Living together

by Jose Antonio Ullate

Although we may not personally know the history of political philosophy, that does not prevent the ideas of past thinkers from permeating our understanding of life in common. Here, "permeating" means to infuse the collective imagination, attitudes, expectations, and even hopes, fixing the limits of what we consider desirable, what we take as unalterable, and what we think is amenable to change.

Why do human beings live together? What lies at the root of the human proclivity to form families, groups, societies, and, in particular, political communities? We rarely stop to reflect on this question because it is the presupposed and unexamined lens through which we look at our lives. Many waters have carried the silt that forms the sediment of our perception of life in common. But, from the point of view of intellectual history, we can reduce them to three main currents. The first stream justifies living together as the lesser evil that is necessary to avoid the greater evil consequences of selfishness resulting from sin.[1] The second current of thought does not consider our inclination towards society as a form of evil, but rather a natural proclivity that originates in a deprivation: the unviable condition of humans to be self-sufficient, which turns them into beings constitutively *in need*, a need that is only satisfied in submission

1 The Catholic and generally pre-Chalcedonian interpretation of original sin is that it wounded our nature, but it didn't corrupt it. Thus, our nature after original sin remains good, though subjected to adverse conditions that make it practically impossible to reach its end without help. For political Augustianism, the adverse conditions that incline us to sin constitute the basis of our incorporation into political life.

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to social life. The third train of thought is owed to Aristotle of Stagira, who does not think that social life is either a lesser evil or necessitated by neediness. Instead, he thought the inclination to political life reflected man's natural appetite to live together with others.

Thus, the three historically conditioned ways of perceiving our living together are society as a preventive punishment, society as a remedy for a radical lack, and society as a desired way of living. Although these three visions are intellectually irreducible to each other, they appear to us in a mixed form because, for us, they are not theoretical postulates but part of the cultural strata that shape our perceptions. It is not strange that we accept that life in common is a necessity we endure because the alternative would be more fearsome, while simultaneously feeling that, since without society we would not have been even physically viable, our relationship to it is marked by debt, if not guilt. Finally, these two acknowledgments may not exclude a certain kind of nostalgia for a life in common chosen for the pure pleasure of being together.

In the short space of this article, I will only address the history of the main and profound discrepancies between two of these matrices of Western cultural thought; those that consider life in common as rooted in something natural. However, in them, "natural" means dramatically different things. In this examination of the history of our perceptions, I do not look back with a moralizing purpose. Rather, I try to understand the origin of some anxieties in our way of looking at life in common, whether it be friendship or politics. For the sake of brevity, I will focus on Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas (who draws on Plato via Avicenna) to contrast the two ways of naturalizing living together.

From "homo appetitivus" to "homo miserabilis": the radical change in the origin of politics

Aristotle decides to carry out (or continue publicly) his research on ethics and politics when he is at the peak of his prestige. He is a Macedonian of around fifty years old. He ends his honorary stay at Pella's court. He is a free man, recognized and respected throughout *Hellas*, looking towards the last and most fruitful stage of his intellectual activity. Almost any Greek city would have been honored by the presence of the great philosopher. Where will he go?

During the summer of 338 BC, the alliance of Greek *poleis* led by Athens and Tebe had suffered a terrible and humiliating defeat at the hands of Philip II's armies. In a single night, the Macedonians executed about a thousand Athenian citizens and soldiers. The Macedonian *hegemon* imposed an ignominious peace on Athens. The atmosphere in the Attic *polis* was then intensely anti-Macedonian. Two or three years after that shameful defeat, Aristotle chose Athens as the place from which to undertake his most ambitious investigations, the most unlikely place of all, because the infuriated and resentful Athenians were least welcoming to Macedonians, even to one of his august reputation.

"Il maestro di color che sanno" (Inf., IV 131) repeats in both the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Eudememian Ethics* that he does not investigate practical things to know "what good is," but to become good himself. Philosophizing about morality and politics, he says, is a way of carrying out ethical and political action.[2]

2 NE 1094b 11: "Our method of inquiry (*methodos*) seeks the good of these things, since it is a sort of politics (*politikê*)"; NE 1105a 11–12: "... So that is also why our entire work, both as a contribution to virtue and as a contribution to politics..." Aristotle has declared that he is not investigating to know what is good but to become good himself. You cannot truly investigate these things if you don't get your own life involved in it. It is particularly important to note that, for him, this involvement is not achieved by reading books (NE 1103b 23–25); thus, the book is only a support for a serious work of reflection

Men have always organized themselves in institutions of a social-military nature, before and after Aristotle. But none before him had named this common inclination "politics" or inserted it into the core of ethics.[3] His work will only find its sustained readership fifteen centuries later, with the Western reception of William of Moerbeke's translation, but that reception will carry within it a distortion that has accompanied it since. The first great Western commentator on Aristotle's politics is Thomas Aquinas. His unfinished commentary on the *Politics* and, above all, his "*De regimine principum*" (or *De Regno*) show the deep admiration of the saint towards the Stagirite. The unquestionable prestige of Aquinas has however contributed to dramatically distorting Aristotle's view of the *conspiratio* that is expressive of the good life. Aquinas profusely uses Aristotelian "political" language, but only by inaugurating a radical disfigurement of its meaning. Accordingly, a misrepresentation that could have been, in the beginning, a minor deviation from Aristotle leads to a major misdirection in the conclusions on the reasons for living together with others.[4]

and shared life. On this point, a matter that turns everything upside down is involved: In reality, Aristotle only speaks of institutional politics in the polis *in first navigation*. The deeper matter and the true reason for his investigation is how one acts in virtue of the common *telos* when *the polis no longer exists*. That is, he describes in the first instance politics as we, more or less, have understood it, but the deeper meaning (*second navigation*) is not that of the *polis*, but that of the band of foreign friends who make the search for truth their conspiracy.

