

Justice as Responsible Human Relations

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Thomas Aquinas, a renowned philosopher-theologian during the middle ages, and a Doctor of the Catholic Church, qualifies the human person as a social being. The human person has to enter the society because he/she can hardly survive in isolation. Aquinas describes the human person in these words: "Man is a social animal, having many wants he cannot supply for himself. He is born into a group by nature. By living with others he is helped to the good life... as regards necessities without which life cannot be lived, he is supported by the domestic group. He depends on his parents for his birth, feeding, upbringing."¹ He further explains that the human person is at the mercy of others be it the person's family, immediate community, and the society as a whole. The human person is in no way self-sufficient. Furthermore, Aquinas argues that a human person needs others in order to "live well." A decent living is almost impossible without the aid of others. He says, "as regards the conveniences without which life cannot be lived well, he is helped by the civil group, both for material benefit and for moral advantage."² A community survives because of the contribution of each member. Without those people who work for

¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, lecture I (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1964) as quoted in Thomas Gilby, ed., *Philosophical Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), 372.

² Quoted in Gilby, 372.

*the benefit of others, our civilization would not become as advanced as it is now. We are well aware that most of the things that we use and consume are not of our own doing. For example, most of us are not raising our own farms and yet we enjoy the products of the farms. Some of us don't know anything about auto engines and yet we are benefiting the convenience of a car. A society is a venue for people to continue working for each one. Aquinas explains this saying, "one solitary man cannot discover everything for himself. He must combine in a team, so that one may help another and different men be reasonably engaged in different jobs, one in medicine, another in this, another in that."*³ A person who lives in isolation is either somebody who resembles to a god, who knows almost everything, or a person who simply hates the company of others, and lives a very limited existence. It is a fact that the interdependence of people have produced much of this world, and so people are now trying to find means to continue working together in communion and solidarity, for hardly any man could *fully* live his life in isolation.

But if the human person is a social animal, there is also a need for him/her to enter into a kind of structure. Walter Farrel says, "because men are not tied down to one necessary path to the goal, it is possible for men to crash into each other like stars gone wild. Men must have some order other than the merely physical, to govern their mutual relations precisely because of the great potentialities inherent in their nature."⁴ The human person has to structure his/her existence in order to peacefully live with others. This fact necessitates the creation of a state that helps to direct or regulate one person's relationship with other people. Aquinas says, "with many individuals each seeking what suits himself, the mass would disintegrate were there not one power within it caring for the common good. Any organism would disintegrate were there is no unifying force working for the common good of all the members."⁵ Arguing further, Aquinas says, "A ruling cause therefore is required, standing apart from interests

³ Quoted in Gilby, 373.

⁴ Walter Farrel, OP, *A Companion to the Summa: The Fullness of Life*. Vol. 3 (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1940), 166.

⁵ Quoted in Gilby, 380.

of private gain, to act for the common good of the many.”⁶ This ruling cause is the ‘state’ or the ‘authority’ that governs the society in which each human person is a part of.

It seems then, that if a human person needs other people for the former’s survival and well-being, he/she could not really escape his/her associations with the latter. The human person has to be with others. In fact, some contemporary writers claim that a human person can know himself/herself better if he/she is in association with others.⁷ Some collectivists also argue that “man’s life has a totally public character because the individual is adequately defined only through his membership in the social whole...”⁸

Such association with others then affirms the need for a particular standard the function of which is to regulate one’s relationship with others. This is where the practice of justice becomes important. For Aquinas, justice assures that man’s relationship with others is well-ordered for, as he says, justice is the “perpetual will to render to others that which is their due.”⁹ Aquinas further believes that this rendering of each one’s due is the first step toward establishing harmonious and orderly relations of people.

This framework then renders the importance of examining Aquinas’ proposal for the practice of justice in the community. In his definition of justice, there are several elements that may merit our attention in order to understand how justice can serve the purpose of ordering one man’s relationship with other people, as each person seeks perfection for himself by joining others in what we now know as a community, or a society.

