IS THERE A COMMON GOOD?

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[PRENOTE. This article on the “Common Good,” though basically philosophical in nature, contributes significantly to the theological discussion articulated in a number of Vatican II documents. See Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, #14, 31: lay apostolate and the common good (c.g.); Declaration on Christian Education, #1, 3: schools and the c.g.; Decree on the Instruments of Social Communication, #11-12: right to public information, to privacy; censorship and the c.g.; and especially Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, #30: obligation to contribute to the c.g.; #42: person, family and the c.g.; #59: autonomous culture and the c.g.; #68: labor organization and the c.g.; #71: private property and the c.g.; #73: civil liberties, universal rights and the c.g.; #74-75: politics and the c.g.; #78: peace and the c.g.]

Many commentators have remarked on the lack of a sense of the common good in the Philippines. This lack is a great handicap for the reconstruction of democratic institutions and in the inculcation of democratic habits and processes. Without a commitment to the common good, it is argued, people have no reasonable grounds for allowing their own private or family interests to be superceded in the interests of a greater good. Most especially the loyalty to one’s own family and friends which is such an important element in Philippine culture,¹ is seen to be a barrier to the creation of institutions and services which would benefit all citizens equally.

Furthermore, the years of autocratic rule have reinforced the orientation to selfish or family interests, since success in busi-

ness or in government depended on the favor of the president. The habits of favor seeking and graft were built on a cultural foundation which saw it as proper that one should seek favors for oneself and one’s friends and family from patrons. The outcome of such strongly reinforced habits is that people do not have any basis on which to seek the good of all, but only their own good. As a result, those now faced with the tasks of introducing urban and rural land reform, of introducing devolved structures of government in the autonomous regions, of renewing the taxation system, of improving the health care system, the legal system, the educational and welfare systems, cannot rely on a political culture in which the obligations of all to care for the common good are basically acknowledged. What is noticeably lacking is a strongly entrenched conviction of the duty of all to contribute to the common good.

In this article I wish to offer some reflections on the notion of the common good. The purpose is to contribute to the task indicated above, of filling the lack which is such an obstacle to reconstructing a democracy. But while it is necessary to have some idea of what is meant by the common good, it is also important to reflect on the reasons why people have not been able to give their allegiance to projects and institutions purporting to serve the common good. This two-sided approach should help in developing a rationale of the common good which is not opposed by definition to the true good of individuals and families and other groups. The article has three parts. In the first part I survey the range of possible meanings for the notion of the common good in order to specify the question in the Philippine context. In the second part I present an understanding of the common good which allows us to handle the complexity of meanings in an analogical manner. And in the third part I apply the analysis to the problem of politics in the Philippines.

I. VARIED MEANINGS OF "COMMON GOOD"

Talk of the common good is fraught with difficulties. Depending on one’s basic philosophical position, the understanding of the common good can range from a comprehensive content to a total denial of any such reality. There is need to sketch out the mine-
field before beginning a discussion of the common good relative to any particular situation.

1. For Aristotle, and perhaps it could be said for the classical world in general, the point of politics and of political community is a moral one. It is to achieve the Good Life, which involves the formation of citizens in virtue, so that they will live noble lives, distinguished by acts of justice and virtue. The issue for political philosophy is to determine whether the good life pursued by any political community is indeed the best life possible. Common good in this context would refer to the good life, which is the good desired by all citizens as they cooperate in the polis. From his Ethics this good life could be further specified in terms of eudaimonia, usually translated as happiness, or faring-well. This is a common good, in that all desire the ultimate good, what is desired for its own sake and not as means to anything else.

2. For St. Thomas the common good also includes the ultimate good, that for the sake of which other goods are desired, but which itself is not sought merely as means to some further good. In typically Aristotelian fashion, the ultimate end of humankind is specified as the best life possible, understood as the exercise of the highest faculties. This natural end of humankind is the knowledge of God. The role of the political community is understood relative to this specification of the human good, and the particular common good of political societies is subordinate to the common good which is the ultimate end. This view left its impact on Catholic teaching which up to the present century held it to be a duty of the State to publicly worship God according to true religion.

