necessarily conflict with each other since the human good is the object of a universal, self-rational, and spiritual desire which encompasses all desires for good (in their different forms and shapes) as well as all the conditions and activities which realize and bring about the being of good things.⁵ In generic terms, good or the good has been defined by that which conforms with our reason (while bad or evil is defined by what opposes the reasonableness of our reason).⁶ The human good or morality is the object

¹*Sententia libri Ethicorum*, 2, 2, 257. In his analysis of Aquinas with respect to the life of the practical reason, p. 428, *The Ethics of Aquinas*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002), Honnefelder refers to this text that is taken from Aquinas’s *Commentary on Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics* in noting that, for Aquinas, “morally relevant actions can only be good if they occur ‘according to reason’ (*secundum rationem*).”

²*Sententia libri Ethicorum*, 6, 2, 1130; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 58, a. 5. As Martin Rhonheimer (in his *Natural Law and Practical Reason: A Thomist View of Moral Autonomy*, pp. 392-393) quotes Aquinas, *In 2 Scriptum super libros sententiarum*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 1, ad 3 in a way which shows that different virtues are to be correlated with different goods that are sought by us as human beings:

....moral actions do not become specified through their final goal [that is, neither through the person of God or through charity], but rather through their proximate goals [*finis proxima*]; there are many of these and they are related to various actions [*plures diversorum sunt*], just as natural goals are many and various.

³*Sententia libri Ethicorum*, 1, 1, 11; 1, 6, 79.

⁴Frederick G. Lawrence, "The Human Good and Christian Conversation," *Communication and Lonergan: Common Ground and Forging the New Age*, eds. Thomas J. Farrell & Paul A. Soukup (Kansas City, Missouri: Sheed & Ward, 1993), p. 254.

⁵*Sententia libri Ethicorum*, 1, 6, 81; 1, 7, 86. As examples, Aquinas notes that God is a good but so is our intellect and all the categories that we use to talk about things such as quality, quantity, relation, opportuneness, and place. Time as a duration exists also as a good.

⁶*Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 18, a. 5; q. 71, a. 2.

of that which exists in us as a rational desire or appetite.⁷ “Man’s genuine good belongs to reason.”⁸ Accordingly, whatever goes against reason (whatever goes against our reason) is that which also goes against our human nature: what it means for us to be truly and properly human.⁹

With respect to how we are to understand how the comprehensiveness of good is expressed through a plurality of different concrete goods,¹⁰ as the incarnate nature of our human condition works through different virtues and values that we have chosen as human beings, different types of goods can be distinguished from each other on the basis of the different types of desires or appetites which exist within us as these are distributed within the differentiated structure which belongs to the order of our incarnate human form. Since every good is defined by its intrinsic reasonableness or its rationality (by initially and fundamentally its general “conformity to right reason,” *recta ratio*, or by the mean of reason as the measure of its goodness or excellence),¹¹ it accordingly exists as a rationally determined mean that is grasped and discovered since its reasonableness is such that every factor has been given its due, appropriate weight and so, from this, the lack of disproportion argues that the intended, realized good, as an end or goal, is always thus some form of proportion or mean that has not ignored the influence of any relevant, pertinent factor.¹² This mean or proportion, as it is derived from the mean of our reason and as it is then applied to the experience of our desires, then becomes the mean or the proportion of every existing virtue (as a *medium virtutis*) with respect to the desires that are constitutive of our human appetites as this mean or proportion is created and sought by us as human beings in contexts that are defined by varying concrete circumstances and conditions.¹³ Every virtue, in its development, “begins in the reason and ends in the appetite.”¹⁴ Action in accordance with virtue is

⁷*Sententia Libri De anima*, 3, 14, 803; *Sententia libri Ethicorum*, 7, 9, 1438. Cf. Martin Rhonheimer, *Natural Law and Practical Reason*, pp. 15-16.

⁸*Sententia libri Ethicorum*, 8, 2, 1552, my translation.

⁹*De Malo*, q. 14, a. 2, ad 8. As Aquinas distinguishes between a perverse use of reason in terms of its acts or operations, and a normative notion of reason which speaks about the proper form or the nature of our reason and all the operations which are perfectly informed by this form or nature in the *Sententia libri Ethicorum*, 2, 2, 257 (citing Rhonheimer’s translation of Aquinas’s text in his *Natural Law and Practical Reason*, p. 39):

The good of each thing lies in this, that its operation is in accordance with its form. The peculiar form of man is that he is a rational animal. Whence it is fitting that the function [*operatio*] of man is good, insofar as it is in accordance with right reason, for perversity of the reason [*perversitas rationis*] goes against the nature of reason.

