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ST. THOMAS AND TODAY

Comments on the Economic Views of Aquinas

By Dom Virgil Michel, O.S.B., Ph.D.

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VEST POCKET BOOKLETS ON THE SOCIAL QUESTION, by Dom Virgil Michel, O.S.B., Ph.D., of St. John's Abbey, Collegeville. (Wanderer Printing Co., 128 E. Tenth St., St. Paul, Minnesota. **St. Thomas and Today,** 63 pp. $.15; **Human Rights,** 48 pp. .15; **Ownership,** 48 pp., .15; **Labor and Industry,** 48 pp., 15; **The Nature of Capitalism,** 48 pp., .15; **Critique of Capitalism,** 48 pp., .15; **Ideals of Reconstruction,** 56 pp., .15. The entire set of 7, Price $1.00 net.

The above pamphlets by Dom Virgil Michel, O.S.B., are studies of fundamental Christian principles in their relation to the various aspects of the social problem of our own day. The first on the list examines the viewpoints of St. Thomas as gathered from the various writings of the Angelic Doctor, most of which are not easily accessible to the general reader. The fundamental viewpoints of Thomas Aquinas are as applicable to our day as they were to his, since they embody the basic principles as Christian tradition has developed them in the light of the Gospel and of sound human thought of all times.

The other pamphlets form a series on the Social Question. They discuss the general topics indicated in the different titles by taking the fundamental Christian principles as their basis and then applying them to the conditions of our own time and to the many different ideas and schemes that are afloat in our day. All of the articles in these pamphlets were first printed serially in the *Wanderer*. Since their appearance in pamphlet form they have met with a most welcome reception in many circles ranging from university professors to the ordinary man of the street. They have been commended in particular for their clear development of fundamental principles and for their succinct form of presentation. They can be read profitably in the many brief intervals of time that so often are frittered away just because pamphlets such as these are not ready to hand. Many persons interested in social problems have been carrying these pamphlets with them for ready discussion and reference, and they have also been put to good use as basic materials by many study club groups.

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1. Economics and Ethics

ALL the views and teachings of St. Thomas were permeated by Christian thought and principles. It could not be otherwise for a mind that grappled with all the known problems of life, and that ever sought to lead back all things to their basic relations to God according to the teaching of Christ. Since the world was created by God, it was impossible for Thomas to consider the study of the world final and complete, unless it also took into account the world's relation to God.

This was true whether he happened to treat a matter from the standpoint of theology or from that of philosophy. Theological treatment was based on the word of God; the philosophical study of a subject aimed at whatever knowledge could be attained by human reason and experience. In regard to the former there was the certainty of divine Truthfulness. In regard to the latter there were different degrees of certainty. Less certain, among matters of philosophical knowledge, were certain questions of ethics; that is, the knowledge of right and wrong human conduct as gained by natural human reason.

Still, ethics gave us the best knowledge about human conduct that the mind could attain without the aid of revelation; and it had its proper application whenever any question of human ac-

tion was under discussion. For Thomas it was pure nonsense to discuss questions of proper political or economic conduct except in the light of the ethical principles of right and wrong.

In that regard, a vast change has taken place in the course of history. "All's fair in war and love," says an old slogan. To the strange bedfellows of war and love, a third must be added today. "All's fair in business" is at least a very widely accepted practical motto today.

There are several historical factors that brought about the vast change of attitude from the times of St. Thomas to our own day. I shall mention a few of them here in very brief form.

It is now acknowledged generally that Calvinism gave great impetus to the drive for economic success that has characterized the modern world of Europe and America. Since God had chosen His elect from all eternity, and predestined them for everlasting bliss, there was nothing left for these predestined souls to do about it. All they could do was to try to find out. Fortunately there was a way: success in amassing the goods of this world. The more they succeeded in the economic enterprises of this life, the more sure could they be that they were among the chosen ones of God for all eternity. What an incentive to a tireless pursuit of worldly goods, and what a joyous gospel for the fortunate of this world!

The modern theory of economics developed more definitely in the eighteenth century. It is closely linked up with the name of Adam Smith (1723-1790). Smith was a disciple of

Hutcheson, and both belong to the so-called moral sense school of ethical philosophers. These philosophers taught that ethical conduct was not something that could strictly be reasoned out; it was guided rather by a natural moral sense. Some spoke of a two-fold instinct in man, egoistic and altruistic. Proper conduct consists in a balancing up of the egoistic and the altruistic instincts; and the moral sense takes care of this balancing.

Now because of the double aspect of all human nature, all that is necessary, some taught, is for each one to look out for his own self. Thereby the best good of all will be automatically attained. That Smith held such ethical views is quite certain. And he set forth a very similar platform for the economic life. In order that the best economic good of all men be attained, he said, it is but necessary for each man to strive after his own best interests. The good of society will then take care of itself. So true is this, that the government should keep its hands entirely out of business and let well enough alone. Calvinism furnished a religious incentive for the endless pursuit of individual gain of material goods; now a defense of such activity was furnished in terms of natural morality.

In the nineteenth century, human life and society came to be viewed under the ascending star of materialistic evolution. The law of selfishness was applied to the life of men as it was to that of nations. The deism of the previous

century had still held to the notion of God. But it was a God far removed from the earth, who was little concerned with the actions or problems of men on earth. It took little effort to displace such remote religious ideas from the hearts of men. The "new knowledge" had easy work.

It taught us that all through the history of the world the natural law of struggle for existence and survival of the fittest had been dominant. There was no other law than that, just as there was no other religion than that of nature and its brute strength. The Christian laws of mercy and charity, of sympathy for the weak, were explained away as defenses set up by the weak against the strong in the inevitable struggle for life.

No wonder that in our own generation the practice of cut-throat competition, of business combinations for greater profit, of sweat-shop oppression and war-profiteering have reached their height. Why not, if there is no God, no higher law for man than man himself?

As a remedy against the pagan naturalism of today, both in economics and elsewhere, we often hear the proposal: Get back to the observance of Christian rules of conduct, and all will be well. That may be so, simple as it sounds. All fundamental truths are simple. Yet, can we be satisfied with this answer, when it implies offhand that there is nothing wrong with our economic structure as such, but only with the hearts of men?

The march of history has for centuries been progressively under the inspiration of a denial of the Church of Christ, then of Christ, and finally of God. The full and final development of our present economic structure is coincident with the full devlopment of this trend unto a pagan naturalism that is worse than the paganism of old since it is based on a rejection of the Christian dispensation. Can it be, that in the economic structure thus developed there are no elements that are basically un-Christian?

Before we can answer that question smugly in the negative, surely there should be some study of it in the light of Christian economic views. And the latter will best be studied as they existed in a time when men were still untouched by the de-Christianizing trend that was born so shortly after the days of St. Thomas.

2. Purpose of Material Goods and Riches

A fundamental principle in the social philosophy of St. Thomas is that of the general purpose of material goods in this world of ours. Why are the external or material goods in this world at all? Certainly not for themselves.

Ultimately, Aquinas would say, everything in this world is for the two-fold purpose of the glory of God and the sanctification of man. Leaving theological views and expressions aside, and limiting ourselves to the philosophical approach, we should express the purpose of material goods as follows: It is that of *serving unto the happiness of man.*

The term *man* in such instances always means the whole human race, all of mankind. There is no exception to this as far as the natural law goes. For in terms of the natural law all men are equal; all possess the same human nature. As persons endowed with understanding and free will all men, both in dignity and nature, rank high above the brute or irrational animals and the inanimate things of this world.

So much for the term *man* in this connection. Now for the term *happiness*. For St. Thomas human happiness did not at all exclude the right to a proper degree of worldly joy and pleasure. On the contrary, a proper degree of natural joy and satisfaction was a legitimate object of desire for the average man. Happiness without the latter was reserved for those souls, who out of higher love for God could practice even here on earth a heavenly detachment from that earth. The privation of happiness here below could not be imposed on the vast majority of men, least of all in the name of natural human reason.

Still, the happiness of man here below was something quite distinct from pleasure sought for its own sake. Real happiness for man can only be such as satisfies the entire man.

Now, the whole man is a very complex thing. There is the biological aspect of human nature, on the level of which man's functions are like those of the ordinary plant; *i.e.*, in regard to cell production, nourishment, and growth.