3 Among many instances, see: "Since we see every city to be a sort of community, and every community to be formed for the sake of some good (for everyone does every action for the sake of what seems to be good), clearly, then, while every community aims at some good, the community that has the most control of all, and encompasses all the others, aims both at the good that has the most control of all and does so to the highest degree. And this community is the one called a city, the community that is political" (Politics, *incipit*, 1252a 1-6); A political philosopher, "is the architectonic craftsman of the end to which we look in calling each thing unconditionally bad or good" (NE 1152b1); "The ruler must have 'complete virtue of character. For his function is unconditionally that of an architectonic craftsman, and his reason is an architectonic craftsman'" (Politics 1260a 16). (my translations).

4 "In authors such as Thomas Aquinas, John of Paris, James of Viterbo and Dante

Aristotle insists repeatedly on the radical difference between the household on the one hand and the *polis* on the other. The *raison d'être* for the house and the village is to ensure *mere life*—the physical reproduction of its members, while the proper form of the *polis* is very different —to promote good and virtuous living among its participants. In Aristotle's scheme, the proportionate set of families and villages makes up the material (*hyle*) of the *polis.*[5]

Although Thomas addresses the distinction between matter and form in the *polis* in his commentary on Aristotle's books on politics, he manages to do so without the specific use that the Stagirite makes of these two principles. Crucially, Thomas translates Aristotle's *zoon politikon* (political animal) indifferently as both *animal politicum* and *animal sociale.*[6] This means that for Thomas, *politicum* is strictly equivalent to *sociale*, blurring the formal difference between the political

Alighieri, a double and common characteristic is verified: on the one hand, they preserve the Aristotelian language and argumentative scheme about the origin of the political order, as well as – although already partially devalued – the conception of politics as the realization of a virtuous life; On the other hand, all of them tend, in one way or another, to dilute the qualitative distinction between the oíkos and the *pólis* –and, a fortiori, between the economy and politics– on which the theory presented at the very beginning of the *Libri Politicorum* was based. In these authors, the decisive break between ethics and politics does not occur, certainly, but the progressive identification of politics and economics does occur, in the form of the identity of the *civitas* with the *societas*. This identification would give rise, between the 17th and 18th centuries, to the birth of a new discipline, political economy, which would end up absorbing the specificity of the political in the increasingly ubiquitous sphere of economics" (Mariano Pérez Carrasco, "Animal domesticum et civile: Economic order and political order in Thomas Aquinas, Jacobo de Viterbo, Juan Quidort and Dante Alighieri." *Revista Española de Filosofía Medieval*, 27/1, 2020, p. 48).

5 *Inter alia*: "The cause, though, of their [of the household] being so disposed is that what they take seriously is living, not living well" (1257b40); "They do not do these things only for the sake of living, but more for the sake of living well" (1280a 30); "The city is the community in living well" (1280b 30).

6 "…later readers might question whether Aquinas' indifferent use of *animal politicum* and *animal sociale* as translations for Aristotle's *zoon politikon* did not miss the essential point that Aristotle was making: man is a political being, a polis dweller, and not merely a gregarious or a social animal" (James Schmidt, "A Raven with a Halo: The Translations of Aristotle's Politics," *History of Political Thought*, Summer 1986, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 312).

community and the lower natural communities.[7] The reverse of this confusion has even more dramatic consequences. At the very beginning of his *De regno*, Thomas questions the reason that naturally pushes men to form political communities (which, as we have already seen, are not distinguished from any other social community). The friar affirms that what is characteristic of man is to be a "social and political animal," because of "the *needs* that man naturally has."[8] That is, for Aquinas, the inclination to live in a political (or social) community is natural to the extent that human needs are natural.

Here I cannot overlook one fundamental and astonishing fact. Although the Thomist foundation of living together rests on the privation inherent in human nature, we notice that the Dominican's position hides, in itself, many more latent tensions than that of the Macedonian. Thomas shares with the Stagirite his affirmative vision of life in common:

> That which is proper to a thing and to which it is most inclined is that which is most becoming to it from itself; wherefore every living thing gives proof of its life by that operation which is most proper to it, and to which it is most inclined. Thus, the life of plants is said to consist in

7 This operation constitutes one of the main intellectual roots of the modern distinction between *private* and *public* life. By making the specific difference between social inclination and political inclination inconsistent, the *vita socialis* absorbs all the realm of interhuman activity. In turn, this means that the *vita politica* is dissolved, and the *vita socialis* is subdivided into *vita privata* and *vita publica*. The disorder in our perceptions is abysmal: we associate political life with public life, when, in reality, public life is characterized by being just a pure framework of coexistence for the pursuit of the only ends that are recognized, the private ones (See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998. Section II, The Public and the Private Realm. pp. 22-78).

