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Chapter 10

Alignment of the Individual and Common Good in the Political Theory of Johannes Althusius



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10.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the relationship between the common and individual good in *Politica Methodice Digesta, Atque Exemplis Sacris et Profanis Illustrata* (1614),¹ which is a book written by the German Calvinist jurist, rector, and civil servant Johannes Althusius (1563–1638). Althusius is hailed as one of the leading reformed political thinkers of the early modern period, and a vigorous defendant of the local autonomies of the old plural order of guilds, estates, and cities against the rising sovereignty of the territorial state, advocated by Jean Bodin (1530–1596) and later by Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679). Being on the wrong side of history, so to speak, made Althusius' work controversial – while *Politica* was widely read in its time, it was also despised by many. Famous contemporary critics of Althusius include, among others, Henning Arnisaeus (1570–1636).² In this chapter, we will find grounds to think of Althusius as a defendant of the plurality of communities, but I suspect that the reasons for possible antipathy will be different now than 400 years ago. For it is not his views on the rights of the associated people and the possibility of deposing, even executing, a ruler appointed by God that now sends shivers down

¹ 1614 is the publishing year of the third edition of *Politica*, which was preceded by a substantially different first edition of 1603 and the second edition of 1610.

² I base these facts on Grabill 2013, xix–xxiv, and Henreckson 2019, 127–28. For introductions to Althusius' life and context, see, e.g., Friedrich's introduction to *Politica* 1932, xxiii–xcix; Carney's introduction to the English translation of *Politica* 1995, ix–xxix; Hueglin 1999; and Witte 2007, 143–207.

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the spine but his views on the extent of political control that is needed to lead people to their individual and common good.

The basic relation between the common and individual good in Althusius' theory is laid out in section two, followed by a short discussion concerning the terms 'the common good' and 'individual good' in the context of *Politica*. The basic proposition is that the common and individual good are intimately connected in Althusius' theory. Section 10.2.1 deals with the plurality of communities. It will be shown that despite the multitude of communities, there emerges no serious challenge to the unity of the common and individual good. Instead, different communities and their members form a harmonious society in which different parts are in reciprocal relationships with each other. Section 10.2.2 in turn pays attention to the normative conditions of social life. Harmonious and reciprocal social life and the parallel alignment of the individual and common good do not happen automatically but require the observation of various norms. Section three moves on to analyze, case by case (Sects. 10.3.1 and 10.3.4), selected conflict situations in a society envisaged by Althusius. These involve, in some way or another, a conflict between the common and individual good of a member, part, or individual subject of a commonwealth. In the concluding section four, the various findings from section three will be summarized and discussed to specify what the alignment of the common and individual good in fact requires.

10.2 Harmony Between the Individual and Common Good

The relationship between the common and individual good seems quite straightforward. According to Althusius, human beings are by their corrupted nature incapable of satisfying their various needs in solitude.³ In order to live well, and indeed to live at all, they need the help of others.⁴ Thus, a community (*consociatio*) is established to engage in mutual communication (*communicatio*), or sharing, to provide for the needs of all.⁵ Instead of sharing ideas, *communicatio* mainly involves sharing things (*res*), works (*operae*), and right (*jus*), but also charity (*charitas*), benevolence (*benevolentia*), help (*auxilium*), and advice (*consilium*), for instance.⁶ In mutual life, each contributes according to his or her calling from God, that is, according to his or her natural abilities and learned skills.⁷ As a result of various works and

³ Althusius, *Politica*, chapter 1, sections 3–4 (ed. 1981). The notion of corrupted human nature is visible in Althusius' rector speech *De utilitate, necessitate et antiquitate scholarum*, printed as an appendix to *Politica* (Friedrich 1932, lxx–lxxi; Koch 2009, 82).

⁴ *Politica*, ch. 1.4 (ed. 1981).

⁵ *Politica*, ch. 1.2, 1.7, and 1.22 (ed. 1981).

⁶ See, e.g., *Politica*, ch. 1.4, 1.7–10, and 1.33–34 (ed. 1981); *ibid.*, 4.8; 6.35; 21.24. See also Povero 2010, 142, who has made a categorization of different objects of sharing.