¹⁰*Sententia libri Ethicorum*, 1, 1, 11; *De Malo*, q. 1, a. 2. To illustrate something about the comprehensiveness of good as Aquinas understands this to be, in the *De Malo*, q. 1, a. 2, Aquinas speaks, for instance, about three types of good. There is the goodness of a thing’s perfection or realization, the goodness of a thing which has had its perfection realized, and the goodness of what is potential or what can be realized or receive goodness.

¹¹*Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, q. 128, a. 3: “bonum rationis...est proprium hominis bonum”; 1a2ae, q. 55, a. 4, ad 2: “bonum animae est secundum rationem esse.”

¹²*Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 64, a. 1 & ad 1; 2a2ae, q. 47, a. 7.

¹³*Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 59, a. 4; q. 64, a. 2. See also q. 54, a. 3: “acts of virtue are suitable to human nature, since they are according to reason.”

¹⁴*Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 59, a. 1.

none other than action which has been rationally determined by the good of our reason.¹⁵ The concrete determinations of every virtue will vary as each of us seeks to determine what is truly virtuous in any given situation where, amid concrete things, this mean will always be something which presents itself to us as a specific intelligibility or suitability which exists as a kind of in between.¹⁶ Extremes are to be avoided since rash actions, or the lack of any kind of response at all, can trigger passions and resentments which can lead to responses and behaviors that are less rational than prior responses and behaviors. In descriptive terms, a mean of virtue exists as an end that cannot be either too much or too little. As such a mean modifies human desires or appetites to a point of determination which specifies the good of a virtuous response (which calms the passions of our human emotions by regulating and ordering them), at the same time too, this regulating and ordering works from a prior understanding of things that has properly accounted for all the pertinent circumstances and which has understood how their relations are to be ordered to each other.¹⁷

On the different kinds of good which exist as specifications of a general desire for good, first, and most obviously, the first type of human good is one that immediately meets physical and biological needs and desires which vary from person to person and from context to context, and which are rooted in the demands and requirements of our sensitive human living.¹⁸ A human being possesses an animal nature which is subsumed, informed, and limited by an existing rational nature,¹⁹ and so this sublating union of body and soul explains why physical and bodily goods are to be regarded as legitimate human goods

15Rhonheimer, *Natural Law and Practical Reason*, p. 81, as citing from the *De Malo*, q. 1, a. 4. For this reason, it can be argued that the order of reason as it operates within the context of our natural human desires is to be identified with the order of virtue (the order of our moral human virtues), *ordo rationis* with *ordo virtutis*. Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 94, a. 3. In the context of our moral activity, the order of virtue in moral matters corresponds to an ordination that is directed to “the general end of all human life.” Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 21, a. 2, ad 2; Rhonheimer, *Natural Law and Practical Reason*, p. 157, n. 52.

16*Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 64, a. 1, ad 1 & 2; q. 95, a. 2; 2a2ae, q. 92, a. 1; Frederick E. Crowe, *Three Thomist Studies*, supplementary issue of *Loneragan Workshop*, vol. 16, ed. Fred Lawrence (Boston: Loneragan Institute, 2000), pp. 58-60. As Aquinas goes on to note in 2a2ae, q. 59, a. 2, the varying presence or absence of virtue in each person mediates how our human reasoning and understanding is to be related to specific actions in terms of how specific actions are to be morally qualified from the viewpoint of a given subject and the kind and degree of responsibility that an individual person should individually bear. A given act can be an act which is not good (or which is never good) but the *culpability* of a person will vary depending on whether or not a person is behaving in ignorance, or out of weakness, or out of deliberate malice and forethought. In the absence of a bad or evil intention, no culpability can be ascribed to the doer of an otherwise bad or evil action.

17*Sententia libri Ethicorum*, 2, 7, 320; *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, q. 91, a. 1.

18*Sententia Libri De anima*, 3, 14, 804.