8 "Naturale autem est homini ut sit animal sociale et politicum, in multitudine vivirs, magis etiam quam omnia alia animalia, quod quidem naturalis necessitas declarat." Sancti Thomae of Aquinas, *De regno ad regem Cypri*. Liber 1, Caput 1, in https://www.corpusthomisticum.org/orp.html). Also, in the *Summa Theologiae,* Thomas declares that the foundation of life in common is not, as in Aristotle, an affirmative call, a desire to enter into an operational and celebratory relationship with others, but rather a radical and essentially negative escape from a state of inadequacy (S. Th. I, q. 96, a. 4, *resp*).

> nourishment and generation; the life of animals in sensation and movement; and the life of men in their understanding and acting according to reason. Wherefore also in men the life of every man would seem to be that wherein he delights most, and on which he is most intent; thus, especially does he wish to associate with his friends (Ethic. ix, 12).[9]

Although he notes this joyful interior affection (*id in quo maxime delectatur, et cui maxime intendit*!), our friar forgets this inclination and places the fulcrum of a life in common on the precariousness of man's means, on the perception of a lack or inability. The ordeal of Saint Thomas is that even if he spontaneously uses a sunny language (man wishes to associate with his friends because that is where he delights most), it is only an empty homage because the ultimate reason that causes us to live together is fear and need, not celebration. This is not the place to fully develop the reasons that move him to take the gloomier path. The point is that the idea of human nature that Aquinas paints could not be further from that of Aristotle.

The Macedonian philosopher formally distinguishes between the natural inclination to social life and the natural inclination to political life. Crucially, Aristotle does not accept that even the most basic unit of social life—the household— has its origin in the perception of a need or deprivation. Instead, the household is grounded in a natural impulse or drive, comparable to any other living being, to procreate. As he says about living together: "It is not by deliberate choice (*prohairesis*)" but by the urge to leave behind one like oneself.[10] For the Macedonian, purely "economic" life is not based

9 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-IIae, q. 179, a.1, *respondeo*.

10 "Those who are incapable of existing without each other necessarily form a couple, as female and male do for the sake of procreation (they do not do so from deliberate choice, but, like other animals and plants, because the urge to leave behind something of

on the perceived advantage of associating to satisfy needs. Furthermore, Aristotle says that while social life expresses the drive to reproduce, political life is the desire to live together according to virtue, for the good life. Man is inclined to enter society through a natural appetite or desire (*homo appetitivus*), prior to all deliberation.[11] The invitation to political life is a conscious attraction towards the virtuous life (*homo virtuosus*) and is, in itself, alien to necessity. Even when one does not need the assistance of others, one keeps being attracted to the good life, to the life of friendship![12]

Thomas's way of looking at social and political life is decisively different from Aristotle's. Thomas dissolves the political inclination into a generically social one. Thomas removes natural impulse, inclination, or proclivity to replace it with lack, inability, or need. For Thomas, the deliberate choice to group together in a protective community is sparked by the awareness of a lack or inability—a need—which is first imputed and only then experienced.[13] Indeed, as Pérez Carrasco explains, if the perception of needs lies at the origin of social life,

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the same sort as themselves is natural), and as what rules by nature and what is by nature ruled do for the sake of preservation" (*Pol*. 1252a 25-30). Note that this natural impulse that generates social life for Aristotle is twofold: not only reproduction but also command and obedience for mutual benefit.

11 It is important to note, however, that for Aristotle, although the natural appetites that incline us towards the elementary forms of social life (couple, family, village) are affirmative and not deliberate, the naturalness of the *bios politikos*, the good life, is affirmative (the inclination towards the good), but it is also elective, freely chosen (see above).

12 "In our first discussions […] it was also said that a human being is by nature a political animal. That is why, even when they do not need each other's assistance, people desire no less to live together" (Pol. 1278b 18-22).

13 As Marianne Gronemeyer puts it, "The needy person […] is not the master of his or her neediness. The latter is much more the result of a comparison with a foreign normality, which is effectively declared to be mandatory. One becomes needy on account of a diagnosis–I decide when you are needy. Help allocated to a needy person is a transformative intervention" (Wolfgang Sach, ed. *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*. London: Zed Books, 2010, p. 70)

then it could not have its roots in the subject.[14] Thus, Thomas Aquinas consecrates the idea that will settle at the heart of Western "political" thought: that the "naturalness" of politics (or the family, which is only a matter of degree) rests on the *neediness* of man.[15] In a very true sense, Thomas coins not the name, but the idea of "homo miserabilis."[16] This idea, radically

14 "If the cause of political association were economic, then the political community would have an external origin, based on the decision of individuals to unite to form a *societas*; if, on the contrary, the first cause of the association were biological–as Aristotle maintains–then the political community would have an internal origin, based on an instinctive impulse, which does not depend on the decision of individuals" (Mariano Pérez Carrasco, "Animal domesticum et civile: Economic order and political order in Thomas Aquinas, Jacobo de Viterbo, Juan Quidort and Dante Alighieri." *Revista Española de Filosofía Medieval*, 27/1 [2020], Page 51). "In authors such as Thomas Aquinas, John of Paris, James of Viterbo and Dante Alighieri, a double and common characteristic is verified: on the one hand, they preserve the Aristotelian language and argumentative scheme about the origin of the political order, as well as–although already partially devalued—the conception of politics as the realization of a virtuous life; On the other hand, all of them tend, in one way or another, to dilute the qualitative distinction between the *oíkos* and the *pólis*– and, a fortiori, between the economy and politics– on which the theory presented at the very beginning was based. In these authors, the decisive break between ethics and politics does not occur, certainly, but the progressive identification of politics and economics does occur, in the form of the identity of the *civitas* with the *societas*. This identification would give rise, between the 17th and 18th centuries, to the birth of a new discipline, political economy, which would end up absorbing the specificity of the political in the increasingly ubiquitous sphere of economics" (*Id*. Page 48).