⁷ *Politica*, ch. 1.26–27 (ed. 1981); *ibid.*, 7.13–15, 7.19–25; 8.48; 20.7.

contributions, each receives what they were initially lacking as individuals.⁸ The outcome of this development is an active, reciprocal life between the members of a community.⁹ As Althusius himself writes:

Thus the needs of body and soul, and the seeds of virtue implanted in our souls, drew dispersed men together into one place. These causes have built villages, established cities, founded academic institutions, and united by civil unity and society a diversity of farmers, craftsmen, laborers, builders, soldiers, merchants, learned and unlearned men and so many members of the same body. Consequently, while some persons provided for others, and some received from others what they themselves lacked, all came together into a certain public body that we call the commonwealth, and by mutual aid devoted themselves to the general good and welfare of this body.¹⁰

According to this statement, social life seems to emerge simply to provide for the needs of individuals. Reflecting the vein of thought that the editors of this volume identify as “ancient”, Althusius holds that the good of a human being, his or her aim, is sought and obtained in social life.¹¹ This is supported by the comparison between the aim of human beings, which is “holy, just, comfortable, and happy symbiosis, a life lacking nothing either necessary or useful”,¹² and the aim of politics, which is “the enjoyment of comfortable, useful, and happy life, and of common welfare [...]”. The end is also the conservation of human society, which aims at having a life in which it is possible to worship God quietly and without error.”¹³ Both definitions include similar terms and involve secular and religious elements. Indeed, for Althusius, the aim of social life – or “symbiotic life” in his terminology – is to provide the needs of both the body and the soul, which refer to material needs and security on the one hand, and to education and religion on the other hand.¹⁴ While education covers the training of reason and skills, it also covers knowledge of God, morals, and true religion, which are essential since social life is not established solely for well-being in this earthly life but also in order to live a life that is pleasing

⁸ *Politica*, ch. 1.27, and 1.33 (ed. 1981).

⁹ For Althusius’ preference of active life, see *Politica*, ch. 1.24–28 (ed. 1981). For a more thorough analysis of the origin of society see, e.g., Koch 2005, 61–63, 69–70, 154–57; and ead. 2009, 82.

¹⁰ *Politica*, ch. 1.27 (trans. Carney 1995, 23); “Corporis itaque & animi necessitatis atque virtutum semina animis nostris insita, homines dispersos & dissipatos in unum locum contraxerunt. Hae caussae aedificaverunt vicus, construxerunt civitates, fundarunt Academias, multorum agricolarum, artificum, fabrorum, architectorum, militum, mercatorum, doctorum atque indoctorum varietatem, tanquam totidem ejusdem corporis membra, unitate & societate civili copularunt, ut dum alii aliis suggererent, alii ab aliis quod ipsi desiderabant, sumerent, omnes pariter in publicum quoddam corpus (quam Remp. vocamus) coalescerent & mutuis auxiliis in generale corporis illius bonum & salutem intenderent [...]” (*Politica*, ch. 1.27 [ed. 1981]).

¹¹ See the introduction to this volume.

¹² “Homini politici symbiotici finis est sancta, justa, commoda & felix symbiosis, & vita nulla re necessaria vel utili indigens” (*Politica*, ch. 1.3 [ed. 1981]).

¹³ “Finis politicae, est usus vitae commodae, utilis, & felicitis, atque salutis communis; [...] Finis quoque est conservatio humanae societatis, cujus finis est, habere vitam, in qua possis sine errore & quiete Deo inservire [...]” (*Politica*, ch. 1.30 [ed. 1981]).

¹⁴ *Politica*, ch. 1.14–17 (ed. 1981).

to God in the hope of salvation and eternal life.¹⁵ Yet, the discussion about the “general good and welfare of this body” in the quote above¹⁶ as well as the discussion about the “conservation of human society” as an aim of politics suggest that, in addition to the needs of the body and soul, there is also concern for the continued existence of the established community and society.¹⁷