19*De Veritate*, q. 21, a. 1; q. 22, a. 5, ad 6, ii; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 94, a. 2. See also Niamh Middleton, “Aquinas, the Enlightenment and Darwin,” *New Blackfriars* 86 no. 1004 (July 2005): 443-444. As Middleton speaks about the reasonableness of Aquinas’s understanding of our human nature, he avers to contemporary evidence that can be cited in its favor. Current inquiry into the genetic code of human DNA has discovered that human beings “share ninety-eight per cent of their genes with chimpanzees and thirty-five per cent with daffodils.” Hence, our human nature is not purely animal nor purely spiritual. While man’s “bodily materiality is part of his essence,” it is not to be equated with all of his essence. A human being is more than an animal and less than a spirit.

and why these same goods possess an individuality and a particularism which reflects their origins in the human life of sense.²⁰ As certain goods are good only in relation to the needs of certain persons, they cease to be goods in relation with other persons.²¹ Such and such a good is good only for such and such a human person.²² Hence, the pleasures which attend the enjoyment of these particular goods are to be regarded also as but relative goods (since the enjoyment which is experienced truly benefits their recipients but not necessarily anybody else).²³ While, as human beings, we all need food, drink, clothing, and shelter, the amounts and forms will naturally vary from person to person and from culture to culture. The physical attractiveness of particular goods explains why they can be often referred to as sensitive goods.²⁴

²⁰*Sententia super Metaphysicam*, 12, 8, 2538. In the *Sententia libri Ethicorum*, Aquinas speaks about possible oppositions that can arise between goods that are goods from a purely sensible perspective and goods which are goods from a rational perspective which can include goods that are related to goods of the body but which, more importantly, can also include goods that transcend goods that belong only to the body. From a purely sensible perspective, certain things are good but they are not good if rational considerations are then taken into account (3, 5, 829). Any creature that operates from a purely sensible perspective seeks to immediately satisfy its felt desires and, if it does not work from instincts which could suggest a consciousness of time and a need to make plans to meet future contingencies, it normally acts to gratify desires and needs as these immediately arise. Pleasures are not to be delayed. However, as is the case with us as human beings and the human experience of our rational desires, a sense or consciousness of time (as an interconnection of past, present, and future) encourages a different kind of response which rejects the utility of some form of immediate gratification. Human beings employ some aspects of their humanity (which transcend their animality) when they engage in hedonistic forms of living which require careful thought and foresight (since indulging in any form of immediate gratification can greatly harm persons who fail to evince any concern for long term forms of good). However, at the same time, it has to be admitted that when, as human beings, we use our minds to postpone any gratifications (in order to satisfy our bodily needs more fully at a later date), great harm can befall us as human beings when we try to live by precepts that encourage a form of living which seeks pleasure purely as an end and not as a possible means to other forms of good. A sense or feeling of well being can accompany any form of human act, as in acts of understanding and acts of charity (the joy and even the elation that is experienced by us in our understanding, and the peace and joy that is also experienced by us in helping another person in need). But, if the object is only an experience or a feeling which suggests the presence or sense of well being, an experience can be confused with a reality that is not really present. When experiences of pleasure serve as final objectives or ends, as human beings, we would be encouraged to live within the experiences which we enjoy and which we might wish or want to cultivate. Pleasures sought for their own sake do not try to draw or lead persons toward goods which would transcend any experiences of pleasure that are given to us. If they were to do so, pleasure would cease to be a final end as some other form of good replaces it and then, in this context, pleasure becomes only a secondary kind of good which persons should not devote their whole lives to.

²¹*Sententia libri Ethicorum*, 7, 12, 1484; 8, 2, 1553. See also 3, 15, 827.

²²Bernard Lonergan, *The Incarnate Word*, unpublished manuscript translated 1989 by Charles C. Hefling, Jr. from the Latin of the *De Verbo Incarnato* (Rome: Gregorian University Press *ad usum auditorum*, 1964), pp. 365-366.

²³*Sententia libri Ethicorum*, 7, 12, 1485.

²⁴*Sententia super Metaphysicam*, 12, 8, 2538.