15 "Thomas Aquinas, in his *De regno*, introduced in this regard the non-Aristotelian idea of man conceived as an animal that has needs. Unlike other animals, nature does not immediately offer him food, protection from the cold, weapons of defense or attack for his survival: to obtain all this, man is forced to associate with other men. This topic is absent from Thomas Aquinas's commentary on *Politics*, and for good reason: it is not easy to combine this conception with that of Aristotle! (Gianfranco Fioravanti, "La réception de la Politique d'Aristote au Moyen Age tardif". In Yves Charles Zarka (sous la direction de), Aspects de lapensae médievale dans la philosophie politique moderne. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999. Page 19). "Tommaso, infatti, nel De regno, have introduced a questo proposito a concetto non present in the Aristotelian text: quello dell'uomo come 'animal di bisogni'" (Gianfranco Fioravanti, "Aristotelian 'politics' in the Middle Ages: Linee di una ricezione" *Rivista di Storia della Filosofia*, 1997, Vol. 52, No. 1, pp. "Abbiamo infatti una 'naturalità' che sembra fondarsi su di una mancanza ed insufficienza della natura umana" (p. 26).

16 In 1992, Ivan Illich described *homo miserabilis* as a mutation of *homo oeconomicus*, the protagonist of scarcity (Wolfgang Sach, op. cit., page 92). The *needy man* who is forced to enter society due to his deprivation, not his impulses, as Thomas describes him, establishes the starting point that leads to the appearance of that *homo miserabilis*.

absent from Aristotle's thought, has become the starting point for political theories in modernity.

"Civitas vel regnum": the drive for the vanishing of matter in politics

We can now understand why, despite Thomas' effort in his commentary on politics to follow Aristotle's reasoning, his examination of the combination of matter and form in the *polis* is inconsistent. Whereas for Aristotle there is an interplay between the matter and form of the political, for Thomas, the political is only a matter of form.

Thomas Aquinas starts from two axial statements that are impossible to reconcile with the Aristotelian view of politics:

> a. The radically *economic* character (*oikos-nomos*) of all social life. Although he repeats the Aristotelian distinction between the economic and political order,[17] he is trapped by his identification of social life with political life, which inevitably "economizes" all "political" life.[18] The center of all socio-political life will be the satisfaction of needs and not a radical inclination towards living together, freely supported by others. Thomas will continue talking about the good life as the proper goal of politics, but he will identify it with an abstract "common good" indiscernible from the directive action of the ruler, particularly through the law.[19] The law absorbs (and eclipses) the character of common consensus or

17 *In Libros Politicorum* II 15: "Quod quidam dicebant tamquam nihil differret domus a civitate nisi magnitude ine et parvitate; ita quod magna domus sit parva civitas, et e converso; quod ex sequentibus patebit esse falsum."

18 See also, Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998. Part II-The Public and the Private Realm, pages 22 and ss).

19 In Aristotle, τὸ συμφέρον means, indistinctly, the common good or the common advantage.

conspiracy.[20] Hence his hesitation: he insists on the difference between the king and the father of a family, but he cannot avoid saying that, in a certain sense, the king is the father of the multitude.[21]

b. The anthropological fatalism of *homo miserabilis* (apparently not directly linked to his faith in the dogma of original sin[22]), is incompatible with the joyful *conspiratio* of free men in pursuit of the good life.

Paraphrasing Augustine, these positions are as two radically diverse "loves" that constitute two different "cities" and two mutually unrecognizable "politics."[23]

When developing his vision of socio-political life, Thomas will continue to resort to the binomial matter/form, but for him, the matter of politics is reduced to being the physical support ("passively passive") of the only true purpose of politics, which is the management of the life of a multitude. For Thomas, as for medieval writers in general, *polis*, translated into Latin by Moerbeke as *civitas* (*city*), designates only the territory and the population governed by the same chief

20 Though significant, the influence of Aristotle's thought on Thomas's is not, however, the dominant one. Certainly, the main influence is that of St. Augustine, but in the political-legal aspects, the Roman jurists and Cicero were very authoritative for him. Quite eloquently, Cicero wrote: "What is a *civitas* if not a society united by laws?" (*The Republic*, I: ii: 4. Cf. James Schmidt, "A Raven with a Halo: The Translations of Aristotle's *Politics*." *History of Political Thought*, Summer 1986, 7, 2, p. 306.)

21 The loss of the sense of proportion also entails, for Aquinas, the reduction of the common good to a mere idea, detached from the concrete flesh of the participants. There is no carnal proportion between an inhabitant of Kaliningrad and one of the Kuryl Islands, or between one of Anchorage and one of Tampa. Therefore, when speaking of a "political common good" among such two, we necessarily speak of an idea whose support is a law. On the other hand, the concept of a conspiracy for the good of the whole rests purely on carnal proportion, as Aristotle explicitly states.