Justice is always other-oriented

Examining closely the Thomistic definition of justice, one would explicitly see the presence of the “other.” Josef Pieper says,

⁶ Quoted in Gilby, 380.

⁷ Jose de Mesa, *In Solidarity with Culture: Studies in Theological Re-rooting* (Manila: Maryhill School of Theology, 1991), 45.

⁸ Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 1975), 74.

⁹ ST II-II, q. 58, art. 1, I answer that.

"in the relationship of justice, men confront each other as separate others, almost as strangers. Justice properly speaking, demands a distinction of parties."¹⁰ It immediately appears that justice is not meant for oneself. Aquinas himself argues that there is no justice about the self. Justice always entails an "other." The angelic doctor commented on Aristotle's *Ethics* that claims, "towards one's own things injustice does not exist... there is no injustice done to oneself."¹¹ In the same vein, Aquinas argues that there is no issue of justice, properly speaking, between the father and his son or chattel, because the son, until he comes to age and can act on his own accord, belongs to the father since the father looks after his son as he does himself.¹² In this regard, justice always has a social value. This means then that justice finds its fulfillment, not in the individual, but in one's relationship with others. This makes justice an important ingredient in one's harmonious relationship with others.

Further, it also appears that the talk of justice as other-oriented is primarily a talk of "responsibility" more than "rights." Ironically, modern views on justice are so directed towards "rights," which at times even compromises the value of "responsibility." Aquinas' definition in this case directly reminds us that justice is primarily an issue of "rendering to others," that is, a justice that is first and foremost a call for performing or doing one's responsibility. The issue of justice is basically an invitation from the "other" imploring us to honor that which is "due" him/her.

Justice is a discourse about the "due"

Another aspect of the definition that is worth mentioning is the concept of the "due." In Aquinas, the notion of the due is discussed alongside the notion of "right," which can be categorized into three types: the objective right, the subjective right, and the right that proceeds from law. He distinguishes the three kinds of "right" in this way,

¹⁰ Pieper, 54.

¹¹ Aristotle's *Ethics*, Book V, lecture XI:C, 1013.

¹² Cf. Pieper, 54.

First the objective right, which is a thing as tangible as basket of groceries, the solid wall of a house or the gay sunshine of spring day. The second is the subjective or moral right, the moral faculty of doing, having or omitting something; it is by this that we lay claim to the objective right. Finally the third is law as we understand it today.¹³

The "due" is what he calls as the *debitum*, or the demand that one person or even the entire community or the state should not hinder the other person's search for wholeness or perfection. Pieper even claims that in the Thomistic distinctions of justice (as distributive, commutative and legal), there is the hallmark of *indebtedness* although such is of a different character in each of the three forms of justice.¹⁴ It can be claimed that with this notion of the *right* or the *debitum*, the close connection between the law and the doer's subjective intention is brought into surface. Modern views on justice would even say that justice can only be best defined in *praxis*. They believe that the situation would warrant the *just* things to be done. Others would even claim that apart from *praxis*, justice can hardly be talked about. To this however, it can be argued that Aquinas was not really ignorant about the *particularity* or the *concreteness* of justice. It would be harsh and unfair to claim that the middle ages people, the Scholastics including Aquinas, simply create concepts of justice and thus reduced it into a mere "precept." It is quite clear from his notion of 'right' that Aquinas was well aware of the role of one's *subjective claim* over the objective right (the objective and actual thing that is "due" to a person claiming it). The notion of the right reveals that the person's subjective concern, especially his needs, calls for the practice of justice. However, it should also be stressed that justice also calls for the objective performance of and obedience to the law. Hence Aquinas would claim that justice should not only be limited to issues of distribution and interpersonal relations (distributive and commutative justice). The individual person also relates with the society as a whole, and thereby, has to be faithful to what Aquinas would call as *legal*

¹³ Walter Farrell, OP, *A Companion to the Summa: The Fullness of Life*, (New York: Sheed and Ward, Vol. 3, 1940), pp. 167-168.

