

Anselm Spindler

Politics and collective action in Thomas Aquinas's on kingship

**Article (Accepted version)
(Refereed)**

Original citation:

Spindler, Anselm (2018) *Politics and collective action in Thomas Aquinas's on kingship*. [Journal of the History of Philosophy](#). ISSN 0022-5053

© 2018 [Journal of the History of Philosophy, Inc.](#)

This version available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/87076/>

Available in LSE Research Online: March 2018

LSE has developed LSE Research Online so that users may access research output of the School. Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may download and/or print one copy of any article(s) in LSE Research Online to facilitate their private study or for non-commercial research. You may not engage in further distribution of the material or use it for any profit-making activities or any commercial gain. You may freely distribute the URL (<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk>) of the LSE Research Online website.

This document is the author's final accepted version of the journal article. There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

Politics and Collective Action in Thomas Aquinas's *On Kingship*

There is currently a vibrant debate in philosophy about the nature of collective intentionality and collective action. However, these topics are rarely explored in detail from the perspective of the history of philosophy. And if reference is made to the history of philosophy, it is mostly to antique authors like Plato¹ or to modern authors such as Hobbes², Rousseau³, or Kant⁴ – although it has been appreciated that these were important issues in the Middle Ages as well.⁵ Therefore, I would like to contribute a little bit to a broadened understanding of the history of these concepts by exploring the political philosophy of Thomas Aquinas.

This, however, may seem an unlikely place to look. After all, what Aquinas's political philosophy is mostly known for is not a theory of collective intentionality or collective action but rather a kind of Christian-Aristotelian perfectionism that has its roots in his moral philosophy. Therefore, his political philosophy is often portrayed as being based on claims such as these: (1) The relevance of the political community and of political institutions is due to the way in which they contribute to the moral perfection of human beings, a process that is aimed at the twofold “temporal” and “eternal” happiness of man. (2) The political community and political institutions contribute to this process (i) by providing certain goods that the twofold human happiness requires and (ii) by providing a system of behavioural guidelines, i.e. positive law, that help human beings to develop the virtues that the twofold happiness requires. (3) Both the good ruler and the good citizen are characterised by a specific set of virtues that accords with their role in the political community. (4) The previous claims are the main reason why political philosophy is a branch of moral philosophy.⁶

Passages supporting a perfectionist interpretation of Aquinas's political philosophy abound. There is, for instance, the argument in favour of the institution of positive human law in *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 95: Human beings are supposed to strive for virtue in order to lead a good life. However, the acquirement of virtues requires moral education which men, because of their peculiar natural setup, normally have to receive from others. In many cases, parental admonition suffices to provide this education. But there are also some “insolent persons prone to vice who cannot easily be moved by words”. And therefore, “it is necessary that they are kept away from the bad by force and

1 Pettit 2003.

2 Martell 2009.

3 Gilbert 1990.

4 Korsgaard 2014.

5 Pettit/List 2011, 10-11.

6 Interpretations of Aquinas's political philosophy in terms of some or all of these claims, or nearby versions of them, can be found in a wide range of contributions to the subject. See e.g. Crofts 1973, Weisheipl 1975, Scully 1981, Dupré 1993, Finnis 1998 and 2014, Kempshall 1999, Pakaluk 2001, and Aroney 2007.

fear”; and “this education which coerces by fear of punishment is the education of law”.⁷

A second example is Aquinas's discussion of prudence in *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 47 where he argues that prudence, as a virtue that is concerned with the rational direction of human action, is not a specific virtue of those who are subject to political rule. Because insofar as they have this role, they do not “direct and govern” human actions. Rather, it is a specific virtue of the people in government whose job it is to direct the actions of their subjects according to reason.⁸

A third example is the division of philosophy that Aquinas proposes in the prologues to his commentaries on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*⁹ and *Politics*¹⁰. In these texts, Aquinas advocates the traditional view that moral philosophy is a practical rather than a theoretical science; and that it has three parts, namely individual ethics, household management, and political science. Furthermore, he argues that political science belongs to the moral sciences because politics is not a sphere of production “where the activity is transferred to some external material”. Rather, like morals in general, it is a sphere of action in the narrow sense of moral practice “where the activity remains in the one who acts”.¹¹

However, ironically, it is Aquinas's political treatise *On Kingship to the King of Cyprus* (*De Regno ad Regem Cyprici*) that has proven to be strangely resistant to a compelling interpretation in these terms. Commentators often approach this text in search of support for a perfectionist interpretation of Aquinas's political philosophy. Therefore, they focus on issues such as the definition of the common good as peace and unity¹² or the relationship between the “temporal” and the “ecclesiastical” authority that corresponds with the relationship between the “temporal” and the “eternal” happiness of human beings.¹³ But there are various important themes in *On Kingship* that do not straightforwardly lend themselves to a perfectionist interpretation. Take, for instance, the thought experiment that is at the heart of the foundational argument of the opening chapter: If human beings lived a solitary life like some other animals, they would not need anyone else to direct them. Instead, everyone would be his or her own king, directing his or her own actions through their faculty of reason.¹⁴ But according to Aquinas's perfectionist understanding of politics, human beings socialise because life in groups provides certain goods that they require for a good life. Furthermore, in acquiring the virtues that allow them to reasonably direct their actions, most

7 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 95, a. 1 (174-175). – All quotations from Aquinas's works are taken from the *Editio Leonina*; page numbers are given in brackets. All translations in this article are my own.

8 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 47, a. 12 (360).

9 Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia libri Ethicorum* I, 1.

10 Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia libri Politicorum*, Prologus.

11 *Ibid.* (70).

12 See e.g. Finnis 1998, 222-234.

13 See e.g. Weisheipl 1975, 189-195; Miethke 2008, 25-43.

14 Thomas Aquinas, *De Regno* I, c. 1.

humans depend on education they receive from the family or the government. These assumptions suggest that if humans lived a solitary life, most of them would not be their own king because they would lack the material basis and the moral education required to direct one's own actions according to reason.

A second example is the distinction between just and unjust forms of government.¹⁵ Here the fault of the unjust ruler is not described in the terms that Aquinas's perfectionism suggests, i.e. as a lack of certain virtues. Rather, it is described in terms of the institution of government: The political community is a multitude of free persons, not a multitude of slaves. Therefore, it is the government's job to pursue the common good of the citizens. As a consequence, the fault of the unjust ruler is that, contrary to his "job description", he uses his power to further his private ends instead of the common good. And this seems to be a fault independently of the moral merits or demerits of his individual character and of his individual conception of happiness.

A third example is the discussion about the rewards for the good ruler.¹⁶ Against the background of Aquinas's perfectionism, this discussion may seem to turn on the question of how promoting the moral perfection and happiness of others is conducive to realising one's own moral perfection and happiness. However, it appears to turn rather on a particular problem of motivation that results from the distinction between the common good and individual happiness: It is the ruler's job to promote the common good of the political community, which means that he has the task of pursuing an end that is not his own. But as a human being, his own happiness is the ultimate motivational basis for whatever he does. So how can this motivational basis be connected to the pursuit of the common good? This problem also seems to exist independently of the moral merits or demerits of the ruler's individual character and of the ruler's individual conception of happiness, and even of the common good itself.

So several important themes in *On Kingship* are not straightforwardly explicable in terms of the perfectionist understanding of politics that is commonly attributed to Aquinas. However, I will not dispute the cogency of a perfectionist interpretation of his political philosophy in general because it has a firm textual basis. Also, I will not suggest to downplay the relevance of *On Kingship* as a source of his political philosophy because of its unfinished character or its supposed philosophical weakness; or to call into question its authenticity altogether because of certain discrepancies in content.¹⁷ Instead, I would like to propose that the foundational argument of *On Kingship* is actually quite strong and that it can be interpreted as the consequent development of an idea that is present in

15 Thomas Aquinas, *De Regno* I, c. 1.

16 Thomas Aquinas, *De Regno* I, c. 7-9.

17 On the character of *On Kingship* and its place in Aquinas's oeuvre, see e.g. Eschmann 1949, xxii-xxvi; Weisheipl 1975, 189-195; Torrell 1996, 170; Dyson 2002, xix; Miethke 2008, 25-43.

texts the authenticity and philosophical strength of which is considered to be beyond doubt. This idea, however, is not part of Aquinas's perfectionist view of politics as it is usually portrayed. Rather, it is what I will call an “action-theoretical” conception of the political community according to which the political community is an artificial and yet distinct subject of human agency. This conception of the political community allows for a compelling interpretation of central themes of *On Kingship* as a theory of representative government that is meant to solve a collective action problem which results from human sociation; an interpretation that links this theory of government with today's debate about the nature of collective intentionality and collective action.