As the account above shows, ‘the common good’ – or the common or public utility (*utilitas*), benefit (*commodum*), and welfare (*salus*), of which Althusius himself generally writes about – is a multi-dimensional notion.¹⁸ It includes at least two discernible aspects: (1) teleological, referring to the aim or purpose of social life/community/society, which were just shown to connect directly to the aim of human beings; and (2) concrete, referring to the *communicatio*, that is, the sharing of things, works, and rights. These relate to each other in the way that *communicatio* provides the means to the common aim(s). This straightforward relation is complicated first by the fact that the community takes an instrumental role in the pursuit of the aim of human beings as the framework for *communicatio*: it is a means to an end (or ends). However, when the ‘common good’ is extended to include the ‘good of the community’, the aim is not simply to satisfy the needs of the body and soul of individuals but also to preserve the community, as noted. Hence, the community is also an end in itself. Consequently, the common good involves multiple aims, which *communicatio* can be made to serve. Another complication arises from the fact that Althusius discusses various kinds of communities, and consequently, his model of society includes a multitude of communities with more or less separate aims, sharing, and existence. It follows that the network of means and ends is expanded further. Both of these complications in determining the common good are discussed in what follows since they give reason to doubt the smooth consolidation of the individual and common good.

Now if ‘the common good’ is a complicated notion, ‘individual good’ and ‘self-interest’ are outright problematic in Althusius’ theory. The individuality or singularity of the good of an individual does not, in fact, truly exist in Althusius’ theory because the good for an individual is ultimately to achieve the general aim of human beings – rather than some specific individual aim – which in turn is common to all human beings and hence, in a sense, the common good. This aim is the mentioned “holy, just, comfortable, and happy symbiosis, a life lacking nothing either necessary or useful”. There is of course something of the individuality present even in Althusius’ theory since not every human being is the same and they clearly have different strengths and skills to utilize and roles to play in society. In a word, they

¹⁵ *Politica*, ch. 1.15 (ed. 1981). See also *ibid.*, 18.25; 11.38–39; and 28.33–35. For this double aim of life, see also Koch 2005, 154–55.

¹⁶ See footnote 13.

¹⁷ The aim of conserving the associated body, or community, becomes explicit in further chapters of *Politica*. See, e.g., ch. 11.1 (ed. 1981).

¹⁸ The term *bonum commune* appears only occasionally in *Politica*. See, e.g., *Politica*, ch. 11.21 (ed. 1981); *ibid.*, 21.32.

have their own *vocatio*.¹⁹ The point is rather that while the differences between human beings are in this sense recognized – and play a major part in the origin of social life and in the operation of communities and the broader society – social life is built with an eye for what is shared: the common aim and the means to achieve it. Consequently, the success of a community, and social life in general, is measured in relation to the attainment of the shared aim and not by the achievement of the possible individual aims of individual human beings, which play only a supporting role. Indeed, Althusius' society is not a liberal society of individuals seeking self-interest in the manner of John Locke (1632–1704).²⁰ For example, the *vocatio* of a human being is not really his or her free choice but planned by God and regulated by the ruler.²¹ What is made to matter for individuals is whether or not they achieve the general aim of all human beings, and not whether they are free to pursue their particular interests. Regardless of this entanglement of the individual and common good, the sense in which I will track the individual good and self-interest here is through the utility, benefit, and welfare of an individual human being(s), or some member(s), or part(s) of a community or broader society. What is sought after is the possibility of demarcation and conflict between the good for individuals (and members or parts) and the good for a community (or the whole).

10.2.1 *The Plurality of Communities and the Reciprocity Between Them*

One of the defining features of Althusius' understanding of society is that it involves a plurality of communities. He discusses different types of *consociationes*, starting from private communities, including the family and guild (*collegium*), and proceeding to public communities, such as cities, provinces, and commonwealths. The sequence of treatment reflects Althusius' conviction that society develops starting from the family – as the seedbed of rest – and culminates in the commonwealth.²² This opens an interesting prospect that there might be many common goods rather than just one, if the 'common good' is understood as the 'good of the community'. However, this is not quite what happens.

It is true that we can discern different aims or purposes between communities as well as differences in their scope and quality of *communicatio*. Private communities are established by individual human beings through a special covenant (*pactum*) to share among themselves something special (*quid peculiare*) according to their circumstances and way of life, that is, according to what is useful and necessary for

¹⁹ See, e.g., Odermatt's (2009, 204–6, 210) and Malandrino's (2010, 344–48) remarks concerning *vocatio* in *Politica*.