22 Thomas Aquinas will confront the peculiar dogmatic "pessimism" of the Franciscan schools, which made man's sociability depend on his fallen condition. For Thomas, even in the pre-lapsarian state the human being is a *being of needs*!

23 "Fecerunt itaque civitates duas amores duo" (*De Civitate Dei*, l. XIV, c. XXVIII).

(*simpliciter rex*). For Thomas, *civitas* can be a fortress, a city, a province, or a kingdom. What gives *civitas* its form is that it is ruled by the same king or leader.[24] What gives unity to a multitude and a territory is being subject to the same governmental action, to the same king.

It is sufficient here to point out that Thomas does not share the ultimate meaning of the Aristotelian conception of politics. For him, the matter of politics is reduced to a pure arrangement of passive elements (population and territory) that acquire the status of a community of only one form: unified government exemplified by the law of the king. Accordingly, our friar does not assign to suitable matter any fundamental role for a good political life. He does not notice that the proper matter of the *polis* is not the result of government action, but rather the result of chance (or providence) and, therefore, is not the object of education and the fulfillment of obligations, but rather the object of the prayers of rulers and the people. From Aristotle's perspective, Thomas Aquinas destroys the materiality of the *polis*, by absorbing its proper and original scope into the realm of the form, that is, into the action of government. For Thomas, political science is exclusively a reflection on the forms of government and particularly on what he considers the most appropriate one, the monarchy.

We can be sure that a keen scholar like Thomas does not depart from Aristotle's authority on this fundamental

24 "Qui perfection communitatem regit, id est civitatem vel provincialm, antonomastice rex vocatur; qui autem domum regit, non rex, sed paterfamilias dicitur. Habet tamen aliquam similarityinem regis, propter quam aliquando reges populorum patres vocantur. Ex dictis igitur patet, quod rex est qui unius multitudinem civitatis vel provinciale, et propter bonum commune, regit" (*De Regno*, l. 1, c. 1, *in fine*). As has been said, this equivalence is only apparent: in reality, the area par excellence of Tomasian "politics" is the "kingdom." Thomas dispels this identity between kingdom and city when he explains that the founder of a kingdom must search, within its territory, for the most suitable places to establish cities, villages and military fortresses ("Puta, si regnum instituendum sit, oportet providere quis locus aptus sit urbibus constituendis, quis villis, quis castris, ubi constituenda sint studia litterarum, ubi exercitia militum, ubi negotiatorum conventus, et sic de aliis quae perfectio regni requirit" (De Regno, l. 1, c. 14, *in fine*).

point through carelessness or caprice. There is a long tradition of thought that identifies man's precarious condition and his inadequacy to survive alone as the cause of his incorporation into social life. The most authoritative starting point of this tradition is that of Plato. In the dialogue *Protagoras*, and through a peculiar version of the myth of Prometheus and Epimetheus, Plato explains how the exceptional precariousness of the human being pushes him toward society.[25] However, the corpus of Platonic dialogues, except for the *Timaeus*, was not yet accessible to medieval Christian scholars, and its influence could only be indirect. Until Thomas, Christian thinkers did not take into consideration the naturalness of "social" or "political" life. They considered it a mere *factum*, but following what has been called *political Augustinianism*, that fact had the character of a necessary evil. The dominant theological thought was that before the primordial fall of Adam and Eve, human nature did not need a community since the intelligence of individuals, subject to God, would perfectly govern their sensitive inclinations, thereby making the idea of government between men superfluous. This current, later headed by the Franciscan Duns Scotus in antithesis to Thomasian postulates, argued that the wound of sin introduced the disorder of passions, selfishness, and envy making the institution of power necessary to repress the destructive tendencies of concupiscence. The rulers were thus invested with the legitimacy of serving as God's ministers for the material aspects of life in common.[26] This is the cultural environment in which Aquinas was formed. The elements of this framework enjoyed great religious prestige that made

25 *Protagoras*, 320 a - 322 a.

26 "Need I recall the notion and role of the secular arm, or the name 'exterior bishop' (eveque du dehors) often given to kings ...?" (Jacques Maritain, *Integral Humanism. Temporal and Spiritual Problems of a New Christendom*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973. p. 149).

any questioning difficult. The only probable precedent for the Thomistic solution is found in the respected Persian philosopher Avicenna, whose works had been translated into Latin a century earlier and whom Thomas knew in depth. Avicenna offers an interpretation of Aristotle that is heavily filtered by Neoplatonism, and it is he who introduces this Platonic insertion into Aristotle's (for example, in his *De Anima*, his *De Animalibus,* and his *Metaphysics)*.[27]

It is interesting to note that Aristotle was perfectly aware of the doctrine of his teacher Plato on this subject and explicitly rejected it. In a famous passage of *De Partibus Animalium*, he recognizes the indeterminacy of the organs of the bodies of men, but far from deducing from this an ominous lack that fatally pushes humans into institutionalization, he understands it as a manifest sign of their superiority and self-determination![28]

By losing sight of the discrete but decisive role that Aristotle assigns to the matter of the *polis*, Thomas seeds an omission that, while almost imperceptible to him, is incompatible with the vision of the Stagirite. Thomas does not pay any attention to the fact that the *polis* and politics demand a proportion (*analogia*) and that the size of the population and the territory are not irrelevant but factors that must be adequate to the task. A territory and population that are too small

27 Cf. Irina Nanu, *La segunda Partida de Alfonso X el Sabio y la tradición de los* Especula principum [Doctoral dissertation. Universitat de Valencia. 2013]. Pages 247-248, where she also notes the possible influence of Alfarabi in that same sense and sets out how Thomas was persuaded of this doctrine from an early age, as is shown in various unequivocal passages of his *Summa contra Gentes*.

