

## The Imperative of Common Good in Nation Building

Philip Chika Omenukwa

Department of Philosophy, Catholic Institute of West Africa

\*Corresponding Author: Philip Chika Omenukwa

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21189693>

Article History	Abstract
<b>Original Research Article</b>	<p><i>A group of people who share culture, tradition, history and are under one government can be regarded as a community, society and on a larger scale, a Nation. Nation building therefore can be referred to as a social process that involves the development of communities, societies and nations. This development occurs when individuals of a community work together to achieve common goals for the group for the collective interests in which the personal interests of the individual members are ennobled and dignified. It is disturbing when a genuine lack of concern for the common good of the society is noticed in both the socio-political sphere as well as in the other spheres of life and care about the private life and benefits of individuals in a society are unduly emphasised at the expense of the common good. Hence, this work therefore seeks to address the consequences that could emanate therefrom by adding some stress to how the society would be negatively affected by such negligence. It therefore asserts that the survival of any society hinges on the depth and seriousness with which the citizens attend to issues of common concern for the sake of the health of the community, because it is in the conscious determined representation of the common good that the individual good is ennobled and properly accomplished.</i></p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Common Good, Individual Good, Nation Building, Community, Polis, Society.</p>
<b>Received: 10-05-2026</b>	
<b>Accepted: 13-06-2026</b>	
<b>Published: 04-07-2026</b>	
<p><b>Copyright © 2026 The Author(s):</b> This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.</p> <p><b>Citation:</b> Omenukwa, P. C. (2026). The imperative of common good in nation building. UKR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, 2(7), 01-11.</p>	

### Introduction

The concept of the common good stands as a cornerstone in the foundation of societal harmony and progress. At its core, it represents a collective ideal, transcending individual ambitions and covers the welfare and standards of an entire community or nation. Hence, to relegate the common good is as bad as fostering anarchy and stagnation. It is a paradigm that underlines the importance of collective benefits and societal cohesion, fostering an environment where every individual's well-being is considered integral to the prosperity of the whole. The concept of the common good is so paramount since nature has arranged it that humans and the various segments of society need and mutually complement each other to survive meaningfully. Hence, "the human person therefore cannot find fulfillment in himself apart from the fact that he exists with others and

for others. This very assertion indicates the very importance of the social ethics principle of common good in the society for the realization of a just and peaceful co-existence of humans in the society."<sup>1</sup> The importance of the common good is so evident that "the science of bioethics today calls for replacing the current ethics of individual rights with an ethics of common good."<sup>2</sup> To achieve the overall wellness of the human person and the realization of the goodness of a large society, private interest cannot be the basis for action.

Reflecting on societal life, one is tempted to ask questions such as; does the society exist for each of us or do each of us exist for the society? Why should we care about the good of the others? If everyone decides to live an individualistic life or private life, can we have a workable society? These

<sup>1</sup> Chiwuba Anthony Ibe; The Imperative of Solidarity, Subsidiary and Common Good as Principles of Justice and Peace in the Human Society' in *Evangelical Witness* ed.

Ugochukwu Stophynus Anyanwu and Nnamdi Stanislaus Iheoma, Owerri, APT publications 2017, p. 166

<sup>2</sup> Velasquez M. et al, 'The Common Good', In *Issues in Ethics*, vol. 5 NI (Spring 1992)

questions and many more have led various scholars into this discussion on the concept of common good. The English poet and Scholar John Donne in one of his poems 'No Man is an Island' writes "No man is an Island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main." These words depict the concatenation of humanity. J. Donne in the poem purports that no individual is really isolated but rather forms an essential constituent of humanity at large.

Man is a relational being, as such, there is a need for the other person and there is the tacit principle that the affairs and rights of the other should be cared for and respected. Imagine waking up to the world alone, having only doctors existing in the world, or doctors treating only family members. Also, a situation where for personal benefits a doctor does whatever he wants to get whatever he wants without regulations or restrictions, where traders throw caution to the wind and maximize their gains by selling expired, dangerously life threatening substances and bad products at the price of good ones for the singular purposes of maximisation of business gains, where embezzlement is the norm in political offices, where public office holders have no interest in effectively carrying out their duties and assignments, where the rights and privileges of members of the society are trampled upon in a seemingly democratic government. Hence, there arises the need to deliberate again and again on the principles of common good as an important aspect of building a community, society or nation, and it cuts across various individuals, agencies, and governments that make up a nation.

Fundamentally, humans are sociable entities that are in need of human contact, which is the foundation of the formation of a community as their natural habitat, hence the justification of the concept of common good as a determining factor in the development of such communities. Scholars in different fields of study and institutes of life have made laudable researches with the aim of positing what the common good entails and how it can be achieved in societies. It is important to insist unapologetically that the concept of the common good is important in nation building and so, it cannot be over-emphasized as it has become a guiding principle in the organization of both the civic and political life. This work intends to make a critical exposure of the concept of the common good, by highlighting various philosophical opinions and stand-points. Then a step further will be taken

---

<sup>3</sup>Chiwuba Anthony Ibe; The Imperative of Solidarity, Subsidiary and Common Good as Principles of Justice and Peace in the Human Society' in *Evangelical Witness* ed. Ugochukwu Stophynus Anyanwu and Nnamdi Stanislaus Iheoma, Owerri, APT publications 2017, p. 180

to apply its principles to the societal framework by emphasizing its benefits in nation building.