²⁰ Hueglin 1999, 92, 160.

²¹ Odermatt 2009, 204–6.

²² *Politica*, ch. 2.14 (ed. 1981); *ibid.*, 3.42; 39.84.

private symbiotic life.²³ Private communities are divided into natural (conjugal, kinship, and household relationships) and voluntary (various *collegia*) *consociationes*.²⁴ The conjugal relationship is established to produce offspring and to avoid fornication, while the other natural relationships extend mutual care among relatives and housemates.²⁵ The purpose and *communicatio* of a *collegium* are determined by its members, wherefore there is a whole range of different *collegia* for different purposes.²⁶ Usually, they are established by the heads of households of the same trade and occupation for their mutual benefit.²⁷ In particular, the *collegia* of magistrates serve, however, the benefit of the broader society since magistrates in general are not allowed to advance their own private benefit, but they use public jurisdiction (*jus potestatis*) to give rules for the other *collegia*.²⁸

Nonetheless, the given plurality of aims and the division of society into many private communities that serve the benefit of their own members does not lead to a true plurality of the good of communities nor to competition or conflict between communities. As has been pointed out in the literature, the result is instead reciprocity, or subsidiarity, between communities, where they all serve the same overall purpose of social life but do it by providing different useful and necessary things for this aim.²⁹ This is particularly clear in the transition from private to public communities. For example, some households – through their internal organizations of private things, work, and rights – produce agricultural goods, others produce craftworks, and yet others engage in commerce.³⁰ United in a city, they can share and exchange with each other the useful and necessary fruits of their labour and benefit from the public goods and works of the community – individually as well as collectively.³¹ They do so under the shared law and right of the community, the guidance and direction of the magistrate, and the protection provided by the city guards, walls, and other measures of defence.³²

The peculiar fact that there are several types of public communities rather than just one does not lead to conflict either. Again, we can discern some traces of a division of labour among the first level of public communities which do not only cover cities in a narrow sense of urban community, but also smaller rural communities such as villages and towns, for example.³³ The inhabitants of the latter carry out

²³ *Politica*, ch. 2.2 (ed. 1981).

²⁴ *Politica*, ch. 2.13–14; 4.1–3 (ed. 1981).

²⁵ *Politica*, ch. 2.37–39 (ed. 1981); *ibid.*, 3.34; 3.37–40; 38.107.

²⁶ *Politica*, ch. 4.1 and 4.24 (ed. 1981).

²⁷ *Politica*, ch. 4.3–4 (ed. 1981).

²⁸ *Politica*, ch. 4.24 (ed. 1981); *ibid.*, 18.6–7; 18.40–42; 19.35. See also footnote 59.

²⁹ On ‘subsidiarity’ see, e.g., Hueglin 1999, 152–68; and Scattola 2002. For a detailed analysis of the character, role, and relationship of different community types, see especially Hüglin (a.k.a Hueglin) 1991.

³⁰ *Politica*, ch. 2.15–36 (ed. 1981).

³¹ *Politica*, ch. 6.28–38 (ed. 1981).

³² *Politica*, ch. 5.43–44 (ed. 1981); *ibid.*, 6.30, 6.34, and 6.39–48.

³³ *Politica*, ch. 5.28–48 (ed. 1981).

agricultural activities, whereas the inhabitants of urban communities engage in manual labour (*functiones mechanicae*) and scholarly studies (*studia*)³⁴. In the end, it is the urban community that unites the various villages under one law and thus enables the *communicatio* between rural and urban populations³⁵. These urban communities in turn vary in size and status, reflecting a more or less extensive sphere of *communicatio*.³⁶

A similar division of labour is not formally discernible between *civitas*, *provincia*, and *respublica* as they all show a rounded concern for the good of the body and soul of their people and use similar means to achieve these.³⁷ Furthermore, possible conflicts between levels of public communities are minimized in Althusius' schema, in which the cities and provinces are the members of the commonwealth and, as a collective, the sovereign of the realm.³⁸ As the holders of supreme power, the members collegially determine the rights and laws of the commonwealth, the scope of its *communicatio*, and the mandate of its ruler (*summus magistratus*).³⁹ According to Thomas Hueglin (a.k.a. Hüglin), who emphasizes the importance of representation and collegial decision-making procedure in Althusius' theory, cities and provinces retain jurisdiction in their own matters, while the level of commonwealth establishes a sort of framework of law and justice for the various sub-groups to operate in.⁴⁰ Following Hueglin and others who underscore the relative autonomy of the sub-groups and division of jurisdiction between the public communities, we can conceive that Althusius recognizes the existence of different interests among them – and, as Hueglin argues, skilfully manages those interests with his federal model for society – but even so, no difference in the ultimate aim emerges.⁴¹