The paper is divided accordingly: In the first part, I will reconstruct Aquinas's conception of the political community as an artificial and distinct subject of human agency (1.). In the second part, I will argue that this action-theoretical understanding of the political community allows for a compelling interpretation of central themes in *On Kingship* as a theory of representative government that is intended to solve a collective action problem (2.). In the third part, I will carve out certain features of Aquinas's understanding of the political community as a subject of agency in more detail and argue that his approach is quite similar to but also interestingly different from List's and Pettit's influential theory of “group agents” (3.).¹⁸

1. The Political Community as an Artificial Subject of Agency

In the first part of the paper, my aim is to reconstruct Aquinas's conception of the political community that can be found in the prologues to his commentaries on Aristotle's *Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*. In these texts, as in the prologues to his commentaries on Aristotle's works in general¹⁹, Aquinas locates the subject matter under discussion – i.e. morals and politics – in a comprehensive system of philosophy. Thus, in both texts, he advocates the traditional view that moral philosophy is a practical rather than a theoretical science; and that it has three parts, namely individual ethics, household management, and political science. In the course of arguing for this view, he describes the political community as an artificial and yet distinct subject of human agency: It is artificial because it is the product of human action. And it is a distinct subject of human agency because actions can be attributed to it that cannot be attributed to any of its individual members, and vice versa.

1.1. The Political Community as an Artefact

¹⁸ List/Pettit 2011.

¹⁹ Cheneval/Imbach 1993, LVII–LXX.

Aquinas develops the first element of this conception – that the political community is an artefact – in the prologue to his commentary on Aristotle's *Politics*.²⁰ The basic move is a distinction between nature and art that implies two claims. The first is that the distinction between nature and art is an exhaustive distinction between two domains of reality according to their causal history: The concept of art applies to all things that exist as products of human activity. And the concept of nature designates all things that exist because of divine activity.²¹ The second claim is Aristotle's dictum that art imitates nature²² of which Aquinas gives the following interpretation: There is a certain similarity between the human and the divine intellect because both are capable of productive action. But the human intellect is characterised by a lesser degree of perfection and therefore, the imperfect productive activity of humans must imitate the perfect productive activity of God as it is present in nature. Thus, art must seek to imitate nature because nature is the ideal example of artistic activity. Against this background, Aquinas first draws a distinction between theoretical and practical reason in human beings and a corresponding distinction between theoretical and practical sciences. As sources of productive action, the divine intellect and the human intellect do not mingle: Nature does not produce the works of art and art does not produce the works of nature. As a consequence, the human intellect is theoretical or speculative with respect to nature because it can cognize but not produce it. With respect to artefacts in the broad sense envisaged here, on the other hand, the human intellect is practical because it both cognizes and produces them.²³

Secondly, Aquinas specifies the claim that art imitates nature. This imitation consists in the adoption of an abstract principle of productive action, namely that productive action proceeds by composition.²⁴ In human practical reason, this principle has two applications: The first is in the production of material objects that are useful for human beings, such as ships or houses, which are construed out of simpler parts. The second application is in the ordering or arrangement of

20 Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia libri Politicorum*, Prologus.

21 Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia libri Politicorum*, Prologus (69): “[S]icut se habent principia adinuicem, ita proportionabiliter se habent operationes ad effectus; principium autem eorum que secundum artem fiunt est intellectus humanus, qui secundum similitudinem quandam deriuatur ab intellectu diuino qui est principium rerum naturalium: unde necesse est quod et operationes artis imitentur operationes nature, et ea que sunt secundum artem imitentur ea que sunt in natura.”

22 Ibid.: “Sicut philosophus docet in II Phisicorum, ars imitatur naturam.”

23 Ibid.: “Set natura quidem non perficit ea que sunt artis, set solum quedam principia preparat et exemplar operandi quodam modo artificibus prebet; ars uero inspicere quidem potest ea que sunt nature et eis uti ad opus proprium perficiendum, perficere uero ea non potest. Ex quo patet quod ratio humana eorum que sunt secundum naturam est cognoscitiua tantum, eorum uero que sunt secundum artem est et cognoscitiua et factiua. Vnde oportet quod scientie humane que sunt de rebus naturalibus sint speculatiue, que uero sunt de rebus ab homine factis sint practice siue operatiue secundum imitationem nature.”

24 Thus, it is a more abstract interpretation of the Aristotelian dictum than the one in *Summa contra Gentiles* II, 75 or *De Veritate* 11, 1 where the idea seems to be that art should imitate nature in the more material sense of adopting the same methods and means to achieve a desired effect.

individual human beings in such a way that they form a community such as the domestic or the political community.²⁵ And since, as Aquinas assumes, the political community is the community that aims to achieve the highest possible human good, i.e. the self-sufficiency of human life, he can conclude: “[T]his whole which is the political community must be the highest of all wholes which can be cognized *and* constituted by human reason.”²⁶

1.2. The Political Community as a Distinct Subject of Agency

So in the prologue to his commentary on the *Politics*, Aquinas characterises the political community as an artefact: It is not part of nature but belongs to the realm of things that exist because human beings produce them. He develops the second, complementary element of this action-theoretical understanding of the political community – that it is a distinct subject of human agency – in the prologue to his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*.²⁷

In this text, Aquinas first characterizes moral philosophy in general as a practical science that is concerned with the rational direction of intentional human action.²⁸ He then accounts for its division into individual ethics, household management, and political science by distinguishing three distinct subjects of intentional human agency:

[O]ne must know that this whole, which is the civic multitude, or the domestic family, only has the unity of order according to which it is not something that is simply one; and therefore, a part of this whole can have an activity that is not an activity of the whole, just as the soldier in the army has an activity that is not the activity of the whole army. But nevertheless, this whole itself has some activity which does not belong to any of its parts, but to the whole, namely the battle of the whole army. [...] But there is another type of whole which has the unity not just of order but of composition or connection or continuity, according to which a unity is something that is simply one; and therefore, there is no activity of the part which is not also an activity of the whole. For in continuous things, the

25 Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia libri Politicorum*, Prologus (69): “Procedit autem natura in sua operatione ex simplicibus ad composita, ita quod in eis que per operationem nature fiunt, quod est maxime compositum est perfectum et totum et finis aliorum, sicut apparet in omnibus totis respectu suarum partium; unde et ratio hominis operatiua ex simplicibus ad composita procedit, tanquam ex imperfectis ad perfecta. Cum autem ratio humana disponere habeat non solum de hiis que in usum hominis ueniunt, set etiam de ipsis hominibus qui ratione reguntur, in utrisque procedit ex simplicibus ad compositum: in aliis quidem rebus que in usum hominis ueniunt, sicut cum ex lignis constituit nauim, et ex lignis et lapidibus domum; in ipsis autem hominibus, sicut cum multos homines ordinat in unam quandam communitatem. Quarum quidem communitatum cum diuersi sint gradus et ordines, ultima est communitas ciuitatis ordinata ad per se sufficientia uite humane: unde inter omnes communitates humanas ipsa est perfectissima.”

26 Ibid.: “[N]ecesse est quod hoc totum quod est ciuitas sit principalius omnibus totis que ratione humana cognosci et constitui possunt.” (My emphasis.)

27 Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia libri Ethicorum* I, 1.

28 Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia libri Ethicorum* I, 1 (4): “Sic igitur moralis philosophiae, circa quam versatur praesens intentio, proprium est considerare operationes humanas secundum quod sunt ordinatae adinvicem et ad finem.”

movement of the whole and the part are the same; and similarly, in composite things or in connected things, the activity of the part is principally an activity of the whole; and therefore, the consideration of the whole and the part must belong to the same science. But it does not belong to the same science to consider a whole that has only the unity of order and its parts. And therefore, moral philosophy is divided into three parts. The first of these, which is called individual ethics, considers the actions of the single human being oriented towards a goal. The second, however, which is called household management, considers the actions of the domestic multitude. The third, however, which is called political science, considers the actions of the civic multitude.²⁹

Aquinas's perfectionism suggest that political philosophy is a branch of moral philosophy because it is also concerned with the moral perfection of human beings; a fact that is mirrored in a focus on the specific virtues and actions of the rulers and of the citizens. However, in this passage, Aquinas argues for this hierarchy of disciplines in a different way, namely by introducing a subject of human agency that is distinct both from the rulers and from the citizens: Political science belongs to moral philosophy in general because it is also concerned with the rational direction of human action. But it must be distinguished from individual ethics and household management in particular because it is concerned with a distinct subject of human agency, namely the political community as opposed to individual human beings and the domestic community.