### **The Concept of Common Good**

The term common good is understood in philosophy as the collective will of everyone. It is the particular good that is shared by all or at least a majority of the people involved. Most authors define the common good as "the quintessential goal of the state, which requires an admission of the individual's basic right in the society: the right of everyone to the opportunity of freely shaping his life by responsible action, in pursuit of virtue and in accordance with the moral law."<sup>3</sup> The church defines the common good as "the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual member relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment."<sup>4</sup> The Congregation for Catholic Education outlines three important characteristics that the common good demands: first, respect for the life and dignity of every person and the safeguarding of the basic human rights of each individual. Secondly, commitment to the social welfare and total development of each individual, particularly by guaranteeing that all persons have access to food, clothing, shelter, medical treatment, education, employment, family life, etc. And last, the making of real peace based on a fair society, which creates stability.

The components of the common good are intertwined with the functions of the common good in the society. "The common good ultimately consists in goods and values actualised in the members of society."<sup>5</sup> Its functions are typically two: "first, it promotes and makes possible an integral human existence for its members. In the realisation of this goal a person is helped by different societies, which all have their own common good in order to assist their members in the attainment of full humanity. Second, the common good is to preclude antisocial impulses in human nature from interfering with the rights of others and with the social order. This aspect of the common good is realized by the establishment and securing of peace and order."<sup>6</sup> The Catechism of the Catholic Church gives a very lucid definition that encompasses the elements of the common good when it says: "by the common good is to be understood the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as a group or groups to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily. The common good concerns the life of all."<sup>7</sup> Hence, the common good are those conditions of life necessary for the individual's and community's fulfillment. The essential elements of the common good

<sup>4</sup> Vatican II *Gaudium et Spes* no. 26

<sup>5</sup> Karl H. Peschke p. 558

<sup>6</sup> Karl H. Peschke p. 558

<sup>7</sup> CCC 1906

include; respect for the human person, social well-being and development of the group. Furthermore, “the common good is always oriented towards the progress of persons. The order of things must be subordinate to the order of persons and not the other way round. This order is founded on truth built up in justice and animated by love.”<sup>8</sup>

The social nature of man shows the incompleteness of man alone. Humans need and rely on one another. They complement and assist each other, thereby highlighting the nature of man as being interdependent.<sup>9</sup> The Vatican II council document *Gaudium et Spes* buttresses this when it stipulates that “Insofar as man by his nature stands completely alone in need of life in society, he is and he ought to be the beginning, the subject and the object of every social organization. Life in the society is not something accessory to man himself; through his dealings with others, through mutual service and through fraternal dialogue, man develops all his talents and becomes able to rise to his destiny.”<sup>10</sup>

These bonds of human interdependence, present in the social life of man, necessitates the need for a social condition which allows people or groups in the society to easily achieve their goals and fulfillments.<sup>11</sup> Hence, the human society is not possible unless it is based on some common moral and legal understanding with social laws, values and controls to sustain it.<sup>12</sup> Every individual or group therefore must take into account the needs, rights and obligations of every other individual or group in the society to ensure the good of the human family as a whole and the growth of the society.

The purpose of society is to bring about its own end, the common good, which is nothing more than the state of affairs that makes an ideal human life possible for all its members.<sup>13</sup> The common good is the individual good because the person depends on others to bring about the end

of society. However, the individual as a member of the community must, as far as this is possible, on his own responsibility, attain aims and realise ideals, on the basis of the principle of social cohesion and solidarity.<sup>14</sup>

### **Opinions of some Philosophers on the Common Good Thesis**

Different philosophers have produced significant insights on the idea of common good in various cultural contexts, social milieus or historical epochs. From the ancient to the modern times, these thinkers have tried to address the problem of improving the benefit of every individual or group in the community, utilising the premise of the common good as a moral ideal.

For the ancient Greek philosophers, the “polis” was the place where citizens gathered in deliberation to make decisions about governance and their life in common. This thus demonstrates an unsaid but emphatic recognition and consequent assertion of an admirable strength in the existence of the community. The polis was not necessarily a geographic location, but an association of citizens where the exercise of the public virtue of citizenship was achieved.<sup>15</sup> The common good therefore was understood as seeking the general welfare of the polis. For Plato, the good is “unitary and nothing outside of the soul can harm ones soul.”<sup>16</sup> Every soul aspires towards that which is good and arriving at such knowledge within a community creates unity, which is the greatest blessing for a state.<sup>17</sup> We see in Plato’s ideology that there is an understanding between the individual good and the common good, the private good and the public good, insofar as individuals are thought to attain happiness through the pursuit of justice and the common good.

Aristotle in his *Politics* observed that the city - state is a particular type of community, and that, like all communities, it is “established for the sake of some

<sup>8</sup> CCC 1912

<sup>9</sup> See, Philip Chika Omenukwa, Religion and the Dynamics of Language and Culture in Nigeria, *West African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2025, 142-158; See also, Philip Chika Omenukwa, On the Interdependency Between Language and Culture, *Journal of Contemporary Research in Social Sciences*, 2024, vol. 6, no. 2 61-71.

<sup>10</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*; Vatican II Council, The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents (ed. Austin Flannery, O. P.) St. Pauls pub, 2007, 814.

<sup>11</sup> See, Philip Chika Omenukwa & Anthony Ikechukwu Kanu, Private Language in Wittgenstein and the Igbo-African Worldview, *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, 2024, vol. 22, no. 1, 646-660; See also, Philip Chika Omenukwa & Anthony Ikechukwu Kanu, Meaning in Wittgenstein and African Indigenous Languages, *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, 2024, vol. 22, no. 1, 661-676.

<sup>12</sup> Okafor, Fidelis C. *Man and His Government: A Philosophical Perspective*; Awka: Fab-Anih Press, 2017, 113.

<sup>13</sup> Nwosu, Bernard C. *Understanding Political Behaviour*; Awka: Nnamdi Azikiwe University Press, 2018. 77-78.

<sup>14</sup> Edet, Jeffrey A. *Ancient and Modern Political Philosophy*; Uyo: Hercon Press, 2014. 124.

