

**NATURE, FREEDOM, AND THE COMMON GOOD:
PROPERTY RIGHTS IN THE CATHOLIC TRADITION**

An essay submitted for the course in Christian Political Thought

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For western Christians living after Fukuyama's fabled "end of history"--the demise of communism and triumph of capitalism--it is easy to feel as if the problem of private property is not a problem at all. All sides of the political spectrum, whatever their differences, would agree that private property is good and necessary, and that, on the whole, we have succeeded in assuring adequate access to it in our societies (though conservatives would gripe that it is not sufficiently free from government predation, and liberals would implore us to make it more a reality for the lower strata of society). But in Christian history, it started as quite a serious problem, with many Church Fathers denying the legitimacy of private property altogether. In the Middle Ages, theologians developed a more nuanced view, influentially crystallized by Thomas Aquinas, who affirmed the good of private property, but made it subordinate to the right of common use.

The gradual growth of capitalism over the ensuing centuries, favoring increasingly unrestricted private property rights, finally incited a radical reaction back towards the abolition of private property, in the form of socialism and communism, in the 19th-century. Within the Catholic tradition, this evoked fresh reflection on the question of private property, and a particular urgency to unequivocally justify it against these new threats, as we see in Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*. Leo, however, achieved this unequivocal justification at the cost of theological coherence and of loyalty to the tradition, particularly on the priority of common use and the relationship of private property to the natural law. In the early 20th-century, an intriguing new current of Catholic social thought emerged in the form of Distributism, propounded by the English writers G.K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc. They radicalized *Rerum Novarum's* somewhat superficial critique of capitalism and socialism and articulated more clearly the importance of private property,

but in the process lost sight of theological criteria and the principle of common use altogether.

In this essay, I propose to compare these two modern forms of Catholic reflection on property rights to Thomas Aquinas's account of private property in the *Summa Theologiae*. I will argue that, although Distributism in particular highlights some key issues that are insufficiently present in Aquinas, both Leo and Belloc's arguments manifest troubling capitulations to modern, non-theological paradigms, undermining their ability to critically engage the dangers of modern economic rationality. Moreover, I will suggest that their departures from the Thomist tradition are ultimately unnecessary to meet the threats they perceive, as this tradition possesses adequate resources for a response to the social problems of both capitalism and socialism. Although a full account of property ethics would involve a number of other issues, in this brief essay, I will limit myself to the questions "Is private property legitimate and desirable? If so, on what basis and for what ends?"

To understand Aquinas's answer, we should first understand the two traditions to which he seeks to do justice. The early Church Fathers are full of statements which seem deeply hostile to the institution of private property,¹ and, although we may make allowances for rhetorical exaggeration, there is little doubt that the Patristic era essentially viewed private property as, at best, a deeply ambiguous imposition upon the natural state of common ownership (a teaching derived from the ancient Stoics). Aristotle, on the other

¹ A thorough selection can be found in Anton Herman Chroust and Robert J Affeldt, "The Problem of Private Property According to St. Thomas Aquinas," *Marquette Law Review* 34:3 (1950), 155-75.

hand, had offered a much stronger endorsement of private property, and by the thirteenth-century, his thought was gaining a great deal of authority in Western Christendom.

Aquinas thus faced the dilemma of reconciling, on the one hand, a long Christian teaching on the unnaturalness of private possession, and, on the other hand, an Aristotelian insistence on its naturalness, together with the testimony of practical experience that showed the prudence of such an institution.

His solution was to affirm, with the Christian tradition, that the natural law prescribed common ownership, while arguing that it did not thereby *proscribe* private ownership. Private ownership, then, although not natural, was not thereby *unnatural*; rather, it was a legitimate and (perhaps) necessary development and augmentation of the natural law.² He arrives at this solution by means of a number of subtle distinctions, which I will seek to carefully spell out.

First, in article 1 of the question on property,³ Aquinas establishes that it is lawful “for man [speaking of mankind in general] to possess external things” (*art.*). Although only God can have dominion over the world and its fruits in terms of their *nature*, yet he has given to mankind the right to exercise dominion over them “with regard to the use of them” (*resp.*). This natural right exists in virtue of man’s reason, the divine image in him, by which “he is able to make use of external things to his own advantage” (*resp.*).