While sensible goods thus truly exist as goods, their sensible character explains why they are not as good as goods that can also be grasped and affirmed by us in our human understanding as, here, the sensible nature of us as human beings interacts with an intellectual, rational nature to reveal goods which incline us as persons toward experiences and desires for goods that transcend the sensible order and the goods that are proper to the sensible order of things.²⁵ A general principle avers that “the good of the part is for the good of the whole.”²⁶ As our human intellectual life transcends our human sensate life, a second type of good emerges through the apprehension of a second type of good whose term is the realization of intelligible goods (in obvious contrast with the realization of prior, sensible goods).²⁷ The differences which distinguish sensible and intelligible goods from each other reveal an ordering in the goods which can be attained by us as human subjects through the actions which we perform and engage in.²⁸ As a manifold of different desires seek a manifold of different kinds of good, a hierarchy of goods can be discerned which acknowledges relations which can move us as human beings from one type of good to other, higher types of good.²⁹ The realization of one type of good hastens the probable realization of other types of good.³⁰ In other words, “goods added to one another make for greater good.”³¹ The achievement of lesser goods creates conditions which favor the possible achievement of other, greater goods in a subordination of ends and means that reveals a complicated differentiation in the structure of the human good. Differentiations in the structure of being reveal parallel structures in the order of good in a way which points to a positive connection which exists between the kind of inquiry which exists in metaphysics and the kind of inquiry which exists within the praxis of our human, moral deliberations.³²

A good of order presents itself as an initial, lesser form of intelligible good since the creation of an order which can co-ordinate an assemblage of different human activities into a single working unit that can achieve common social ends in an ongoing manner exists as an achievement of our understanding minds that is able to grasp how elements or parts can be related together in ways which create a common understanding of things and which can lead toward common actions that are directed toward a commonly understood end. A good of order is more important or it is more good than any element or part which it orders into a relation with other elements or parts since the goodness of any part, element, or single thing is usually only enhanced if parts, elements, and things can be brought into a working relation with each other in a way which can then create or realize goods which would not be otherwise available.³³ Without an order of some kind, a first cannot be distinguished from a middle or a last, nor

²⁵*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 60, a. 5, ad 3.

²⁶*Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 109, a. 3. See also *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3, 112, 5.

²⁷*Sententia super Metaphysicam*, 12, 8, 2538; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 2, a. 6. As

Bernard Lonergan explains this on p. 309 in *The Incarnate Word*:

...to the extent that our nature is intellectual, it naturally heads for the whole of being and the whole of the good; to the extent that it is sensitive, however, it naturally heads for objects [that are] proportionate to sense and to [our] sensitive appetite.

²⁸*Sententia libri Ethicorum*, 1, 1, 4.

²⁹*Sententia super Metaphysicam*, 12, 8, 2538.

³⁰*Sententia super Metaphysicam*, 12, 12, 2632; 2636.

³¹*Sententia libri Ethicorum*, 10, 2, 1970 & 1973.

³²*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 47, a. 2; q. 48, a. 2, ad 3.

³³*De Veritate*, q. 21, a. 5; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3, 112, 8-10; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q.

an effect from its cause,³⁴ and so, as a result, no one would know how each part is to contribute to the good of a whole which acts to perfect the goodness of each element or part. An army, for instance, which wins a battle illustrates the higher functioning of a good of order over any parts since, if the disparate components of an army cannot be brought to act together to function as a single unit under the leadership of one command, military defeat will probably and inevitably result.³⁵ A victorious army imposes its order on its foes.

While primitive, intersubjective goods of order supply an order of primitive, intersubjective goods, more sophisticated goods of order can be constructed to supply goods which cannot be easily supplied by more rudimentary goods of order which exist at a lower level.³⁶ A family, for example, as a good of order, provides necessities of life for individuals which otherwise would not be available (if individuals had to try to obtain these things on their own). But, to meet needs and supply goods which are beyond what families can provide, civil communities necessarily come into existence as a second good of order that provides a larger and richer context for living a more fully human life. As a civil good of order meets needs that cannot be met by families, it, in turn, also provides a context which can make for the better living of our family life. Goods of order promote each other and they lead to the creation of other goods of order in an ascending scale which reveals a hierarchy of many different kinds of goods and values.

A well governed state exists as a community which manifests a common mind and will (a form of common understanding and willing) that unites individuals in a way which fosters the good of all and not the good of any one single individual or group to the detriment of other individuals or groups.³⁷ In the context of common agreements about ends and means, no one group and no one citizen feels that his rights and privileges are being violated and, in the union which results, the private good of individuals and groups yields to the common good of all in the belief that private desires or the desires