<sup>15</sup> Nnamdi B. S., Ogan T. V. *Jacques Maritain on Common Good – A philosophical critical appraisal*; International Journal of Peace and Conflict studies (IJPCS), vol.5, no.2, 2018, 122-132, 123.

<sup>16</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, trans. A. Bloom . New York : Basic Books, 1968, 185.

<sup>17</sup> Nnamdi B. S., Ogan T. V. *Jacques Maritain on Common Good – A philosophical critical appraisal*; International Journal of Peace and Conflict studies (IJPCS), vol.5, no.2, 2018, 122-132, 123.

good.”<sup>18</sup> He recognizes the temporal priority of the parts of the polis when he explains how a house stems from the union of a man and a woman, a clan stems from the union of many houses, and a polis stems from a group of clans.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, he adds that ‘individuals, houses and clans have the polis as their final end and, which he qualifies as the final end<sup>20</sup> noting that it is the first cause of every reality.’<sup>21</sup> In line with the Aristotelian thought therefore, human beings can only achieve their end within the end of the Polis. The polis according to Aristotle exists ‘for the sake of a good life’, polis ‘is and includes end of human beings’<sup>22</sup> The happiness of the polis (*eudaimonia*) is the same as the happiness of the individual which explains why even if the good is the same for a city as for an individual, still the good of the city is apparently a greater and more complete good to acquire and preserve.<sup>23</sup>

The good of both polis and individuals is to achieve a good life that leads to happiness: ‘the best way of life, for individuals severally as well as for states collectively, is the life of goodness.’<sup>24</sup> When this good is complete it is “self-sufficient.”<sup>25</sup> However, Aristotle insists; ‘what we count as self-sufficient is not what suffices for a solitary person by himself, living an isolated life, but what suffices also for parents, children, wife, and, in general, for friends and fellow citizens, since a human being is a naturally political animal’<sup>26</sup> Consequently, the task of the political community and of society’s authorities is to drive and support the good actions that enable all citizens to attain and live this life of true happiness and goodness.

In sum, Aristotle views the common good as happiness for all citizens. In his philosophy, he always seemed to have in mind the happiness or good life of the citizens, which he understood to consist of “noble actions.”<sup>27</sup> That is to say, the pursuit of happiness requires participation in public life and the cultivation of virtue, rather than, say, the selfish

accumulation of wealth. Happiness in this sense should be promulgated for all members of the society and, thus, only achievable within the polis, and consequently leading him to the conclusion that the common good is the end of a just polis. He further clarified that the good of the city-state is the most authoritative good, which encompasses all other goods.<sup>28</sup> For Aristotle therefore, the purpose of political communities is to secure not merely the conditions of living, but those of living well.<sup>29</sup>

In the medieval era, most scholars were of the opinion that the individual good is truly realisable only in the common good. They discussed the common good from a Christian perspective, while positing that one is incapable of understanding and determining the good of the individual without first of all understanding the good of the community. Augustine developed his teaching on common good from the Greek understanding of “polis” but insisted that the full and complete realization of the common good of the “polis” exists only partially here in the earthly realm, and only completely with and in God in the eternal realm.<sup>30</sup> The common good in this context takes on a divine understanding in addition to a political one.

Thomas Aquinas further elucidates a theological conception of the common good. The common good for Aquinas has both a supernatural and a temporal dimension, which conforms to what the society needs for its development and good life. The ultimate good that is sought is not anything to be achieved on earth but is only achieved in the fullness of life in God.<sup>31</sup> Michael Novak explains further that “this characteristic of God, now understood to be in man, meant that man could never be a means to the end of a common good. Instead government must exist, or be the means; to allow people to reach their fulfillment of union with God.”<sup>32</sup> Government qualifies as a tyranny when “it is not directed to the common good, but to the private

<sup>18</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*; Trans. Benjamin Jowett, New York: Random House, 1943, I, 2, 1253a 1.

<sup>19</sup> Crespo, R.F., *The Common Good and Economics*; Cuadernos de Economía, 2016, vol. 39, 23-33, 26.

<sup>20</sup> ‘the reason for the sake of which a thing exists’

<sup>21</sup> Crespo, R.F., *The Common Good and Economics*; Cuadernos de Economía, 2016, vol. 39, 23-33, 26.

<sup>22</sup> Aristotle., *Nicomachean Ethics*; Trans. Terence Irwin (second edition), Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 1999, 1,2,1094b 7.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 1,2,1094b 8-9.

<sup>24</sup> Crespo, R.F., *The Common Good and Economics*; Cuadernos de Economía, 2016, vol. 39, 23-33, 27.

<sup>25</sup> Aristotle., *Nicomachean Ethics*; Trans. Terence Irwin (second edition), Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 1999, 1,7,1097b, 9-12.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 1,7,1097b, 9-12.

<sup>27</sup> Morrison D., *The Common Good*; In: Deslauriers M. and Destrée P. (eds) *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 176–198. 190.

<sup>28</sup> Keys, M.M., *Aquinas, Aristotle, and the Promise of the Common Good*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 31

<sup>30</sup> Nnamdi B. S., Ogan T. V. *Jacques Maritain on Common Good – A philosophical critical appraisal*; International Journal of Peace and Conflict studies (IJPCS), vol.5, no.2, 2018, 122-132, 124.

<sup>31</sup> Eschmann, T., *A thomistic glossary on the principle of the pre-eminence of the common good*; Mediaeval Studies vol. 5, 1943, 123 - 165. 126.