But what does it mean to say that the political community is a distinct subject of human agency? The passage turns on the idea that something can be a unified whole in the sense of being “simply one” or in the sense of possessing the “unity of order”. Aquinas employs these concepts in other contexts as well, e.g. when discussing the unity of the world or the unity of the human soul: Something that is “simply one” is unified in virtue of its substantial form; a human being, for instance, is “simply one” in virtue of its soul.³⁰ In contrast, something that possesses the “unity of order” is not an individual substance that is unified in virtue of a substantial form; rather, it is a multitude of individual substances that is unified because these individual substances have a certain order imposed on them both in relation to one another and in relation to a common point of

29 Ibid.: “Sciendum est autem quod hoc totum quod est civilis multitudo vel domestica familia habet solam ordinis unitatem, secundum quam non est aliquid simpliciter unum; et ideo pars huius totius potest habere operationem quae non est operatio totius, sicut miles in exercitu habet operationem quae non est totius exercitus; habet nihilominus et ipsum totum aliquam operationem quae non est propria alicuius partium sed totius, puta conflictus totius exercitus [...] Est autem aliud totum quod habet unitatem non solum ordine sed compositione aut colligatione vel etiam continuitate, secundum quam unitatem est aliquid unum simpliciter; et ideo nulla est operatio partis quae non sit totius; in continuis enim idem est motus totius et partis, et similiter in compositis vel colligatis operatio partis principaliter est totius. Et ideo oportet quod ad eandem scientiam pertineat consideratio talis totius et partis eius, non autem ad eandem scientiam pertinet considerare totum quod habet solam ordinis unitatem et partes ipsius. Et inde est quod moralis philosophia in tres partes dividitur, quarum prima considerat operationes unius hominis ordinatas ad finem quae vocatur domestica, secunda autem considerat operationes multitudinis domesticae quae vocatur yconomica, tertia autem considerat operationes multitudinis civilis quae vocatur politica.”

30 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* II, 58. See also Henry 1991, 279-313.

reference. The world, for instance, possesses the “unity of order” because it consists of a multitude of individual substances that are ordered in a certain way in relation to one another and in relation to God.³¹ Now Finnis describes Aquinas's application of this distinction to human communities as follows: “[c]ommunities [...] are groups, each of them a whole [*totum*] made up of persons (and perhaps of other groups), their unity being not merely one of composition or conjunction or continuity, but rather of *order* [...]”³² However, Aquinas's point is not that human communities *not only* possess the unity of composition, conjunction, or continuity; it is rather that they *only* possess the unity of order. Because something that possesses the “unity of order” is a unified whole to a *lesser* degree than something that is “simply one”.³³ Thus, just like the world, these communities are not individual substances unified in virtue of a substantial form. Rather, they consist of a multitude of individual substances, i.e. individual human beings; and these can be considered a unified whole because a certain order has been imposed on them both in relation to one another and in relation to a common point of reference. However, according to Aquinas, their unity of order has an effect that the world's unity of order does not seem to have, namely that the whole itself emerges as a subject of agency that is distinct from the subjects of agency that make it up: Actions can be attributed to the community as a whole that cannot be attributed to any of its individual members; and actions can be attributed to its individual members that cannot be attributed to the community as a whole. This distinguishes these communities from things that are “simply one” where an action of one of the parts is *principaliter* an action of the whole: If I take a walk, the movement of my feet and my taking a walk are not distinct actions; and my feet and I are not distinct subjects of agency.³⁴ But this also distinguishes these communities from the world, considered as a unified whole. For the world, while also an ordered multitude of individual substances, does not emerge itself as a distinct subject of agency.

2. Representative Government and the Political Community as Subject of Agency in *On Kingship*

In the second part of the paper, my aim is to show that a better way to approach central themes in *On Kingship* is to view them as a consequent development not of Aquinas's perfectionist understanding of politics but of his action-theoretical conception of the political community according to which the political community is an artificial and yet distinct subject of human agency.

31 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 47, a. 3.

32 Finnis 2014 (his emphasis).

33 See also *Summa contra Gentiles* II, 58.

34 See also Henry 1991, 313-317.

I will first offer an interpretation along these lines of the foundational argument of the opening chapter and then briefly sketch how some other important themes flow from it.

2.1. The Argument for the Indispensability of Government

In *On Kingship*, Aquinas makes rather free use of the literary form of the “Mirrors for Princes” by presenting a general theory of government and a justification of monarchy as the best regime type.³⁵

In this spirit, the first chapter begins with a foundational four-step argument for the indispensability of government in social groups.

In the first step of this argument, Aquinas introduces a general conception of intentional goal-directed action:

[I]n all things that are ordered towards an end the attainment of which allows one to proceed this way or another way, there must be something that guides through which the end is directly achieved. For the ship, which according to the impulse of different winds can move in different directions, would not arrive at its destination if it were not directed to the port through the diligence of the pilot.³⁶

So Aquinas claims that if an agent has a certain orientation towards a goal and if there is more than one way to achieve that goal, then the very achievement of the goal requires that there is some sort of guiding authority in the agent that determines which way to go. The example of the ship suggests that this implies two things: First, it is not just that there are in theory multiple ways of attaining the goal. Rather, for each of them, there are certain reasons or “impulses” that favour it over the others. Secondly, the course of action eventually chosen by the agent need not be identical with any of those suggested by the different reasons or “impulses” taken alone.

In the second step of the argument, Aquinas applies these considerations to human beings and their teleological orientation as rational agents:

Now man has an end to which his whole life and action is ordered [...]. But men can proceed towards this intended end in different ways, as the diversity in human endeavours and actions shows. Therefore, something that guides towards this end is required in man. Now every man by nature has the light of reason, through which he directs his actions towards this end. And if man lived a solitary life, as many animals do, he would not need another agent directing him towards this end, but every

35 See Lambertini 2011.

36 Thomas Aquinas, *De Regno* I, c. 1 (449): “In omnibus autem quae ad finem aliquem ordinantur, in quibus contingit sic et aliter procedere, opus est aliquo dirigente per quod directe debitum perueniatur ad finem. Non enim nauis, quam secundum diuersorum uentorum impulsum in diuersa moueri contingit, ad destinatum finem perueniret nisi per gubernatoris industriam dirigeretur ad portum.”

man himself would be a king under God, the highest king, insofar as he directs himself in his acts through the light of reason given to him by God.³⁷

Thus, on Aquinas's view, there is a goal towards which the life of human beings is oriented; it seems natural to read him as referring here to happiness as the ultimate goal of human action. As the diversity in the actions and the paths of life of human beings shows, however, there are different ways of achieving this goal. Therefore, these actions and paths of life must be thought of as the result of choices each person makes on the basis of reasons. As a consequence, there must be some sort of guiding authority in human beings that makes these choices. On Aquinas's view, it is the faculty of practical reason that has this “piloting” function. This, in turn, leads him to the claim that if human beings lived a solitary life, they would not need anyone else to direct their actions because each would be his or her own king through their faculty of practical reason.³⁸

But human beings do not live a solitary life. As Aquinas argues in the third step of the argumentation, human beings are by nature social and political animals:

But it is natural for man, more than for any other animal, that he is a social and political animal that lives in a multitude, which natural necessity shows. For nature gave the other animals food, a covering of hair, means of defence, such as teeth, horns, claws, or at least swiftness for fleeing. Man, however, is set up without having any of these things prepared for him by nature, but instead of these, he has been given reason by which he can produce these things for himself though the work of his hands, for which one man does not suffice. For one man, by himself, cannot sufficiently provide for his life. Therefore, it is natural that man lives in the society of many.³⁹

Thus, for Aquinas, living in social groups is essentially a compensation for the somewhat deficient natural setup of human beings. Unlike many other animals, human beings are not equipped with physical or mental properties that could serve them as natural means for providing for their needs.

37 Ibid.: “Hominis autem est aliquis finis ad quem tota eius uita et actio ordinatur [...]. Contingit autem diuersimode homines ad finem intentum procedere, quod ipsa diuersitas humanorum studiorum et actionum declarat; indiget igitur homo aliquo dirigente ad finem. Est autem unicuique hominum naturaliter insitum rationis lumen, quo in suis actibus dirigatur ad finem. Et si quidem homini conueniret singulariter uiuere sicut multis animalium, nullo alio dirigente indigeret ad finem, sed ipse sibi unusquisque esset rex sub Deo summo rege, in quantum per lumen rationis diuinitus sibi datum sibi in suis actibus se ipsum dirigeret.”