This, however, is an entirely distinct question from “Whether it is lawful for anyone to possess something as his own,” (*art.* 2⁴) that is, the question of private property. Here,

² Aquinas carefully delineates how the natural law may be augmented without being changed in *ST I-II q. 93 a. 5*, in R.W. Dyson, ed. and trans., *Aquinas: Political Writings*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 123-25.

³ *ST II-II q. 66 a. 1*, in Dyson 205-6

⁴ *ST II-II q. 66 a. 2*, in Dyson 207-9.

he invokes a further distinction to resolve the problem--between "use" and "the power to procure and dispose" (*potestas procurandi et dispensandi*), which we could call "administration" for short. The use of external things is given to all men in common, and yet, in order that the goal of common use may be best achieved, it is generally more effective that individuals be given the right, or perhaps better, the responsibility, to administer a certain portion of the world's goods for their own use and that of others. Aquinas gives three reasons for this: 1) the tendency towards laziness and abdication when working on something commonly possessed, 2) the confusion that results from the attempt at common administration, and 3) the quarrels that result when each tries to claim his just share of the common property. In view of these practical concerns, he argues that "it is necessary to human life" to allow a private right of disposition, while keeping the use of external things common, "that is, in such a way that he [the owner] is ready to share them with others in the event of need" (*resp.*).

In this account, since the common use of the earth's goods is according to natural law, common use has priority over private disposition, and the latter exists to serve the former. For this reason, private property cannot be justified in itself, but only insofar as it serves as a means to facilitate common use. According to John Finnis, the justifications for particular property rights are based on "general justice"--the advantages they will bring to the whole community.⁵ Private property is "derivatory and secondary" right, with "the obligation to realize the primary purpose of property, namely, use,"⁶ (96) according to

⁵ John Finnis, *Aquinas : Moral, Political, and Legal Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 189.

⁶ Anthony Parel, "Aquinas' Theory of Property," in *Theories of Property*, ed. Anthony Parel and Thomas Flanagan (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1979), 96.

Parel, who even says, “if there is conflict between use and ownership, there was no doubt in Aquinas’ mind which should prevail.”⁷

But how exactly does this “derivatory” right of private possession relate to the common possession given in natural law? Aquinas carefully states that common possession is natural *not* in the sense that the natural law

dictates that all things should be possessed in common and that nothing should be possessed as one’s own, but because the division of possessions is not according to natural right, but, rather, according to human agreement, which belongs to positive right, as stated above. Hence the ownership of possessions is not contrary to natural right; rather, it is an addition to natural right derived by human reason (a. 2 *ad* 1).

It is possible to read this in at least two crucially differing senses. On the one hand, one can read “the division of possessions” as meaning “any division of possessions, as opposed to the initial common ownership.” On this reading, Aquinas is saying that the fact of private property does not arise from nature, but from contingent, pragmatic arrangements that human societies may make, which are nevertheless, insofar as they serve common use, legitimate augmentations of natural right. Parel, taking this reading, goes so far as to say that property right “is to be sought rather in historical conditions which vary from time and place and culture....But this is something for the times, for the cultures, and the good legislators to determine.”⁸ If we take this reading, then private property rights are derived from the natural law only in the same sense that, say, legal penalties for adultery are; they can be prescribed based on rational application of the natural law to particular circumstances, but they are not part of it. In other words, private property is permitted (and in practice, generally very desirable), but not mandated.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Parel 97.

On the other hand, one can read “the division of possessions” as meaning “any particular schema for dividing up possessions at a particular time and place,” such that it is only such particular arrangements that are not “according to natural right, but, rather, according to human agreement.” Presumably, then, on this interpretation, the *general* fact of divided possessions is not merely a matter of human agreement, but is, in some sense, according to natural right. On this reading (taken by Leo in *Rerum Novarum*, as we shall see shortly), private property is still not a primary postulate of the natural law (it is clear that, for Aquinas, it is not), but is still, as it were, *part of* the natural law as a “derived principle.”⁹ An example of such a derived principle might be “Whosoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed.” For Aquinas, such a principle, although not straightforwardly given in the natural law, can be deduced from it as a necessary consequence, not a historically contingent application, and this is how Leo and his followers want to read Aquinas on property. In other words, private property *is* mandated by the natural law.