Then there is the level of sense-life, in which man functions like the other higher animals; *e.*

g., blood circulation, glandular activities, nerve reactions, all the activities of ordinary animal sense-perception and instincts.

Finally, there is the rational level of human nature, in which man exercises the functions of understanding and free will. They include purposive action, foresight, deliberation, thoughtful decision, etc. These are the highest activities of human nature, and are the best expression, the only full expression of the true nature of man.

Any happiness, to be genuine for man, must be happiness on this higher level. Only thus does it harmonize with and answer to the dignity of human personality. But this higher level of man's life necessarily includes the lower levels. For the three levels mentioned are not so many separate sections or divisions of human nature. The latter can indeed function on the biological level while there is unconsciousness on the sensory and rational levels. But the reverse is not true. Man exercises his higher functions only in and through the sensory activities; and the latter only in and through proper biological activity. Stop or impede any lower level of activity, and any higher level will cease functioning or functioning properly.

This brief analysis will help us to understand better what St. Thomas has in mind when he says that the purpose of material goods is to serve unto the happiness of mankind. And it is in this light that statements like the following are always meant by him: "Man has natural dominion over external goods, because by his

reason and will he can use external goods for his own benefit, as if they were made for him. For the less perfect things are always for the sake of the more perfect."

Man is not really using a thing for his own benefit, if the latter is not a benefit, either directly or indirectly, to the whole human personality. There is no real human benefit, in the mind of Aquinas, unless it accords with man's whole nature, physical, intellectual, and especially moral. In particular is the latter aspect of intellectual life always included in this, as it is in any full meaning of the term *happiness*.

In fact, regarding the moral question one can well say in this connection: Not only is it true that the moral perfection of man ordinarily includes benefit to the entire man, but also: Whatever is of benefit to the whole man, to the integral human personality, is just in so far forth also moral.

It is now time to get back to our original point at issue: The purpose of material goods is to serve the happiness of man. This means, as we have seen, *all mankind*. From the economic standpoint we have a Thomistic principle here that is absolutely fundamental.

"Community of goods," says St. Thomas, "is attributed to the natural law, not because the natural law demands that all goods be possessed in common, and that nothing be possessed as one's own; but because the natural law makes no distinction of possessions."

The natural law does not point out that this or that particular goods must be possessed by this or that man. As far as the goods as such are concerned, the natural law does not even say directly that the goods must be privately owned and may not be held in common.

What natural law does say as its most basic principle is, that the *material goods are for the benefit* of mankind; that is *of all men* to the exclusion of none. Whatever makes it impossible for some men to have this service of necessary material goods, offends fundamentally against the law of nature.

3. Private Ownership of Goods

IN speaking of the relation of man to the material goods of this world, St. Thomas makes several distinctions that must be kept in mind. To forget these, means not only to misunderstand the views of St. Thomas but also to fail to avoid the confusion that so easily follows from a hasty study or discussion of a complex question.

St. Thomas distinguished clearly between the general purpose of material goods that we discussed in the previous chapter, and the private ownership of goods by particular persons. The natural law tells us definitely, as we have seen, that the general purpose of material goods in this world is to subserve the happiness of all mankind without exception.

But, he says, the natural law as such does not determine which particular persons should own

certain goods, or which particular goods should be privately owned. The determination of that rests with man. In other words private ownership is a human institution, which is determined at least in its definite characteristics by human reason or by human convention. "Ownership of goods is not contrary to the natural law, but is superadded to natural law by determination of human reason."

This view, however, by no means implies that private ownership is not *in some way derived* from the natural law. If private ownership were an essential demand of the natural law, no one would be allowed to renounce such ownership and live a life, in union with others, of common ownership of all possessions. The conditions under which the latter is practiced are, however, the exception rather than the rule.

Under all ordinary conditions of life, the natural law does point out, at least indirectly, that there should be some distinction of ownership between different persons. This is due in part to the imperfection of human nature, rather than to any other reason. Were human nature ideal, one may argue properly, the natural law would not point to the need of private ownership. The latter is under existing conditions, a derivation, not an essential demand, of the natural law.

First of all, man as a person endowed with understanding and free will is capable of owning goods. He has the ability both to acquire and to dispose of goods. Hence there is no justi-

fication for denying the *right* of ownership of goods to any man. Secondly, there is under the average conditions of life and of human nature a need for private ownership of goods. Things being as they are, it is impossible for men to be happy unless the right of private ownership be allowed.

Several reasons are given by St. Thomas why private ownership is necessary for a happy human life.

The first of these is that only if private ownership be allowed will there be sufficient incentive for man to work properly. Man is by nature more solicitous for what he can regard as his own than for what is not his own in any way. Man will work harder and more steadily, if he can get something out of his labor that he can consider as his own. If the fruits of his work never belong to him, if his personal efforts do not entitle him to personal share in these fruits, his efforts will become half-hearted and listless. Again, only on the condition of private ownership, will there by any incentive for man to provide by his labor for his dear ones, both for the present and the future.

The second reason for private ownership is that there will be better order in life. Order there must be. It can exist only when there is a place for everything and everything is in its place. In reference to our question one might say that order can exist in life only when everything has its acknowledged owner, and every owner possesses what is his own. When a thing

does not rightfully belong to any single owner, when things belong to all, then St. Thomas, following Aristotle, visualizes a general disorderly scramble for things, and a resulting social chaos.

A third reason for the institution of private ownership is that thus alone will there be social peace. This reason is but another aspect of the previous one. There can be no social peace where there is confusion and disorder. Moreover, man is content only with what he can call his own. If he can call nothing really his own, he will be dissatisfied and restless. The acquisitive instinct in him, we should say today, demands an object to satisfy it; and it can be satisfied only by actual acquisition of things, *i.e.*, by possession of them as his own.

All three reasons given for the justification of private ownership of goods are rooted on last analysis in the imperfection of man. Individual possession of goods is indeed necessary for man, but only because man is not more perfect.

On the basis of the argument for private ownership advanced by St. Thomas, one may well conclude that, were human nature more perfect, there would be no need of distinction of possessions. A further conclusion from this might in turn be: If ever in the progress of human life and civilization, man arrives at a stage where he is no longer so subject to the weaknesses of his nature as he has been throughout all history—there will be no reason for maintaining the institution of private property.

There was a further distinction made by Thomas in regard to our present subject. We shall be content with a mere mention of it here.

In modern times the right to ownership is taken to imply the right to do with one's property as one pleases. The right to own goods, putting it in plain words, is equivalent to the right to use or misuse the goods at will. Private ownership is absolute.

This was not the mind of Thomas. For him there was a distinction between the right to own a thing and the right to its use; and the latter right was less absolute than the former.

4. Material Goods and Happiness

THE whole argument for right of ownership of material goods gets its basic value from the fact that material goods are indispensable to man. The latter cannot be happy without them, conditions on this earth being as they are. St. Thomas says this very explicitly.

"For imperfect happiness, such as can be attained in this life, external goods are necessary; not as being of the essence of happiness, but as serving as instruments towards this happiness, which consists in a virtuous life. . . . For in this life man needs the things required by the body both for the pursuit of contemplative virtue, and for that of active virtue."

St. Thomas in this quotation is speaking of the average man. Human happiness, to be true and lasting rather than fleeting and deceptive, is

obtainable only in a life of virtue—not only the contemplative virtue of souls who have chosen a special service of God, but as well the practical virtue that must characterize the life of every Christian. Just as truly as happiness is possible only for the virtuous man, so true is it that for the average person a virtuous life is not feasible without some material goods. The latter are needed as instruments in the pursuit of a happiness conducive to a virtuous life.

If a man is to pursue a life of happiness, he must be free to consider the nature and the means of such a life, and to devote both effort and attention to its attainment. Now if a man has no external goods, or no ordinary reliable means of attaining the necessary external goods, he must needs be wholly preoccupied with the problem of attaining the latter. He must be entirely concerned about and engaged in the pursuit of such goods, however discouraging his efforts may prove to be. The more unsuccessful he is in this, the more must the pursuit of necessary material goods become a constant object in his life. Thus, what should actually be a ready-to-hand means for a better life, in reality turns out to be an elusive object of futile but all-absorbing effort.