103, a. 2, ad 3; q. 93, a. 2, ad 3; q. 47, a. 1; cf. q. 22, a. 1. While, in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3, 94, 11, Aquinas admits that the part of something would be better or it would have more qualities if it were to engage in activities which more properly belong to other parts or elements, if the good of the whole is to be served however, it is better that some parts engage in subordinate functions in relation to other parts or elements who engage in an order of higher functions and activities. As, in his own way, Jean-Pierre Torrell summarizes the point in his *Saint Thomas Aquinas Volume 2 Spiritual Master*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), p. 241, “...each species of creature corresponds to a special intention of the creator and contributes at its level of being to representing the goodness of God, so that what is missing in one being is supplied by another, and the whole universe represents the divine perfection more perfectly.” Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 47, a. 1: “the universe [Greek: cosmos, ‘order’] as a whole is a more perfect participation and manifestation of the divine goodness than is any individual creature whatsoever,” as quoted by Bernard Lonergan in *The Triune God: Systematics*, trans. Michael G. Shields, ed. Robert M. Doran & H. Daniel Monsour (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 673.

³⁴Lonergan, *Incarnate Word*, p. 388.

³⁵*Sententia super Metaphysicam*, 12, 12, 2630.

³⁶*Sententia libri Ethicorum*, 1, 1, 4.

³⁷*Sententia libri Ethicorum*, 1, 2, 30; *De Regimine Principum [De regno ad regem Cypri; On Kingship, to the King of Cyprus]*, 1, 1, as cited from *Philosophical Texts, St. Thomas Aquinas Philosophical Texts*, trans. by Thomas Gilby (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 380-381, n. 1093.

of a particular group are best met by attending to the needs of other persons and groups in a relation which creates reciprocal bonds that found and ground both the being and the flourishing of a human community (because of interdependent relations which are fostered in how persons and groups are relating to each other). The goods and desires of individuals and groups do not dominate to a point which necessarily leads to the destruction of a common order which grounds forms of community life and, within the context of a given good of order, individuals and groups retain activities which are properly their own. In a good of order, the proper good or activity of each individual and group is coordinated or combined in a manner where the end product is an activity which now properly belongs to a whole. The good of community ultimately takes precedence over the good of an individual or the good of a group³⁸ since, as we attend to the origin and life of any individual or part, we find that, without a prior good of order, no individual or part can exist or be known as an individual or part that is distinct from other individuals or parts. The good of an individual cannot be realized without the prior existence and good functioning of a good of order for which an individual willingly sacrifices personal, individual goods and the desires which go with these goods. Individuality, or the good of any individual, exists as a function or as a product of a higher good of order.³⁹ “Every part, as such, belongs to the whole.”⁴⁰ Order does not exist essentially as a function or as a product of individuality although, if instead of speaking about individuals we choose to speak about persons and about how individuals exist as persons and can become persons, we move into a context of analysis and thinking which joins the being of persons with the being of relations. Each points to the other as, increasingly, we move from a notion of individuality which exists, more or less, as a material determination or potency toward a notion of personhood which exists with a form and realization that cannot be apart from an order of constitutive relations which make for the being and the life of a person in contrast with the being and the life of an individual. “Person signifies what is most perfect in all nature – that is, a subsistent individual of a rational nature.”⁴¹ With respect to ourselves as human beings, the greater the degree of receptivity in terms of our sensing and understanding, the greater is our personhood. These points and distinctions aside however, because goods of order benefit a large number of participating agents and subjects who are related to each other in ways which form a bonded human community and society, for this reason we can say that goods of order can be regarded as public goods and not as private goods which belong to either to individual human beings or to the striving and the preferences of special interest groups.⁴²

Through creating goods of order which can understand how parts can be united into a whole, rational

38*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3, 17, 6; 3, 125, 10; *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, q. 47, a. 10; *De Regimine Principum*, 1, 1. See also *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, q. 99, a. 1, ad 1.

39*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 15, a. 2; q. 61, a. 3. Cf. *In 4 Scriptum super libros sententiarum*, q. 1, a. 1: *naturalis ratio dictat ut homines simul cohabitent*, the “natural reason dictates that human beings live together,” as quoted by Rhonheimer, *Natural Law and Practical Reason*, p. 289, n. 10. The necessity of human community is a natural law. It is the term of a naturally created act of human reason as this reason is brought to term by an act of understanding.

40*Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, q. 64, a. 5; 3, p. 1463; cf. q. 64, a. 2; 3, p. 1461: “every part is directed to the whole, as imperfect to perfect, wherefore every part is naturally for the sake of the whole.”

41*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 29, a. 3, as quoted by Jacques Maritain, “The Individual and the Person,” *The Social and Political Philosophy of Jacques Maritain Selected Readings*, eds. Joseph W. Evans and Leo R. Ward (London: Geoffrey Bles, MCMLVI), p. 21.

