The Person and Economic Society

By Jacques de Monleon

We have already noted that, among the innumerable societies that men can form, there are two which pursue the human good in its wholeness, that is, the good of man insofar as he is man and not insofar as he is a professor or an artist or a podiatrist. The two societies which pursue the good of man insofar as he is man are domestic society and political society. We have seen the difference that exists between these two: domestic society is the society satisfying our basic needs and supplying the first formation of human life, while political society is the society in which man can be perfected as man.

In what kind of society do we live?

But we are faced with another question: in what kind of society do we live today? In our day domestic society, namely, the family, seems relatively reduced compared to what it was, and the same is true of political society. In fact today we live in an intermediate society, an "economic" society which, on the one hand, has displaced the family, and on the other, has usurped political society. And what is each of us reduced to in today's society? Today each of us is a seller of something and a buyer of everything else. That is, we are reduced to two economic functions. And we place ourselves into categories according to our professional or economic functions; we *are* salesmen, engineers, CEO's or workers and this is the way in which we know ourselves, designate ourselves, and characterize ourselves. But these are all designations taken from economic society: in general, we are all either bourgeoisie or proletarians.

We can see that it is not just capitalism that makes economic life dominant over the rest of life; rather, the real tendency of socialism is to permanently establish this dominance of economic life over every other aspect of life, particularly over man's social life. Thus one might characterize socialism as a system which arranges the whole of human life on the basis of economic function; everything must be determined on this basis, not only the life of man in society, but even human life as such.

Thus, it is always very important, and today particularly urgent, that we investigate the relation between the human person and economic society. But economic life has become so developed, has become a reality so complex and so cumbersome that, unless you are competent, or even an expert and specialist in this domain, you dare not speak or even begin to speak about it. You dare not even discuss it. Of course, it is right that we approach the subject with modesty, but all the same we should not be condemned to complete silence, so that only a Nobel Prize winner in economics is allowed to say anything.

And the first reason is because we have never seen someone so entirely proficient in this discipline that he has completely mastered it, either in theory or in practice. We all know something of the history of economic doctrines; those doctrines come and go, one after another: first, there was Mercantilism, then the Physiocrats, then the Liberalism of Smith, then Ricardo and Malthus, and later Marx and his followers. Finally, there are the more recent economists, such as Keynes, etc. All of these shone brightly for a moment, and

then collapsed. Each of their doctrines has manifested some aspect of economic life to us, but none has stood the test of time. Their doctrines neither embrace nor contain the whole of economic life. The economists have not produced a theory that is either complete or able to regulate concrete and practical problems. We cannot say that their achievements have been particularly brilliant.

I wanted to point this out in order to justify us and give us a good reason to talk about these problems: in the midst of the economic complexities of which we are speaking, there are always the fundamental elements of human life, the elementary and universal givens that the specialists so often leave to the side. I am not saying that they deny them, but that they leave them aside, through a kind of awkwardness, a timidity, I might even say a lack of human experience; they are very strong on theory, but human relations and human life appear to escape them: they combine their lack of human experience with an often excessive confidence in the rational elaboration of all of their beautiful theories. They are far too sure that everything can be explained by class struggle, or by purchasing power, or by the GDP. We should not have much confidence in their interpretations. Human reality is living reality and it leaks through all of these theoretical "sieves."

So it makes sense that we attempt, with modesty, to survey the elementary regions of economic life. We will not look at every problem or try to resolve every question, but we will simply try to reflect a little on the fundamental givens. And since we cannot hope to discover everything on our own, even the elements and foundations, that is, the common conceptions, let us begin by reading those men who were nearest to them and who have first discovered them, namely the Ancients: they were occupied with economic life, economic reality, and it is through their eyes that we should begin our study.

Of course, economic life in the ancient world was contained in an incomparably narrower framework than modern economic life. It was not so complicated and vast, so much in perpetual movement and evolution. There is no comparison between their economy and ours, if we are looking at its framework and dimensions: but the Ancients knew how to mark out the fundamental and essential; and above all else, when problems first arise and we are trying to see them clearly, we ought to have recourse to their light in order to brighten our own lantern, especially since in the end we always have to return to the light which they have furnished, the points that they have perceived and marked out, although in different circumstances and under different appearances. Likewise, in order not to make things unnecessarily complicated, we will simply adopt some of the words which they use in this matter and which they use, not as if blowing hot air, but with an authentic understanding of their meaning and having deeply considered their signification.