It is not easy to adjudicate between these two interpretations. The former, while it seems to square with Aquinas’ emphasis on the priority of common ownership (which is reduced to little more than a cipher in the latter reading), runs into the problem that Aquinas speaks of division into private property as “necessary to human life,” not, as Parel does, as “something for the times, for the cultures, and the good legislators to determine.” The latter, while it does justice to the idea of private property as a *necessary* augmentation of the natural law, makes Aquinas’s statement in *ad 1* terribly banal--did

⁹ Matthew Habiger, *Papal Teaching on Private Property, 1891 to 1981* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1990), 32.

Aquinas really mean to state the obvious fact that “natural right does not itself determine the specific property arrangements for any given time and place”? The ambiguity here, it should be pointed out, is not unique to this issue, but resides in the ambiguous role that the *ius gentium* (in which private property seems clearly to belong for Aquinas¹⁰) plays in Aquinas’s thought, as a sort of middle axiom linking natural law and positive law. In any case, we can probably safely say that Parel’s interpretation is rather too weak, and Leo’s certainly too strong.

Moreover, we can say this much with certainty about Aquinas’s view of the right of private possession, distinguishing it in crucial ways from some later theories: unlike the general right of man’s possession of the earth, the right of private possession does not derive from anything inherent in the nature of the world, or man’s relationship with it, but from the requirements of the common good arising from man’s relationship with other men. As John Finnis puts it,

The moral or juridical relationships to such an entity that we call property rights are relationships to other people. They are matters of interpersonal justice. Arguments for founding property rights on alleged ‘metaphysical’ relationships between persons and the things with which they have ‘mixed their labour’, or to which craftsmen have ‘extended their personality’, are foreign to Aquinas.¹¹

Six hundred years later, the growth of capitalism has called forth a militant socialism in reaction. Its call for the abolition of all private property by the state incites Leo XIII to respond with the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, inaugurating the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching. At the center of this document is a full-blown attack on socialism, based on a

¹⁰ Chroust and Affeldt 182.

¹¹ Finnis 189.

sturdy defense of the right of private property, a right that Leo feels the need to affirm more strongly than Aquinas did. While seeking (and no doubt perceiving himself) to be in line with Thomist teaching, Leo comes close to simply rooting the right of property in nature, in a way that Thomas never does. He does this by importing a Lockean metaphysical account of property, suggesting that a right to private property simply arises out of one's labor upon that property. It is worth attending carefully to how he constructs his justification and how it differs from Aquinas's.

According to Matthew Habiger, Leo's case for private property is based on four main arguments. First, "property is man's wages in another form,"¹² an argument that Leo develops in paragraph 5 of the encyclical, saying, "It is surely undeniable that, when a man engages in remunerative labor, the impelling reason and motive of his work is to obtain property, and thereafter to hold it as his very own."¹³ The worker ought to be free to dispose of his wages as he sees fit, and this means he should be free to buy property as he desires. This argument seems to be a bit of a *petitio principii*, since, if private property is illegitimate, the mere fact that a worker wants to use his wages to acquire it can scarcely make it legitimate; Leo's main point in this argument seems to be to convince the socialists that, on a pragmatic level, their proposals to help workers will actually make life worse for workers. It is worth remembering this appeal to the importance of the worker's freedom, because it will resurface in Belloc in a much stronger form.

¹² Habiger 10.

¹³ Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* (The Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1891). <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum_en.html> (accessed April 8, 2010). Subsequent parenthetical citations are to paragraphs in this translation.

In paragraph 6, Leo moves on to what he sees as the crux of the issue: “What is of far greater moment, however, is the fact that the remedy they propose is manifestly against justice. For, every man has by nature the right to possess property as his own.” His second and third arguments are elaborations of this appeal to nature. Habiger summarizes the second, “Of all animals, only man can plan for future needs. He therefore has a right to permanent possession”¹⁴ (developed in *RN* 6-7), and the third, “Man’s cultivation of nature entitles him to possess that which he cultivates”¹⁵ (developed in *RN* 9-10). I will return to these in a moment, as they deserve to be considered in careful detail.