¹⁴ Pieper, 72; cf. Fr. Fausto Gomez, *Promoting Justice, Love, Life* (Manila: UST Publishing House, 1998), 117.

justice. The law also plays an important role in the administration of justice. A subjective claim, despite its urgency, may not run contrary to the law. The law also at the same time defines the just things to be done. There is always the constant tension between the law whose scope is universal and that of the person's subjective moral claim over a thing. The granting of the "*right*" (the objective right or the actual thing claimed as a "due" to a particular person) is just only when it does not offend or ignore either the subjective claim of the individual or the universal demand of the law. In other words, when laws are created, the subjective moral claim of individuals may not just simply be taken for granted or ignored, while at the same time, the subjective moral claim of individual/s may not readily permit any act contrary to what has been permitted by the law.

Furthermore, the discussion of the right may also afford us a good understanding of the aspect of "equality" in the discourse of justice. Aquinas would always say that the notion of justice also promotes "equality." He says, "justice is properly included among the other virtues in that it orders man in his relationship with others. It is concerned with a certain equality as its name indicates. Equality moreover is concerned with others, whereas other virtues perfect man solely in those things which are appropriate to himself."¹⁵ Even in the Thomistic distinction of the distributive and commutative justice, the emphasis remains to be the equality of men. Distributive justice, which refers to the distribution of goods by the State to the people, is based on desert and the intensity of the need. There is however a growing debate about the concept of desert or the merit that should be accorded to each person. In understanding Aquinas' concept about the "due," it should always be taken into mind that the "right" should not only be understood as a desert in the sense of merit whereby a person is granted a share *only when* such merit was acquired by what one has done. Rawls is quoted in one work saying, "one cannot claim a greater part of the pie merely on the ground that he has labored more or has more talent than the other."¹⁶ Instead,

¹⁵ ST II-II, q. 57, art.1; also cf. Robert Goodwin, "Aquinas' Justice: An Interpretation," *The New Scholasticism* 63, no. 3 (1989), 276.

¹⁶ Manuel Corpuz, "Redefining Justice in Philippine Situation," *Unitas* 58, no. 4 (1985), 420.

there are rights that are inalienable to a person not because of any merit but simply because of the fact that one is a human person. Pieper himself says, "it is through creation that the created being first comes to have his rights. By virtue of creation first arises the possibility of saying: Something is my due."¹⁷ Aquinas reiterates that in distributive justice, we talk about geometric equality that is, an equality that is proportional. In commutative justice or the kind of justice operating between individuals, Aquinas talks about arithmetic equality that is both quantifiable and measurable. This type of justice assures that the status of individuals prior to a transaction is maintained even after the transaction is made.

With this then, there arise several questions about the administration of justice in actual, concrete experiences. There are issues as to whether justice should be taken as "absolute equality for all" like the view of socialist communism, or as mainly based on deserts, as in the case of capitalism, whereby the one with the biggest share earns the most in a business undertaking. Corpuz, for example, cites a tension between distributive justice and commutative justice. He argues that in the Philippines, "the distributive view should be taken as the criterion of justice."¹⁸ But such valuation of distributive justice is used as a critique to the other form, commutative justice, when he says, "the *freedom to get* as implied by the liberal morality of the commutative view cannot be just in a situation where it results to the unequal distribution of basic benefits."¹⁹ There seems to be an irony in this claim, however. How can the administration of commutative justice become an instance of injustice itself?

To resolve this seeming dilemma, it would be good to look once again at our basic understanding of what justice is. Noting the two things that have been highlighted earlier regarding the definition of justice namely, the one person's responsibility for the

¹⁷ Pieper, 46. For a more detailed discussion about the "due" vis-à-vis the concept of merit or desert, see the work of Julian Lamont, "The Concept of Desert in Distributive Justice," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 44, no. 174 (1994), 45-63.

¹⁸ Corpuz, p. 420.

¹⁹ Corpuz, p. 420.

other and the notion of the *due*, there are inevitable realizations that need to be recognized. One of these is the fact that justice is primarily about *human relationship*. To speak of justice is basically to speak about *responsible human relations*. Injustice occurs if one's relationship with another has become *irresponsible*, that is, if one places a substantial hindrance against the other person's search for wholeness or perfection.