38 Aquinas doesn't explicitly refer to the concept of choice (*electio*) here. But it seems to me that it is implied in his idea of guiding one's actions through the faculty of practical reason in the face of alternative possibilities. See *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 13 for a detailed discussion of choice.

39 Thomas Aquinas, *De regno* I, c. 1 (449): „Naturale autem est homini ut sit animal sociale et politicum, in multitudine uiuens, magis etiam quam omnia alia animalia; quod quidem naturalis necessitas declarat. Aliis enim animalibus natura praeparauit cibum, tegumenta pilorum, defensionem, ut dentes, cornua, ungues, uel saltem uelocitatem ad fugam; homo autem institutus est nullo horum sibi a natura praeparato, sed loco omnium data est ei ratio per quam sibi haec omnia officio manuum posset praeparare. Ad quae omnia praeparanda unus homo non sufficit, nam unus homo per se sufficienter utam transigere non posset; est igitur homini naturale ut in societate multorum uiuat.”

Instead, nature has given them the faculty of reason and a pair of hands. But even these exclusive gifts allow humans to sustainably provide for themselves only if they join forces and cooperate to produce what they need to meet the complex and demanding requirements of their happiness. A human being on its own could not achieve that.⁴⁰

So on Aquinas's view, humans have something like a shared interest in the kind of cooperation that life in social groups allows for because it is only this kind of cooperation that makes a good life possible. However, life in social groups requires the institution of government, as the final step of the argumentation is meant to show:

So if it is natural for man to live in society with many, it is necessary that there is something in all groups through which the multitude is governed. For if there are many men, and each of them provides for his own good, the multitude scatters in different directions, if there is not also something that takes care of the things that belong to the good of the multitude; just as the body of man and every animal dissolves if there is not a general reigning force in the body which strives for the common good of all members. [...] But this happens for good reasons: For what is particular [to each] is not the same as what is common [to all]. Things differ according to what is particular to each, but they unite according to what is common. But diverse things are the cause of diverse things. Therefore it is necessary that, next to what moves towards the particular good of each individual, there is also something that moves to the common good of the many. [...] Therefore, there must be something that governs in every multitude.⁴¹

Thus, Aquinas concludes his argument by pointing out that there is something like a motivational counterweight to the individuals' shared interest in the cooperation that life in social groups allows for, namely their diverging particular interests based on their individual conceptions of happiness. Therefore, lest these diverse impulses threaten the integration of the social group and the profits of cooperation, there must be some agent or authority that acts to promote the common good of the group as a whole.

40 The needs Aquinas is speaking of in the passage quoted here may not seem particularly complex and demanding. But he goes on to make similar points about the production of technology and knowledge. Also, he argues that language makes humans especially social and political animals. Thus, he essentially makes the same point as in *Sententia libri Ethicorum* I, 1, namely that social and political life is necessary for a good life for human beings.

41 Thomas Aquinas, *De regno* I, c. 1 (450): "Si igitur naturale est homini quod in societate multorum uiuat, necesse est in omnibus esse aliquid per quod multitudo regatur. Multis enim existentibus hominibus et unoquoque id quod est sibi congruum providente, multitudo in diuersa dispergeretur nisi etiam esset aliquid de eo quod ad bonum multitudinis pertinet curam habens, sicut et corpus hominis et cuiuslibet animalis deflueret nisi esset aliqua uis regitiva communis in corpore, quae ad bonum commune omnium membrorum intenderet. [...]. Hoc autem rationabiliter accidit. Non enim idem est quod proprium et quod commune est; secundum propria quidem differunt, secundum autem commune uniuntur. Diuersorum autem diuersa sunt causae; oportet igitur, preter id quod mouet ad proprium bonum uniuscuiusque, esse aliquid quod mouet ad bonum commune multorum. [...] Oportet igitur esse in omni multitudine aliquod regitivum."

2.2. Representative Government and the Constitution of the Political Community as a Subject of Agency

This foundational argument in the opening chapter of *On Kingship* is rarely discussed in detail; and if explicit reference is made to it, it is often portrayed as a more or less orthodox Aristotelian story about human sociation that is motivated by Aquinas's moral and political perfectionism.⁴² However, I would like to argue that Aquinas goes beyond the Aristotelian framework here: At the core of the argument is the identification of a collective action problem that results from human sociation. And the solution to this problem is a conception of representative government that draws on the idea that the political community is an artificial and yet distinct subject of human agency.

As we saw, Aquinas begins by explaining the “constitution of agency”⁴³ in individual human beings. According to his view, the ultimate end of human action is happiness. However, there are different ways to achieve this end and different reasons that favour one way over the others. And therefore, intentional action in pursuit of happiness must be thought of as the result of a choice made on the basis of reasons. This, in turn, implies that there must be a faculty of choice in human beings that has a certain reflective distance to any one particular reason for action and at the same time the authority to determine what the agent should eventually do, all things considered. According to Aquinas, this faculty of choice is practical reason.⁴⁴ This constitution of agency in individual human beings implies “intentional autonomy” in two senses: First, it implies that human beings, at least in principle, are able to direct their own actions according to reason with their own happiness in view; they would not need anyone else to guide their actions *if* they were solitary animals. Secondly, it implies that the intentionality of individual human beings “bottoms out”⁴⁵ at their own individual happiness. That is to say, the ultimate reference in explaining their intentional actions is to their own individual happiness.⁴⁶

Aquinas then turns to social groups and argues that life in social groups also requires a certain constitution of agency. This requirement results from the distinction between the common good of the group as a whole and the particular happiness of its individual members. However, at this point,

42 See e.g. Finnis 1998, 222; Dyson 2002, xix, xxvi and 2003, 198.

43 I borrow this phrase from Korsgaard 2014.

44 Aquinas develops this picture of human action in much more detail in *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 1-17. For the leading role of practical reason in human action, see also the discussion of the *inclinationes naturales* in *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 94.

45 I borrow this phrase from Schmid 2008, though this aspect of rational agency is called “intentional *autarky*” in his terminology.

46 This does not imply egoism at the level of the content of individual intentionality. But it does imply a certain “structural” or “formal” egoism because the ultimate goal of any human agent is his or her own happiness and not anyone else's.

Aquinas is not primarily concerned with giving any particular content to the idea of the common good; it is only later in the text that he explicitly equates the common good with peace and unity.⁴⁷ Also, his point is not the one that he often makes when speaking about the relationship between the common good and the individual good, namely that the common good is superior to the individual good.⁴⁸ Rather, he is interested in a different question, namely whose good the common good is and which agent actually pursues the common good considered as such. And he argues that the distinction between the common good and the individual good gives rise to a collective action problem in social groups: Human beings create social groups because they have a shared interest in social cooperation. So they have a shared goal to establish and sustain a functioning social group that helps them to provide for the many things they require for a good human life. However, the individual group members intend this common good only under a weak, *distributive* description. Their individual intentionality bottoms out at their individual happiness. And therefore, they are interested in the establishment and sustainability of a functioning social group only insofar as it is good from the point of view of their individual pursuit of happiness. At this individual level, however, the interest in social cooperation competes with other reasons for action they might have in pursuit of happiness; and insofar as their conceptions of happiness diverge, these reasons for action diverge as well. For example, the different professions, trades, and crafts that the political community comprises – say, the craftsmen, the tradesmen, the lawyers, and the scholars – have an overlapping interest in social cooperation. But they also have certain particular interests relative to the particular ways of life they have chosen in pursuit of happiness; and these are interests that they don't share. This divergence is not due to a moral difference between the individuals but rather to the fact that there simply are different legitimate ways to achieve human happiness that do not make the same practical demands. The different ways of achieving happiness converge because they all depend, in one way or another, on the benefits of life in a social group. But beyond that, they differ in content and generate reasons for action that point the individuals in different directions.

Therefore, Aquinas argues, the individual citizens should not be directly in charge of governing the group because that would make the realisation of the common good – i.e. of that which is good or in the interest of all – directly dependent on the contingent balance of reasons in the particular intentionality of the individual group members who view the common good from the perspective of their own pursuit of happiness. Rather, what is needed is an agent that is distinct from the individual

47 Thomas Aquinas, *De regno* I, c. 3. For the debate about the “material” aspects of the common good in Aquinas, see e.g. Finnis 1998, 222-234 and Pakaluk 2001.