Naming *Goods*

Human social life comes from *relations between persons* and implies economics *goods*, that is, possessions. *Goods* are one of the basic and essential concerns of economics. But how do the Greeks designate these goods which man needs in order to live? They use two terms: first κτημα, *ktema* (in the plural κτηματα, *ktemata*); second, χρημα, *chrema*, (in the plural χρηματα, *chremata*).

What does *ktema* mean? *Ktema* designates in general the goods which we possess following upon a process of

acquisition. This is what a Greek thinks of, this is what Aristotle, Plato and Socrates understand when they use this word. But *ktema* is also often used in a more particular and more determinate sense, as landed property; *ktemata*, from the point of view of economic goods, are the goods which have an immovable value and durable stability, what today we call "real estate."

In contrast to *ktema*, with its general meaning of a good which we possess because we have acquired it and its more particular meaning of the landed property which is in our possession, there is the word *chrema* whose root is near to that of χειρ (*cheir*) "the hand." *Chrema* is a good considered, not so much from the aspect of acquisition as from the aspect of use. We acquire goods, and then we use them. And since, when we use a thing, we make it movable, that is, we put it in motion, *chrema* comes to mean movable wealth. As *ktema* takes on the aspect of immovable wealth, of stable and foundational wealth, the word *chrema* takes on the aspect of movable wealth, of currency with its connotations of trade, of commercial and financial transactions, of business and exchange, of speculation, in short, of every aspect of the economic life that we have come to know so well.

These are the two aspects, the two extreme poles which are signified by these two words, and you can easily see that this distinction is a duality which always holds and which is real even today. Landed property, in the further evolution of economic life, has lost its importance in comparison to movable wealth, in comparison to currency, but the coexistence of these two kinds of wealth always poses problems. For example, the problem with which Marx is concerned occurs because there is a tension between the two. Of course for Marx landed wealth is no longer represented by property values but by human labor: it is the latter which comes to be *ktema par excellence*. In Marxist economics capitalism is an economy in which landed wealth, founded upon human labor, is directly in conflict with currency, trade, exchange, or commerce; it is an economy which expresses itself through the exploitation of human labor by the man of money and commerce, precisely that man who uses movable wealth. Marxism hopes to be the solution to that problem.

The necessity of acquisition for man

Let us leave aside for a moment this opposition and return to the first and general sense of the word *ktema*, the goods possessed through acquisition. It is on this theme of acquisition that we will first linger, in order to see how the acquisition of good fits with the human person as we have defined him.

The first thing that we need to recall is the necessity of acquisition: it is a fundamental condition of human life, but we must precisely mark out the reasons for this. We have said, "The human person is an individual substance of a rational nature." Insofar as he has a rational nature, the human person is open to all that is, to the universality of the Good, and it is in this direction that he ought to follow real his vocation, that he ought to advance. Consequently, he should reach out for something, develop himself, and move himself toward something which transcends himself. But his individual substance is completed by being supplied with tools or instruments, resources which permit him to advance towards an end which transcends himself, which end, finally, is God.

In fact, this is true of every spiritual creature and it is very interesting to underline this. Today we are not supposed to talk about angels because they are mythological . . . but to man this seems like a mythology because he is placed between the angel and the animal. The angel, even though he is so much higher than man, still needs his substance to be completed by resources which allow him to advance into the horizon in which his intellect works. That is, he has a need for ideas because his intellect does not find in his own being the proper universality, the proper fullness of being. He is only a finite substance, he is not God; consequently, to think about the horizon of universal and infinite being, he needs to complete his intellect with representations, with ideas. Even the angel needs resources to live, although these are spiritual resources and thus belong to an entirely transcendent order.

The same thing is true, analogically, of the animal. The animal needs organs, tools which complete his nature and which allow him to move himself (it is in movement that the animal attains its perfection, comes to its completion). The bird needs wings to fly; it needs something complementary which allows it to advance towards its vocation.