It might be helpful to go back to Aquinas' teaching on justice via this bias on "responsible human relationship."²⁰ If this is the case, then the question of "how can I be just?" maybe translated into the question, "how should I responsibly relate with others?" This question can however only be answered hypothetically. Aquinas himself hardly speaks of the "other" in the sense that the "other" is spoken of these days. But what is certain is the fact that in the talk about justice, Aquinas explicitly also speaks of the "*other*"²¹ as the true end of our just actions. Fr. Fausto Gomez says, "the three main properties of justice that flow from its definition are *otherness*, indebtedness, and equality."²² The one who should primarily benefit one's just action is the "other" and not the "self."

Furthermore, when we talk about the "due" there seems to be the need to determine what exactly we do mean by it. It has

²⁰ Admittedly however, justice viewed as responsible human relationship still has to be determined by varying situations, cultures and contexts. Every instance of relating with the 'other' comprises an issue of justice. Hence, the question about the 'responsible' relationship is something that is constantly discerned in every context because the understanding of the 'responsible' relationship may be nuanced as contexts change.

²¹ The tone about alterity in the talk of justice is commonly identified with some contemporary philosophers like Emmanuel Levinas. But such available labeling should not hinder us to look at Aquinas' teaching on justice via the perspective of the "other." A known Thomist, Etienne Gilson, himself says "we are always just or unjust in regard to another. But as the effect of this disposition is to assure that we act rightfully toward another according as reason would have us, it renders its possessor better." [Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 307].

²² Fr. Fausto Gomez, "The Relevance of St. Thomas Aquinas' Teaching on Justice Today," delivered during the national conference on *St Thomas Aquinas and Contemporary Philosophy*, last January 19, 2007 at the Graduate School of the University of Santo Tomas, Philippines.

already been stated earlier that the *due* is threefold but such characterization remains to be vague and general. We may, for example, ask about the extent of the “objective thing” as the *due* to a person? How would we determine a person’s *due* when we talk about the *right* over concrete things? Is the subjective moral claim enough for us to say that a person deserves the objective thing that he claims for himself/herself?

We shall proceed in our reflection of the *due* by bringing into our investigation the *other person* who is entitled to receive that *due*. We shall here try to address the question, ‘who is the other?’ In Aquinas, there are two things that are worth keeping about the human person as the “other,” to whom I, as an individual, relate within a state or a community:

The other is an image and likeness of God

Respecting another person necessitates the recognition of that person’s primordial dignity as the one creature of God and the one who bears God’s image and likeness.²³ However, care must be exercised in distinguishing the dignity of the human person as the bearer of Divine image, and the kind of “person” that an individual, who is accorded with particular honors, may acquire. In his discussion about just distribution, Aquinas was particularly concerned with the fact that rewards in distribution should not be “personalist” in the contemporary sense of the word. The basis for distribution is not the kind of personality that one may have in the society. There has to be a “cause” of the distribution that is apart from the “person” of the recipient. Aquinas claims, “respect of person is contrary to distributive justice.”²⁴ Then he describes one case of ‘respect of person’ as the following: “in conferring something on someone, you consider in him not the fact that what you give him is proportionate or due to him, but the fact that he is this particular man, then there is respect for person... since you give him something simply because he is this person.”²⁵ Herein then, it is clear that Aquinas proposes the fundamental

²³ See ST I, q.93, a.2 and ST I, q.93, a. 4.

²⁴ ST II-II, q.63, a.1.

²⁵ ST II-II, q.63, a.1.

equality among men, that is, no one may claim a greater part in the distribution by virtue simply of his person or privileged status or position. Everyone fundamentally deserves an equal share because we are all equal in dignity.