3. Modern political philosophies typically begin from the supposition that there is no agreement among people about the good, and address themselves to the problem of creating stable political order in the absence of any shared conviction about the good life. They deny that there is in fact any common good in the Aristote-
lian or Thomist sense, which includes some specification of the ultimate end for all human beings. As evidence for their conclusions they would point to the absence of consensus among philosophers or cultures about the nature of this ultimate end, and to the historical experience of armed conflict between devotees of different visions of the good, in the name of those visions. Such positions tend to be minimalist, looking for the basic common denominator of political order, on which they could hope all would agree. So like Hobbes they would identify security from the threat of attack and other disruptions of civil order as the common good for the sake of which people would be willing to sacrifice some of their liberties and cooperate in society.\(^5\) Or with Locke they would identify the protection of natural rights as the appropriate common good of those who would relinquish some of their rights in order to form political society. Or perhaps they would take Locke literally, as some liberals do, and specify the protection of property as the common good.\(^6\)

4. Sometimes the determination of the state’s responsibility is so minimalist that the writers in question deny the reality of any common good. Rather, they assert the primacy of individual interests and oblige the state not to interfere with the liberties of citizens as they pursue their own interests. In answer to any question about the effects of such a policy for the fabric of social and political life they draw on the idea proposed by Adam Smith that the pursuit of private interest by selfish individuals results in the achievement of public well-being. As if by the arrangements of an “invisible hand” the individual acts of those who pursue their own purposes are made to contribute to society’s good. The common good, if there is any such reality, will be achieved, not by deliberate policies for the sake of the common good, but by permitting self-interested people to act for “the gratification of their own vain and insatiable desires.” The slogan “private vices, public benefits” makes the point that private self-interest and the common good are coincident, or at least compatible. This line of argument is popular at present among right-wing advocates of the minimal

state. However, even though it has lost favor among moral philosophers, this way of viewing the problem still dominates the thinking of the philosophers who consider the basic question of social philosophy to be one of how to reconcile private and public good, individual and social well-being. The predominance of the language of private interests conditions contemporary reflection on public well-being.

5. In a very enlightening analysis of modern philosophical ethics Alasdair MacIntyre has suggested that the contemporary debate is polarised between representatives of "The General Welfare" and proponents of "Human Rights." This polarisation has occurred because of the disintegration of a shared view of the human telos, the purpose or end which would be the fulfilment or completion of human life. Without such a shared view of the human good, there is no common basis available to disputing parties for the justification of disputed norms or laws. Moral systems have to seek some other justification than their suitability for preparing people for their proper telos. On one extreme of the polarisation, Utilitarians have substituted a new view of the purpose of human life and action, which supposedly has the advantage over the classical views of being objectively measurable. At the other extreme are those who ground the obligatoriness of the moral law in its rationality, finding in the respect owed to rational beings the basis of a duty equal to the traditional force of the Will of God expressed in the moral law. This is the polarisation reflected in the Moral Textbook dichotomy between Teleological and Deontological ethics.

However, MacIntyre's comments go beyond the situation of academic moral philosophy. He is pointing to a polarisation which is to be found in public and political debates as well as in the halls of academe. Typical of contemporary politics is a polarisation of interests, those of individuals expressed in terms of rights, and


those of government or bureaucratic institutions formulated in terms of utility.\textsuperscript{10} This accounts for the fact that protest is so often the form in which the claims of individuals over against the communal interests are expressed. Individuals’ rights being denied or abused, but all that can be done to protect those rights is to protest, mostly for the benefit of those sharing the same interests. Representatives of governments or the interests of bureaucracies justify their actions and policies in terms of the general welfare, calculated on some utilitarian criterion, and the assertion of the rights of individuals has no place in that calculation. Protests fall on deaf ears. This analysis reflects the standard criticism of utilitarian theories, that they are generally willing to tolerate harm done to individuals or minorities, if this contributes to the overall good. MacIntyre’s point however is that this criticism cannot be effective in making Utilitarians think again, because they have no way of calculating or identifying harm other than in the categories of the general welfare.