We ourselves are also in the same situation; of course there is a great difference, and this difference comes from three characteristics of our nature:

First, man is certainly the creature who needs the greatest quantity of resources. Look at all the bric-a-brac of hats, toothbrushes, shoes and cars! It is incredible, all that we need to live. It is much simpler for the angel: he has no need for suitcases, nor for vehicles to move himself around. And even the animal is not encumbered with a large quantity of things: the bear is well-equipped with his fur, and he doesn't drag around dishes and sauce pans. So, among all the things that exist, we are the ones who need the most things.

Second, among all the things that exist, we are the ones for whom these things are not provided by nature. True, the angel's intellect needs to be completed by what idealist philosophers call innate ideas; but according to the theologians, the angel receives these at the time of his creation; he does not have to acquire them. And the animal receives from nature all the equipment that he needs. Are we left entirely unprovided for? Not entirely: nature gives us reason and hands, but then she says to us: "Make do for yourself!" And this is why the proposition of Marx, that man is distinguished from the animals in this, that he produces his own means of existence, is a true proposition.

Third, in order to acquire these things necessary for our lives, we cannot be alone. A man by himself with his reason and his hands will not live very long, even if he is a genius. We can only acquire these things socially, with others; by ourselves we cannot exploit the resources that our reason and our hands give us.

Thus man occupies a very peculiar position: he needs a great number of things, he is not given them by nature, and he can only procure them if he associates himself with a group, that is, if he constructs a society for acquisition, an economic society through which he procures for himself all the things he needs in order to live. It is very important to note this: this is the basis of all economic life, its reason for being. Moreover, we should note that the process of acquisition is never finished. Man has to engage in acquisition unceasingly, under pain of falling back into his original poverty. Man is called to exercise incessantly the activity of acquisition which, understood correctly, occupies and even preoccupies him.

The process and the means of acquisition

Now that we have made this clear, let us look at what kind of process and procedure acquisition is. There are two great means of acquisition: either we acquire the goods for ourselves, or we obtain them by exchange. True, nature furnishes for us our first food, milk. At first, nature puts milk right in our mouths, although afterwards she leaves us to fend for ourselves. If nature offers us other goods, it is always on the condition that we procure them for ourselves through various activities: hunting, fishing, herding and, a more stable activity, farming. When we look at the ways in which the economy has developed in human society, we witness this progression.

But we procure all these things because each thing has its own function: bread is for eating, a bed is for sleeping in, etc. But we cannot satisfy all these needs by ourselves; we can procure nourishment through hunting, fishing or agriculture; we can produce clothing by weaving; still none of these goods by itself is enough to satisfy the needs of our nature. Should we satisfy our need for wheat, we would still lack wine. Our poverty presses down on us, our reason intervenes, and then we establish a new means of acquisition, exchange.

Reason awakens. Fortunately, we are always at least a little rational. Reason does not let itself be restricted to something determinate. Instead, it is the function of reason to see a relation between one thing and another, and this is what happens in exchange: we compare one thing to another. I do not see wheat just as something that enables me to feed myself. I compare my wheat with my neighbor's wine. I say to myself: look, he has a lot of wine, but no wheat; I have a lot of wheat, but no wine. Man can exchange and acquire something through an exchange. He can compare a good which he produces and possesses with another product which he does not possess.

Our reason is not limited there; it continues to calculate, to imagine and to elaborate. Exchanges multiply and, in order to deal with partners farther and farther away, we find a means to facilitate exchanges: money. Money was invented to permit and facilitate exchange. It is an extraordinary commodity. In place of carrying one hundred bushels of wheat to get one hundred measures of wine, you only have to pass some coins from one hand to another. It is all the more convenient because a man might not know where to put all the wheat that you want to give him. And thus we enter into realm of mobile wealth, *chrema*.

There are two basic means of acquiring the goods necessary for life: to procure them by oneself thanks to the start which nature gives, or to obtain them from others by way of exchange, with the added ease provided by money. This is the general procedure which everybody knows about, but we still need to examine it closely because it gives us the fundamental elements of the human economy. And clearly this is not just a return to elementary and obsolete things. The whole critique of Marx, his whole critique of economic society is based upon these concepts. A man like Marx returns to the elementary things, and he develops his theory using (or perhaps misusing) them.