This suggests then that the acts of injustice, or *irresponsible* human relations, are basically a forgetting of this fact of a human person's dignity and his/her fundamental equality with others. For example, the injustice against which the women have cried out since the entrance of the feminist movements is premised on this failure to recognize them as bearers of God's image and likeness in the same way that the members of the male species are. Similarly, the injustices against the poor are founded on the rejection of the poor man's dignity as an image of God. Withholding from others that which is their due as an image of God is tantamount to the destruction of the state because such is a basic act of injustice that disturbs the inescapable bond among people. Pieper even claims that when one withholds from the other the latter's rights, the former even destroys himself/herself in the process. He says, "the man who does not give a person what belongs to him, withholds it or deprives him of it, is really doing harm to himself; he is the one who actually loses something – indeed in the most extreme case, he even destroys himself."²⁶

Hence, if we are to recognize the person as bearer of the image of God, who is ultimately the distributor of all the good things of this earth, then we need to uphold the fact that this person's rights are *inalienable*. Pieper claims, "man has inalienable rights because he is created a person by the act of God, that is, an act beyond all human discussion. In the ultimate analysis then, something is inalienably due to man because he is *creatura*."²⁷ By reason of his being a creature of God, a human person poses that moral demand to other people around him. Pieper also speaks of this when he claims that "whatever is due to a person is something that one man may demand of another as owing to him."²⁸ Every person is crying out, 'I am a person and therefore I should

²⁶ Pieper, 47.

²⁷ Pieper, 51.

²⁸ Pieper, 47.

be treated with the dignity of an image of God and be accorded with my right.' Pieper again says, "everyone is aware however that there are rights which do not arise out of one's work; in other words, that man has a right to some things as his due, which has no basis in any action of his. No one for example doubts that a man has a right to his own life."²⁹ A human person has the obligation to recognize the right of the other. By virtue of such right, the person "can plead against everyone else."³⁰ It is "a right which imposes upon every one of his partners the obligation at least not to violate it."³¹ Any disregard of these inalienable rights is a clear instance of injustice.

Secondly, the recognition of the human person's fundamental dignity highlights the issue of equality. To justly relate with others, one must start with the realization that the other is my equal. Equality in this sense should not however be wrongly construed as uniformity. To be equal does not necessarily mean that everyone has to be the same. Aquinas himself admits that even in the state of innocence, a sort of inequality occurs. Aquinas has a negative reply on the question: "whether men were equal in the state of innocence?"³² Moreover, Aquinas also admits that in the state of innocence some men could have been masters over other men.³³ But the second statement comes with a distinction. He says,

Mastership can be twofold: First, as opposed to slavery, in which sense a master means one to whom another is subject as a slave. In another sense, mastership in a general sense to any kind of subject; and in this sense even he who has the office of governing and directing free men can be called a master. In the state of innocence, man could have been a master of other men not in the former sense but in the latter sense.³⁴

Our current talks about social justice are largely based on this claim for fundamental equality. Eleonore Stump even argues

²⁹ Pieper, 50.

³⁰ Pieper, 50.

³¹ Pieper, 50.

³² ST I, q.96, a.3.

³³ ST I, q.96, a.4.

³⁴ (ST I, q.96, a.4); cf. Gilby, ed., 382.

that Aquinas opposes usury precisely because such practice promotes inequality, which is against justice: "one of his reasons for opposing usury is commonly cited, namely, that the use of money is not the kind of thing which should be sold. But he also has another reason, which shows his attitude towards economic exchanges: it is manifest that this leads to inequality, which is contrary to justice."³⁵ Etienne Gilson also explains that, "injustice, properly so called, consists in falsifying the equality in our relations with other persons."³⁶ Hence, in our contemporary debates about the issues of distribution and allocation of wealth and properties, Aquinas has already antedated our critique against the huge gap that separates the rich and the poor. The legal claim over the extravagantly abundant property of the rich, in the face of the ineffable miseries of many poor people, falsifies this fundamental equality of human persons. To a reasonable extent, there is injustice in these things.

Our right for private properties should not compromise our fundamental equality with others.³⁷ St. Thomas himself has boldly spoken about the distribution of wealth: "goods that are held in super abundance by some people should be used for the maintenance of the poor."³⁸ In fact, this leads to a controversial position that "in the case of necessity everything is in common. Therefore a person who takes somebody else's property which necessity has made common again so far as he is concerned does not commit sin."³⁹ Stump even explains that the "the type of distribution Aquinas recommends is designed to promote equality among

³⁵ Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2005), 319.