Be that as it may, the reason for associating further in higher-level *consociationes* seems to be to increase self-sufficiency. When explaining, at the end of *Politica*, the relationship between different community types and levels, as well as the natural progression of communities from the family to the city, Althusius states somewhat

³⁴ *Politica*, ch. 5.28, 5.29, and 5.40 (ed. 1981).

³⁵ *Politica*, ch. 5.41 (ed. 1981).

³⁶ *Politica*, ch. 6.1–12 (ed. 1981). See also Hüglin 1991, 108–10.

³⁷ There are clearly differences between these association levels, as, e.g., Hueglin (1991, 1999) and Scattola (2002) have pointed out, but I find no clear difference in purpose among them. Moreover, the *communicatio* – although of different scope and related powers, as well as differently systematized by Althusius on different levels – concerns similar matters like public goods (*bona*), private and public affairs (*negotium*), security and defence, punishments and rewards, taxes and other contributions, commercial activity, weights and measures, language, and money. To see this, compare the relevant sections in *Politica*, ch. 6.17–43 (ed. 1981) on city, ch. 7.12–15, 7.26–29, and 7.57–64 on province, and chapters 9–17 on commonwealth (see esp. 10.10–12, and 11.4). The only clear element that occurs solely on the level of commonwealth is the granting of privileges and titles (chapter 15). Of course, none of this means that, for example, different provinces could not *de facto* produce different things that are then shared through trade within the commonwealth.

³⁸ *Politica*, ch. 9.6, 9.18, and 9.25 (ed. 1981).

³⁹ *Politica*, ch. 9.1; 9.7; 18.10; 19.1–8; and 19.14 (ed. 1981).

⁴⁰ Hüglin, 1991, 121–22, 130–33; Hueglin 1999, 147–48, 158–59.

⁴¹ For Hueglin's view see, e.g., 1999, 130, 158–60, 165–67.

cryptically that “these symbiotic communities can survive without the province or commonwealth, but until they are joined in symbiotic body of province or commonwealth, they are deprived of many benefits and necessary supports of life”.⁴² It seems then that communal life is possible without higher levels of public communities, but provinces and the commonwealth still bring about many useful and necessary things for social life. Hence, self-sufficiency is a continuum and ever-expanding phenomenon rather than something that is conclusively achieved on a certain level of association. Even the commonwealth is not in every respect self-sufficient because the goods (*bona*) of the associated body can be increased by forming confederations.⁴³ Their purpose is either limited to mutual defence or extended to the creation of a new body with a new sphere of shared right, on account of which inhabitants engage in commercial activities in confederated realms.⁴⁴ Beyond these few remarks on confederations, and on the usefulness of trade and merchants for cultivating goodwill between different areas and peoples, Althusius is not really dealing with international relationships like his contemporary and adversary Hugo Grotius was.⁴⁵ However, *Politica* includes a lengthy discussion on arms and war, and hence Althusius acknowledges that international relations can be hostile, that is, non-reciprocal.⁴⁶

10.2.2 *The Normative Framework of Sharing*

The reciprocal life between the members of a community requires the sharing of right (*jus*) in order to succeed. The *lex consociationis et symbiosis*, or *jus symbioticum*, as Althusius calls shared right, is essential for the other aspects of *communicatio* since it serves to direct and govern social life and prescribes the reason and manner of sharing between members of the community.⁴⁷ In other words, social life in general, and particularly the reciprocal character that Althusius attributes to it, does not happen just in any way but within certain normative bounds and with active directing and governance.