28 *Parts of Animals*, 687 b-688 a. "If, for Plato, man needs to associate with other human beings in order to compensate for his defects and imperfections and to protect each other, from Aristotle's point of view, man's deficiencies are not in themselves sufficient for the establishment of a society, since, as he clarifies in the Politics, 'even when they do not need mutual help, men no less seek coexistence', and, if it is true that 'they are brought together by the common utility, insofar as each one has a share in the well-being', it is no less true that 'they also come together simply to live and constitute the political community'" (Irina Nanu, op. cit. page 241).

cannot ensure the continuation of life. However, too large a territory and population prevent the characteristic conspiracy and co-responsibility of politics.

Thomas' take on political matters makes the good government by a king the exclusive concern of politics, which operates on and directs an inert raw material (population and territory.)[29] From now on, the question of politics will revolve around political forms, relegating the appropriate matter of politics to the formless quantity of territory and population that each king dominates. The loss of Aristotelian awareness of the significance of the matter of politics is such that our Saint will understand the expansion of territories and population, without any intrinsic limit, as a natural feature of kingdoms.

As I said in the beginning, men before and after Aristotle have been governed by modes of living together. Aristotle did not intend to prepare an instruction book for the ruler but rather to think with his friends about the concrete possibility of leading a good life.[30] Before and after Aristotle, rulers aspired to expand their domains and sometimes went so far as to forge empires, as did his student, Alexander. The

29 Having established a starting point for political life that is radically different from that of Aristotle, Aquinas' subsequent analysis of politics is riddled with contradiction. He insists on the active character of the participation of the "subjects" in the common good but, at the same time, leaves in the shadows that their previous constitution as participants is not active, but passive; it is not free but the fruit of necessity. In other words, that we are "subjects" of this or that "kingdom" is the result of two necessities: that of the original ineptitude of the human individual and that of the fatality of the power games of the different kings. An example of this original passivity: within any Neapolitan family, in less than a century and a half (1712-1861), its members went from being subjects of the King of Castile (and of Naples), to being subjects of the Emperor of Austria, to being subjects of a King of Naples separated from Castile, to being part of the brief Parthenopean Republic (a subsidiary of the revolutionary French Republic), to once again obeying the King of Naples, who, shortly afterwards, would merge his two domains and become King of the two Sicilies, and finally, to become part of the Kingdom of Italy. Theoretically, at each of these changes the people were stipulated to have an "active" participation in the common good of a "new" kingdom.

30 I will not dwell here on what is ultimately most important in Aristotle's political reflection, that is, the discovery of how the end of the good life can be achieved by a handful of foreigners (*metoikoi*) amidst disproportionate forms of government and social arrangements.

idea of the *cosmopolis* represents the disintegration of all proportions wherein matter need no longer be suitable and functions merely as the pure passive support of form.

For Thomas, there was nothing self-contradictory in an ideal of a *cosmopolis*, if the legislation of that universal (*catholicus*) empire adjusted to the limits of Christian morality, as he understood it. Such blindness to proportion and ordered matter was already hegemonic in his time and continues to be so in ours. For instance, doctrines about *manifest destiny* exclude any notion of limit or intrinsic proportion in the population or the territory. We lack the good sense to understand the difficulties entailed by the current tendency to form supranational associations, such as the European Union, or to consolidate disproportionate nation-states. We lack the true *custodia oculorum*, the true care of the senses, which would allow us to notice that excess, even in politics, is always a sin of *hubris*—a sin that carries its own *nemesis*, the sadness of life.

consummata est commixtio, the mixing is complete

To understand ourselves and the world in which we live—not to judge the past—we have explored some aspects of the complicated relationship between the Aristotelian view of politics and the Thomasian one. Thomas was not an unconditional Aristotelian, nor was his *forma mentis*, his way of looking at things, Aristotelian. He sees in Aristotle a happy repertoire of discoveries that he can draw on for his own intellectual purposes.[31] However, beneath this surface of due

31 *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q. 84, a. 5 Whether the intellectual soul knows material things in the eternal types? Through the example of Augustine, he sets forth his own method: "As Augustine says (*De Doctr. Christ*. ii, 11): 'If those who are called philosophers said by chance anything that was true and consistent with our faith, we must claim it from them as from unjust possessors. For some of the doctrines of the heathens are spurious imitations or superstitious inventions, which we must be careful to avoid when we renounce the society of the heathens.' Consequently, whenever Augustine, who was imbued with the doctrines of the Platonists, found in their teaching anything consistent with faith, he adopt-

theological orthodoxy, Thomas' work tends to show an undisguised admiration for and intellectual affinity with the intelligence of the Macedonian heathen.