³⁶ Gilson, 309.

³⁷ This thought has started the controversy regarding one economic measure termed as "redistributive taxation," which, for several thinkers, is an address to the issue about the widening gap between the rich and the poor. The concept of "redistributive taxation" however is plagued with several ethical questions. Nevertheless, it suggests that several people are scandalized by the undeniably wide gap between the rich and the poor. For a good discussion about the case of redistributive taxation, see David Gordon, "Justice and Redistributive Taxation: James Buchanan versus Ludwig von Mises," *The Review of Austrian Economics*, vol. 8, no. 1 (1994), 117-131.

³⁸ ST II-II, q.66, a.7.

³⁹ ST II-II, q.66, a.7; cf. Fr. Fausto Gomez, *Promoting Justice, Love, Life*, 126.

people.”⁴⁰ Further, she describes Aquinas’ proposal for the distribution of wealth as consisted of a “prohibition against retaining more of one’s possession than is needed.”⁴¹ Such prohibition “is clearly designed to keep the inequalities among persons small.”⁴² To deny this fundamental equality among all human beings will eventually lead to gross offenses against justice. The widening gap between the rich and the poor opens possibilities for more unjust actions in the community. The wider the gap among people in terms of political and economic opportunities and other benefits, the more marginalized people would there be. These are the people who are limited and enslaved by their poverty, and according to St. Thomas, this is not justifiable in man’s original state of innocence.⁴³ Poverty takes away freedom. But the human person, even in the state of innocence, is fundamentally free.

A person is incommunicable and autonomous

In addition to the truth that every human person is created in God’s image and likeness, one must also realize that each person is incommunicable and autonomous. Incommunicability means that a human person is subsistent and absolutely distinct from one another. The incommunicability of the human person is reminiscent once again of the modern concept of “alterity.” Pieper says, “to be just means to recognize the other *as* other; it means to give acknowledgment even where one cannot love.”⁴⁴ Therefore, to realize the incommunicability of the human person, the best approach for justice should be *respect*. To be just would require that we *let the other be the other*. Pieper again claims that “a just man is just, therefore, because he sanctions another person in his very separateness and helps him to receive his due.”⁴⁵ It would be worthwhile to note here that the demand of justice is the *minimum*. It does not even require us to embrace the other into our life. It simply asks us to let the other *be* not even as part

⁴⁰ Stump, 319.

⁴¹ Stump, 319.

⁴² Stump, 319.

⁴³ ST I, q. 96, a.4.

⁴⁴ Pieper, 54.

⁴⁵ Pieper, 55.

of us but as somebody *separate*. This is perhaps the reason why moralists like Annette Baier are dissatisfied with the 'ethics of justice' and proposed the 'ethics of care' instead.⁴⁶ Justice is simply a basic requirement for community living. It simply allows each individual to have a room for expression and self-actualization. With the practice of justice, there shall be no impositions because to aggressively impose anything over another person is an offense against the other's incommunicability and is thereby grossly unjust.

Furthermore, this leads us to another facet of the human person, his autonomy. The human person is the master of his/her own actions. Aquinas calls the human person as "a special case of being moved by an intrinsic principle."⁴⁷ He also adds, "forasmuch as man is rational it is necessary that man has free-will."⁴⁸ The human person chooses his/her own paths and any act of hindering such pursuit is an act of injustice. To be just, one should see to it that he has not placed any hindrance on others' path.

More than the freedom to choose for an end, autonomy also means that the person has the "capacity" to pursue such goal. The freedom to choose becomes futile when the strength to bring that choice into fruition is absent. Real freedom is present only in the realization of one's strength and capacity to realize his ends. A person who is not able to carry out his/her decision is also, at the same time, not free. Freedom becomes illusory once the strength and the capacity to do things are not provided. With this then, the human person's autonomy calls for the "empowering" of that same person. The call for justice could not simply ignore the incapacities of people. There is no justice when people are left powerless to work for their ends. Some people may not be coerced to choose a particular path, but when he has no power to tread it, he is not yet autonomous. When we talk of justice, it would not be complete unless we "empower" the powerless.