The laws of a particular community stipulate the way the community is to be ruled and concern the specific way and extent of *communicatio* in that community.⁴⁸ These “proper laws” (*propriae leges*) of the communities are based on natural and

⁴² “Atque hae consociationes symbioticae, tanquam primae per se subsistere possunt etiam sine provincia, vel regno, quamvis, donec in corpus consociatum universale symbioticum provinciae, vel Reipubl. regnive non conjungantur, multis commodis & necessariis vitae subsidiis destituantur” (*Politica*, ch. 39.84 [ed. 1981]).

⁴³ *Politica*, ch. 17.24 (ed. 1981).

⁴⁴ For confederations, see *Politica*, ch. 17.25–41; 31.75–77 (ed. 1981).

⁴⁵ *Politica*, ch. 2.35 (ed. 1981). On Grotius, see Laetitia Ramelet’s chapter in this volume.

⁴⁶ *Politica*, ch. 34 and 35 (ed. 1981).

⁴⁷ *Politica*, ch. 1.10 (ed. 1981).

⁴⁸ *Politica*, ch. 1.19–21 (ed. 1981).

divine laws that are fully compatible and substantially manifested in the Decalogue.⁴⁹ The latter is relevant because it gives the guidelines for living piously towards God (the first table of the Decalogue) and justly towards fellow human beings (the second table).⁵⁰ Whereas the precepts of the first table explain the duties towards God, the precepts of the second explain the duties in human relations, that is, between superiors and inferiors and between neighbours.⁵¹ The proper way of treating people includes respect for life, honour, and the property of one's neighbour.⁵² The precepts tell us what belongs to me, what to you, and what to God according to natural/divine justice. In a sense, they set the just and inviolable limits for sharing and governance but also positive duties to act and live in a certain way in relation to God and other people.⁵³

The directing and governing function of social life, which is a part of the *jus symbioticum*, has a general aspect that is common to all communities. It states that in every community, some people rule and others submit according to their different abilities and worth.⁵⁴ In the context of arguing for the naturalness of ruling, Althusius writes, for example, that "it is very useful for the individual who cannot provide for himself to be helped and preserved by the other; and that is said to be the better which is self-sufficient and can help others [...]"⁵⁵ Leader(s)⁵⁶ are needed because people are not capable of leading themselves, and an attempt to do so would only lead to continuous discord and the dissolution of society.⁵⁷ Besides the *communicatio*, there is a need for *administratio* that sees to the fulfilment of the former.⁵⁸ However, Althusius repeatedly stresses that the authority of the leader(s) is given only for the good (that is, welfare, utility, or benefit) of the community – for the "utility and welfare of the subjects individually and collectively".⁵⁹

⁴⁹ *Politica*, ch. 21.19ff. (ed. 1981). For the different types of laws, see, e.g., van Eikeme Hommes 1988; De Vries and Nitschke 2004; and Witte 2007, 156–69.

⁵⁰ *Politica*, ch. 21.18, and 21.22–29 (ed. 1981); see also *ibid.*, 21.41.

⁵¹ *Politica*, ch. 21.24–27 (ed. 1981).

⁵² *Politica*, ch. 21.27 (ed. 1981). See also *ibid.*, 7.9–10 and 11.5–7.

⁵³ Odermatt (2009, 209–10) notes in fact that religious commandments become social obligations for Althusius.

⁵⁴ *Politica*, ch. 1.11 (ed. 1981); *ibid.*, 1.34–37.

⁵⁵ "[...] Utile enim est maxime singulis, quae sibi sufficere nequeunt, ab alio juvari, & conservari, & id melius dicitur, quod & sibi sufficit, & aliis prodesse potest [...]" (*Politica*, ch. 1.34 [ed. 1981]). The section is part of a rather lengthy citation of Petrus Gregorius' *De Republica* (see Carney's footnote 32 in *Politica*, ch. 1.34 [trans. Carney 1995, 26]).

⁵⁶ Called as *praefectus*, *rector*, *director*, *gubernator*, *curator*, *administrator*, *imperans*.

⁵⁷ *Politica*, ch. 1.11–12 and 1.34–38 (ed. 1981). See also, e.g., *ibid.*, 18.16–17.

⁵⁸ Althusius typically first discusses the subject matter from the point of view of *communicatio* and then turns to *administratio*. For analyses of the *administratio*, see especially Ingravalle 2010a, b; and Overeem 2014.