The instrumental function of external goods, their place in life as a means to a further end, happiness, contains other implications. Since the function of material goods is merely instrumental, the amount of material goods to be owned by anyone need not be excessively large at all.

Only so much of it, and no more, is necessary as will function properly as a means to the good life, *i.e.*, to happiness. Any other view is as unintelligible and nonsensical as it would be to defend the necessity of sledge-hammers for the cracking open of almonds or even peanuts.

Man is indeed not happy without the external goods necessary to life. This is a fundamental principle for Aquinas. But man does not need a great abundance of them. Proper judgement, both in the realm of ideas and of practical life, as well as external virtuous action, he says almost naively, are possible without an abundance of riches or material goods. In fact, a superabundance of the latter makes man less sufficient unto himself, insofar as he needs the help of others in guarding and administering his superabundant riches.

It would be an idle speculation to try to guess which of two extremes in regard to material goods Aquinas considered the more reprehensible, extreme riches or extreme poverty; or which condition he would have considered the more immoral.

"Superabundance of riches and beggarly indigence must, it seems, be avoided by those who wish to live a life of virtue, insofar as both are occasions of sin. For an abundance of riches is the occasion of haughtiness, while indigence gives the occasion for theft, and lying, even perjury. . . . Still not all poverty is an occasion for theft and perjury . . . but only that which

is involuntary, for the escaping of which man steals and perjures himself. Voluntary poverty is free from this danger, and such poverty Christ himself chose."

For anyone, therefore, who has not chosen voluntary poverty for the sake of Christ, some concern with material goods is necessary; but it should always be in a proper measure that accords with the status of riches as a means and not as an end in themselves.

"External goods have the status of utility for an end, as was said; whence the good of man must consist in a certain measured use of them. That occurs when, for example, man seeks to have external goods according to a certain measure, insofar as they are necessary for living in accordance with his status. Sin consists in an excess beyond measure; *i.e.*, when someone wishes to acquire or retain them in excess of the proper measure—which is of the nature of avarice, defined as the immoderate love of possessing."

What St. Thomas would say today of the accepted aim in life of "getting rich," in the sense in which that is ordinarily meant, needs no elaboration. Nor need we emphasize the vast difference, the antithesis, between his views and a civilization that is dominated by the economic attitudes of our own day.

Thomas could as little subscribe to the view that acquiring riches is the purpose of social life, as that men live together for the sake of the biological function of living.

"For if men congregated for the sole purpose of living, then animals and slaves would be a part of the civil community. But if it were for the sake of acquiring riches, then those doing business together would thereby constitute a single state; in matter of fact, we do see those alone reckoned as forming a civic group who are directed toward the good life by the same laws and the same authority."

Aiming at the acquiring of riches is not aiming at the "good life" that alone brings happiness to man. St. Thomas never seems to tire of stressing the subservient rôle of material goods in human life, however indispensable that rôle is.

"For the good life of any man two things are needed: One, primary, is that of virtuous conduct (for virtue is the means of good life); the other, secondary and as it were instrumental, is a sufficiency of corporeal goods, such as is necessary for a virtuous life."

5. Misuse of Riches

WHEN speaking of "riches" St. Thomas distinguishes two kinds, natural and artificial. Natural riches are such as serve in themselves to satisfy the needs of man, for example, food, clothing, and shelter. Riches are artificial if they do not administer as such to man's natural needs; "but if human art has invented them for the sake of facility in trade, so that they may be a measure of saleable things." The chief type of artificial riches is money.

"Now it is manifest," says St. Thomas, and this has been discussed in previous articles, "that the happiness of man cannot consist in natural riches; these are sought for the sustenance of man's nature, whence they cannot be his ultimate end."

Much less can money be the ultimate end or goal of human life. "The artificial riches are sought only for the sake of the natural. They are sought only because with them can the things be bought that are necessary in life; whence still less are they man's ultimate end. It is therefore impossible to find happiness, which is man's end, in riches," whether they be natural or artificial.

With this we come to a source of great tragedy in many human lives. Though men can not find true happiness in earthly riches, many may yet look upon riches as their ultimate end or goal in life, and thus strive inordinately after what is in the very nature of things incapable of giving final satisfaction.

The satisfaction of natural needs of man by means of natural riches is not infinite, says St. Thomas, "for nature is satisfied with a certain measure." Man cannot eat indefinitely, there is a definite limit to his hunger and to his capacity for food. Again, he cannot wear more and more clothes without end; there is a definite limit set to possibilities by his nature.

Moreover, the ordinary satisfaction of natural appetites by the temporal goods adapted to such appetites is limited for the very reason that the

excessive attempts at satisfaction defeat themselves. The more a man has set his heart on the acquisition of certain temporal goods and pleasures, the more is he disappointed in their attainment.

"For when they are attained, they are despised, and others are sought, and that because their insufficiency is noticed the more they are attained."

It is otherwise with the inordinate desire for money; "the appetite for artificial riches may be infinite, since it serves inordinate concupiscence, which is not moderated." Hence we have the situation of the miser, who seeks his ultimate end in the possession of money. The purpose of money is that of an instrument for acquiring the means of a good life. The miser "seeks money only in order to possess it"—a double perversion of the right order of things.

All inordinate love of riches, as we have seen, is a perversion of the natural status of things, and therefore it naturally leads to results contrary to the good of man, and fosters evil.

"An abundant possession of riches leads to more abundant solicitude, by which man is very much distracted, and hindered from fully serving God. Two other things follow only upon abundance of riches; namely, a love of riches, and elation over or glorying in riches,"—all of which help to turn a means into an end, and to divert man's efforts from his true end, the better perfection of his moral personality.

The inordinate solicitude a man shows for his own riches, "springs from the personal love wherewith he loves himself in a temporal or worldly way." This is always an inordinate love of self; and with that we are at the root of all real evil; for "it is evident that inordinate love of self is the cause of all sin."

The truth of this statement is immediately seen from the actions to which this inordinate love of self and of riches leads. Persons possessed of this vice "superabound in the acceptance (of money), not caring what they accept, or whence they accept or make profit. Some of them make gain by vile and servile actions; some by immoral and forbidden actions. . . . Some make gain by dishonest exactions, like usurers. . . . All of the aforesaid receive where they should not."

It is thus that inordinate love of money leads men to receive money where they should not, or receive more than they should.

In one respect the avaricious man and the man who spends his riches recklessly are alike. Both sin against themselves; the one by stinting himself too much, and the other by using up what he should be saving. Again, St. Thomas goes on, both sin against their neighbors; the one by failing to give to his neighbors in charity, and the other by using up on himself what he should use in providing for others.

Avarice is indeed more than just a sin against those who are dependent upon one. The goods of the earth are for the support and comfort

of all men. Whence the avaricious man, in accepting and storing up more than is proper, sins directly against all those who are in want.

"For in external riches one man cannot have in superabundance without another's suffering want; since temporal goods cannot at the same time be possessed by many."

The above views of Aquinas need no special comment. The conditions prevalent in the world today emphasize their wisdom, yet they could not be enunciated more clearly than was done long ago by Thomas.

6. Proper Use of Riches

CONFUSION of ideas occurs when we neglect to distinguish between things that are really quite distinct. St. Thomas always sought for clearness, and never failed to make the distinctions that were necessary for the avoidance of confusion.

He often emphasized the fact that material goods are necessary for man. In regard to this necessity he made a clear distinction. "With regard to external goods," he says, "we can call something necessary from two standpoints. First, that without which it is impossible for anyone to live. Secondly, something is said to be necessary for us, if we need it for an honest living, or for living decently according to our state."

In this division into two grades or degrees of material goods that are necessary to man, we

see the implied acknowledgment, that all men have a right not only to the material goods, needed to support life, but also to whatever external goods they need to live decently and properly according to their state of life.

Here again we are in touch with a basic ethical economic principle of Aquinas. The value and force of the principle is not minimized by the evident difficulty of determining just how much material goods is needed to satisfy the second type of necessity.

St. Thomas himself says that the latter goods could ordinarily be increased somewhat without exceeding the amount needed for one's state in life; or, on the other hand, some could be taken away without making a decent living impossible. He does point out, however, that also "so much can be added as to exceed the requirements of decent living, and so much taken away as to have a remainder insufficient for the decent preservation of our condition." In regard to this no hard and fast rule can be established. "The judgment of prudence must here be applied, which guides us in all things"; that is, the judgment of prudent men.