Leo considers these arguments of justice to be conclusive, saying (perhaps a bit pompously) “So strong and convincing are these arguments that it seems amazing that some should now be setting up anew certain obsolete opinions in opposition to what is here laid down” (10). Nevertheless, he adds one more pragmatic argument, which Habiger summarizes, “Man, as a father, must provide for those he has begotten. Property enables him to do so with security” (developed in *RN* 12-13). This argument does not seem to hold much water on its own, since the socialists might well reply that under their system, each family would be provided for with much more security and reliability than private property would allow, and each father could rest assured that his offspring were taken care of. Although Leo seems to state very strongly that each father has the obligation to *himself* provide, out of *his own* resources, for the needs of his family (“It is a most sacred law of nature that a father should provide food and all necessaries for those whom he has begotten” [13]), it is unclear why this must necessarily be the case. The main

¹⁴ Habiger 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

burden of Leo's defense of private property, then, falls on his second and third arguments, from nature and justice.

The first of these is recognizably Thomistic, though it has changed significantly from its original use. Leo appeals to the rational nature of man, unique among animals in his ability to plan for the future, and to administer this world's goods, by his reason and will, for his present and future needs. "And on this very account--that man alone among the animal creation is endowed with reason--it must be within his right to possess things not merely for temporary and momentary use, as other living things do, but to have and to hold them in stable and permanent possession" (6). Jose María Díez-Alegría points out that, in arguing from man's reason to his right of possession, Leo seems here to be following Aquinas's argument from *articulus* 1: "Whether it is lawful for man to possess external things."¹⁶ However, whereas for Aquinas this argument established the right of mankind in general to possess external things (prior to consideration of the issue of private property), for Leo, this shows that "*every man* has by nature the right to possess property as *his own*" (6, emphasis mine). This marks a "seriously erroneous interpretation"¹⁷ of Aquinas's argument, and loses much of the logical coherence of the original.

The next argument has nothing in common with Aquinas, as it seeks to justify private property on metaphysical, rather than social, grounds, following closely in the footsteps of Locke. Indeed, the echoes of Locke are hardly subtle:

¹⁶ "Ownership and Labour: The Development of Papal Teaching," in *Rerum Novarum: One Hundred Years of Catholic Social Teaching*, ed. John Coleman and Gregory Baum (London: SCM Press, 1991), 18.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Now, when man thus turns the activity of his mind and the strength of his body toward procuring the fruits of nature, by such act he makes his own that portion of nature's field which he cultivates - that portion on which he leaves, as it were, the impress of his personality; and it cannot but be just that he should possess that portion as his very own, and have a right to hold it without any one being justified in violating that right. (9)

One wonders whether this argument actually proves rather more than Leo would wish to, for by saying that ownership of a thing arises directly and automatically from the application of one's labor to it ("As effects follow their cause, so is it just and right that the results of labor should belong to those who have bestowed their labor" [10]), he would seem to undermine the whole capitalist arrangement, in which the laborer is always bestowing his labor on things that remain the property of the capital owner. He does not seem aware, however, of the tensions that arise from his application of a metaphysically-determined property right to a system governed by socially-determined property rights. Distributism, indeed, might fit more comfortably with Leo's arguments than the capitalist arrangement he basically accepts.

Although Leo appeals to the Thomistic distinction between common use and private ownership, quoting Thomas directly in paragraph 22 regarding the duty that every man has to use his possessions for the common good of all, he significantly alters the relationship between the two. We can see this clearly in paragraph 8:

The fact that God has given the earth for the use and enjoyment of the whole human race can in no way be a bar to the owning of private property. For God has granted the earth to mankind in general, not in the sense that all without distinction can deal with it as they like, but rather that no part of it was assigned to any one in particular, and that the limits of private possession have been left to be fixed by man's own industry, and by the laws of individual races.

This seems intended as something of a restatement of Aquinas's argument in *a. 2 ad 1*, regarding the senses in which the natural law does and does not prescribe common

ownership, but, as already discussed above, it basically removes the caesura that Aquinas has carefully placed between the natural law and the institution of private property.