The presence of the many weak individuals among us is a manifestation of injustice. These inept individuals are deprived of their *due* autonomy and freedom. When we ignore their lack, we also condone injustice in our midst.

⁴⁶ Stump, 311.

⁴⁷ ST I-II, q.6, a.1.

⁴⁸ ST I, q.83, a.1.

Conclusion

The ambiguity and broadness of the scope of justice really demands that each context is weighed in lieu of the principles enveloping the "other," who is the concern of justice. This is the reason why one author has even claimed that justice had to be reinforced by prudence.⁴⁹ It is the virtue of prudence that allows the person to cognize which of the various courses of actions is just in a given complicated situation. But in discerning which ways are just, Aquinas has at least given us good parameters for consideration. Primarily, in the talk about justice, one thing ought not to be forgotten, that is, the welfare of the person. The person has inalienable right by virtue of his being created in the image and likeness of God. Hence, the other has a moral demand on every individual. The incommunicability of the person does not just separate him/her from my grasp and manipulation, but more importantly, it demands something from me. The notion of the "right" reminds me that I have to be mindful of that moral demand that the other person has imposed on me.

In the talk of justice, it is then important to take note of this emphasis on one's indebtedness to the other. The realization of my responsibility to respond to my fellow human beings' demand as they search for their "due" can serve as a measure to soften the imposing shouts of every contemporary person regarding his/her rights. Social policies may be engineered to make people realize that the more fundamental ingredient for justice is not to claim for "my right" but in the realization of my responsibility to respect the *due* of others. It has been argued a while ago that the "right" is not just determined by the subjective moral claim but also of the universal legislation of laws. The law may balance the self-centeredness of the contemporary "shouts for right." Since every person is unique and incommunicable, we do not impose our "right" on others, but rather we allow our person to radiate so that our "due" would pose an undeniable moral demand on others, in the same way as the "due" of others morally demands for our attention and action. Justice, we reiterate, is not virtue for the self, but for the "other."

It is the mutual recognition of rights and responsibilities that can perhaps mold us into equally virtuous people. In his article

⁴⁹ cf. Pieper, 92.

in the *U.S. Catholic* magazine, Patrick McCormick criticizes the idea of retributive justice that has been taught anywhere nowadays. We feel good at movies whose protagonists have finally overcome and made even with their persecutors. McCormick however says that this type of justice contributes even to the perpetuation of the cycle of violence in our communities. This has inspired kids, bullied at school, to think of ways of getting even with their oppressors, thereby exercising violence over the latter in the end. "Retribution is the thinnest part of justice,"⁵⁰ McCormick says. But retribution is mainly premised by the idea that 'my rights have been offended' and so I have to cry foul. While this can be legitimated as an act of justice, it has however been found less effective because it started from the wrong perspective. We suggest that the process be reversed.

When Aquinas maintains that the practice of justice has to promote the equality of men, he shows that inequality, even if it has been there since the state of innocence, should not be manipulated to justify the insurmountable gaps between people. The issue about uneven distribution of wealth and the imbalance acquisition of properties in our communities remained to be urgent concerns for justice. Justice is more than the talk of 'deserving something because one has worked for it.' It is rather primarily interested in "empowering" people in the pursuance of their ends. When poverty restricts people from their perfection, especially when there are people who brag of their superfluity, then there is a danger of injustice.

We say that justice is the minimum requirement for community living. But the problem comes when the minimum is still reduced and minimized. When the minimum requirement of allowing and even helping each one to pursue a particularly chosen end is not achieved, then good community living remains far from becoming a reality. We could hardly brag of our abundance if there are people who wallow in poverty. We could hardly boast of our strength when there are people who are weakened by their misery. We are invited to realize that we are not too different from our neighbor, and that the picture of a rich man dining sumptuously on a golden table becomes ugly when there is a poor man crawling under him fighting with his dogs for the scraps. (Lk. 16:19-31) □

⁵⁰ Patrick McCormick, "J is for Justice," *U.S. Catholic*, Vol. 66 (July 2001), 46.