The limits of natural acquisition

Let us pass on to two more elementary considerations: the principle and the term of acquisition. On the one hand, the principle of acquisition, what provokes acquisition, is our human poverty in respect to what is necessary and useful for life. We are poor by nature (this fundamental poverty and

neediness of man should never be forgotten). On the other hand, the term of acquisition is to obtain such a sufficiency of goods that a man is able to live well, that is, to live a truly and happily human life. But in order that the acquisition of riches might be relative to real human needs (food, drink, clothing, shelter, etc.), it is necessary that it be restrained within certain natural limits. That is to say, no matter how hungry someone might be, even if he were a glutton, he could not keep on eating bread, or even chocolate, forever. There will be a moment when he has had enough. A blacksmith does not need an infinity of hammers or an infinite hammer. He might need a more or less large number of hammers, but finally only a limited number of finite hammers. Once while I was at the sea-side I met a tailor who told me about one of his customers who had three-hundred and sixty five suits. I found that extraordinary: a suit for every day of the year. There are also some men who wear the same suit every day . . . To have three hundred and sixty five suits is certainly possible. Perhaps this man has a job which requires that, perhaps he is the master of ceremonies for royal receptions or burials and so a large number of suits is a necessity of his existence. Very well, but even here there is a limit: he does not need an infinity of suits. We can acquire masses of goods, but there is always a limit to their use and consumption. Ultimately we should pursue goods insofar as they correspond, by their nature, to our needs: bread for eating, shoes for wearing. There is a material limit: we are very needy, but our neediness is not capable of consuming anything.

Moreover, the acquisition which enables us to satisfy the needs of our existence, to possess enough, ought to be subordinated to living a human life well. Of course, to live life well requires a sufficiency of material goods, but it consists in something entirely superior and of another order: for man, to live well is to live in conformity with that which is highest in him, with that which is specific to his nature, namely, reason or spirit.

The acquisition of goods is thus comprised between two boundaries. The one boundary, the principle, comes from the fact that the necessities of our nature are limited (we cannot eat or drink indefinitely, we do not have an infinite need for umbrellas), that there are natural limits. The second boundary comes from the fact that acquisition has for a term that for the sake of which we acquire. Acquisition ought to enable us, not just to heap up the necessities of nature, but to lead a life properly human in accord with the true good for man, which really means to lead a morally good life. Such are the two boundaries between which acquisition is contained.

The dizziness of the infinity that starts with money

What we have said so far is true, but we can still ask about what we see in the real economic life of men. Do we ourselves live this kind of wise and measured economic life which satisfies man's needs as abundantly as is necessary according to his circumstances and situations, all the while having in view the superior finality of man, which is to live human life well, not only his individual life but also his common life, his social and political life? Do we see an economy contained between these two measures, our needs and the finality of man? When we seek the facts, and the interpretations of the facts which are economic and social theories, it seems that reality runs contrary to this. We see that the activity of acquisition has become so developed that, on the one hand, it looks to (I am not saying, arrives at) and seeks to exceed the natural limits of our needs, particularly in seeking to awaken new needs; moreover, we see an activity of acquisition

that is not truly and seriously subordinated to the superior finalities of human life, to living well according to the moral life and to preserving the true good of society. The present tendency is to take as the principle of acquisition no longer the needs of man but his active energy (as well as the active energies of nature), and acquisition no longer has for its term a measure which is exterior or superior to itself. This activity of production develops by itself in an autonomous fashion: it tends to the unlimited acquisition of wealth through commerce, finance and industry. This is the tendency so predominant today.

The main thrust of capitalism, for example, is not just the pursuit of indefinitely increasing wealth; it also sets up a system in which humanity appropriates the very forces of production (all the productive forces which nature can give us: wood, coal, petroleum, electricity, atomic power). The development of a capitalist society consists in using these productive forces without limit, putting our hands on them in such a way that they can always produce more and more and can assure the production and acquisition of goods without measure. And the first of these productive forces is human labor. It is human labor that the economists – first Smith, the great theoretician and the prophet of the liberal economy, and then Ricardo (and he will be taken up again by Marx) – have posited as the first of the forces whose deployment enables us to pursue acquisition without limit. But it turns out that capitalism dispossesses man and strips him of his property because of the intervention of money, of exchange, of commerce: it distorts, turns aside or curbs this indefinite power of production that is human labor. It is then necessary that capitalism pass away into a new stage in which man would socially enter into the full possession of his ultimate acquisition, namely, his unlimited power of production, and this is precisely the goal of the Marxist revolution. Such is the objective of Marx: finally, in good time, to put man in possession of his unlimited power for the production and acquisition of goods. He tells us this clearly in his *History of Economic Doctrines*, in a very striking and forceful text:

> Ricardo, rightly for his time, regards the capitalist mode of production as the most advantageous for production in general, as the most advantageous for the creation of wealth. He wants production for the sake of production and this with good reason. To assert, as sentimental opponents of Ricardo's did, that production as such is not the object, is to forget that production for its own sake means nothing but the development of human productive forces, in other words, the development of the wealth of human nature as an end in itself. To oppose to this end the welfare of the individual, as Sismondi does, is to assert that the development of the species must be retarded in order to safeguard the welfare of the individual; so that, for instance, no war may be waged, since at all events some individuals perish in it. Sismondi is only right against the economists who conceal or deny this contradiction. Apart from the barrenness of such edifying reflections, they reveal a failure to understand the fact that, although at first the development of the capacities of the human species takes place at the cost of the majority of human individuals and even classes, in the end it breaks through this contradiction and coincides with the development of the individual; the higher development

> of individuality is thus only achieved by a historical process during which individuals are sacrificed.[1]

Notice what he is trying to say: to arrive at this final state, it is necessary to sacrifice the individual, but this ultimately will be the salvation of the individual. In the final society, the individual participates in an infinite power of production and acquisition which would be liberated from all the limitations, constraints, contrarieties and contradictions which he finds in capitalist society. As Marx writes elsewhere, "True riches is the full productive power of all the individuals."[2] This is the ultimate *ktema*, this is the fundamental wealth that man ought to acquire. This is the end point of this evolution.

How has this state of affairs been brought into existence? A door has been opened. We have spoken of a natural economy, contained in natural limits, but a break, an opening has appeared with the creation of money; it is currency which enables man to hurl himself into an unlimited conquest of goods.

We have seen how natural goods taken in their natural specificity (the bread that we eat, the shoes that we wear, etc.) imply limits, but the advantage of currency is that we are not obliged to consume it; we consume it in a certain way, but we have another sack than our stomach for receiving it and an infinite desire to possess it. Since money is a representative of any and all goods, we can always desire more of it: "All things obey money," "All things answer to the call of silver," because to possess silver is to possess the infinite power of acquisition. Thus, although money has opened the door to infinite of human desires, it cannot be the definitive basis of unlimited acquisition: it is too fluid, too inconsistent. For the Physiocrats that definitive basis would be nature itself, since for a grain of wheat she gives back an ear; nature is the principle of unlimited acquisition (this is the position of Quesnay in the 18th century, and more or less that of Turgot). Smith, in contrast, asserts that the basis of unlimited acquisition of wealth is human labor, a theme taken up by the liberal economists and then by Marx. This is how these things have happened, how today it seems that we live in an economy captured by the dizziness of infinity, an economy of perpetual growth: we must always produce more, always sell and then sell some more. This tendency to the infinite absorbs all natural limits, and the finality of something superior has been completely drowned in that movement.

The sharing of goods

The question we now need to ask is how to find the right place for this necessary acquisition of goods in society. Aristotle has already said that the whole life of business is a kind of slavery, and I believe that nearly all businessmen would agree. The activity, the occupations that we have to undertake in order to "earn our bread," to live, are on the whole slavish. They are a constraint, and it is not there that the person can fulfill himself, even if we have the highest GDP possible . . . The systems which introduce the aforesaid point of view as fundamental and which try to establish it in the real life of society thus leave man in a slavery which does allow him to fulfill himself. This is true because, while the *ktemata*, the material goods, are surely the result of acquisition, they only exist in order to serve us. Human life is defined before all else by the activities which use them. We acquire shoes to wear them and bread to eat it.

[1] Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value* in *Capital*, Book IV, Chapter 9, Section 2.
[2] Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 632.