48 See e.g. *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 90, a. 3 or *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 31, a. 3. On the hierarchical relationship between the common good and the individual good in Aquinas, see e.g. Eschmann 1944 and Kempshall 1999, 76-129.

group members and that pursues the common good as such, i.e. under a strong, *collective* description as that which is in the interest of all. And on Aquinas's view, this agent is the institution of representative government, i.e. a government that acts in pursuit of the common good of the group as a whole. It replaces the potentially precarious intentionality of the individual members in certain domains that are relevant to the realisation of the common good. And it is the more reliable guardian of the common good because it intends the common good as such, i.e. under a strong, collective description. That is to say, while no individual member intends the common good as such, the common good serves explicitly and under this description as the ultimate reference point for whatever the government does in the name of the group as a whole. Thus, the common good, i.e. that which is in the interest of all, is where the intentionality of the institution of government ultimately bottoms out.⁴⁹

What I would like to suggest is that this theory of representative government, intended as the solution to a collective action problem with respect to the common good, is a consequent development of Aquinas's understanding of the political community as an artificial and yet distinct subject of agency. As we saw, the idea is that the political community possesses the “unity of order”, which means that intentional actions can be attributed to the political community as a whole that cannot be attributed to any of its individual members; and that intentional actions can be attributed to its individual members that cannot be attributed to the political community as a whole. Now in *On Kingship*, the reason for this “intentional differentiation” turns out to be that the political community as a whole possesses an intentional orientation that is distinct from the intentional orientation of any of its individual members. That is to say, intentional actions can be attributed to the political community that cannot be attributed to any of its individual members because these actions, performed by the government, are driven by the political community's own intentional orientation towards the common good; an intentional orientation that is distinct from the intentional orientation of any of its individual members who each strive for their own individual happiness. However, the intentional differentiation between the political community as a whole and its individual members is an artefact that depends on the institution of representative government: Just as practical reason in human beings, representative government has a certain reflective distance from the particular interests of any one individual member (or faction of members) of the political

49 I should say that Aquinas does not use the language of representation in his political writings; the term *representatio* only appears in the context of his philosophy of mind (see e.g. *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 17 and q. 57). However, in what follows, I hope to further support the claim that the conception of government in *On Kingship* can be aptly described as representative because the essential elements are there: The government is an agent that is distinct from the individual citizens; the government is authorised by the free citizens to govern the political community; and because the citizens are free, it is the job of the government to pursue not the interests of the people in office but the common good of citizens. Thus, it fits the general outline of standard conceptions of representation, such as Pitkin's (1972).

community and is therefore in a position to make choices in the name of the political community as a whole, i.e. with respect to what is in the interest of all. Thus, it is only in virtue of the institution of representative government that the common good comes into view under a strong, collective description. And therefore, it is only through the institution of representative government that the political community emerges as a unified whole with an intentional orientation of its own that is distinct from the intentional orientation of any of its individual members. This accords with Aquinas's conception of the political community as possessing the unity of order: The political community is an unified whole only in virtue of the common orientation of the individual citizens towards the institution of representative government – just as the world is a unified whole only in virtue of a common orientation of the multitude of individual substances towards God.

2.3. Some Implications

Before concluding the second part of the paper, I would like to sketch briefly how other important themes in *On Kingship* flow from this foundational argument.

First, take the thought experiment according to which every human being would be his or her own king if human beings were solitary animals.⁵⁰ This thought experiment is not meant to tell us something about how the political community and political institutions contribute to the moral perfection and happiness of human beings. Rather, it is a consideration that is meant to point out that the constitution of the political community through the institution of representative government results in certain constraints on individual self-determination. On the one hand, Aquinas's conception of representative government constrains government action by making the common good its ultimate goal. But on the other hand, the institution of representative government also imposes constraints on the self-determination of the individual members of the group. Since life in social groups is beneficial to all, the individuals have good reason to abandon their unconstrained authority over their actions and jointly decide to give up their individual intentional agency in certain domains and install a government that acts in the interest of all. This, however, means that the individual members are no longer exclusively their own kings because part of their authority over their action has been transferred to the institution of representative government that acts in the name of the political community as a whole.⁵¹

50 Thomas Aquinas, *De regno* I, c. 1.

51 This corresponds with Aquinas's claim in *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 90, a. 3 (151-152) that not everyone has the authority to make binding laws under which he and the other members of the community live; this is the privilege of the “whole multitude” or of a public person who governs “instead of” (*vicis*) and “has the care for” (*cura*) the whole multitude, i.e. the institution of representative government.

Secondly, Aquinas's distinction between just and unjust government answers directly to the idea that the intentional orientation of the political community is different from the intentional orientation of all its individual members considered as such:

“But the appropriate goal of a multitude of free persons is different from that of a multitude of slaves. For free is the person who is her own cause; but a slave is the one who, in that what he is, belongs to someone else. If therefore a multitude of free persons is being oriented by the ruler towards the common good of the multitude, it will be a right and just government, which is appropriate for free persons. But if the government is oriented not to the common good of the multitude, but to the private good of the ruler, it will be a perverse and unjust government [...].”⁵²

So drawing on an understanding of freedom as the opposite of slavery, Aquinas argues that the distinction between just and unjust government with respect to the political community rests on the idea that the individual members of that community, i.e. the citizens, are free persons.⁵³ Because they are free persons, the government must be representative in the sense that the relationship between the government and the citizens must be the reverse of the relationship between a master and his slave – both with respect to the authority relation and with respect to the benefit.⁵⁴ A slave works for and is being dominated by his master to promote the master's good. In contrast, a representative government works for and is being authorised by the free citizens to promote the common good of the community as a whole; a conception of government that corresponds with Aquinas's description of the person(s) governing the political community as elected officials.⁵⁵ Against this background, Aquinas argues that the fault of the unjust ruler is not that his character or his personal goals are essentially immoral. Rather, it is that the unjust ruler, contrary to his “job description” as an authorised representative, pursues not the common good of all but his private ends. For he substitutes the intentionality of the political community he is authorised to act on, i.e. the common good, with his personal intentionality which, like the intentionality of all individual human agents, bottoms out at his own happiness.⁵⁶

52 Thomas Aquinas, *De regno* I, c. 1 (450): “Alius autem est finis conueniens multitudini liberorum et seruorum; nam liber est, qui sui causa est, seruus autem est qui id quod est, alterius est. Si igitur liberorum multitudo a rege ad bonum commune multitudinis ordinetur, erit regimen rectum et iustum quale conuenit liberis. Si uero non ad bonum commune multitudinis sed ad bonum priuatum regentis regimen ordinetur, erit regimen iniustum atque peruersum [...].”

53 This is an Aristotelian theme; see *Politics* I, 1253b1–1254a17. For Aquinas's reading of this passage, see *Sententia libri politicorum* I, chapters 2-4.

54 This is also an Aristotelian theme; see *Politics* I, 1255b16–1255b40. For Aquinas's reading of this passage, see *Sententia libri politicorum* I, chapter 5.

55 See e.g. *De Regno* I, c. 6 and *Summa Theologiae* I-II, 105, a. 1.

56 Aquinas relies on this definition of unjust government in a number of other texts as well, for instance in his discussion of sedition in *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 42.

A third important theme in *On Kingship* is Aquinas's justification of monarchy as the best regime type.⁵⁷ However, contrary to Brett's suggestion, Aquinas is perfectly aware that the argument for the unity of government and the argument for the unity of the ruling person are “two different arguments”.⁵⁸ He starts from the premise that the government as an institution must be a unified agent in order to effectively promote the common good, i.e. to see to it that the political community's “unity is being conserved, which is called peace, in the absence of which the benefit of social life is lost [...]”.⁵⁹ He then compares the different types of just government to see which is best suited to guarantee the unity of the institution of government. Now the monarch has the advantage of already being one in person.⁶⁰ In an aristocracy or a polity, on the other hand, the government consists of more than one person. And this results in another kind of collective action problem, for these persons first have to make themselves in to a unified agent before they can govern effectively. And they have to achieve this against the background threat of disagreement:

It is clear that many in no way govern the multitude if they completely disagree. For it is required in many a sort of union, so that they are able to rule in some way. For neither many people pull a ship to one place, unless they are somehow bonded together. But many people are said to unite through an appropriation to one [...].⁶¹

So Aquinas does not rule out the other regime types on any principled reasons. Rather, he points out that they involve an extra step in making the government an effective, unified agent. And therefore, they involve a special risk of disintegration.⁶²

A final example is the extensive discussion of how a just ruler is to be rewarded for his service in government. This discussion is the flipside of the characterisation of the unjust ruler in terms of the distinction between the common good and the individual good:

57 I refer to monarchy as a “type” of government to point out that in Aquinas, just as in Aristotle, the distinction between the different regime types rests on a more fundamental distinction between two forms of government, namely unjust (or despotic) and just (or political) government.