Aquinas resolutely affirms (whatever his remaining ambiguities) that the right of private property does not arise directly from nature, but is the product of a natural state of common ownership that has been subsequently modified by social arrangements resulting from prudent deliberation, and can be justified only on the basis of its social value. Leo, on the contrary, has made himself quite clear in stating that the right of private property is given directly by nature, and holds irrespective of its social value (though Leo does seek to bolster his case with arguments from social value). Habiger affirms that this is Leo's intent, and demonstrates moreover that it was the intent of the two main drafters of the document: "It is clear from the final redaction of *Rerum Novarum*, approved by Pope Leo XIII, and from the thought of the two theologians who composed the earlier drafts of the document, that the right (or principle) of private property is established by a direct appeal to the natural law....The foundation of the right is located ultimately in the natural law."¹⁸ Habiger indeed tries repeatedly to show, *contra* Leo's critics, that this is no departure from Thomas's teaching, but is simply a different emphasis.¹⁹ He reads Aquinas as rooting private property in the natural law: "Already we see that St. Thomas would hold that private property is an enhancement of the natural law principle of common property, made necessary by man's Fall, and is a permanent, although derived secondary principle in man's post-lapsarian condition."²⁰

¹⁸ Habiger 44.

¹⁹ Ibid. 25-32, 343-46.

²⁰ Ibid. 32.

Even if Habiger's reading of Thomas is correct, however, and Aquinas does make private property a "derived principle," the derivation is quite different from Leo's, since Aquinas derives it from man's obligations to other men, to effectively facilitate the common use of property, while Leo roots it in man himself, and his relationship to the world. Common use is thus severely marginalized in Leo's account, and there is no hint of Aquinas's suggestion that private property ceases to be justified if it ceases to serve common use.

Within the few decades following the publication of *Rerum Novarum*, the dominance of capitalism and the threat of militant socialism remain, but the alternatives become somewhat clearer. By the time Hilaire Belloc is writing *The Servile State* in 1913, and certainly by his *Essay on the Restoration of Property* in 1936, it has become clear that socialism does not mean, as Leo perhaps still imagined, the abolition of property ownership, but rather, the concentration of property ownership in the hands of the state. Belloc is thus able to recognize socialism not as the opposite of capitalism, but simply as an essentially pragmatic development of the same impulse, underlying industrial capitalism, of centralizing control of the means of production. Hence, in contrast to Leo, Belloc believes the situation calls a defense, not of private ownership in the abstract against common ownership, but of well-distributed private ownership against concentrated ownership--it is empty, in his mind, to defend the right of private property if only a small sliver of the population are to enjoy that right. It is worth noting also that,

perhaps due to his English setting, he does not want to explicitly situate himself in the Catholic tradition, though we can surmise that it lies in the background of his thought.²¹

Like both Aquinas and Leo, Belloc's endorsement of private property combines aspects of an appeal to nature and to practical considerations, but the form of his argument has more in common with Aquinas than Leo: private property does not derive directly from nature, but the structure of nature is such that private property proves most beneficial to man. The content of Belloc's argument, however, has more in common with Leo, focusing more on the good of the individual possessor, rather than the benefits accruing to society as a whole,²² and bears the stamp of modernity in its consideration of "freedom" as a preeminent value. Assuming, with Leo, the priority of the family as the basic economic unit, he focuses and provides a clear basis for Leo's concern that each family be able to provide for itself. "It is obvious that whoever controls the means of production controls the supply of wealth. If, therefore, the means for the production of that wealth which a family needs are in the control of others than the family, the family will be dependent upon those others; it will not be economically free."²³ He of course acknowledges that such pure freedom and independence is neither possible nor desirable,

²¹ Later distributists have not necessarily been so reticent. See for instance Reginald Jebb, "Private Property and the Distributist Thesis," *New Blackfriars* 31, no. 364 (1950), 324, where he gives the basic outlines of a Thomistic justification for private property--first, the general natural right of man's possession, based on his exercise of reason and will, second, the practical need for this to take the form of private possession, to prevent quarreling and strife--before moving on to justify specifically distributist recommendations for how property should be administered.

²² With the notable exception of a passage in *The Restoration of Property* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1936), 24, where he echoes Aquinas's concern that no one will care for common property as diligently as he will care for his own: "No man feels of public property that it is his own; no man will treat it with the care or affection of a thing which is his own."

²³ *Ibid.* 14.

since man is a social animal,²⁴ but he nevertheless thinks it important that the family retain as much freedom as possible.