<sup>32</sup> Novak, M., *Free Person and the Common Good*; Boston: Madison Books, 1989, 26- 28.

good.”<sup>33</sup> The notion of the common good therefore is not merely a political ideology, but has a divine aim and therefore transcends the limits of human political affairs. However, the individual good can be a true authentic good only if the moral subject actualizes his or her own good by accomplishing the good of others, and the only way the subject can do his or her own good is to do the good of the community first.<sup>34</sup>

In the course of time, various notable scholars made remarkable contribution towards an understanding of the concept of common good. Around the 17<sup>th</sup> century and beyond, the concept of common good not only focused on the moral virtues of individuals in a society or a concern towards the creation of an ideal political society, rather it further encompassed and gave precedence to a more practical consideration of the wellbeing of individuals in a society. The English philosopher Thomas Hobbes “subjectified” the notion of the good, to the extent that it was defined as anything that a person might desire.<sup>35</sup> For Hobbes, the role of the state is to ensure that individuals can pursue their personal ends in accordance with their common peace and safety, as opposed to promoting a moral vision of the good life.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, John Locke, in his ‘Two Treatises of Government’ (1988), contrasted arbitrary power with legitimate rule, which is limited to the public good of the Society.<sup>37</sup> For Locke, this meant above all that the government ought to respect and protect people’s inalienable rights to life, freedom, and private property.<sup>38</sup>

Having observed the effect of the aftermath of the Second World War in the society, the French philosopher and political thinker, Jacques Maritain, sought to reconcile the discrepancies and misconceptions between the good of the society and the good of individual persons. In an attempt to clarify these misunderstandings, Maritain pointed out that primarily, the human person cannot exist without relationships with his fellow human beings. One’s fellows are, as it were, “indispensable to one’s dignity as a person.”<sup>39</sup> Hence, the person in society needed secure

protection to exist and to thrive. The common good therefore “is neither the mere collection of private goods, nor the proper good of a whole which, like the species with respect to its individuals or the hive with respect to its bees, relates the parts to itself alone and sacrifices them to itself”.<sup>40</sup> Rather, the common good, for Maritain, is “the good human life of the multitude, and their communion in good living”.<sup>41</sup>

The concept of common good has played an important role in various political thoughts and praxis since its nascence in ancient Greece. With its diverse understandings and subsequent application in society, this concept has aided in building nations across the world. In this work, however, an elucidation of the various ways in which the notion of common good has been and continues to be integral in the community, society and nation building will be made.

### The Necessity of Community

Humans are by birth heavily indebted to nature, since they are in very limited form products of nature and will still exist within nature.<sup>42</sup> The natural habitat for the human person is within the relationship of other human beings and entities; the society.<sup>43</sup> For Aristotle, “social interaction proves crucial for both sustainability and the development of rationality.” Individuals have a natural impulse toward association: they do not need a contract to become social; they are born social.<sup>44</sup> Basically, every individual in whatever space he occupies contributes uniquely in building the society together, inasmuch as he or she occupies a space within the geographical bounds of that society or of a specific determined point. In living out his existence, Man for Aristotle always seeks the good. Attainment and fulfillment of all kinds of good takes place within a society. Humans therefore need the society as much as the society needs the individual. For it is in the coming together of man and society that both the individual and the societal needs will be met as well as the individual and the societal development will be achieved. The common good in this sense therefore is not only the good

<sup>33</sup> Aquinas, T., *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 35, Consequences of Charity. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1972, 107.

<sup>34</sup> Novak, M., *Free Person and the Common Good*; Boston: Madison Books, 1989, 30.

<sup>35</sup> Keys M.M. and Godfrey C., *Common Good*”. In: M. Bevir (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Political Theory*. Los Angeles: Sage, 2010, 239–242, 242.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>37</sup> Locke J. *Two Treatises of Government*; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, 2, 357.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 357.

<sup>39</sup> Maritain, J., *The Person and the Common Good*, Trans. J. J. Fitzgerald, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1947, 60.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>42</sup> See, Philip Chika Omenkwa, Nigerian Media and the Quest for Clarity in Thinking and Speech: Philosophical Insights from Ludwig Wittgenstein, *West African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 2024, vol. 4, no. 1, 39-52.

<sup>43</sup> See, Philip Chika Omenkwa, Language, World of Existence and Entrepreneurship, *Philosophy of Entrepreneurship: Intersections and Insights*, 2025, 112-128.

<sup>44</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*; Trans. Benjamin Jowett, New York: Random House, 1943, I, 2, 1253a 29---30.

that is common to the individuals who live in a community but also the good of the community itself.<sup>45</sup>

The society as a matter of fact cannot exist on its own independent of that of its members. As such, it is the prerogative of the members of the society to see to its development. In as much as the individual person desires his personal good since that is a natural impulse in him, he does so within a society.<sup>46</sup> The society has an end, which is its common good, and which, although cannot be merely reduced to the individual good of its members but all the same, it cannot be placed in direct opposition to it. There is the good of the person and the good of the society, and these concepts do not coincide but are related.<sup>47</sup> The good of the society includes the good of each and every individual in the society, but not limited to a particular individual or group. It is the common good which aids in the sustenance and development of a society and subsequently in developing a nation.

Paul Ricoeur holds that the common good is “the aim of the good life, with and for others in just institutions.”<sup>48</sup> Thereby buttressing the fact that the principles of common good can provide the conditions in which individual lives can flourish in the society. The common good is indivisible because the good that benefits each person cannot be separated from the good of others. Nonetheless, it cannot also be appropriated by one individual or group in the society; all have access to it.<sup>49</sup>

However, in the case of a diversified community of people who may not have the same understanding of what their common good should be, would it then be the death of the common good of a nation? The realization that a society where no one does anything but for themselves, is destined to decline into anarchy, should be of primary concern in such situation. Members of diversified communities should understand that there is an opportunity for growth and development if they put each other first as a unit over themselves. The emphasis here is not on the subversion of the individual autonomy and so of its dignity, but a conscious projection of the common good for the fuller flowering of the individual good and its nobler accomplishments. The individual good in this sense can be achieved in the pursuit of the common good. Serving the good of the society is a “precondition for the attainment of

personal good, therefore, individual persons must contribute to the good of the other members of the society – not to the particular good of each one, but to the good that the society provides to them.”<sup>50</sup> Necessity therefore calls on the members of the society not to create a dichotomy between the pursuit of the common good and the pursuit of the individual good, since the good life which is desired by all human beings is achieved within the societal space within which the community is established and nurtured. Consequently, care should be taken by individual persons not to destroy the society in the search of individual good but to enhance and develop the society, which can be attained only by seeking the good of the society.