Why, then, would Thomas have departed so abruptly from Aristotle on the decisive question of the basis for the naturalness of social life? This departure is no banality. It is full of capital consequences. Was it not possible to preserve the Christian theological vision together with the luminous and affirmative vision of the origin of society in the desire for friendship? That is, was it not possible to preserve a celebratory vision of living together while emphasizing the difficulties that sin introduces into that dynamic? The truth is that Thomas' vision of the cause of our sociability stains our perception with a permanent sense of guilt, and it places before our eyes a debt that is impossible to cancel.[32] By placing our incapacity at the origin of our sociability, we are irremediably subordinated to the group, to the family, to the state. For that reason, we also internalize a gregarious fatalism, which makes it difficult for us to discern the excesses and disproportionate-

ed it: and those things which he found contrary to faith he amended."

32 In the *Summa Theologiae* (II-IIae, q.80) when discussing the parts of justice linked to its integrity, Thomas includes two virtues that share the feature that they place the subject in a permanent position of debtor. One of them is *pietas* (*eusebeia*), in which the obligation arises from having received a gift that we can never repay, since we can never repay what we have received from God, from our parents... and from the political community (fatherland, *patria*). The other one is *observantia* (respect, reverence), by which we must always bow in "a deference and honor rendered to those who excel in worth." In both cases, Thomas invokes the authority of Aristotle (NE 1163b 20 for piety; 1124b 5 for observance), together with that of the Roman Cicero. However, in the first case, Aristotle is referring to a purely moral and intrafamilial debt (sons are always ethical debtors of their parents, unable to reintroduce equality with them) or religious one, and in the second, to the ironic expectation of a great souled person, who knows that when a moral action is perfect, recognition from others adds nothing to it. Yet, Thomas promotes these virtues to the demands of justice that subjects are obliged to in the legal or public realm. Consequently, the condition of the permanently insolvent debtor that a son is to his father who gave him existence is extended to any member of a political community with respect to it. In Thomas, the 'citizen' owes a permanent and unpayable debt to the political society of which he is a part because he is in need of it. This blurs the specific Aristotelian difference between the political and the economic, with the result that all public life is absorbed by the unpolitical logic of *oikos*.

ness of the family, the community, or the state.

Thomas is not a pessimistic character and has a taste for celebration. But he is also a serious Christian and theologian, and he must reckon with a fact that is not present in Aristotle's vital horizon: the novelty inaugurated by *Emmanuel*, a God who sets up his tent among us.

Incarnation involves accepting the ambiguous nature of contingency and embracing the perennial possibility of misunderstanding. Incarnation means abandoning the security of the univocal word, which men attribute to the world of ideas, the supramundane, to the hyperspace uncontaminated by the flesh. The time inaugurated by the Incarnation is that of analogy. The link, the point of connection (*metaxu*, Simone Weil would say) between God and man, is now primarily the flesh of the son of man, prolonged in time.

Thomas Aquinas is a son of the church and of the church of his time. Political theology (*ante litteram*) required that the noble activity of life in common be ordered towards the ultimate supernatural end, *salus animarum*: the salvation of souls. Thomas departs from the natural impulses of Aristotle in his attempt to explain and acknowledge the aspect of participation and the leading role of human freedom in mundane life. His theological presuppositions require that the dissolving tendencies of wounded nature be controlled and that the conditions for the development of Christian life—understood primarily as conformity to certain duties—be ensured.

When Thomas places the unviability of the individual human being at the source of man's sociability, he has in mind his conception of the supernatural end. The truth is that Thomas casts a shadow of tragic consequences over life in common to ensure the constitution of society. Though Thomas also wants to incorporate a large part of Aristotle's social anthropology and his co-responsible vision of life in common, he sets in motion a hybrid device in which the two

conceptions he intends to integrate are in perpetual civil war. Historically, this vision has mostly reinforced the condition of gregarious passivity that I have already pointed out.

The worldview of the Incarnation permanently cements the disparity between Aristotle's affirmative view of the origin of life in common and Thomas's negative one. Aristotle cannot imagine a promise of life that affects *all* men. The life achieved in the *polis* is not a universal invitation. Although the denominations are more symbolic than literal, for him neither slaves nor barbarians, nor merchants, nor manual workers—that is, most men and all women—enter into the dynamics of politics. In contrast, Thomas is a Christian for whom all men have been invited to a promise of life ("He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, *but also for the sins of the whole world*" 1 Jn 2,2). Again, this difference does not necessarily justify a negative view of life in common, but Thomas, like everyone else, is a child of his time and of his world: a strictly class-based, solidly hierarchical society is the model that the friar projects on the view of the entire universe.[33] For Thomas, the class-based and hierarchical perception of the macrocosm and the microcosm, together with the conviction that the temporal order must include everyone, necessarily leads to an understanding of life in common based on deprivation, on *man in need*.

Let us just point out that this explanation is unavoidable for Thomas' sociology, but it is not necessarily so from Thomas' theological premises. The order of the supernatural end (*beatitudo*) is beyond the reach of human forces, and, in this sense, man is a permanently dependent being. But submission to an orthodox temporal order cannot produce grace either, as Thomas perfectly knows! Thomas is a sincere believer, but for him, the force that compels each one to enter soci-

33 Katherine Archibald, "The Concept of Social Hierarchy in the Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas." *The Historian*, Autumn, 1949, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 28-54

ety is of a sociological and natural order. It also happens that this society has theological duties (public orthodoxy), but its fateful and original binding force does not lie in these sacred duties. As I have pointed out above, the supposition of original privation makes Thomas emphasize the *form* of political life, specifically the Christian public orthodoxy guaranteed by the laws. The consequence is the forgetfulness of the matter of politics (*hyle*), which, from now on, is always taken for granted.