In regard to these two grades of riches or earthly goods, a further distinction may be made. The necessity of each grade of riches may be taken: "First, in relation to ourselves alone—that which is necessary for an individual; secondly, with regard to those of whom one has charge, and then we speak of that which is

necessary to a person insofar as he has care of others."

Summarizing the above, we may speak, as Thomas does in his practical applications, of three grades of material possessions: (1) That which is necessary for the bare support of life for oneself and one's dependents, sometimes called absolute necessity. (2) That which is necessary for the decent living of oneself and one's dependents, sometimes called conditioned necessity. (3) That which is over and above, which is superfluous in regard to any real need—wealth that is luxury. These three grades are all important in regard to the practical rules of life Thomas bases on them.

The practical rules regarding the proper use of riches are thus tersely put down: "Since the use of riches must be directed towards the subvention of the necessities of the present life, which subvention must be properly ordered, it is evident that anyone not using riches for supplying the needs of present life, or using them inordinately, departs from the path of virtue. In this, however, two things must be kept in mind. First that the owner first of all supply himself, then those dependent on him, and then others. Secondly, as to the necessity, the following order holds: the absolute necessity of anyone takes precedence over any conditioned necessity which occurs when anyone needs something for the decent preservation of his state in life."

From this statement one can see both what use a man *may* make of his riches, and what use he *must* make. We shall develop this in the form of a series of practical rules expressed in the words of St. Thomas himself.

1) "That without which an individual himself, or those for whom he must provide, cannot live, need not be given away as alms."

2) "That which cannot be subtracted without taking away the decency of one's state in some manner, or of the state of one's dependents, need not be given in alms . . . unless some other necessity outweighs the above, that of some special person in extremest need, or of the Church, or of the State, for the good of the race is above that of the individual."

3 "That which can be added or taken away without diminishing the decency of one's state can be given in alms, though there is no special precept, but only a counsel in regard to it."

4) "Giving something that is not needed for the first grade of necessity but is needed for the second, and thereby relieving someone's greater necessity, even if the latter be not absolute, is doing good, but is not obligatory by precept."

5) "Whatever exceeds the demands of decent living according to one's state, must be given in alms—and this is strictly a precept."

6) "The law obliges that a person first minister to the absolute necessity of strangers (oth-

ers) before ministering to the conditioned necessity of himself or his dependents."

7) "When someone is in extreme necessity, all goods for him become common, so that, even if he obtains goods by violence or theft, he does not sin."

8) Finally there is the strict precept of giving "when a person has many things which he does not need either for the support of his life or for that of his dependents, nor for the decent preservation of his life—and that even if the poor in question are not in extreme necessity."

To the writer the above rules and ideas are too portentous and at the same time too clear-cut to need any comment. The latter would only take away from their forceful precision and their telling denunciation of our thoroughly un-Christian civilization.

What further could St. Thomas himself say, were he with us today, and witnessed on the one hand the vast multitudes of those who are through no fault of their own deprived of the bare necessaries of life, and on the other hand the immoral unconcern of those who in the face of such conditions cling tenaciously to goods that are superfluous, not needed either for the subvention of their life or for the preservation of a decent status on earth.

Let the curtain fall in silence and hide the scene.

7. The Economic Life

FROM the manner in which St. Thomas stresses the fundamental principle that the goods of this world are to serve the needs of all men, the distinction he made between this general purpose of goods and the private ownership of goods is seen to have its obvious importance.

Private ownership does not mechanically, as it were, fulfil the general function of material goods. On the contrary, any particular case of private ownership must still justify itself before the tribunal of the moral law by the degree in which it fulfils the primary purpose of material goods. So fundamental is the latter principle, that in extreme cases of necessity private ownership of goods ceases.

The same attitude underlies the other distinction referred to at the end of Article Three. This is the distinction that Thomas makes between the ownership of goods, and the use made of his goods by the owner. From the moral standpoint St. Thomas considers the function of ownership and that of use as two quite distinct things, that are by no means interchangeable.

The owner may only in part determine at will the use to which his goods may be put; in part this is to be determined by the common function of material goods.

How St. Thomas meant this is clear from the excerpts and practical rules given in the pre-

ceding chapter. What is not so clear at first sight is perhaps best asked in the form of a question: "Why does Thomas permit the possession of superfluous goods, if the owners may not use them on themselves, but are morally obliged to use them to relieve the needs of others?"

The answer to this question must be found in the fact that proprietorship may be exercised till the needs of others become obvious in specific cases.

When Thomas speaks of economic life and its activities, he at once compares it with other alternative professions. It is a constant characteristic of his to go to the very bottom of things.

Judging from the standpoint of supernatural merit, Thomas always accorded the primacy to the contemplative life over the active; the former is the more perfect fulfillment of the Gospel counsel of perfection. Yet, further considerations enter into the adjudgment of any single instance.

"It may happen that one gains greater merit in the active life than in the contemplative, and vice versa, according as one has greater charity." It is not true, as some have tried to say, that St. Thomas despised and condemned the active life in general, and the economic life in particular.

Man's holiness, he asserts, is not at all incompatible with a reasonable pursuit of the cares of the body and of the earth; in fact, even in a

life of voluntary poverty, it would be unnatural to withhold the necessities of ordinary life.

Were Thomas of the opinion that economic activity as such is immoral, he would have made short work of it. As it is, he is at pains to outline the various activities of the economic life of his time, and to call the attention of rulers to the importance of being concerned about them:

"There are several ways of acquiring wealth, chief among which, as far as a community is concerned, are its natural riches, fertility of ground, and then trade with other countries." To the natural resources also belongs mining. To trade or exchange in the wider sense belong all negotiations by which goods and money are transferred from person to person. Among these are commerce in the stricter sense, including navigation and land transport, and the investing of money with a merchant; then also usury or interest, and wages or work for hire.

Far from condemning commerce, St. Thomas shows a prudent appreciation of what is necessary for its success. It is necessary "that he who wishes to make gain therefrom know well which things are dearest and in which places, because these abound differently in different regions, so that he buy in a place where they abound and sell in a place where they are dear."

8. Commerce for Needs

THE true purpose of commerce or exchange of goods is not gain as such. St. Thomas always views a particular object or action in the light of its wider setting.

"It seems that buying and selling were introduced for the common advantage of both parties; namely, when one needs what another has, and vice versa." In the same way business in a state takes place for the exchange of things necessary for a good life. "Hence exchange is to be sought in a state to the extent that it supply the necessaries of life for it, and no farther; just as the means toward an end are sought in so far as they are proper to that end."

The proper kind of trade, therefore, is that which exchanges one thing for another, or for money, *in order that the necessities of life may be had.* But St. Thomas, even in his time, knew of another kind of business, "which exchanges things or money for other money for the sake of gain" as such. And his strictures of that kind of business have a distinctively modern ring to them.

"Business considered without qualification has something shameful about it, insofar as of itself it does not imply a good or necessary end."

"For by the practise of business, cupidity is fostered in the hearts of the citizens, and from this it comes that all things in the state are for sale; and faith being abandoned, the way is open

for all sorts of deceit; the public good being despised, each one will serve his own private advantage; the striving for virtue will cease, while the honor of virtue will be pushed aside by all. Whence the civil intercourse in such a state will necessarily be corrupt."

Yet, it is not the mere acceptance of gain, or the conducting of business with the intention of accepting some gain, that is immoral. All-important is the question of what lies behind the whole thing. To seek gain for gain's sake sets no limits to one's avarice; seeking gain with a proper end in view always implies proper limits and is not immoral.

"Nothing forbids one to strive for gain for some necessary end or for an honest one. Thus business transactions are rendered lawful; as when someone, seeking a moderate gain through business negotiations, uses it for the support of his household, or else for supporting the needy; or again when someone engages in business pursuits for public utility, so that the country be not lacking in what it needs; thus seeking some gain, not as an end in itself, but as a wage for his labor."

Again, in the above quotation, it is strikingly evident, how the principle of "material goods for human needs" is the fundamental guide for Thomas in his judgments on all aspects of economic life. Hence it will not cause surprise to hear that Aquinas condemns as immoral all monopolies that are constituted for the purpose

of greater gain by cornering a market; or that he says expressly: the exchange value of a thing is not to be reckoned by the utmost price a person can extort from a buyer, nor even by its intrinsic value, but by the needs of men.