### **Walking along the tight Rope of Tensions of Interest**

In the course of history, some theories have purported that there is a conflict between the notion of the common good and the good of the individual person. Highlighting that occasionally, what is good for the individual may conflict with what is good for the society. This creates a gap between the good shared by all individuals in a society and that which is subjectively valuable to an individual person. In addressing these perceived claims of conflict, it would be pertinent to point out that ‘the good’ especially in the ancient and later in medieval moral philosophy, is understood as objectively valuable and capable of undermining any apparent conflict between self-interest and the common good.<sup>51</sup> Good conduct and action are “based on the fundamental assumption that the good of an individual coincides with goodness that is common to all rational and social/political creatures.... This assumption, commonly considered to be the cornerstone of what is known as ‘eudaemonist ethics’, entails that there is no conflict between individual happiness and the demands of a virtuous life.”<sup>52</sup> One is always better off by acting virtuously, which presupposes setting aside one’s narrow self-interest, doing what is rationally and objectively good and thus also furthering the common good.<sup>53</sup>

Nevertheless, since the society on its own cannot exist without the existence of its members, and bearing in mind that man innately desires for himself that which is good, it becomes apparent that the idea of an individual good is not a disservice to society. The society however needs to enact certain rules guiding the pursuit, ownership and use of

<sup>45</sup> Argandoña, A., *The stakeholder theory and the common good*, Journal of Business Ethics, 17, 1998, 1093-1102, 1095.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 1095

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 1096

<sup>48</sup> Ricoeur, P., *One Self as Another*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. 1992, 202.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 202.

<sup>50</sup> Argandoña, A., *The stakeholder theory and the common good*, Journal of Business Ethics, 17, 1998, 1093-1102, 1100.

<sup>51</sup> Annas, J., *Ancient Eudaimonism and Modern Morality*. In *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Ethics*, ed. C. Bobonich, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2017, 265–280. 268.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 269

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 269

privately owned goods. Taking cognizance of the nature of the social stratum of individuals and work in the society, it becomes a possibility that in the pursuit of satisfying our individual needs, the strong or wealthy can annex for themselves more than they need, thereby leaving the weak in need of attaining their needs. For, "If no one can claim that certain goods that are necessary for the satisfaction of their needs belong to them, then a violent man may, without legitimate opposition, wrest something he does not need from someone who needs it, which means that (1) society will no longer be at peace and (2) everyone's needs will cease to be met."<sup>54</sup> Instituting private property according to John Duns Scotus therefore simply means forbidding the strong from threatening collective peace and granting the weak the right to keep what they need to survive.<sup>55</sup> This is not to say that having all things in common would necessarily lead to universal strife and famine.<sup>56</sup> As such, both because of the threat of violence and because of this constant tension, Scotus calls private property "consonant with human nature."<sup>57</sup>

This means that we cannot logically conclude from what we know of our nature that private property is an absolutely necessary law within human communities, but one may not be wrong to conclude that it is the law that best fits human beings.<sup>58</sup> Attainment and use of private goods and property, however is not the solution that totally brings about the common good of the society, it also needs to be reasonably managed and, if necessary, rescinded if it undermines the good of the society. In line with this, John Duns Scotus asserts that the institution of private property is a product of positive law<sup>59</sup> which is introduced by a legislator, and a legislator can legitimately introduce one provided (1) they are prudent, that is, that they follow right reason in making the law, and (2) they hold authority, that is, that the community of human beings they are a part of be bound by their law.<sup>60</sup> Hence, they become the guardians of whatever affects the good of society. When circumstances of oppression or harm that undermines the common good

arise, appealing to authority becomes justified in the eyes of Scotus.

In sum, John Duns Scotus views the common good as that which brings peace among a given community in which the needs of every member is met. Conscious of the nature of human beings, legal boundaries need to be created so that everyone receives what they need to live, and no one is neglected or oppressed. "Private property as administered by a just authority is therefore the way to preserve the common good of the community."<sup>61</sup> This is not to say that everyone has the final say regarding the goods they own no matter the circumstances. In fact, though political authority will not make private goods common, it has a great deal of power when it comes to redistributing goods, to such an extent that, in many cases, it is actually just to commit a private injustice if it is for the good of all.<sup>62</sup> When understood properly, the close relation between the well-being of citizens, understood in terms of virtuous action, and the well-being of the community as a whole, entails that there can be no real conflict, or even real tension, between the common good and the good of the individual for the good of the whole necessarily includes the good of the parts that form the whole.<sup>63</sup>

### **The Imperative of Common Good in Nation Building**

There can be no better way to begin discussions on the imperative of the common good in nation-building without talking about the common possession which is a vital aspect of the principle of common good. Innocent Asouzu observes that "we own these resources collectively and they can help us add more quality and meaning to our individual existence. As common goods, we are challenged to uphold and preserve them as a common legacy. If we are successful, they can be a cause of our joy and in this case, we sense the urge within us, which challenges us to keep them as something good, to hold firmly to them now and in all future cases. This challenge is possible primarily as a mutual experience."<sup>64</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Scotus J. D., *Selected Writings on Ethics*. Ed. and trans. T. Williams. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2017, 273.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 273

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 274

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 274

<sup>58</sup> Vos, Antonie., *The Philosophy of John Duns Scotus*, In *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*, ed. T. Williams, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2003, 51

<sup>59</sup> All legal precepts derive either from divine law (legal norms that are instituted by God), natural law (legal norms that can be derived from the nature of things, and especially of human beings), or positive law (legal norms that are instituted by human beings). Cf. Möhle, Hannes. *Scotus's Theory of Natural Law*, In *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*,

ed. T. Williams, 312–31. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2003, 313.