58 Brett 2005, 14.

59 Thomas Aquinas, *De regno* I, c. 2 (451): “Bonum autem et salus consociatae multitudinis est ut eius unitas conseruetur, que dicitur pax; qua remota socialis uite perit utilitas [...]”.

60 See also *Summa contra Gentiles* IV, 76.

61 Thomas Aquinas, *De regno* I, c. 2 (451): “[M]anifestum est quod plures multitudinem nullo modo regerent si omnino dissentirent; requiritur igitur in pluribus quaedam unio ad hoc quod quoquo modo regere possint, quia nec multi nauem in unam partem traherent nisi aliquo modo coniuncti. Vniri autem dicuntur plura per appropinquationem ad unum [...]”.

62 This argument is compatible with the view that the disadvantage of aristocracy and polity with respect to guaranteeing the unity of government is offset by advantages they may have in other respects. Thus, Aquinas eventually seems to favor a kind of “mixed constitution”; see *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 105, a. 1 and Aroney 2007.

But since, according to what was said before, the king has to seek the good of the multitude, the office of the king would seem too burdensome unless some particular good would result for him from this activity. Therefore, it must be investigated what the reward for the good king is.⁶³

Again, Aquinas poses the problem not in the way that his perfectionism suggests, namely as the question of how promoting the moral perfection and happiness of others is conducive to realising one's own moral perfection and happiness. Instead, he claims that even the good king needs an incentive at the level of his individual conception of happiness lest his office be “too burdensome”. Thus, the discussion again turns on a distinction between private and public endeavours and therefore on the idea that the political community represented in government possesses an intentional orientation of its own that is distinct from the intentional orientation of its individual members – including those in office. The good or the just ruler, as opposed to the unjust ruler, sticks to his “job description” as a representative of the political community: He acts to promote the common good of the citizens. But that does not change the fact that his individual intentionality, like the intentionality of all individual human agents, bottoms out at his own happiness and not at anyone else's. Thus, the question of the reward of the good king arises because the common good, considered under a strong, collective description as that which is in the interest of all, is not the ultimate goal of any individual human agent; for all individual human agents view the common good from the perspective of their own pursuit of happiness. And therefore, there must be some sort of incentive at the individual level even for the good ruler in order to bridge the gap between his individual intentionality and the intentionality of the political community he is authorised to pursue, i.e. the common good.

3. Aquinas's Conception of the Political Community as a Subject of Agency and the Debate about the Nature of Collective Intentionality

I have argued that the opening passages of *On Kingship* should be interpreted as providing a theory of representative government that is intended to solve a collective action problem that results from human sociation and that rests on a conception of the political community as an artificial and yet distinct subject of human agency. In the final part of the paper, I would like to show that this action-theoretical understanding of the political community occupies a middle ground between two conceptions of collective agency that have been attributed to Aquinas in the past. These conceptions

⁶³ Thomas Aquinas, *De regno* I, c. 7 (456-457): “Quoniam autem secundum praedicta regis est bonum multitudinis quaerere, nimis uidetur onerosum regis officium nisi ei aliquod proprium bonum ex hoc proveniret. Oportet igitur considerare quale sit boni regis conueniens praemium.”

are instructively contrasted in an early paper by Eschmann: The first is an “organic” conception of collective agency according to which a social group is “a living organism and a real person, with body and members and a will of its own”⁶⁴, that is “*simpliciter et per se*, one subject of action”⁶⁵. The second is an “individualistic” conception of collective agency according to which a social group possesses only a “teleological unity, the unity of *order* built around a common cause”⁶⁶; thus, the group's “common action” has an object that is “of common character and universal relevance”, but its subject is not the group as a unified agent but “each and every individual who is part of the community and acts in view of the aforementioned *causa universitatis*.”⁶⁷ In order to show that Aquinas's conception of the political community occupies a middle ground between these alternatives⁶⁸, I will compare it to an influential contribution to today's debate about the nature of collective intentionality, namely List's and Pettit's theory of “group agents”.⁶⁹

3.1. “Joint Action” and “Group Agents”

List and Pettit develop their conception of “group agency” against the background of a distinction between “joint actions” and “group agents”.⁷⁰ The idea is to structure the vast debate about the nature of collective intentionality by distinguish between two different phenomena: The concept of “joint action” paradigmatically applies to cases such as taking a walk or painting a house together, where some individuals act jointly to achieve a shared goal. In such cases, the individuals count as really acting jointly only if their mental states interlock in certain ways and each individual does his or her part of the joint action accordingly. But this does not mean that any agential properties can be ascribed to the group as a whole as distinct from its individual members. And this, according to List and Pettit, is different with “group agents” such as business corporations, churches, or states. These are groups of individual agents that are organised in such a way that they assume a corporate identity that is relatively independent of their individual members. Group agents are established

64 Eschmann 1946, 2.

65 Ibid., 41. This interpretation relies on texts such as *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 81, a. 1.

66 Eschmann 1946, 28 (his emphasis).

67 Ibid., 27. This is the conception of collective agency that Eschmann himself attributes to Aquinas, mainly on the basis of an analysis of *Scriptum super Sententiis* 4, Dist. 18, Q. 2, a. 3, q. 2.

68 Aquinas does not refer to these alternatives in the texts I discussed. But there is reason to think that he was familiar with them through Aristotle's *Politics*. In some passages, Aristotle seems to advocate an “organic” conception of the *polis* where the individuals relate to the political community just as the members relate to the whole body; see e.g. 1253a18-29 on the basis of which Barnes (2005) defends an “organic” interpretation. In other passages, he seems to advocate a distributive individualism which holds that the *polis* consists of independent individual agents and therefore cannot itself be a unified agent as well; see e.g. 1261a16–22 which has inspired Mayhew's (1997) individualistic interpretation. For Aquinas's rather descriptive comments on these passages, see *Sententia libri Politicorum* I, 1 and II, 1.

69 List/Pettit 2011.

70 List/Pettit 2011: 33-34. Similar proposals can be found in Isaacs 2011 and Schmid 2008.

through the joint action of their members; but in doing so, the members go beyond the mode of joint action by establishing the group itself as an independent centre of intentionality that is numerically distinct from the individual agents that constitute it.

This distinction between “joint actions” and “group agents” lends itself neatly to a description of the stages of political incorporation as Aquinas envisages them: At first, human beings socialize because they have a shared interest in cooperation. But then it turns out that the integrity of the group that allows for fruitful cooperation is best served if they create, through joint action, the institution of representative government. The institution of representative government, however, constitutes the group itself as a “group agent”, i.e. as a subject of agency with an intentional orientation towards the common good that is distinct from the intentional orientation of any of its individual members. As a consequence, the intentional actions performed by the representative government in pursuit of the common good can be ascribed to the political community itself; actions which cannot be ascribed to any of its individual members considered as such because these are rooted in the members' individual intentionality geared towards their individual happiness. Thus, on Aquinas's view, the institution of representative government results in an intentional differentiation between the political community as a whole and its individual members. And because of this intentional differentiation, the political community can be considered as a “group agent” in List's and Pettit's sense, i.e. as a centre of intentionality that is numerically distinct from the individual agents that make it up.

3.2. Group Agents between “Organic” and “Individualistic” Conceptions of Collective Agency

Against the background of the distinction between “joint action” and “group agents”, the main task of a theory of group agency is to show that a group agent is indeed a subject of agency that is distinct from its individual members. It is instructive to compare Aquinas's conception of the political community with List's and Pettit's theory in this respect because this brings to light that the political community in Aquinas – just like a group agent in List's and Pettit's sense – is aptly described neither in terms of an “organic” nor in terms of an “individualistic” conception of collective agency.