St. Thomas develops the latter point in a manner that might almost seem naive to some, yet the reasoning is cogent.

"All things can be measured according to one norm, as was said. And this norm which measures all things is need, which embraces all exchangeable goods insofar as all are referred to human needs. For they are not appraised according to the dignity of their natures, else a mouse, which is a living sentient animal, would be more precious than a pearl, which is a lifeless thing. But a price is put on things according as men have need of them for their use. And the evidence of this is found in the fact that if men needed nothing, exchange would cease."

Since human needs are the guiding factor in economic life, it follows that the latter must be organized and directed with a view to the needs of man. In the mind of St. Thomas, this always means the needs of a natural group or community of men, and not that of an individual. As soon as one looks only to the good of oneself, he says, the true inspiration for economic action is no longer human need but inordinate self-love.

St. Thomas follows Aristotle on this point and is in perfect agreement with him. The lat-

ter mentions the fact that there are men who from inordinate self-love pursue only that which is good for their own selves, whence arises the theory that those alone are prudent who look to their own profit.

Aristotle mentions the theory only to reject the error. And St. Thomas, in pointing this out, agrees with him on the reason why the theory is false. Every individual is also a member of social groups; and the good of the individual is dependent on the good of the social groups to which he belongs; the two stand or fall together.

"The individual good of each single person is unattainable without economy, that is, without a right regulation of family affairs; nor is it attainable without urbanity, that is, without a right regulation of the state, even as the good of a part cannot exist without the good of the whole."

This leads over directly to the question of the relation of the economic life to the state.

9. The State and Economics

ST. THOMAS frequently stressed the fact that the good of individual man is unattainable apart from the good of the social groups of which he is necessarily a member. For Aquinas it would have been impossible to countenance anything like the personal selfishness that has characterized our civilization and its basic social forms.

The good of man, therefore, demands communication or social bonds between human in-

dividuals; it rests on considerations that go beyond the individual as such. Aquinas mentioned a four-fold social relationship between men: 1) That of *family*—"There is a natural intercourse between men, according as they share a common natural origin; and in this is based the friendship between father and son, and other relatives by blood." 2) *Economic society*—"Another type of intercourse is economic, according to which men communicate in domestic (economic, household) services." 3) The *state*—"Another is political, according to which men communicate with their fellowmen living about." 4) The *Church*—"A fourth is divine, according to which men share in the one ecclesiastical body, either actually or potentially, and this is the friendship of love, which is exercised towards all, even enemies."

The chief aim of economic life, in the mind of St. Thomas, could only be the welfare of the family. Basic to his views is the principle that the economic life is by nature ordained to the social welfare of men living in society of the family rather than to the personal gain of isolated individuals. This principle, in turn, is closely linked up with that of the general purpose of all material goods as subserving the needs of all men.

In the light of the close interrelation between economic and political life, it is not surprising to find Thomas giving the different divisions of the body politic in terms of occupations. In this

Thomas in part follows Aristotle, whose views he at times explains without criticism even when he does not agree with "the Philosopher"; and in part he echoes the condition of society at his time, which was made up of rather fixed social strata.

In the state, says Aquinas, quoting Aristotle, there are food providers, like the farmers, who are on the lowest scale; and those who hire out for work. Then there are the merchants who engage in buying and selling, commerce and the handling of money. Above these in rank are the warriors and judges, counsellors, the wealthy, and the rulers. The wealthy are mentioned here because the state must be self-sufficient—an interesting sidelight on the function of wealth in the body politic! "It is necessary that there be riches in the state, else the latter could not exist. Hence the opulent are necessary in a state, who have such riches."

Sometimes Thomas follows Aristotle in speaking of the state, not as the totality of those living in it, but as the political organism insofar as it is the mechanism for actively promoting social peace and welfare. It is in this sense that we must understand the assertion, for instance, that farmers and workers are not a real part of the state, but are necessary for the state. Such statements must always be understood in terms of their background.

This is also true of the position of warriors in the state, or of assertions that certain things

are necessary "for war expeditions." Such assertions are given their true meaning only when one remembers that for Thomas war is never justified in itself and can be waged only for the preservation of peace and tranquility in the state —and is in itself never a "good" at all.

Commerce, as we have seen above, is always fraught with the possibilities of moral evil, avarice, and the like. Wherefore St. Thomas says that the ruler of the state and his officials should not be obliged to enter into commercial transactions with their fellow-citizens.

They should not be obliged to enter into business transactions! What satire is not contained in this innocent statement for our own day, when the intimate connection of public state officials with all forms of graft and corrupt business deals is a matter of great scandal.

The possibilities of moral evil latent in business seem to have been constantly in the mind of Thomas. One gets the impression often that he should have liked to exclude at least foreign merchants from a state, if possible; and that he allows them to enter only by way of a concession arising out of the necessities of the case.

It is impossible, he says, "to exclude merchants entirely from a state, since it is not easy to find a place so abounding in all the necessaries of life as to need nothing gotten from elsewhere. Then, too, the oversupply of things in one place would result in harmful overabundance, if they could not be transferred elsewhere

by merchants. Hence a perfect state should make moderate use of merchants."

10. Laissez-Faire

St. Thomas never for a moment doubted the need and the right of state surveillance over commerce and trade. This he acknowledged on principle, insofar as the object of commerce was really the same as that of a state—social good of the community. His words often have a strikingly modern ring. Witness, *e.g.*, his views on city congestion in relation to our present-day suburban movement.

Because the frequent gathering of people, especially for trade and barter, gives occasion for quarrels and sedition, Thomas follows Aristotle in speaking up for the greater advantage of having merchants reside outside the cities rather than within the walls of the latter.

"Now, if a state is given over to commerce, it is very necessary that the citizens reside in the city to exercise their profession there. Hence it is better that a state derive its victuals from its own fields, than that a state be given over completely to commerce."

But just as a ruler of a state cannot produce men or territories out of the air, so he cannot produce the necessaries for support of life by sheer will. He must use things as nature supplies them. Hence it is a first care of the ruler to see that there be in the state an abundance of

natural riches, such as are necessary for the peace and comfort of the citizens. (Note: Natural riches, for Thomas, are such things as food, clothing, shelter, and the like.)

This means, for Thomas, that the ruler is bound to take an active hand in the regulation of economic life. For the attainment of purposes of the state, that is, the promotion of the good and virtuous life among all citizens, a certain share of economic goods is not only generally necessary but entirely indispensable.

Let us recall the succinct way in which Thomas states this; for it is the expression of a basic Thomistic principle.

"For the good of a man two things are necessary: one, which is primary, is the exercise of virtue (for virtue is that by which men live well); another, which is necessary and as it were instrumental is a sufficiency of corporal goods, the use of which is needed for virtuous conduct."

The latter is the ultimate purpose of human society; and therein lies the supreme duty of the ruler.

The true good of the citizens is not something that can really be attained by a momentary sufficiency of the necessaries of life. It is something more than that; and the duty of the ruler is to provide the security essential to permit each citizen to work out his destiny.

Men are mortal, and cannot live forever. Nor are they always of the same strength, but subject to many vicissitudes of life. Hence they must be able to look ahead, and provide for the future. The institutions of economic life must therefore look to more than any mere momentary relief of needs; but must be so organized as to enable men to provide themselves against sickness, old age, and the like.

In fact, the state has the duty of promoting the good of its citizens in all possible ways. The ruler must be universally solicitous for the welfare of the citizens; and must set to work, wherever any deficiences exist in the social or economic life of the state. "If there is anything inordinate in the conditions of this life, it must be corrected; if anything is wanting it must be supplied; if anything could be done better, the ruler must strive to bring it about."

Finally the state must also take a hand in economic activities from the standpoint of safeguarding justice and equality of rights among its citizens. To this end the judicial power of the state must be exercised with great vigilance.

"Two things pertain to the judge: one is that he establish equality among others, and this is done by positive law; another is that he punish those promoting inequality."

This brings us to the question of justice, which must regulate the relations of man to man, of subjects to civil authority. It is as fundamental a matter in the economic life as it is in that of the state.

11. Justice

THE question of justice arises only in connection with the actions of men in relation to other men. There is no question of justice unless there is question of actions between men, either actions already performed or about to be performed.