<sup>60</sup> Möhle, Hannes. *Scotus's Theory of Natural Law*, In *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*, ed. T. Williams, 312–31. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2003, 313.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 327

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 327

<sup>63</sup> Keys, M. M., *Aquinas, Aristotle, and the Promise of the Common Good*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2006, 20.

<sup>64</sup> Innocent Asouzu, *The Method and Principles of Contemporary Reflection in and Beyond African Philosophy*, Calabar: University of Calabar press, 2004, p. 381

All-round development and nation-building is only possible when the principle of the common good is effectively practiced within the confines of selflessness, inclusiveness and mutual responsibility. The fostering of the common good for the good of the nation does not come without sacrifices. Thus, Robert J. Samuelson says “we face a choice between a society where people accept modest sacrifices for a common good or a more contentious society where groups selfishly protect their own benefits.”<sup>65</sup> The common good thesis and its projections must be seen as a vital element of the progressive survival of the human society. This is because; “today, it is possibly easy to have a common issue affecting many nations together. And this common pathway is becoming most pronounced in this our time, such that a national peace is no longer achievable without concern for universal common good.”<sup>66</sup> This inclusive tendency has made the world a global village, a common family. As a result of this, societal values and issues such as peace, justice, progress and advancement have become a collective enterprise and as such requires the imports of the principle of the common good.

Human beings with their diverse choices in life situations are inconsistent and contradictory especially when it comes to making or taking practical decisions and actions. Having presumably observed these inconsistencies and contradictions besieging human behaviour as concerns theoretical knowledge and practical actions, Aristotle paid more attention in teaching the need for the wisdom that informs the choices we make. Practical wisdom for Aristotle “is the virtue which directs our choices to goods that lie within our ability.”<sup>67</sup> It therefore becomes an arduous task to concretely articulate an objective pragmatic means of realizing the common good. But because it is impossible according to Aristotle “to live well or indeed live at all, unless the necessary conditions for the good life are present”<sup>68</sup>, attempts would be made to make concrete points that would aid in illustrating how the implementation of the notion of common good builds and develops communities, societies, states and nations.

To live the good life, citizens of the state should have the benefit of a healthy and well-nourished body, for even the man who seeks wisdom needs such to be efficient. Food

therefore is essential to Aristotle for ‘none of the citizens should go in need of subsistence.’<sup>69</sup> Food is a basic need of the human being, but it is alarming how millions of the world’s population die of starvation even when nations not so far from them are living in excess. One wonders how far the institutions governing the society are agitated by this unfortunate reality. Or is there a lack of interest to the bane of hunger experienced by members of the community? A situation where the wealthy feast lavishly but the poor who are the service men find it hard to feed. A situation whereby the government turns a blind eye to the hunger and starvation suffered by people in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria, as a result of the oil pollution on their farmland and water, thus making agricultural activities fruitless and gruesomely frustrating is a concrete example in this regard. Meanwhile the oil companies and a group of individuals are benefitting from the crude oil domiciled in the region. Already Aristotle insists; ‘The first thing to be provided is food. The next is arts and crafts; for life is a business which needs many tools. The third according to him is arms: the members of a state must bear arms in person, partly in order to maintain authority and repress disobedience, and partly in order to meet any threat of external aggression. The fourth thing which has to be provided is a certain supply of property, both for domestic use and for military purposes. The fifth (but in order of merit, the first) is an establishment for the service of the gods, or as it is called, public worship. The sixth thing, and the most vitally necessary, is a method of deciding what is demanded by the public interest and what is just in men’s private dealings. These are the services which every state may be said to need.’<sup>70</sup>

‘The end and purpose of a polis is the good life, and the institutions of social life are means to that end.’<sup>71</sup> Political institutions which govern and sustain the society are designed to help ensure the good welfare of the people. In his work on *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle states, ‘legislators make the citizens good by forming habits in them and this is the wish of every legislator, and those who do not effect it miss their mark, and it is in this that a good constitution differs from a bad one.’<sup>72</sup> In his view, law-givers can promote virtues through two indirect ways: education and law. Virtues, law and education make up a self-developing, virtuous circle that makes people happy

<sup>65</sup> Manuel Velasques et al; The common Good, in issues in ethics vol. 5 No1, 1992. Retrieved from <https://www.scu.edu/ethics/ethics-resources/ethical-decision-making/the-common-good/#>

<sup>66</sup> Chiwuba Anthony Ibe; The Imperative of Solidarity, Subsidiary and Common Good as Principles of Justice and Peace in the Human Society’ in *Evangelical Witness* ed. Ugochukwu Stophynus Anyanwu and Nnamdi Stanislaus Iheoma, Owerri, APT publications 2017, p. 190

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. 25

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 25

<sup>69</sup> Frey, B.S., Stutzer, A., *Happiness and Economics: How the Economy and Institutions Affects Human Well-Being*; Princeton University Press, Princeton. 2002.