6. While the Catholic Church is outstanding in the modern world in continuing to advocate the reality of a common good and to outline the obligations of all to contribute to it, there have been some notable developments in its understanding of the common good. Recent reflection in Catholic social teaching has led to a distinction in levels of the common good. This development is associated mainly with the emergence in Vatican II of the awareness of the autonomy of the secular, and with the assertion of the fundamental rights of persons, especially to religious liberty. The common good in the comprehensive sense can still include the knowledge of God and communion with him, but in recognition of the appropriate functions of civil authorities and acknowledging the dignity of conscience of the individual, the common good of political community is not so extensive. Rather, the common good which governments ought to pursue is better expressed as public order, namely, that aspect of the extensive common good which is amenable to organisation and direction by the State. This public order however, while it would include the maintenance of security in the Hobbesian sense, and the protection of human rights in the Lockean sense, goes beyond the minimalist specification of the

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid. 71.
common good. It would include a positive responsibility for justice and for welfare understood in substantive terms.

This brief survey reminds us of the complexity of meaning for the term common good in relation to political community. There can be the virtual denial of the reality of any distinct common good, along with the assertion that the public interest is identical with the facilitation of private interests; there can be the assertion of some restricted purpose as the common good of political community, as for instance internal and external security, or the protection of property, or the enforcement of contracts; there can be the utilitarian summation of private interests under the heading of General Welfare, viewed as a counter-pole to the claims of individuals; there can be the comprehensive vision of human fulfilment articulated as a good for any human person, and therefore a good common to all; and finally, there can be a nuanced understanding of the common good, distinguishing various levels of meaning along a spectrum. This complexity of possible meanings is relevant when we ask about the common good in any concrete situation.

THE PROBLEM IN THE PHILIPPINES

The phrase common good can be used to refer to the comprehensive and unrestricted good, whether understood in a philosophical or a faith context. Or it can be used to refer to a minimal condition for the existence of public order and society and political authority. When it is asserted that there is a lack of commitment to the common good in Philippine culture, which sense is meant?

Those faced with the problems of housing, transport in Metro-Manila, education, unemployment and power-supply could answer in very concrete terms what they mean. It is good for anyone to have a secure dwelling, to have a job, to be able to travel conveniently to work, to have opportunities for education for children. But if each works alone to achieve such goods, there will be inefficiency and mutual frustration. While for any one person a car is a very useful means of transport to and from the place of work, the existence of too many cars makes it impossible for each one to operate efficiently. Without coordination and regulation of the efforts of all, those who succeed in achieving their objectives are
likely to do so at the expense of those who fail. Even though this reality is confirmed again and again in experience, the only response seems to be an even more determined effort by individuals to struggle for their own goals. The harder they all strive, the more they undermine the chances for their own success.

This is easily illustrated in the case of transport, but also, perhaps more tragically in the case of education. Parents make sacrifices to enable their own children to get some qualification, with the result that there is a qualification inflation; the more qualified people there are around, given a relatively static job market, the higher the qualifications which will be required by employers. The more people struggle to escape through the narrow hatch, the more thoroughly they block the escape route. While people are willing to go to great lengths to achieve those goods for themselves and their families, there seems little willingness to work to achieve cooperation, which might also allow others to achieve similar goods at the same time. The reference to the common good in these contexts suggests the search for a source of motivation which would be effective in bringing about social cooperation.