"Justice is the giving to each one what is his own." Hence the question of justice as such is preceded by that of right; that is, of a moral claim to call a thing one's own. Unless men have such moral rights, there is no basis for speaking of justice between them. "The act of justice is preceded by another by which a thing is made one's own, as is evident in human life. For by working a man merits what another gives him, and that, as a matter of justice."

Justice has to do with persons, in the sense that only human persons are the strict possessors of rights here on earth, or of a rightful claim on things. It is the same action of a man, by which he acquires a claim to some thing as his own, that also gives rise to a question of justice. By the very definition of justice (as given above), a rightful claim to a thing as one's own is a claim in justice, and gives rise to the question of justice.

Justice therefore also has to do very much with things, and it is measured in terms of the things to which one has claim. Hence these things are also called the remote matter of jus-

tice; whereas the actions regarding those things are called the proximate matter.

"The proper matter of justice consists in the external actions of men in their relation to one another; the external things, such as money and the like, are matters of justice insofar as they are used by men; and therefore they are the remote matter."

Ordinarily the persons in question do not as such come into consideration in estimating a case of justice. As long as justice arises out of claims that are fundamental rights of all men, the character or individuality of the persons in question should be ignored; in such matters the rights of all men are equal, regardless of personal differences. In that sense justice makes no distinction of persons.

But when different rights arise by virtue of different circumstances and conditions surrounding certain persons by reason of official positions in the community or in a society, then a distinction of persons in their representative capacity does not enter into the question of justice. Such official conditions and circumstances do make an objective, not an imaginary, difference. "For striking a person in authority is deserving of greater punishment, since it is a greater offense"—not against the person *per se* but on account of his official character.

All justice centers about the notion of equality. The latter is two-fold, and so gives rise to two distinct types of justice. It is very im-

portant to distinguish properly between these, and to keep them well apart in deciding any cases of justice.

First, equality may be absolute. This is the equality between two things that stand on the same footing, one in relation to the other. This equality exists where two things or persons are viewed from an angle that gives neither of the two any prominence or superiority over the other.

As soon as judgment between two things is concerned with the relative values of two things in reference to something higher or lower, and the relative values are different for each of the two things, the equality between them is no longer of the first kind, or absolute. It is then proportional, or relative.

An example given by Thomas to illustrate this second kind of equality is that of the fingers of the human hand. In one sense the fingers of the hand may all be said to be equal as fingers. Yet they have not only different positions on the hand, but are also of different sizes and abilities, and they have different functions to perform in relation to the hand or the whole person. Moreover, one finger under the circumstances could not at all perform the functions done so well by another. Hence the equality that undoubtedly exists between the fingers belongs to the second and not to the first type of equality. "The fingers are not absolutely equal, but are proportionately or relatively so, since in

quantity each finger suffices for performing its duty."

According to these two types of equality there are also two chief kinds of justice between men.

One of these has to do with the relations of two persons when they meet, so to say, as man to man. This kind of justice "consists in mutual giving and receiving, as in buying and selling, and in other exchanges of this kind; and this the Philosopher calls commutative justice. . . . The other consists in distributing, and is called distributive justice. According to it the governor or dispenser of goods gives to each one according to his dignity" or relative merit.

In commutative justice there is equality between the giver and the receiver, the latter getting what is due him by reason of what he has previously given the former. Now, since anyone should receive from another exactly as much as he has in turn given, this type of justice strictly follows arithmetical proportion. As far as humanly possible, it should attain absolute equality of justice between the two persons.

In distributive justice different quantities are distributed to different persons in accordance with each one's desert. In this there is no requirement for strict quantitative equality, but merely equality of proportion of shares. The basis of distributive justice is "geometrical proportion, in which the same proportion is preserved, but not the same quantity."

This lies in the very nature of human life. Persons are equal fundamentally as men or per-

sons, but they often differ greatly as to personal abilities, spirit, or services rendered. Where several contribute to a common enterprise, their contributions will differ because of these differences, and again because in any cooperative work the several men must needs perform different functions. Each one is strictly entitled to his own share of the common result; that is, each one according to his contribution. Since the contributions differ, the rights of all can be satisfied only by distributive justice.

12. Buying and Selling

THE question of justice has one of its most frequent applications in the universal practice of buying and selling. This is an action in which the two parties objectively stand on an equal footing; it is a matter of absolute equality between them, as far as such equality is ascertainable.

At all events, the general conditions of a just or an unjust transaction can be laid down very definitely in theory, even if in practice it may be hard to determine the exact status of a particular instance.

There is injustice in the mutual action of buying and selling whenever a thing is not bought or sold for its right price. "That is, either if the price exceeds the quantitative value of the thing, or if on the other hand the thing exceeds the price—hence to sell dearer or to buy cheaper than the thing is worth, is itself an injustice."

Here we again have an opinion that seems extremely naive to the man of today. We are so accustomed to paying as little as possible for the things we purchase, to buy them at the lowest price possible, nay, to rejoice whenever we think we had to pay less for a thing than it is worth—that we forget altogether to inquire about the morality of the action. This in undoubtedly greatly due to the fact that there is no bartering today, but only sale on the basis of take-it-or-leave-it fixed prices. Then the practice in our day of monopoly prices or of concerted raising of prices gives the advantage so greatly to the seller that people in general feel they usually overpay for goods rather than not.

St. Thomas drew the full consequences of his view. Underpaying for goods bought, or receiving overpay for goods sold is a violation of justice. In either case there is an unjust loss inflicted by one party on the other, and every case of such injustice calls for restitution. "He who receives more" than his just due in the transaction, "must recompense him who has suffered the loss, if there be a notable loss."

St. Thomas well recognizes the difficulty or impossibility of determining a just price exactly. Hence "it must be judged by a type of estimation in which a small addition or diminution does not take away the quality of justice." According to his general practical rule, the individual must guide himself in such instances by the judgment of prudent men.

But how then must the latter go about the matter of determining a just price? What are the general factors that enter into such a judgment? Thomas mentions several, which have been considered such from time immemorial. And they still hold today, even if they do not give us a definite, quantitative handrule for the measurement of prices.

The value that goods have for men is generally something more than, or other than, a mere quantitative value objectively determined as far as possible. For instance, one man may be in possession of a thing that he needs, whereas another man may desire it still more than the owner. For the latter to sell it under the circumstances, is to undergo a loss by depriving himself of a thing of which he has need.

"In such a case the just price will look not only to the objective value of the thing, but to the loss sustained by the seller in selling it. Thus it may be lawful to sell a thing dearer than it is worth in itself, although it may not be sold for more than it is worth to the one who owns it."

As soon as the circumstances are altered, the case is also different. "If the buyer is greatly helped by the thing he receives, but if he who sells it suffers no deprivation by getting rid of it, the seller may not charge more. For the usefulness that accrues to the buyer does not come from the seller but from the condition (need or desire) of the buyer, and no one should sell to another what is not his own, although he may

charge up to the other any loss he himself suffers."

In simple but forceful words Thomas here analyzes one of the commonest injustices in business. As soon as a price is added to, merely because a buyer has need of a certain thing, then the seller is charging extra for something that is not his own, something to which he has no claim. Such an additional price is unjust!

It is therefore not the intrinsic value of things as such that decides their price, but the use-value. "The chief consideration is the utility of the thing for man. Hence it is not necessary for the seller or buyer to know the hidden qualities of the thing, but only those by which the thing acquires its usefulness. *E.g.*, whether a horse is strong, and runs well, and the like."

Prices, moreover, depend on the abundance of the goods to be sold; hence they will be different in different localities for the same kind of goods. Who is to determine this matter? Those most interested in the financial transactions?

"In every place it is up to the directors of the state to determine what are the just prices of things, both the condition of the place and that of the goods being taken into consideration. Hence it is not lawful to step beyond the prices thus installed by public authority or by custom."

Prices may therefore not be artificially raised for the sake of gain. For every selling of a thing

dearer than it was bought, some good reason must obtain.

"If one buys a thing, not for the sake of reselling it, but to keep it, and later sells it for some reason or other, it is not a (disreputable) business transaction even if he sell it dearer. He can lawfully do this, either because he improved the thing in some way, or because the price of the thing is different by reason of a different locality, or of time, or of risk assumed by carrying the thing from place to place, or shipping it. And in all these cases, neither buying nor the selling is unjust."