This use can be a personal use, but there is also a use which corresponds more completely and perfectly to the vocation of the person, which is precisely to share these goods. In fact, it seems to me that it is in sharing that the person makes himself most perfectly real. Why? Quite simply because acquisition does not require us to go outside of ourselves, but limits us to the life of concupiscence and desire: this is a life which makes us seek the good only for ourselves. Someone might argue that we are not wishing the good just for ourselves, but for the whole world; but in reality, if we truly embrace and espouse the philosophy of acquisition, which is at the root of Marxism, for example, we wish for things insofar as they procure something that is good for ourselves. Perhaps we wish the same thing for everyone, but only on the condition that everyone has the same will, a will in which each wishes the good for himself. This is a generalized concupiscence in which I am not concerned about others. Marx tells us that the perfect society will have such an abundance that we will not have to dispute about goods; just as we do not, at least for the moment, have to dispute about the air we breathe (there is so much that everyone can enjoy it). In that day acquisition will not imply any conflict, competition or exploitation of one man by another. There will be so many things that we will only have to help ourselves. This will be the highest possible state of affairs in which all selfishness will be able to be satisfied and in which the sharing of goods between one person and another will be absolutely unnecessary. There will no longer be sharing in the sense of being able to or being obliged to "pass the dish" to another, to benefit another with such a good or such an advantage. But, I think that this does not correspond to true human nature, to the true needs of the human person.

The human person is an intelligent person; insofar as he is intelligent, he is able to know reality and being as it is in itself, and the good as it is in itself. Thus he is capable of transcending the good, insofar as it has an interest and advantage simply for the subject who knows. My intellect is able to see that health is a good thing in itself, and not only good for me; and since the good is diffusive of itself and in itself demands that it pour itself out, the human person who discovers that something is a good sees it as a good reality in itself and thus as a reality that ought to be shared. The good physician is not the one who only wants to heal in order to receive his fee from the consultation; rather, the good physician is the one for whom health is a good which ought to be shared with the greatest possible number of men. The moment in which the human person is truly himself is not when he tries to aggrandize himself or to acquire something, but when he gives, when he shares.

But this does not mean that the person ought to cross over into a state of pure sharing, stripping himself of every selfish pursuit of acquisition in order to do nothing but give to others. This also is not human. St. Thomas shows us this in an extremely important, even metaphysical, article which touches upon the fundamental problem of sharing and acquisition. The article asks whether God is truly the Supreme Good to which the whole universe is ordered, whether He is the final cause for all beings. In the course of his argument he tells us this: God is the only being able to be a purely sharing being because only He has all of being in Himself. He is the infinite Good and there is nothing that He can acquire. God is the being Who is above every kind of acquisition and Who can give purely and simply; He takes nothing back in His sharing. St. Thomas adds: But notice, this is not true for any creature; a creature can never be elevated to that state. Every creature, through the very act of sharing something, also acquires something. Suppose that you pour out a hundred million dollars upon your Catholic college

for the defense of the truth and that you make yourself miserably poor because of this; that is certainly an extraordinary sharing, isn't it? Yes, but this beautiful act is all the same an acquisition for you; it pleases you.

This is what enables us to respond to the proposals of Fenelon, of Madame Guyon, and of Quietism (it is necessary to make all these comparisons in order to grasp the root of these problems) in their quest for an absolutely disinterested love of God. They say: I would love God even in Hell, even if I am deprived of everything, even if this love gained me nothing. St. Thomas responds: no, you are not God, you are a creature, and consequently you have to acquire, you necessarily would acquire something.

In fact, it is not at all necessary that the notion of sharing simply transforms itself into the idea of "pure" generosity. It is very necessary to see one in relation to the other. It is very necessary to see that, even if the person is more perfectly fulfilled in sharing than in acquisition, this does not prevent it being true that acquisition is a prerequisite for sharing. It is absolutely necessary that acquisition be accomplished first.

But it is also necessary to add: this necessary condition can be transcended. Because he is intelligent, because he has a spiritual appetite which we call the will, a person can, in a certain way, attain something of the divine ability to share. It is then that we most approach God, that we are truly a person in vocation and reality: we can share for the sake of sharing – even if we cannot share without by that very fact acquiring something – but our reason for sharing will be taken from the good of sharing itself. Contrary to what La Rochefoucauld thinks, who says that we can never detach ourselves from self-interest in doing good ("The virtues are lost in self-interest like rivers in the sea"), the human person can in reality detach himself from his self-interest and in this way self-interest will not be the determining reason for his action: the sharing will be for him an acquisition, but it is not the acquisition which moves him to act.