Of course, it may be the case that people have good reasons for ignoring the claims of the common good, in whichever sense, and for concentrating on their private interests. The analysis presented by MacIntyre may well reflect the experience of many people, who have found themselves carrying an inordinate burden in the name of the general welfare, or the common good. Perhaps the experience of the majority of Filipinos justifies their disregard for the claims of the common good? They had long been asked to accept a restriction of their civil liberties under martial law, in the name of the common good; they had been asked to tolerate revisions of the Constitution and of ordinary democratic legislative procedures, also in the name of this common good. Those at the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum have been asked, and in fact are still being asked, to modify their demands for a greater share in the country’s wealth and in the fruits of their work, for the sake of a longer term recovery in the economy. They have been asked to respect the security forces in their efforts to maintain law and order, while experience showed them that the law in fact did little to
protect their own interests. Again and again politicians have asked for voters’ support, with a promise of better times ahead. I suspect there has been repeated experience over time to confirm people in the view that the common good usually refers to somebody else’s good, because they have so rarely seen the sacrifices they have made in its name as in any way benefiting them.

How is the common good to be understood, so that it genuinely is a common good, and not the sectional good of rulers or administrators or beneficiaries? How can there be a genuine common good, when there are not only diverse interests in society, but interests which are opposed to one another? What has to happen in order that such a properly understood common good can become the basis for new forms of cooperation in politics?

II. JOHN FINNIS ON THE COMMON GOOD

There has been a revival of interest in the common good in recent philosophical debates. A major contributor to these discussions is John Finnis.\(^{11}\) His analysis of the common good is rooted in a broader reflection on practical reason. In this context, the common good refers to those reasons which people could give to make sense of their willingness to cooperate with others in projects at various levels. This broader context for the discussion adds significantly to the content, but in a manner which can be easily overlooked. The emphasis on the practical context transposes the issue of the common good from being a matter for analysis to being a matter for practical deliberation.\(^{12}\) Then the question of whether or not there is a common good is relegated to secondary importance alongside the question of what kind of political community we desire for ourselves. As a result, the deliberations of political philosophy are placed at the centre of the on-going political debate, and the philosopher is challenged to contribute to the communal search for the good life. While the context of practical rationality changes the focus of the analysis, it also points up the significant limitations which the perceptions and aspirations of people impose on political action. While the philosopher or any


group may answer for themselves the question about the type of political community they desire, that aspiration is one of several which must be conciliated in political dialogue. As well as asking ourselves what we want, we must ask others what they want, and come to terms with them.

Why people in fact cooperate, and why they ought to cooperate with one another, cannot be explained without reference to the reasons which they themselves can give to explain and justify their action. These reasons which people have for cooperating with one another are referred to in summary form by means of the expression “The Common Good.” It is not some identifiable or measurable content, as might be implied by a utilitarian emphasis on the “greatest good of the greatest number.” Rather, its reality is the actual sharing of purposes and concerns by people who are involved in joint action. Appeal to the common good is therefore contingent. The effectiveness of the appeal depends on there being reasons which do in fact give those addressed grounds for cooperating with others. Obviously, there are also psychological and sociological conditions which contribute to this contingency: for instance, the people addressed must be capable of recognising their own interests, and the social means of communication must be effective in allowing the message to be heard. However, the contingency I wish to point out here, is that the reasons adverted to in the appeal to the common good, may not in fact be held by those addressed. If they do not have the opportunity to declare what their own interests are, and accordingly to specify which of their interests are shared with others, and are therefore a common good, then any appeal for their cooperation in the name of the common good is likely to be manipulative.

The common good identifies the point of continuing cooperation. It refers to the answers which people might give to questions like: “why do you go along with that crowd?, why do you continue to go to those meetings, to work with them?, why do you let them do that?, why do you not stop them?, why do you pay your contribution to that organisation?” The people involved must themselves be able to say what the point of their common activity is; their common good is something which, ideally, they themselves could identify, rather than something proposed to them from outside.