The whole theory of Thomas, as of Aristotle, on this matter has been summed up as follows: "In the determination of value the following factors are distinguished: Need, Utility, Work, Expense, Rareness. The basic concept among these is need. To have economic value means to be able to satisfy social needs."

13. Distributive Justice

THE economic theorists of the Middle Ages, says Brant, an authoritative student of the subject, did not work out a definite theory of the distribution of goods. The spirit of the times, however, did not look with favor upon situations such as are so familiar to us; that is, "situations of opulency that could not be related to public and social service." The medieval spirit of the time of St. Thomas was distinctly "hostile to an indolent and delicate life; it preached the duty of work, the proper use of

goods; it is desirous of seeing the common good attained; but a theory of the better distribution of goods is nowhere unfolded from the economic point of view."

Distributive justice, as we have seen, treats different persons differently, but always with good reason. Hence there is in it no "acceptation of persons," such as St. Thomas declared to run counter to true justice.

Acceptation of persons, he says, takes place when persons receive privileged treatment out of relation altogether to the conditions of service that might give them special dignity. Some persons are then given special benefits for the mere reason that they were able to have themselves considered as so privileged, and without having given the added service, either in quantity or kind, that would justify such privileged treatment.

In such treatment, Aquinas says simply, there is real inequality "insofar as we give something to a person out of all proportion (to his deserts), in which proportion the equality of justice consists." Thomas would have made short shrift of some of the absurd salaries that have been paid to "accepted persons" in the economic life of our own day.

It is in distributive justice that a distinction of persons is in place. In all human society, made up of many different members and supported and sustained only by the different services contributed by the different members, true

justice must take these differences into account. There is no sense in speaking of an absolute equality between men in this regard, since the real situation is that of differences in both abilities and importance of functions and of contributions. Here true justice and equality can only be observed, if the proportionate relation of all the contributions to the whole social undertaking is kept in mind. True justice, which is distributive in the nature of the case, must needs rest on a proper distinction of persons.

The recompense of the wage earner is today often treated only from the standpoint of distributive justice. St. Thomas knew nothing of the relation of wage-earners to the gigantic industrial enterprise of our day, in regard to which the question of distributive justice is all-important.

Nor was he seemingly acquainted with a labor contract theory, according to which it is held just to give to the laborer any recompense he can be made willing to work for.

The paying of a laborer for the work he has done is distinctly a case of commutative justice for Aquinas. Employer and employee are both obliged to observe equality of exchange insofar as that can be humanly determined. Anything else is unjust.

"When one man works in the vineyard of another, the latter is made debtor to the former in accordance with the value of the former's labor. . . . That is called just in our work, which answers to the equality with another."

And that equality is satisfied only when "the recompense of a salary" truly measures up to the "services rendered."

St. Thomas knew little of the application of distributive justice within the field of economic life as such. The most recurrent application for him was in the relation of the ruler to his subjects. Had the complex type of economic enterprise of our own day existed at his time, he would have found few instances where it does not have its direct application.

Yet even in his time, there were forms of economic activity in which the principle of just distribution was necessarily called into play. In such instances there was never a wavering, but always a clearcut application of the principles of distributive justice. Thus "in mercantile enterprises undertaken by a common fund those who gave more receive more."

It is such an application of the principle that Aquinas would undoubtedly have made to every type of complex collective enterprise of our own day. To each one according to his contribution to the entire project, no more than that to any so-called privileged parties, and no less than that to any so-called underdogs! And for him such application would have been made, not as a concession to Christian charity, but as a basic demand of justice.

There is another factor, outside the domain of commutative justice, that has to do with the amount of recompense given to labor. It is

the matter of size of family, to which we refer today in terms of a living family wage.

Today we base the demand for a larger wage to be given to the head of a family on the greater needs of such a man (and his dependents). Not so long ago the question could not have been discussed without sneers at or lamentations over the existence of large families. But white civilization has already arrived at a point where some states offer a bonus, not so much as a reward but as an inducement, for producing larger families.

From the notes of Thomas, as completed after his death by one of his disciples, we have the following statement of the family wage:

"Families do not always increase equally, since it happens that one father has many children and another none. It is impossible for these to have the same possessions, since then one family would lack victuals while the other would abound in them. This would be against the order of nature, since the family that is larger adds more to the stability of the state than the other, and so by a sort of natural right merits to be better provided for by the public law."

14. The Position of Labor

IT WILL surprise many persons to know that St. Thomas mentions slaves and slavery without condemning the latter institution outright. But he comes in contact with the subject chiefly

in his commentaries on Aristotle. There he is satisfied to repeat and to explain further the views of that Greek philosopher.

In the times of St. Thomas, the institution of serfdom was still a recognized part of the social structure. But the serf, although tied to the soil, was already far removed from the condition of the pagan slave.

Thomas speaks of servants (most likely bond-servants) as necessary to mankind for the administration of the necessaries of life. But he does not fail to speak up for allowing them the use of free will and of a certain power of self-determination in obeying those who command them. While this still seems very unsatisfactory for us today, he does come out clearly on the rights of all men, including slaves.

"In those things which pertain to interior decisions of will, man need not obey man, but God alone. Man must obey man in those things which are to be done externally through the body. But man need not obey man, but God alone, in things which pertain to the nature of the body. For all men are by nature equal; that is, in regard to those things which pertain to the support of the body, and the generation of offspring. Hence in the question of contracting marriage, or of preserving virginity, or other similar things, slaves need not obey their masters, nor children their parents. But in matters pertaining to the ordering of human activities and human affairs, the subject must obey his

superior in accordance with the latter's rank of superiority; . . . the slave (or servant) must obey his master in those things which pertain to the performance of servile work."

The society of the Middle Ages was still definitely divided into strata. This must be kept in mind constantly. From the standpoint of Christian principles it may have had this advantage: Everyone was aware that some men were favored by social rank, while others were not and were moreover relatively unable to keep themselves; as a consequence the duty of the more favored to help the less fortunate was an accepted principle at the time.

Today there are in practice social strata among us, based on the possession of wealth. But in principle we acknowledge no such division, and adhere to the view that, since all are equal, they are equally able to help themselves. The consequence is often a most unfeeling disregard for the condition of the less favored on the part of those who are more favored and who could easily help the others.

Next to the slaves in rank, according to St. Thomas, are those "who hired out their labor for the reward of money." These are ordinarily poor, "seeking their daily food by their labor; whence the law properly orders that their wage be given them without delay, lest they be wanting in food."

In a similar way other workers, who ply various trades, are still spoken of by Thomas as

being on a low status, and as usually quite needy. But this is due, in his mind, not so much to the intrinsic nature of labor, as to the condition of poverty that accompanies some types of labor.

In the eyes of the old Greeks, who were distinctly children of their own day—as we all are—it was considered menial and disgraceful to work for a livelihood. Their civilization rested in fact on a social division in which the vast majority of men were the slaves of the minority, and in which work was considered the proper function of slaves, hence degrading for the true citizen.

St. Thomas is, of course, not of this mind. He bases the general duty of work on the need of a livelihood, it is true. But the position of work as a means of livelihood, and as an element of human life, is applied to all men and is shared by all professions.

If the technical arts, he asks, are a means to livelihood, how much more should not the liberal arts and professions assure a man his living? Again, each man is not at all sufficient unto himself, he is greatly dependent on others and on society for many things. There must consequently be a differentiation of labor in society, for which there are different inclinations and different abilities in men.

From this Thomas draws the conclusion that the ordinary duty of work binds all men, and arises out of the general duty of cooperating in

the maintenance and furthering of social life. In this scheme of life indolence has no place. He would countenance no class of "idle rich." Far from finding moral justification for idleness, where men do not need to work for livelihood, Aquinas mentions even personal moral reasons for the general duty to work, over and above the social reason just referred to.

"Manual labor is ordained towards four ends. First of all and principally, for obtaining victuals; . . . secondly, for avoiding indolence, from which many evils arise; . . . thirdly, for checking concupiscence insofar as labor disciplines the body; . . . fourthly, for giving alms. . . ."