<sup>70</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*; Trans. Benjamin Jowett, New York: Random House, 1943, 8, 1328b5 - 16.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 9 1280b 39 - 40

<sup>72</sup> Keys, M. M., *Aquinas, Aristotle, and the Promise of the Common Good*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2006, 21.

and contributes to political stability. Virtuous people obey the law. To be virtuous, people must be educated since the earliest stages of life and for the purposes of an impactful education must be reinforced by laws.<sup>73</sup> If the government invests in schools especially in poor neighborhoods, children and adults from every class in society can get a good education just like those from a wealthier class. And through such means a successful obliteration of social/class stratification as is perceivable in the Nigerian societal set-up and the dangers associated with it like tensions of various kinds, frictions among the members of the society, hatred, criminality etc., would be meaningfully ameliorated. When everyone has access to the same opportunities, society becomes more fair and just. No nation develops from illiteracy.

Education in this discourse does not only mean theoretical knowledge, but also practical knowledge. Virtue which can be learned is present not only in thought, but more in practical actions and the means through which this can be achieved ought to be available to every member of the society. The government should therefore create adequate educational institutions and offer the necessary funding for its maintenance whether in the public establishment or in the private sector. It must be noted that the government has the primary responsibility for the education of her citizens, the private sectors are in this wise agencies with the manifest interest to cooperate with the government in the actualization of her duties.

It is therefore through the gains of education that citizens are led into the awareness of their civic responsibilities and are by so doing enabled to contribute their bit in nation building. Emphasizing this point better, Aristotle holds that Education is the best way to preserve the institutions which govern the people for the good of all. "The greatest, however, of all the means we have mentioned for ensuring the stability of constitutions but one that nowadays is generally neglected is the education of citizens in the spirit of their constitution. There is no profit of the best of laws, even when they are sanctioned by general civic consent, if the citizens themselves have not been attuned, by the force of habit and the influence of teaching, to the right constitutional temper."<sup>74</sup> Hence, these institutions can be called into account by citizens but only when they are informed on their rights.<sup>75</sup>

In as much as the various institutions that govern a state should identify the best means to enable its citizens to achieve the good life, citizens must also play their part, understanding that the common good is not just the task of the government alone, but also of the citizens. Working

together for the common good helps create fairness in society. It is about making sure everyone has the same chances to succeed, no matter where they come from or how wealthy they are. If the members of the society work together to provide equal opportunities for food, education, healthcare, or jobs, everyone gets a fair shot at improving their lives. The government also should actively seek to avoid unemployment and promote public and private business and exchange. It should also focus largely on creating and enforcing good laws and a just judicial system, and providing legal institutions and their corresponding funding. The government should encourage organizations that freely promote the virtues and values intrinsic to the development of society while at the same time moderating their activities.

When people care about the common good, they are more likely to trust each other and work together to solve problems more easily. If everyone in a community does their part whether by building legal businesses, seeing value in working, voting or being voted for, or even in helping their neighbors to actualize their set out goals, it leads to a stronger and healthier society. When people feel like their actions can help others, they are more likely to pitch in and contribute. Furthermore, care of the environment is of paramount importance, and it is the collective obligation of citizens as inhabitants of the environment to see to it that the environment is a safe haven both for its present and future members. When we think about what's good for everyone not just ourselves it encourages us to make choices that protect natural resources, reduce pollution and also control natural disasters. When the members of society work for the common good, a creation of a society where people care about each other's welfare, thus bringing about the good life will be instituted. This makes everyone feel like they belong to a community. When the members of a community share the same goals – the common good, like having provision of good and affordable food, good education, healthcare, good businesses, less pollution, electricity, clean streets, or safe parks, it brings people closer and helps reduce conflicts between different groups making up a society.

## Conclusion

The goal of the common good is to enhance the right of every individual to the attainment of a decent condition of life. Because it belongs to the nature of man to respond adequately not only to his immediate spatio-cosmic habitation but equally to the vastness of his very constitution which his nature embodies via his interconnectivity and relationality with other humans and

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 23

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. 91

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 91

creatures in general. This thus emphasizes the fact that the nature of man is both narrow and vast at the same time.<sup>76</sup> Hence, any society that does not strive to decently aid her citizens reach their destined goals in life is a nation bereft of the principle of the common good. “True world political authority must seek to establish international cooperation and commitment capable of securing authentic integral human development inspired by the virtues of justice, peace and love in truth. This should be the goal of globalization rather than simply a balance of power among the strongest nations.”<sup>77</sup>

The importance of the common good in nation-building cannot be overstated. At the core of a thriving and cohesive society lies the collective welfare and well-being of its citizens. Prioritizing the common good forms the cornerstone of sustainable development, social harmony, and equitable progress within a nation. Furthermore, the common good serves as a unifying principle that transcends individual interests, ideologies, and backgrounds, creating a sense of shared purpose and community. It underlines the importance of ethical governance, environmental sustainability, and social justice, providing a guiding framework for decision-making processes and policy formulation. In essence, the pursuit of the common good in nation-building lays the groundwork for a society where every individual has the opportunity to thrive, where diversity is celebrated, and where the well-being of all members is safeguarded, embracing the common good as a guiding principle ensures a more cohesive, prosperous, and inclusive future for the nation and its citizens.

The notion of common good is about making life better for everyone, not just a few people. It further makes people understand that in order to live a good life, the good of the other person and the good of the society must be considered. Our actions, when geared towards the common good creates a society where people help each other, live peacefully, build nations and ensure that future generations can thrive. Working for the common good is like being part of a team where everyone benefits, and that’s how we build a better and a stronger society.