What kinds of reasons do people typically have for cooperating
with one another? Finnis answers this question by distinguishing various forms of cooperation. Corresponding to each of these forms is a distinctive set of reasons, a particular kind of answer to the question why. Aristotle’s distinction of the different types of friendship, of utility, of pleasure and of pure friendship, is reformulated in a distinction of Business relations, Play relations and Friendship. Finnis adds a fourth, which he calls Complete Community. These forms of cooperation are distinguished according to the various attitudes people may have towards the goals of others with whom they are involved. There can be cooperation where there is either no interest in or even opposition to the goals of partners (business relations); there can be partial interest in the other’s goals as in the form of cooperation where the partner’s successful performance is valued as a condition for one’s own success (play relations); and there can be commitment to the goals of the other on a par with one’s own ambitions (friendship).

**BUSINESS RELATIONS**

It is a familiar element in our experience that we cooperate with people we do not know, that we cooperate with people about whose goals we know nothing and in fact care less, and surprisingly, that we cooperate with people with whom we are in competition, that is, whose goals are at variance with our own. We cooperate in such instances, because there is some good valued by all the people involved, no matter how much they may differ otherwise. Those who come to a market to buy and sell have opposed interests: if the sellers do well, then it is at the expense of the buyers, and vice versa. But even though they have opposed interests, buyers and sellers cooperate in maintaining the market and its arrangements: place, time, auctioneering facilities. Here they have a common good, although their other goals are not shared. Many other forms of joint action reflect a willingness to similar cooperation in the presence of ultimate disinterest in the goals of others. In a well coordinated traffic system, for instance, it is in the interests of each to comply with the regulations for the sake of efficiency in achieving his or her own goals; each would have an interest in the cooperation of all, without being concerned in the least with the goals pursued by others. Whether they are driving to work, to
school, to shop, or to rendezvous with their lovers is of no concern to the other participants in the traffic, only that they comply with the rules of the road. These instances of cooperation involve some measure of common interest, but all in the service of each participant attaining his or her own objective. The objective of each remains individual and private; the success of any one is a matter of indifference to others, and the coordination of action is not valued by anyone as a component of his or her own objective. ¹³

PLAY RELATIONS

In other forms of cooperation the people involved share some goals and the answers they would give to a question about their willingness to continue to participate would point to those goals. In "play relations," Aristotle's friendship of pleasure, people engage in joint activity for the sake of the enjoyment to be derived from that activity. Sport provides the clearest example. If I play well, I can enjoy a game of tennis, but I can only play well if my partner also plays well and gives me a good game. Even though we are competing to win the tennis match, we play tennis for the enjoyment this form of sport provides, and so the interest in playing well and having a good game is more basic than the interest in winning. The love of the game is hardly realised by too-easy wins or no-contest matches. In such forms of cooperation, the success of the other in achieving his or her goal is a condition for me achieving mine. The coordination of activity, the performance itself, is valued by the participants for its own sake, and is a significant part of their common good. ¹⁴

FRIENDSHIP

When one or other of us has improved at the game and we no longer give one another a satisfactory match, it is not at all unusual that we could look around for more suitable partners. In play relations the partner is of interest only to the limited extent of our joint action. But in more extensive relationships like friendship, my willingness to cooperate with the other is not made to depend

¹³. Finnis, Natural Law, 139 f.
¹⁴. Ibid. 140.
on performance or other conditions. Where there is friendship in this fuller sense, I am interested in my friend’s well-being for his or her own sake; my friend’s realisation of the chosen set of goals that make up his or her plan of life becomes a constitutive part of my own well-being. Familial relationships fit into this category as well as the more formal friendships. The concern of parents for the well-being of their children is such that the flourishing of the children is a constitutive part of the parents’ well-being. Husbands and wives engage in joint activity which has as its common good their mutual fulfilment and the realisation of their life’s projects. The interest in the other’s goals is not confined to only one aspect of cooperation, but extends to the whole range of the partner’s good. Friends are interested not just in their own success, in the maintenance of conditions of cooperation, or in successful co-ordination. They are interested in the other’s success as a constitutive part of their own well-being, and so the common good of friends in their shared activity is their mutual fulfilment.