List and Pettit start from “methodological individualism”⁷¹, i.e. the view that the intentional attitudes and actions of a group agent must be accounted for in terms of the intentional attitudes and actions of its individual members. But they aim at a conception that does not meet this requirement

71 Ibid., 3-4.

in the rather trivial sense in which the “dictatorial” model of group agents meets it. According to this model, which they attribute to Hobbes, the intentional attitudes of the group *simply are* certain individual attitudes, namely those of a special member of the group – the “dictator” – which are agreed by all to simply count as the intentional attitudes of the group as a whole.⁷² In contrast, List and Pettit propose to understand a group's collective attitudes on a given set of propositions as the output of an “aggregation function”⁷³ that is realized in certain collective decision-making procedures for which the attitudes of the individual group members on these (or closely related) propositions serve as input. These aggregation functions, however, must be more complex than proposition-wise majority voting in order to produce group attitudes that meet basic standards of rationality.⁷⁴ And according to List and Pettit, an important effect of these more complex procedures is a separation of the group attitudes on the one hand and the individual attitudes on the other: On the basis of these procedures, a set of attitudes may turn out to be the set of collective attitudes of the group as a whole that is not identical with some or even all sets of attitudes of the individual members on the very same propositions. As a consequence, it makes sense to treat the group as a whole as a coherent centre of intentionality that is, to a certain extent, independent of, and can be intentionally addresses quite apart from, its individual members.

On this basis, List and Pettit propose to describe the relationship between the intentional attitudes and actions of a group agent and the intentional attitudes and actions of its individual members as one of “supervenience”,⁷⁵ a concept which stands for the middle ground this conception of group agency holds between two extremes.⁷⁶ On the one hand, it differs from “emergentist” accounts that think of such a centre of intentionality as a “group mind” that is altogether independent of the intentionality of its individual members. For on List's and Pettit's view, the group attitudes are being fixed solely on the basis of the lower-level attitudes of the individual group members. On the other hand, their conception of group agency differs from “eliminativist” accounts of the attitudes and actions of group agents. Since the complex decision-making procedures and the aggregation functions underlying them drive a wedge between the collective attitudes of the group as a whole and the attitudes of its individual members, the attitudes of group agents do not lend themselves to a reductive analysis that treats them simply as the sum of the attitudes of its individual members.

Against the background of List's and Pettit's theory of group agents, it becomes apparent that Aquinas's description of the political community as not being “simply one” but possessing the

72 Ibid., 48f, 53.

73 Ibid., 42ff.

74 Ibid., 49-58.

75 Ibid., 64ff.

76 Ibid., 73-78.

“unity of order” expresses a similar understanding of the status of the political community as a subject of agency. As we saw, Aquinas's idea is that something that is “simply one” in virtue of having a substantial form, such as an individual human being, is a unified agent in the sense that no intentional differentiation is possible between the whole and its parts: One cannot attribute different intentional actions to the whole person and her hand, say, and one cannot treat the whole person and her hand as distinct subjects of agency. In contrast, the political community is a unified agent in a weaker sense: It is an artificial whole that consists of the individual citizens and is constituted as a unified agent in virtue of the order that exists horizontally between the citizens and vertically between the citizens and the institution of representative government as their common point of reference. However, while the political community thus emerges as a subject of agency because it has an intentional orientation towards the common good that is distinct from the intentional orientation of any of its individual members, it does not fully absorb the intentional agency of its individual members. Therefore, the citizens' individual agency survives their incorporation into a political community. And that is the reason why the constitution of the political community as a subject of agency results in the kind of intentional differentiation that Aquinas denies in the case of individual human beings: Actions can be attributed to the political community as a whole that cannot be attributed to any of its individual members; and actions can be attributed to its individual members that cannot be attributed to the political community as a whole.

This conception of the political community as a subject of agency is not aptly described as an “organic” conception of collective agency: What this interpretation does not take account of is that Aquinas considers the political community to be an artificial “unity of order” that results from the institution of representative government through intentional human action; it is not a real, natural person that is “simply one”. As a consequence, the constitution of the political community as a group agent does not *reduce* the number of *loci* of intentional agency to just one because it does not fully absorb the intentional agency of the individual members into a single unified agent. But Aquinas's conception of the political community is also not aptly described as an “individualistic” conception of collective agency: What Eschmann's own interpretation does not take account of is that on Aquinas's view, there is a collective action problem that requires social groups to leave the mode of “joint action” behind in certain domains by creating the institution of representative government that acts instead of them to promote the common good of the political community as the whole. And the creation of the institution of representative government *increases* the number of *loci* of intentional agency: First, there is the institution of representative government that is a subject of agency that is distinct from the individual citizens. But the institution of representative government brings into view the intentional orientation of the political community as a whole

towards the common good – a conception of common purpose that is not accessible from the perspective of the individual intentionality of the citizens that is geared towards individual happiness and that allows for intending the common good only under a weak, distributive description. And therefore, secondly, the political community as a whole must be thought of as a subject of agency that is distinct both from the individual citizens that make it up and from the institution of government that represents it.

3.3. The Constitution of Group Agents: Representation vs Aggregation

So Aquinas's conception of the political community as a subject of agency occupies a middle ground between an “organic” and an “individualistic” understanding of collective agency – not unlike List's and Pettit's conception of group agency. However, there is also a fundamental difference between the two approaches because there are two fundamentally different mechanisms in play that yield the intentional differentiation between a group agent and its individual members. As we saw, List and Pettit start from the “grass-roots democratic” idea of attitude aggregation according to which a group agent's attitudes on a given set of propositions are determined by feeding the individual group members' attitudes on these (or closely related) propositions into collective decision-making procedures. And they argue that it is due to the required complexity of these procedures that the group as a whole emerges from them as a centre of intentionality that is distinct from its individual members. In contrast, Aquinas holds the view that the intentional differentiation between the political community as a whole and the individual citizens that make it up is brought about not by aggregation but by representation, i.e. by the creation of a representative government that is authorised by the citizens to act in pursuit of their shared interests. It is the institution of representative government that brings into view the intentional orientation of the political community as a whole towards the common good; an intentional orientation that is distinct from the intentional orientation of any of its individual members. And therefore, it is the institution of representative government that establishes the political community as a whole as a subject of agency that is distinct from its individual members. This approach to collective agency makes Aquinas's theory of government in *On Kingship* congenial to the political philosophy of authors such as Marsilius of Padua and Thomas Hobbes who believe that “a Multitude of men, are made *One* Person, when they are by one man, or one Person, Represented” and that “*Unity*, cannot otherwise be understood in a Multitude” of individual human agents.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* I, chap. 16 (see Skinner 2005). A similar formulation can be found in Marsilius of Padua, *Defensor Pacis* I, c. 17, 7 (see Syros 2012).

However, there are two points worth making with respect to this difference between Aquinas's conception of the political community as a subject of agency and List's and Pettit's conception of group agency. The first is that Aquinas's conception is also fundamentally different from the “dictatorial” model that serves List and Pettit as a foil. The idea is not that, in a monarchy for instance, the intentional attitudes of the king, considered as an individual person, simply count as the intentional attitudes of the political community. On the contrary, Aquinas insists that the intentionality that a person in office is authorised to act on is not her own or that of any other individual human being but rather the political community's intentionality that is distinct from the intentionality of all its individual members. And it is the institution of representative government itself that serves as the “redescriptive device”⁷⁸ that grounds the attribution of a distinct intentionality to the political community as a whole; a distinct intentional orientation towards the common good that does not lend itself to an “easy translation”⁷⁹ into a description at the level of individual intentionality because each individual's intentionality is geared towards his or her own happiness.

The second point concerns Aquinas's attitude towards democracy. Against the background of List's and Pettit's conception of group agency, one might be tempted into reading Aquinas's theory of representative government – especially if it comes in the form of a theory of monarchy, as it does in *On Kingship* – as fundamentally undemocratic; an interpretation that may be thought to cohere with the fact that Aquinas considers *democratia* to be one of the *unjust* forms of government.⁸⁰ However, I think that such an interpretation would be missing the point: At the heart of Aquinas's theory of government in *On Kingship* is the idea that the form of government that is appropriate for a multitude of free citizens is the opposite of slavery. That is to say, the people in office are essentially authorised representatives: They are elected by the citizens to act instead of the citizens to pursue what is in the shared interest of the citizens, i.e. the common good. Therefore, Aquinas's theory of government in *On Kingship* is not a rejection of the idea that the citizens are the ultimate source of political authority. Rather, it is a theory of representative government that, just as a theory of participatory government, is also meant to spell out the “ideal of giving *kratos* to the *demos*.”⁸¹

4. Conclusion

It has been argued that in *On Kingship*, Aquinas speaks deliberately of human beings as social and

78 I borrow this phrase from French 1979.

79 List/Pettit 2011, 76.

80 Thomas Aquinas, *De Regno* I, c. 1.

81 Pettit 2006, 61.

political animals to point out that these are two quite different dimensions of human nature,⁸² he does not conflate the social and the political, as Hannah Arendt had suspected.⁸³ This view is confirmed by the interpretation of the theory of government in *On Kingship* that I have proposed: It is not an expression of Aquinas's moral and political perfectionism but rather a theory of representative government that is intended to address a collective action problem that results from human sociation. An important part of this theory is the idea that there are two different stages in the process of political incorporation that can be labelled "social" and "political" respectively: Human beings join forces in social groups because they have a shared interest in cooperation. But life in social groups requires a further step, namely the constitution of the group as a political community through the institution of representative government.