But why? Why is economic freedom important? Because, it is needed to properly realize social and individual needs residing in man's nature. First, the social needs: "In its absence general culture ultimately fails and so certainly does citizenship. The cells of the body politic are atrophied and the mass of men have not even, at last, an opinion of their own, but are moulded by the few who retain ownership of land and endowments and reserves. So essential is property to full life."²⁵ Second, the individual needs:

Now, there is discoverable in man, Freewill. His actions are of moral value to him if they are undertaken upon his own initiative; not if they are undertaken upon compulsion. Therefore the use of choice is necessary to human dignity....Next, economic freedom is a good because man's actions are multiple, both his desires and his creative faculties; but it is only in the possession of economic freedom that this multiplicity can be effective.²⁶

This appeal has the basic structure of Aquinas's justification of private property, resting not, as it were, on the *esse* of mankind, but on the *bene esse* of man's life in the world. It has not, then, as for Leo, the character of an *a priori* appeal to the nature of things, but a deductive application of the natural law to the current state of mankind.

But the differences from Aquinas far eclipse the similarities. The principle of common use, for Aquinas the foundation of all discussion of property, and for Leo still present as a restraint on private property, seems to have vanished entirely. Belloc has lost faith in Thomas's crucial distinction between administration and use--whereas Aquinas could be read as saying that some individuals or groups could justly administer the

²⁴ Ibid. 14-15.

²⁵ Ibid. 17-18.

²⁶ Ibid. 21-22.

world's goods for the benefit of all, Belloc argues forcefully that each family must have not just the use of that portion of the world's goods that they need, but the power of administration to produce all that they need. The basic problem then is not that industrial capitalism had failed to genuinely use private possessions for common use, though Belloc certainly thought it had; rather, for Belloc, common use is not enough, because man must have the power not merely to live, but to administer his life according to his own desires and with regard to his own interests. This becomes clear in a crucial passage from *The Servile State*: "What distinguishes private property is not that the possessor thereof is less than the state, or is only a part of the state...but rather that the owner *may exercise his control over it to his own advantage, and not as a trustee for society, nor in the hierarchy of political institutions.*"²⁷ Thus far has the fundamental value of capitalism triumphed over Belloc's mind--that everyone ought to be able to use his own goods for his own advantage, not for others.

Aquinas's hierarchy of values has been inverted--*potestas dispensandi*, has, as it were, taken priority over *usum*--for Belloc, the fruits of the world do not exist primarily to enable man to provide for his material needs, but to enable him to realize his human dignity by giving him the power of disposing of them as he sees fit. Of course, this may well provide a useful augmentation of the Thomist justification for private property: by highlighting its value not merely for society as a whole but also for developing the full moral character and dignity of the proprietor (which thus further benefits society), Belloc's argument suggests that Aquinas should have attended not merely to the importance of the existence of private property, but also of its wide distribution. However, Belloc shifts the emphasis

²⁷ Hilaire Belloc, *The Servile State* (Indianapolis: The Liberty Fund, 1977), 48-49.

so far that the value of freedom is at risk of trumping those of justice and charity, leaving distributism, unlike Thomism, able to say very little when it comes to questions of just use of property.

In conclusion, then, we have seen that both Leo and Belloc, responding to the threats of socialism and (particularly for Belloc) capitalism, alter the tenor of Catholic thinking on property by shifting the emphasis from the priority of common use to the priority of private proprietorship. Leo does this by making private property a principle of the natural law, and thus justified *a priori*, rather than by virtue of its benefit to the rest of society, while Belloc does it by rooting the good of private property in its contribution to individual self-realization through freedom. In both cases, the result is a gravely weakened and theologically impoverished account of the social function of property, and the obligations of justice that govern its use. While Aquinas, though taking note of Aristotle, sought to subordinate him to the Christian moral tradition, Leo and Belloc both end up marginalizing any theological and Christian account of property in favor of values and premises drawn from philosophies outside the Christian tradition.

Finally, these changes seem, in the end, basically unnecessary. Could not Leo have adequately addressed the threat of socialism by reiterating the ways in which neither society as a whole nor the individual worker is well-served by destroying the right of private property? Could not Belloc have augmented, without disregarding, Thomas's statement of the social good of property by drawing attention to the benefits accruing to society when it is characterized by free proprietors rather than wage laborers? In light of these considerations, an essentially Thomist stance regarding the ethics of property

appears to remain the best alternative for a society attempting to cope with the fallout of industrial capitalism while avoiding the threats of socialism.

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