COMPLETE COMMUNITY

The question of the common good does not arise primarily in terms of economic or sporting or intimate relationships, but in relation to political community. What is to be understood by the common good of political community? Finnis follows Aristotle again here. Aristotle explains the emergence of the polis in the evolution of community in terms of the insufficiency of the lesser forms for achieving the human good; the polis is that level of social organisation at which a community can be said to be self-sufficient in providing the good life for itself.15 Households and villages cannot provide all that is needed for the maintenance of the good life in all its aspects. Similarly, isolated instances of cooperation on the model of business relations, play relations or friendship do not nor cannot exhaust all the potential for the realisation of the goods for the sake of which people would have reason to cooperate. And so Finnis coins the notion of “complete community” to characterise that level of social organisation which is oriented to the unrestricted range of the good. He challenges the prevalent assumption that the sovereign nation state is such com-

plete community. This assumption is based on a transference of the attributes of Aristotle’s *polis* to the nation state. In fact, international cooperation is required to deal with problems of an environmental, economic, cultural and ideological as well as technological nature. Complete community, like friendship, is never an achieved state of affairs, but something to be striven for. It involves patterns of cooperation which transcend the divisions of states, but which include sovereign states as actors in the cooperation.

The analysis of this form of cooperation does not require an extra model however, as complete community can be explained as a complex amalgam of forms of cooperation which are instances of business relations, play relations and friendship. Anyone’s activity as a citizen or politician can be understood in one or more of these ways. The citizen who cooperates in abiding by the traffic laws or tax laws may see this as part of a deal made with other citizens, whereby each stands to gain from the established order. The reasoning behind their cooperation would then conform to the model of business relations. Traditional “social contract” philosophies of the state have used this model to clarify the rationality of political community. Each citizen is willing to forego some liberties on condition that all other citizens do so too, for the sake of the security and stability which such an arrangement would bring about.¹⁶

The model of play relations can also explain political activity. Those who take part in political life can be motivated partly by the enjoyment they derive from the power play. Hannah Arendt has interpreted Thomas Jefferson’s famous phrase “the pursuit of happiness” as referring primarily to political activity, rather than to the recreational activities we would be inclined to consider. It is the participation in the deliberation about the well-being of the community, and the opportunity to make one’s contribution to the shaping of the future which is the source of the happiness to be pursued.¹⁷ There is a “pay-off” which those of a political inclination enjoy: popularity, success in swaying meetings, skill in nego-


tiating and forming alliances. The enjoyment of the give and take of political debate, of the access to the levers of power which political office allows, of the influence over events which politicians invariably "enjoy," reflect the appropriateness of the model of play-relations for understanding political activity.

Thirdly, the model of friendship can be a significant element in explaining human cooperation in political affairs. By this is meant not the friendships which statesmen and politicians may form with one another, but the genuine concern for the well-being of others for their own sake, which motivates many to struggle for the creation and maintenance of democratic systems, of rule according to law, of adequate health care and social welfare and education systems.\textsuperscript{18} If there were not this form of motivation for participation in political activity, then our political societies would truly conform to the image of shepherd and sheep, whereby the shepherds take care of the sheep, but only for the purpose of fattening them for slaughter.\textsuperscript{19} The ingenuity and competence which has gone into the organisation of the various elements of government and the social services could not have been motivated alone by desire for the kind of goods achievable in business and play-relations. And indeed societies traditionally recognise their duty to say thank you to those who have contributed to the public welfare, recognising that the salaries paid to officials and the gratification to be had from participation are hardly sufficient to acknowledge the struggles and the commitment which public service has involved. The relationships which exist in political community are not only characterised by private interest which would motivate relations of a \textit{business} nature; they are not only characterised by the pleasure of participation which would motivate relations of \textit{play}; they also include relations of \textit{friendship}, where the motivation is the well-being of others who stand to benefit from the institutions and operations of politics.