This theory of representative government is based on an understanding of the political community as an artificial and yet distinct subject of agency. This makes it congenial to contemporary approaches to the nature of collective intentionality and collective action. In particular, it is similar to List's and Pettit's theory of "group agents" in that the action-theoretical conception of the political community occupies a middle ground between "organic" collectivism and "individualistic" reductionism. However, it is also fundamentally different from List's and Pettit's approach in that the mechanism that yields the intentional differentiation between the political community and its individual members is not aggregation but representation: It is only through the creation of the institution of representative government that the political community emerges as a subject of agency that is distinct from its individual members.

This theory of government is not incompatible with Aquinas's moral and political perfectionism. Its point is not that having a political community and a government is not good for human beings, given their general nature. Also, it is not that we should not be concerned with the virtues an ordinary citizen or a person in government should have. However, I do think that Aquinas separates the spheres of morals and politics in *On Kingship* in a way that is alien to the basic Aristotelian framework that motivates his perfectionism. The theory of government in *On Kingship* is based on the idea that the fundamental problem of politics is different from the fundamental problem of morals: it is not primarily about individual human perfection and happiness but rather about addressing a collective action problem that arises when a multitude of individual human beings with different conceptions of happiness form social groups in order to enjoy the benefits of cooperation. Therefore, one could say that human beings as Aquinas portrays them in *On Kingship* are not only social *and* political animals but also moral *and* political animals in the sense that the spheres of

82 Miethke 2008, 25-43.

83 Arendt 1998, 23.

morals and politics represent two quite different requirements of practical rationality.

Bibliography

Arendt, Hannah (1998), *The Human Condition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Aristotele (2013), *Politics*. Ed. by Carnes Lord. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Aroney, Nicolas (2007), “Subsidiarity, Federalism and the Best Constitution: Thomas Aquinas on City, Province and Empire”, in: *Law and Philosophy* 26, pp. 161-228.

Barnes, Jonathan (2005), “Aristotle and Political Liberty”, in: Richard Kraut, Steven Skultety (eds.), *Aristotle's Politics. Critical Essays*. New York: Rawman & Littlefield Publishers, pp. 185-201.

Brett, Annabel (2005), *Marsilius of Padua. The Defender of the Peace*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cheneval, Francis, Imbach, Ruedi (1993), *Thomas von Aquin: Prologe zu den Aristoteles-Kommentaren*. Frankfurt: Klostermann.

Crofts, Richard (1973), “The Common Good in the Political Theory of Thomas Aquinas”, in: *The Thomist: a Speculative Quarterly Review* 37, pp. 155-173.

Dupré, Louis (1993), “The Common Good and the Open Society”, in: *The Review of Politics* 55, pp. 687-712.

Dyson, Robert (2002), *Thomas Aquinas. Political Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dyson, Robert (2003), *Normative Theories of Society and Government in Five Medieval Thinkers*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press.

Eschmann, Ignatius (1944), “Bonum commune melius est quam bonum unius. Eine Studie ueber den Wertvorrang des Personalen bei Thomas von Aquin”, in: *Mediaeval Studies* 6, pp. 62-120.

Eschmann, Ignatius (1946), “Studies on the Notion of Society in St. Thomas Aquinas”, in: *Mediaeval Studies* 8, pp. 1-42.

Eschmann, Ignatius (1949), *St. Thomas Aquinas. On Kingship to the King of Cyprus*. Toronto: The Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies.

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

Finnis, John (2014), “Aquinas' Moral, Political, and Legal Philosophy”, in: Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2014/entries/aquinas-moralpolitical/>. Last retrieved June 18, 2017.

French, Peter (1979), “The Corporation as a Moral Person”, in: *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16, pp. 207-215.

Gilbert, Margaret (1990), “Walking Together: A Paradigmatic Social Phenomenon”, in: *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 15, pp. 1-14.

Henry, Paul Desmond (1991), *Medieval Mereology*. Amsterdam: Grüner Verlag.

Hobbes, Thomas (1996), *Leviathan*. Ed. by Richard Tuck. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Isaacs, Tracy (2011), *Moral Responsibility in Collective Contexts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kempshall, Matthew (1999), *The Common Good in Late Medieval Political Thought: Moral Goodness and Material Benefit*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Korsgaard, Christine (2014), “The Normative Constitution of Agency”, in: Manuel Vargas, Gideon Yaffe (eds.), *Rational and Social Agency: The Philosophy of Michael Bratman*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 190-214.

Lambertini, Roberto (2011), "Mirrors for Princes", in: Henrik Lagerlund (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy*. New York: Springer, pp. 791-797.

List, Christian, Pettit, Philip (2011), *Group Agency: The Possibility, Design, and Status of Corporate Agents*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Marsilius of Padua, *Defender of the Peace*. Ed. By Annabel Brett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Martell, Timothy (2009), "Hobbes on the Simulation of Collective Agency", in: *Minerva* 13, pp. 28-52.

Mayhew, Robert (1997), "Part and Whole in Aristotle's Political Philosophy", in: *Journal of Ethics* 1, pp. 325-340.

Miethke, Jürgen (2008), *Politiktheorie im Mittelalter. Von Thomas von Aquin bis Wilhelm von Ockham*. Tübingen: Mohr.

Pakaluk, Michael (2001), "Is the Common Good of Political Society Limited and Instrumental?", in: *The Review of Metaphysics* 55, pp. 57-94.

Pettit, Philip (2003), "Akrasia, Collective and Individual", in: Christine Tappolet, Sarah Stroud (eds.), *Weakness of Will and Practical Irrationality*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 68-97.

Pettit, Philip (2006), "Varieties of Public Representation", in: Ian Shapiro, Susan Stokes, E.J.Wood, Alexander Kirshner (eds), *Political Representation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 61-89.

Pitkin, Hannah (1972), *The Concept of Representation*. Berkeley: London University of California Press.

Schmid, Hans Bernhard (2008), "Plural Action", in: *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 38, pp. 25-54.

Scully, Edgar (1981), “The Place of the State in Society According to Thomas Aquinas”, in: *The Thomist: a Speculative Quarterly Review* 45, pp. 407-429.

Skinner, Quentin (2005), “Hobbes on Representation”, in: *European Journal of Philosophy* 13, pp. 155-184.

Syros, Vasileios (2012), *Marsilius of Padua at the Intersection of Ancient and Medieval Traditions of Political Thought*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Thomas Aquinas (1895), *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 47-56 (*De Prudentia*). Quoted from *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici Opera Omnia*, Vol. VIII: *Secunda Secundae Summae Theologiae a Questione I ad Questionem LVI*. Rome.

Thomas Aquinas (1892), *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 90-108 (*De Lege*). Quoted from *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici Opera Omnia*, Vol. VII: *Prima Secundae Summae Theologiae a Questione LXXI ad Questionem CXIV*. Rome.

Thomas Aquinas (1969), *Sententia libri Ethicorum*. Quoted from *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici Opera Omnia*, Vol. XLVII: *Sententia Libri Ethicorum*. Rome.

Thomas Aquinas (1971), *Sententia libri Politicorum*. Quoted from *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici Opera Omnia*, Vol. XLVIII: *Sententia Libri Politicorum, Tabula libri Ethicorum*. Rome.

Thomas Aquinas (1979), *De Regno ad Regem Cypri*. Quote from *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici Opera Omnia*, Vol. XLII: *Compendium theologiae, De articulis fidei, De 108 art., De 43 art., De 36 art., De 6 art., Ad ducissam Brabantiae, De emptione, Ad Bernardum abbatem, De regno, De secreto*. Rome.

Torrell, Jean-Pierre (1996), *Saint Thomas Aquinas. Vol 1: The Person and his Work*. Washington: Catholic University of America Press.