Thus it is important to see that there are, with regard to this acquisition-sharing problem, these two extreme positions:
1) You have those who say that it is necessary to put entirely aside all acquisition (pure sharing, pure love, complete disinterestedness). To these St. Thomas responds: this is divine and not human. Because you are a creature, all of the actions that you perform result in some acquisition. 2) And you have those such as Marx for whom all human life consists in acquisition, and in this they are not fundamentally distinguished from the capitalists. They have the idea that every society has been predetermined by the productive forces which that society has as its basis, its industry, for example. We respond: these are absolutely necessary conditions, but they are not the ultimate determining principle. The human person has a higher determining principle.

Thus society must start with the activity of acquisition, of the production of goods, but the true behavior of the human person in society does not stop there.

We find the two points of view reunited in the question concerning private property as St. Thomas presents it, and you will immediately see them: the point of view of the acquisition of goods and the superior point of view of sharing. The puzzle of private property is unlocked using this double key:

> I answer that two things are fitting to man in respect to exterior things. One is the power to procure and dispense them, and in this regard it is lawful for man to possess property. Moreover this is necessary to human life for three reasons.

First because every man is more careful to procure what is for himself alone than that which is common to many or to all, since each one would shirk the labor and leave to another that which concerns the community, as happens where there is a great number of servants. (*We always wait for someone else to do the work. And who puts himself out to cultivate a common field? Consequently, with regard to the acquisition of goods and the task of procuring them, private property is a useful thing.)*

Secondly, because human affairs are conducted in a more orderly fashion if each man is charged with taking care of some particular thing himself, whereas there would be confusion if everyone had to look after everything indeterminately. (*Here again, acquisition demands private property; the social good will be better assured for all.*)

Thirdly, because a more peaceful state is ensured to man if each one is contented with his own. Hence it is to be observed that quarrels arise more frequently where there is no division of the things possessed.

The second thing that is competent to man with regard to external things is their use. In this respect man ought to possess external things, not as his own, but as common, namely, in such a way that he is ready to share them with others in their need. Hence the Apostle says (1 Tim. 6:17,18): "Charge the rich of this world ... to give easily, to share with others," etc.[3]

Thus, private property is justified and necessary, not because of private interest alone, but ultimately because of the superior finality of the common good. It is absolutely necessary for the effective acquisition of goods in society, but it is subordinated to a superior finality, which is sharing. It is not that you should give away everything (you are not obliged to live like St. Francis), but still it is necessary that you be prepared, when you see that it is a necessary or useful thing, to put the goods of which you are the proprietor at the disposal of others; not necessarily to give them away to others, but at least to lend them.

I believe that that the fulfillment of the person is truly found in this kind of attitude towards material goods. We are obliged to live in an economy of acquisition, but it is necessary to give it its purpose through something superior which, with respect to this good, is an attitude or a disposition of sharing with ease. We must to try to develop this attitude in all areas of social life, and finally this is what all men are looking for. You know very well that when you entrust a task that serves the common good to a child, or really to anyone, he does the task willingly.

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Sharing is not an extraordinary thing. It is something so ordinary that we can stir it up in most men, and economic activity should be penetrated as much as possible by this attitude of sharing. This might be how we can solve our problems. Perhaps through an attitude of sharing we can begin to overcome class warfare. But when the forces of acquisition are so strong that they exclude all else, sharing becomes impossible, and this is not the proper situation for the person in the economic life.

In our day we talk a lot about communication, about sharing information, but we can see the ascendancy of the

[3] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IIa, IIae, q. 66, a. 2.

purely productive conception of man even in the way we speak about communication: the communication which we want, which we so desperately need, has become the work of "producers": television producers, movie producers and all the rest!

Modern economic society has reached a stage of indefinite and almost unlimited production and consumption, and as a result the two functions, the two finalities, of domestic society and of political society have been absorbed into it and have almost disappeared. Man does not need to return to the wheelbarrow, but he does need to uncover the ways in which, in accord with the complexity of economic mechanisms, man in society can rediscover and attend to his true end. In order to lead a truly human life, man must enter into the sharing of the goods that he needs for himself: first, bread and shoes, but more importantly, art, wisdom and friendship.