42*Sententia libri Ethicorum*, 1, 5, 59; *De Regimine Principum*, 1, 1.

instantiations of common good soon emerge as the fruit of our human co-operation and this cooperation, in turn, changes a society to transform it from within. Something greater and more noble soon possibly emerges: a state becomes a commonwealth (a *res publica*). A multitude or gathering of persons ceases to exist as some kind of mob or gang since it is now bound together in a society that is defined “by a mutual recognition of rights and mutual cooperation for the [sake of the] common good.”⁴³ In the context of our human life as it exists within the created order of things, the need for a rational form of co-ordination which can bind individuals into communities accordingly explains why this good ranks as the highest form of good which is to be achieved within the present order of our human existence and why its achievement exists as the responsibility and task of politics which, as a practical science, is to be seen as the most important of all the practical human sciences.⁴⁴

As one good of order creates conditions that favor the emergence of other goods of order, the subordination of ends and means which lead to the creation of different goods of order culminates and endures in a way which points to an order within goods of order that, in turn, points to different degrees and kinds of goodness. Certain goods are more good or more perfect than other existing goods, and so the goodness of higher, greater goods possesses an orientation and place that is more perfectly ordered toward a condition of complete goodness. The application, the dedication, or the commitment is more complete and more firm because the more good which a certain good possesses exists as a kind of cause. It reinforces the directedness or the desire for good which, in some way, a good may already possess and have.⁴⁵ Hence, the orientation of lesser goods towards greater goods and any complete or greatest kind of goodness possesses a lesser degree of strength and vitality than any orientation which proceeds from any greater, higher goods which also exist. The achievement of lower goods can more easily suffer from interferences of one sort or another which would disrupt a natural, normal orientation that is directed toward experiences and realizations of goodness that would exist in a more unrestricted way.⁴⁶ For example, disruptions or imbalances within our human economic order can occur more frequently than disruptions or imbalances within our human cultural order since cultures tend to be more stable in their history than what is found in a corresponding history of human economic orders although, admittedly, if a good economic order does not exist as a prior condition and point of departure, a good cultural order will probably not exist, arise, and endure. We all know that economies frequently move through periods of prosperity which can alternate with periods of depression even as we must admit too that cultures only really flourish if economies have successfully provided for the material needs of a given society and the persons and groups who live within it. In different ways, each touches and influences the other in a way which points to a kind of positive relation which exists between, on the one hand, the material causality of an economic order and, on the other hand, the

43Cicero, *De republica* 1, 25, 39, as cited by St. Augustine, *The City of God*, 2, 21. Another translation from the Latin speaks about an “assemblage associated by a common acknowledgment of law [i.e., an agreement about right or justice], and by a community of interests (see H. Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine*, p. 118). Cicero distinguishes, critically, between a society which exists as a commonwealth and societies which are not. In a commonwealth, the “weal or welfare of all persons” exists as the deciding factor and the operative goal for all the decisions which are made. Just, equitable relations govern how human beings relate to each other. Absence of justice changes a commonwealth into a society which exists as a gang. A society no longer properly exists. It does not truly or really exist.

44*Sententia Libri Politicorum*, Prologue, 7.

45*De Veritate*, q. 22, a. 1, ad 3.

46*Sententia super Metaphysicam*, 12, 12, 2636-2637.

formal causality of a received cultural order.⁴⁷

If lesser goods are more immediately related to material conditions than the being and the achievement of higher orders of good, the proneness to change which belongs to material conditions, in their welter, probably best explains why the remoteness of higher goods exists as a kind of protection or hedge and so, in its own way, it can exist as a point of departure. A greater desire can exist for the being of higher goods if, for all intents and purposes, they possess more meaning and they more fully merit our attention if they are more worthy and so more worth having and enjoying than any other kind of good. Our desires change as we differently relate to an order of materially existing things.