The pagan Aristotle fully understands that the form of life in common (*politeia*) is the strict responsibility of its members, both the rulers and the governed. They must all collaborate and mutually demand this collaboration. Aristotle has the good sense to notice that the quantity and quality of the population and the territory, and the good disposition of the neighbors are as essential as the form to the good of the *polis*. He calls these the "resources" (*jorêgia*: the "political resources," *politikê jorêgia*), the means, or simply, the "matter" (*hylê*) of the *polis*. In Book VII of *Politics*, Aristotle remarks on the "stuff" of which a *polis* is made:

> Therefore, in the first place, we must examine the sorts of hypotheses there should be concerning the city that is going to be constituted to be in accord with our prayers. The best constitution cannot come into existence without suitable equipment. That is why we should posit many things in advance, just as when we are praying, although none of them should be impossible. I mean, for example, the size of the citizenry and the territory. For just as other craftsmen —for example, a weaver or a shipbuilder— must also be supplied with matter suitable for the work, and the better the matter has been prepared, the nobler the product of their craft must be, so too a politician and legislator must be supplied with the proper matter in a suitable condition.[34]

34 Pol. 1325b-1326a. I follow the translation of C.D.C. Reeve, with slight modifications.

"Without a set of appropriate resources (commensurate: *simmetrou jorêgias*)," we cannot even consider forming the best regime for the *polis*. Thomas however has no appreciation for the importance of the appropriate matter of politics. He is concerned exclusively with the orthodoxy of the governance. From him on, Western political theorists will limit themselves to postulating "the best regime" (from medieval theorists to Hobbes, Locke, or Marx), while showing an eloquent indifference to this characteristic concern of any practical man. Unlike Aristotle's, all such theories of political regimes, whether left or right, are abstract theories, obsessively trying to appropriate, from the coldest abstraction, the heat of what is concrete and existing.

Aristotle speaks of the work of constituting a *polis* that conforms to our "prayers."[35] He integrates into his view the role of surprise, of what we cannot predispose. That is the true meaning of prayer understood in the Aristotelian way. Surprise, the unforeseeable, accompanies the entire experience of human action. Aristotle says that the ruler must "pray well," which means being bold in what one hopes for but being careful not to expect impossible things, that is, *impossible in the present.*[36] Aristotle knows that good fortune is essential to having the material resources necessary to carry out the *polis* and the good life in general. Thus, Aristotelian pagan prayer is a hopeful attitude towards the material resources of com-

35 Often, instead of "prayers," translators resort to the vague "wishes," which takes us even further away from the original meaning.

36 Cf. *Politics* 1265a 16-17; 1325b 37-39. As I have noted, many translators refuse to render εὐχή for *prayer, orison*, and reduce it to its purely intentional aspect: *desires*. This distorts Aristotle's thinking on this point, losing all its richness. It is notorious that the Stagirite does not believe in a personal god who can attend to the requests of his faithful. However, the invocation to the god is an explicit recognition that what we desire is not in our hands. Desiring something is not the same as being aware that, although it is possible for it to happen, we cannot produce it, and we not try to do so: *we wait for someone else to provide it to us*. εὐχή, for an ancient and classical Greek, specified the disposition expressed in the fragment of Heraclitus–in Agustín García Calvo's rendering–to be waiting, so that, when the unexpected arrives, we recognize it.

mon life that are beyond our control, while Thomas' Christian prayer, in which rulers and ruled must be jointly involved, ignores the matter of the *polis* as such, to focus on its good government, its prosperity, and its tranquility.

Before I end, I want to refer to an intuition expressed by Hannah Arendt. In a footnote to her *The Human Condition*, she points out that in the analysis of postclassical political thought, it is often quite illuminating to find out which of the two biblical versions of the creation story is cited. Thus, it is characteristic of the difference between the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth and of Paul, that Jesus, discussing the relationship between man and wife, refers to Genesis 1:27: 'Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female' (Matt. 19:4), whereas Paul insists that the woman was created 'of the man' and hence 'for the man,' even though he then somewhat attenuates the dependence: 'neither is the man without the woman, nor the woman without the man' (I Cor. 11:8-12). The difference indicates much more than a different attitude to the role of women. For Jesus, faith was closely related to action; for Paul, faith was primarily related to salvation.[37]

On this point, Saint Thomas, faithfully following Saint Augustine, adopts Paul's perspective. Arendt's suggestive inspiration—taken *cum mica salis*—offers us valuable light on this point. It is certainly possible, and it is real, although it must be nuanced, to distinguish between two ways of understanding Christian persuasion, one that involves the primacy of activity–*praxis*–and one that exalts the primacy of salvation. On this point, I will only note that the primacy of salvation emphasizes the future result of virtuous action, while the primacy of activity identifies salvation with a new and sublime way of loving in the present.

37 Hannah Arendt, *op. cit*. Page 8.