Nevertheless, it must be noted that happiness does not reside on what one owns but a matter of how one lives his or her life irrespective of the particular circumstances within which one lives. “Healthy or unhealthy, rich or poor, educated or uneducated, we should think about our lives and try to live them well.”<sup>78</sup> According to Aristotle, external goods are necessary to achieve happiness, but they do not in themselves

constitute happiness: “Success or failure in life does not depend on these (fortunes), but human life needs these as mere additions, while virtuous activities or their opposites are what determine happiness or their reverse.”<sup>79</sup> To live our lives well is to develop our capacities in the pursuit of worthwhile or useful objectives.<sup>80</sup>

## Bibliography

1. Annas, J., “Ancient Eudaimonism and Modern Morality”. *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient*
2. *Ethics*, ed. C. Bobonich, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2017, 265–280.
3. Annas, J., *Intelligent Virtue*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
4. Aquinas, T., *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 35, Consequences of Charity . New York: Cambridge University Press, 1972.
5. Argandoña, A., “The stakeholder theory and the common good”. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 17, 1998, 1093-1102.
6. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*; Translated by Terence Irwin (second edition), Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 1999, 1,2,1094b.
7. Aristotle, *Politics*; Trans. Benjamin Jowett, New York: Random House, 1943, I, 2, 1253a.
8. Asouzu, I., *The Method and Principles of Contemporary Reflection in and Beyond African Philosophy*, Calabar: University of Calabar press, 2004.
9. Crespo, R.F., *The Common Good and Economics*; Cuadernos de Economia, 2016, vol. 39, 23-33.
10. Edet, J. A., *Ancient and Modern Political Philosophy*. Uyo: Hercon Press, 2014.
11. Eschmann, T., “A thomistic glossary on the principle of the pre-eminence of the common good”. *Mediaeval Studies* vol. 5, 1943, 123 - 165.
12. Frey, B.S. & Stutzer, A., *Happiness and Economics: How the Economy and Institutions Affects Human Well-Being*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.
13. Ibe, C. A.,; “The Imperative of Solidarity, Subsidiary and Common Good as Principles of Justice and Peace in the Human Society”. *Evangelical Witness*. (Ed.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Philip Chika Omenkwa, Man is Narrow but Vast – Ethnicism and its Presuppositions: An Anthropological Appeal to the Fundamental Constitutions of the Human Person, *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development*, 2024, 104-122.

<sup>77</sup> Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, No. 67

<sup>78</sup> Annas, J., *Intelligent Virtue*; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 129.

<sup>79</sup> Annas, J., *Intelligent Virtue*; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 130.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 140

- Ugochukwu Stophynus Anyanwu and Nnamdi Stanislaus Iheoma), Owerri: APT Publications, 2017.
14. Keys, M.M., *Aquinas, Aristotle, and the Promise of the Common Good*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
  15. Keys, M.M. & Godfrey, C., "Common Good". In: M. Bevir (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Political Theory*, Los Angeles: Sage, 2010, 239–242.
  16. Locke J. *Two Treatises of Government*; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
  17. Maritain, J., *The Person and the Common Good*. Translated by J. J. Fitzgerald, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1947.
  18. Möhle, Hannes. "Scotus's Theory of Natural Law". *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*, ed. T. Williams, 312–31. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2003.
  19. Morrison, D., "The Common Good". Deslauriers M. and Destrée P. (eds) *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 176–198.
  20. Nnamdi, B. S. & Ogan, T. V. "Jacques Maritain on Common Good – A philosophical critical Appraisal". *International Journal of Peace and Conflict studies (IJPCS)*, vol.5, no.2, 2018, 122-132.
  21. Novak, M., *Free Person and the Common Good*. Boston: Madison Books, 1989.
  22. Nwosu, B. C., *Understanding Political Behaviour*. Awka: Nnamdi Azikiwe University Press, 2018.
  23. Okafor, F. C., *Man and His Government: A Philosophical Perspective*. Awka: Fab-Anih Press, 2017.
  24. Omenukwa, P. C., "Nigerian Media and the Quest for Clarity in Thinking and Speech: Philosophical Insights from Ludwig Wittgenstein". *West African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 2024, vol. 4, no. 1, 39-52.
  25. Omenukwa, P. C., "On the Interdependency Between Language and Culture". *Journal of Contemporary Research in Social Sciences*, 2024, vol. 6, no. 2, 61-71.
  26. Omenukwa P. C., "Man is Narrow but Vast – Ethnicism and its Presuppositions: An Anthropological Appeal to the Fundamental Constitutions of the Human Person". *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development*. 2024, 104-122.
  27. Omenukwa, P. C., & Kanu, A. I., "Private Language in Wittgenstein and the Igbo-African Worldview". *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*. 2024, vol. 22, no. 1, 646-660;
  28. Omenukwa, P. C., & Kanu, A. I., "Meaning in Wittgenstein and African Indigenous Languages". *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*. 2024, vol. 22, no. 1, 661-676.
  29. Omenukwa, P. C., "Religion and the Dynamics of Language and Culture in Nigeria". *West African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*. vol. 5, no. 1, 2025, 142-158;
  30. Omenukwa, P. C., "Language, World of Existence and Entrepreneurship". *Philosophy of Entrepreneurship: Intersections and Insights*. 2025, 112-128.
  31. Plato, *The Republic*, translated by A. Bloom. New York : Basic Books, 1968.
  32. Peschke, K. H., *Christian Ethics II*, Bangalore: Theological Pub, 1996.
  33. Ricoeur, P., *One Self as Another*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. 1992.
  34. Scotus J. D., *Selected Writings on Ethics*. Ed. and trans. T. Williams. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2017.
  35. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1994.
  36. Vatican II Council II, *The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents* (ed. Austin Flannery, O. P.) St. Pauls Pub, 2007.
  37. Velasques, M. et al., "The common Good". *Issues in Ethics vol. 5 No1*, 1992. Retrieved from <https://www.scu.edu/ethics/ethics-resources/ethical-decision-making/the-common-good/#>
  38. Vos, Antonie., "The Philosophy of John Duns Scotus". *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*, ed. T. Williams, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2003.
  39. Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, No. 67