With respect to the contingent or the created order of things which surrounds us where this order exists as a union of material and immaterial conditions, the *ordo universi*, the order of the universe as a whole, is to be seen as the highest and most important good of order.⁴⁸ Its ordering as an act or inclination exists as an internal or intrinsic end,⁴⁹ and through this ordering, the universe comes to have a unity that, otherwise, it would not have.⁵⁰ The universe exists for the purpose of the ordering which it can do in relating all created things to each other (its parts being all ordered to each other⁵¹) and, so, by this same ordering, it best participates in the goodness of God's own ordering and, better than any one element or creature, it best reveals the greater goodness which belongs only to God as a transcendently existing good who ranks as the external or extrinsic end or good of the entire created universe.⁵² What is best in each part is ordered to what is best and good in the whole.⁵³ Before any individual item can come into its being and existence, a good of order is needed to specify what conditions are needed and what conditions must be fulfilled if any element or individual is to emerge as a discretely existing unit. Individuals do not first exist prior to the existence of a good of order since individuals only exist within a context that is initially specified by the functioning of a given good of order.⁵⁴ Particular goods are only truly and really good to the degree that they participate in a higher, universal type of good.⁵⁵

Beyond the subordination of ends and means which reveals a scale of good within different goods of order, as the subordination of ends and means reveals an ongoing dynamic that in turn reveals the being of higher, more complete types of good, the inevitable result is a shift which ultimately reveals a second type of intelligible good which exists not as the good of order but as the existence of goods that are desired as ends in themselves. These are "sought, pursued, chosen, or desired for themselves"⁵⁶

47For a discussion which speaks about the subtle kind of relation which exists between the possibilities of creating a desired type of economic order and the beliefs or the "moral intuitions" that are denominative of a currently existing cultural order which exists within a given society, see Larry Siedentop's analysis in "Europe and the Global Market," *Democracy in Europe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 151-170.

48*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 15, a. 2; 1a2ae, q. 113, a. 9, ad 2. See also 2a2ae, q. 152, a. 4, ad 3.

49*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 103, a. 2, ad 3.

50*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 47, a. 3.

51*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 48, a. 1, ad 5.

52*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 47, a. 1; q. 47, a. 3; q. 93, a. 2, ad 3; q. 103, a. 2 & ad 3.

53*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 48, a. 2, ad 3.

54*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 15, a. 2.

55*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 103, a. 2.

56*Sententia libri Ethicorum*, 1, 7, 90.

because they are believed to be intrinsically good: intrinsically worthwhile. There is something basic or something ultimate in the goodness which they possess and so, for this reason, the goodness of these goods is not subject to any kind of change or alternation. The existence or the goodness of these goods transcends the existence and the goodness of all other existing goods, and it is for the sake of reaching these ultimate goods that all other goods (including all goods of order) possess an orientation or an ordination which is directed toward these higher goods.⁵⁷ Hence, the goods which exist as goods in themselves are conceptualized in terms about how they exist as “primary goods.”⁵⁸ They exist as final goods or ends as is the case, for example, with the good of wisdom which is desired and valued because, if given, it exists as a theoretical, explanatory knowledge of first causes.⁵⁹ All other goods play a lesser, secondary role and so they are known to exist as secondary goods or as secondary ends. Their status and meaning is determined by how they are related to a higher order of primary goods.⁶⁰ Secondary goods lead us toward final or primary goods and, at times, they will present themselves to us as final goods, albeit, final goods in a purely relative or intermediate sense.

The ordering of all goods in a relation with each other which is ultimately directed toward an experience of ultimate goodness through the orientation of subordinate final ends or goods⁶¹ accordingly explains why the meaning of good or goodness is not entirely univocal nor entirely equivocal.⁶² The meaning varies according to the meaning and reality of a given thing or event and so,

⁵⁷*Sententia super Metaphysicam*, 12, 12, 2628-2631. Cf. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3, 112, 10 (as cited by Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics*, p. 673):

...intellectual creatures, although governed [by divine providence] for their own sake, are nevertheless further ordered for the sake of the perfection of the universe which itself is ordered to God as its ultimate end.

As Aquinas had noted in the Commentary, *II Sentences*, 1, ii, 3, (cited by Gilby, *Philosophical Texts*, p. 252, n. 669), desires for lesser goods implicitly contain a desire which exists as a longing for something that exists as a supreme good.

⁵⁸*Sententia libri Ethicorum*, 1, 7, 90.

⁵⁹*De Veritate*, q. 14, a. 2.

⁶⁰*De Veritate*, q. 21, a. 1, ad 1; q. 22, a. 2.