The common good of complete community is a complex amalgam

\textsuperscript{18} This rationality of friendship must be presupposed by the comments of Mrs. Aquino, in her address on the occasion of the Anniversary Mass for her husband, 21 August 1989. The President identified the murder of Ninoy Aquino as a turning point, because his death demonstrated to the people his willingness to lose his life for their sake, and the people responded courageously to this demonstration of love. On that occasion Filipinos had experienced a leader and a politician who loved them, who was genuinely committed to their welfare and they responded accordingly.

\textsuperscript{19} Plato, \textit{The Republic}, Bk. 1/343b-c; 345c.
of the three types of common good appropriate to the more specialised forms of cooperation. The reasons which anyone might give for participating in and contributing to political activity can range across these three basic models. Accordingly, the common good of complete community would identify a complex set of conditions allowing each, by his or her cooperation, to realise his or her own good; further it would include a set of typical operations by participation in which each would enhance his or her own well-being; but finally it would include a vision of the well-being of all the members of the community, achieved by their own intelligent and responsible pursuit of their own life-plans, facilitated by the structures and institutions of the community.

III. APPLICATION OF FINNIS’ ANALYSIS

The advantage of John Finnis’ analysis is that it permits us to see the point of the other approaches to the common good without being trapped in the restrictions of any particular understanding. Those who view the common good of political community in a minimalist sense or even deny any distinctive common good as such can be seen as interpreting society exclusively on the model of business relations. Those who advocate a comprehensive common good incorporating a moral vision can be seen as interpreting society exclusively on the model of friendship. Each approach has its validity, as is clear from our experience. But if either is elevated to the central role in explaining social relations, the relevance of the other dimensions of human cooperation is overlooked.

THE ANALOGICAL CONCEPTION OF THE COMMON GOOD

Finnis’ analysis of complete community as an amalgam of forms of cooperation, including instances of business relations, play relations and friendship in its various degrees, makes it possible to acknowledge the validity of specialised views. With this approach, firstly, the appropriateness of the minimal social contract to guarantee security, protection of basic rights, and liberties for individual actors can be acknowledged. At the same time, secondly, the importance of participation in political community as constitutive of human flourishing is given its due place. And thirdly, it is recognised that without the friendship which makes
sense of a selfless commitment to the well-being of others political community as such would hardly survive.

WHAT KIND OF POLITICS DO WE WANT?

Talk of friendship as central to political life usually draws a cynical response. The shepherds may well look after the sheep, it is remarked, but that is so that they can later fleece and butcher them. However, it must be remembered that Finnis presents his analysis, not as an empirical description of what is, but as a reflection on the practical reasoning of those who act in cooperation with others. Insofar as this analysis is offered to us, it poses a challenge not only to our understanding, but also to our practical deliberation. What kind of political life do we want? What kind of community are we interested in constructing? What kind of politics are we committed to?

THE MINIMUM IS NOT ENOUGH

If self-interest is to provide the only motivation for socially significant activity, and the market is to be the only nexus of social interaction, then it is clear that political community will function to ensure that the wealthy and the strong survive. Adequate healthcare, legal protection, education, the necessities of life would not be provided for all, since there are many who have nothing to trade and so have nothing to offer those who might be able to help them.

WHO PREFERS THE MINIMALIST VIEW?

Usually those who are benefiting from the system of cooperation in the body politic and the economy give special place to the ‘business relations’ aspect of social cooperation. The rights to property, civil liberties; the legal enforcement of contract, along with the maintenance of a certain type of law and order are part of the structure which allows them to achieve their own private goals. Is it mistaken to suggest that this group will usually include the wealthy land-owners, business people, and powerful political families? When such people rely on the rhetoric of the common good,
they draw on the vocabulary of affection and friendship, of loyalty and gratitude, which properly belongs to political community in the full sense. But though they draw on this rhetoric, they exploit it to evoke commitment to a restricted view of political association, namely one based on business relations. The irony is that the very people whose interests are served by confining themselves to the restricted view of politics, are the very ones who ought to be challenged to contribute out of responsibility for the well-being of less fortunate citizens. The very fact of their wealth and power and command over resources imposes on them a responsibility to use those resources for the sake of the common good, and that means, for the benefit of those who are in need.