The dignity of work and the natural right of equitable recompense for one's work both derive from the same principle, the intimate relation of the work to the person of the worker. A man's labor is not something merely incidental to his person, it is the very expression of the latter, flesh of its flesh, bone of its bone, so to say. Hence labor derives its dignity from the person, and the treatment we accord the labor is in reality treatment accorded the man.

"It is in the nature of a being to live, and consequently to exercise activity. There is no life without some exercise of vital powers. . . . *He who performs actually is in some way the very thing he makes.* For the action of the mover or doer is in the thing moved or receiving this action. Hence the artificers as well as the poets

and the benefactors love their work, because they love themselves."

Were it possible to tell Thomas that today many workers really hate their work, he would simply reply: There must be something very unnatural either about the workers, or about the work itself or the conditions surrounding it.

15. Factors in Production

IF ALL labor were of one and the same kind, the world might be intolerably monotonous and dull, but all work would then be measurable by a single common standard, and it would be easy to decide the question of relative recompense for each man's labor. Or again, if in any more complex business undertaking, all the men would in turn perform every type of work, so that there would be no permanent division of labor among the different cooperators, the matter of a just recompense for each one's contribution to the whole would not be the complicated problem it is in fact.

In our own day specialization and division of labor in any large industry seem to have reached the highest point possible. One may well doubt whether the value of individual contributions to the whole enterprise can be determined even approximately.

In the time of St. Thomas there was some division of labor in common enterprises, as we shall see later. In regard to other factors that

enter into the making of things, there are some that existed in his day just as they do today, for instance that of the raw materials. All the ordinary kinds of productive work are performed with the aid and use of various types of material goods. These also contribute their share to the entire product and cannot be ignored as factors contributing to the being and the value of the finished product, even if some labor theories of our own day seem to hold the contrary.

Thus "the builder is the cause of the house in regard to its coming into existence, but not directly of its total being. For evidently the being of the house follows the form, and the form is a certain order and composition dependent also on the nature of certain materials. For as the cook cooks food by employing some powers of nature, namely fire; so the builder operates by using cement, stones, and wood, which are capable of receiving a form and composition, and of retaining them. Hence the being of the house depends on the nature of these things; while its coming into existence depends on the action of the builder."

The human action is paramount in giving existence to the new product, and therefore to the new economic value deriving from the existence of new useful products. But insofar as the raw materials are indispensable prerequisites for production, there is a first contribution to the general product made by nature prior to all human activity, without which the latter could do nothing.

"For whoever makes something out of anything, his action presupposes that out of which he makes the thing, and the latter is itself not produced by that action. Thus the artificer works on natural things, like wood, metal, which are not produced by his action but by the action of nature. And nature itself causes these things only as to the form they have, presupposing the existence of the matter."

In speaking more definitely of the different factors of production, St. Thomas presupposes knowledge of what one might call the philosophy or the doctrine of causes. In general there are four factors, called by him as by Aristotle causes, that enter into the making of some new article:

First, there is the *material cause,* the raw materials, or matter, out of which the new thing is made.

Secondly, there is the *formal cause,* that is, the thing added to or done to the raw materials in order to make them into a new product. Thus, when a statue is made out of wood or marble, the latter is the material cause; and the form (the word is used in a wider sense) that is added to the raw material to make it the exact statue it is, constitutes the formal cause in thomistic language.

Thirdly, there is the *efficient cause.* That is the action of the agent or worker who produces the new article, or effects the change from the raw materials to the finished new product. So

in a loose sense the sculptor can be called the efficient cause of the statue; more strictly it is the action of the sculptor in making the statue or the sculptor in the act of carving or chiselling.

Fourthly, there is the *final cause.* This is often called the *end,* that is, the end in view, or the aim in mind. In the above instance it would be the sculptor's idea or mental pattern according to which he guided his action of sculptoring. Strictly it is the idea, not as a mere picture in mind, but insofar as the idea is actively guiding or influencing the action of the sculptor in making his statue.

From this outline of the thomistic theory of causes, one can see more readily what the contributing value of each is in the production of the total result. It shows us in particular the position of the material cause spoken of above.

"Since there are four kinds of causes, the material cause is not the source of action, but is rather the subject receiving the effect of the action. It is the end, and the agent, and the form, that are the sources of action, but again in a definite order. For the first source of action is the end, which moves the man to action. Second is the agent himself. Third is the form, which is produced by the action of the agent."

In this quotation, Thomas is describing the temporal sequence of the factors, rather than their intrinsic importance, or their proportional contribution to the whole activity and the resultant product.

16. Distributive Recompense

ST. THOMAS places much importance on the relative amount of labor expended in the production of things, when there is question of the value of finished products. It is to a great extent the amount of labor expended on different products that determines the relative exchange value of one product over against another.

He uses as an illustration of his principle two things economically as far apart as a pair of shoes and a house. In order to have a just exchange, he says, the number of shoes given for one house must be proportionate to the labor and expenses undergone by the builder of the house over against that of the shoemaker.

"For if this be not observed," he continues, "there would be no exchange, and men would not trade with one another." This conclusion may have held in the simple economic days of Thomas when tradesmen and workers were relatively much more independent and self-sufficient. In our day of complex economic life, prices can be adjusted almost entirely in proportion to the need either for the article, or for the selling of one's labor. And the man who does not agree to paying the high price demanded, or to working at the low wage offered, is only free to starve.

Thomas mentions another consequence that would occur, if amount and value of labor are not decisive in determining the price of a product. Here, too, he may give us pause to think. "For it would destroy the arts if he who makes

something would not receive for it as much as he put into it. Hence we must measure the work of one artificer by that of another in such a way as to have a just exchange."

Yet not all human work is on a par. We cannot simply measure the labor of one man against that of another in terms of quantity, or of amount of time spent on it. The quality of mind enters into all human work, not only to differentiate it from all non-human action, but also to distinguish the labor contribution of one man from that of another.

The feature distinguishing man's work from that of brute animals, Thomas will aways insist, is that man uses his reason. While it is the instinct of nature that leads brute animals to action, men proceed under the impetus of reason which guides their actions.

Reason plays its part in man's work in various ways. In the production of anything "we must consider two things: The action of the artificer which is directed by his art, and the work itself that is produced by it. Now the action itself is threefold. First there is the consideration of how a thing is to be made; then there is the work to be done on the external materials; and finally the production of the work itself."

In the making of a thing an artificer tries to produce the best, not the best in itself, but the best according to the purpose of the thing. Thus he will make a saw out of iron, not out of glass although the latter would look more beau-

tiful, since such beauty would impede the purpose of the saw.

All of this shows us the important rôle of brain in work. "To know the aptitudes of things, and their relation to one another, is possible only for the possessor of intellect. . . . It is necessary that all directing occur through the use of intelligence; whence also in mechanical operations those who direct any kind of activities are called wise in those activities."

This should indicate the relative values of different kinds of labor in a common enterprise: of labor that is chiefly directive, or brain work, and labor that is chiefly the execution of orders, or brawn work. In cooperative work, there is a natural scale of values for the appraisal of the parts played by the different kinds of work.

"In craftwork we have the artificer who works only with his hand, executing the commands of another and himself not commanding; for example, the one who prepares the raw materials; then the one who commands the worker preparing the materials and who himself gives the form to the work; furthermore there is the one who himself does no (manual) labor, but only commands, having in mind the ideas regarding the work as these exist in the end or plan which he has projected." The latter is the highest man in the work. The artificer who gives the final form or finish is higher than the others, since he does what they cannot do, and in turn directs the work of the mere pre-

parers, telling them how to prepare the materials.

The above ideas are from the earliest writings of St. Thomas. In one of his latest works he comes back to the same point, mentioning the same threefold general division and hierarchy of labor as a basis for distributive recompense. Of highest importance, he says again, is the guiding mind, then next are the intermediaries who do the finishing touches of the work, the finer part of it and the more skillful, and finally those who do the preparatory rough work.

From the principles mentioned above, it is at once evident that the recompense for labor should range in scale between the different workers according to the value and importance of their contributions to the entire enterprise. Of contributions of money as such to the enterprise, Thomas knew nothing in this connection. But there is no doubt and some of his views on investing money with merchants bear this out—that it would have been deemed by him contrary to all reason to give a minimum fixed recompense to active labor, brain and brawn, and the real profits to the passive contributors of money.

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