⁶¹In the *De Veritate*, q. 14, aa. 2-3 and briefly in q. 24, a. 14, Aquinas distinguishes between different kinds of final ends or final goods. He adverts to a final ultimate end which is eternal life and which cannot be attained by purely human means although the human desire for eternal life should be viewed as a legitimate, proper human desire even if it cannot be met by purely human means. On the other hand, aside from the existence of a supreme final end, other kinds of final ends exist and these are proportionate to human striving and desire as this striving is realized in the human activities which lead to their realization. Wisdom as both term and act ranks as the final end of human cognition in the life of theoretical reason while prudence as both term and act ranks as the final end of practical reasoning since, like wisdom, prudence is an achievement of person which exists in human beings as a realization that is both the term of an act of understanding and, at the same time, the act of understanding from which proceeds the term but which, as an act, immediately changes a person who experiences it (in a change which changes the reality of a person for the better in accordance with a person's form). Term and act cannot be separated from each other since they form an inseparable unity.

⁶²*De Veritate*, q. 14, a. 2; q. 21, a. 4; *Sententia libri Ethicorum*, 1, 7, 96; 1, 9, 104.

as we speak about the mean of rationality in our acts of understanding and the mean of virtue in our acts of moral deliberation and choice, this meaning will always vary from thing to thing or from event to event. But, on the other hand however, it must be also said that the goodness of each thing or event has a meaning which meshes with the goodness of all other things and events in a general symmetry that distinguishes good from evil since, in a symmetry, all things are related in a way which orders them toward some kind of union with that which exists as ultimate meaning (as ultimate goodness).⁶³ Ultimate meaning and ultimate goodness go together since nothing can be ultimately good unless it also has a meaning that is fully complete and so lacking in any need to undergo any form of growth, change, or development.⁶⁴

The fullness of meaning which exists in ultimate goodness in turn suggests why any good which presents itself as an intrinsic good is a good which suggestively points to its autonomy and self-sufficiency.⁶⁵ It possesses a measure of self-directedness since it is not necessary for it that it should live for the sake of any other good if a good which presents itself to us as a form of ultimate justification for what we do in life is a good that is to be regarded as a supreme good (a *summum bonum*) which does not recognize any rivals or competitors. For instance, if, in the decisions and values of some persons, pleasure exists as a final good or it is seen to exist as a final good, then we would begin to live for the sake of pleasure and all other goods would only be seen to exist as goods to the degree that they lead us to experiences of pleasure. If other final goods exist, their existence will be ignored. On the other hand however, if pleasure is desired because it is believed that experiences of pleasure will make us happy, then it can be argued that happiness exists as more properly the final good of life and not pleasure. Happiness presents itself to us as another possible final good since it is very difficult to argue that happiness is not something that, as human beings, we all seek in some way in the course of our daily lives.⁶⁶ However, if happiness exists as essentially an activity (it would be the realizing or the acquiring of a form as an end that is to be reached and acquired),⁶⁷ because it can be argued that God's form or God's meaning is, at the same time, His activity (there being no potentiality in God: no difference between form and act), it can be argued that the fullness of activity in God explains why God is more truly the final good of our lives than anything else which exists.⁶⁸ For God, all other things live and exist.⁶⁹ Hence, as we make decisions about what

63 *Sententia libri Ethicorum*, 1, 1, 12; 2, 7, 320.

64 *Sententia libri Ethicorum*, 1, 9, 107.

65 *Sententia libri Ethicorum*, 1, 9, 112.

66 *Sententia libri Ethicorum*, 1, 10, 119.

67 *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 1, a. 8; q. 3, a. 2.

68 *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1, 38, 1-2.

69 In speaking about God as a final good, Crowe, in his *Three Thomist Studies*, pp. 115-116, summarizes an argument that is taken from Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 6, a. 1 on the goodness of God and how desires for goodness on the part of us as creatures intelligibly orientates us toward God (our desires existing within us in a way which points to the fullness of our creaturely existence and the realization of this existence). In general terms, in ways that apply not only to ourselves but to other existing things:

The good is the object of appetite; all things have an appetite for their perfection; the perfection of an effect consists in being like its agent cause, and so the agent is the object of appetite insofar as participation in its likeness is the object of appetite; but God is the

goods we should believe exist as being really and truly good (hence, if they are to exist for us as final types of good), in the consequences which follow, certain goods will not be recognized for how, in fact, they exist as goods and, at the same time too, we will hold and believe that all of our other or lesser desires will be satisfied by the final or the ultimate good which, in fact, we are desiring and seeking (though we misjudge and often err about how we think and know about what could be the identity of that which exists as the supremely desired good).

first agent cause of all things; God, then, will be the object of appetite and must be called good.