'WHAT'S IN IT FOR US?'

The poor and the less well off, who are frequently asked to accept sacrifices in the name of the common good, though they are addressed in the expansive language of friendship, are quite entitled to ask the question, rooted in the restricted model of business relations, 'what's in it for us?' Jean-Jacques Rousseau has commented that a political community begins to disintegrate as soon as the citizens begin to ask 'What's in it for us?'20 Service of the community rather than exploitation of the common wealth is the life blood of political community in his view. But although this argument is persuasive, it depends on the pre-supposition that there exists a basic equality among the citizens. Where this equality does not exist, and furthermore, where those in the worse-off position have good reasons to suspect they may lose out in the future as they have lost in the past, then they are well justified in asking what's in it for them. This question pushes in the direction of a more comprehensive vision of the common good, in which the well-being of each member of the community is taken seriously. The distribution of housing, jobs, schooling, health care, even food, can effectively map out the reality of the common good. Those who are faring badly in these terms can very reasonably challenge others in the community, and especially those with control over resources and therefore with responsibility, to show evidence of their commitment to the common good.

Suppose people are being invited to act for the well-being of others out of a spirit of friendship towards them, they would be foolish to respond unless the first level of cooperation is realised, that is, the form of political community which guarantees them security, a living, the protection of their rights. Those who wish to advocate a culture of the common good must work so as to persuade people, through the concreteness of their own experience, that they are not like the sheep who are being looked after for the sake of the profit to be made from them. Commitment to the common good can only be expected from people who have had the experience that their own good is seriously taken into consideration by others, but especially by those explicitly charged with responsibility for the common good.

THE MAXIMUM IS NOT POSSIBLE

Just as at one extreme in a spectrum of meanings of the common good, the minimum is not enough, so at the other extreme, the maximum is not possible. The realisation of the comprehensive common good would be heaven, and this is not within the gift of any human society or any state. The genuine alternative to the minimalist conception of the common good, modelled on business relations, is therefore a more comprehensive view which includes elements of friendship, while stopping short of the paternalism which would take complete responsibility for the destinies of people. It is a matter of providing the conditions which make it possible for people, by their own initiative and activity, to achieve their own fulfilment. Or in the words of Gaudium et Spes, “the common good embraces the sum total of all those conditions of social life which enable individuals, families and organisations to achieve complete and efficacious fulfilment.”21 The common good of political community as envisaged by the Council is less than the complete fulfilment of its members: rather it is the set of conditions which allows those members to identify and pursue their own fulfilment.

CONCLUSION

1. The common good is to be understood in terms of the practical rationality of those who cooperate with others.

2. The reasons which people can have for cooperating will be complex, just as the forms of human associating are varied, and the range of goals and values to be realised in coordinated activity is extensive.

3. The question of the common good is not simply one of reporting what happens to be the reasons operative in actual instances of social cooperation, but also a practical one about the forms of political community that we wish to construct and operate.

4. Those who react skeptically to appeals to the common good may be quite justified in their skepticism, because of previous experience of being asked to make sacrifices in relation to their own interests, without compensatory benefits.

5. On the other hand, those who rely on an expansive rhetoric of the common good in order to motivate the cooperation of others, without at the same time moving in practice beyond a self-interested involvement rooted in the business relations models, are to be challenged for the deceitfulness of their position. The rhetoric of the common good can be manipulative unless it is substantiated by activity rooted in the friendship model of cooperation and political community.

6. While the minimalist view of the common good is not sufficient for the maintenance and survival of political community, the maximalist view is not a practicable option.

7. Some intermediate model is more appropriate, which combines elements of business relations, focusing on security and self-interest, with elements of play relations (participation as a value) and especially friendship, whereby the commitment to the well-being of others is a significant aspect of the practical rationality of citizens and politicians.

8. Perhaps a more realistic view of conflict as an unavoidable aspect of political community would be compatible with such a model, and so freeing politics from the demand for consensus and harmony.