⁵⁹ "[...] dirigit & gubernat vitae socialis negotia ad obtemperantium singulorum, vel universorum utilitatem [...] imperet ad singulorum & universorum utilitatem & salutem" (*Politica*, ch. 1.34 [ed. 1981]). For the ideas mentioned in this paragraph, see also, e.g., *Politica*, ch. 1.8 and 1.13 (ed.

The last remarks involve three important points. First, the quoted section suggests that the good of the community can be understood in two ways: as referring either to the utility of individuals or to the utility of the collective or the whole. A concrete example can shed some light on this difference. In his discussion concerning the city (*civitas*), Althusius divides public goods into two categories that are based on Roman law.⁶⁰ In the first place, public goods are such that individual members or citizens can use them for their own utility insofar as their use of these goods does not hinder others from using them.⁶¹ Althusius gives a long list of such goods, including, for example, forests, pastures, fishponds, rivers, roads, temples, schools, and various other public places and buildings.⁶² The second category of public goods refers to things owned by the community (*universitas*), which are not for the benefit of individuals but for everyone collectively.⁶³ These include, for example, tax revenues, storehouses, armouries, and other common stocks, as well as pastures, and ore mines.⁶⁴ While the complete lists of both categories of public goods overlap in kind, there remains the difference that public goods are either for the direct utility of individuals or for the utility of the whole community, for its defence, for example.

The second important point relates to the role of leaders. While Althusius makes it quite clear that the magistrates should advance the good of the people and not their own, it is significant that the care for the good of the community is given to the magistrates. Within their mandate – the jurisdiction given by the members of the community – the magistrates have the responsibility and power to determine what the utility, benefit, and welfare of the subject individually and collectively require.⁶⁵ Although the decision-making is often collegial, involving the members of the community – and takes place on various levels of exercising their own jurisdiction – in practice, the leader enforces on the individuals the way of life that is compatible with the purpose of the community that the members have agreed to.⁶⁶ When we keep in mind that ultimately this purpose pertains to the good of both the body and soul, this creates a setting in which the individual is subject to his superiors when it comes to the attainment of his aim, the “holy, just, comfortable, and happy symbiosis, a life lacking nothing either necessary or useful”.

1981); *ibid.*, 5.22; 8.52; 9.25; 9.1; 18.1; 18.7; 18.32; 18.40; 19.1; 19.10; 19.35; 19.37; 24.43–44. These sections often involve reference to Augustine or Aquinas.

⁶⁰ See also *Politica*, ch. 17.15, where Althusius introduces two further senses of public good.

⁶¹ *Politica*, ch. 6.18 and 6.22 (ed. 1981).

⁶² *Politica*, ch. 6.19–21 (ed. 1981).

⁶³ *Politica*, ch. 6.24–25 (ed. 1981).

⁶⁴ *Politica*, ch. 6.24–25 (ed. 1981).

⁶⁵ Ingravalle (2010b, 293) points out how the theory of the mandate contract (which Althusius utilizes) requires that the agent (the ruler) is free to choose the suitable means to ensure the *utilitas* and *commoditas* of the principal (the people). However, see also footnote 89.

⁶⁶ For the collegial decision making, see, e.g., *Politica*, ch. 17.56–60 (ed. 1981); *ibid.*, 27.42ff.; and ch. 33 *in toto*. For the relationship between the leaders and the people, see, e.g., *ibid.*, 18.7–11, and 18.14–15. Ingravalle (2010b, 299) notes that through the various *councilia* and *comitia*, the public administrators are accountable to the people.

Significantly, the introduction of the magistrate has also a bearing on the relationship between the individual good and the good of the community or the whole. As Francesco Ingravalle has noted,⁶⁷ Althusius posits the care for the wellbeing of the whole (commonwealth) before the care for a member (or part of that commonwealth):

Just as a good physician tends first the whole body, draws out bad fluids from it, and then applies special remedies to the sick limb; so also the administrator of the commonwealth first tends the whole body, then its members, and employs different remedies for them.⁶⁸

When we add here that human beings in general tend to prefer private benefits (*privata commoda*) over public utility (*publica utilitas*), the role of the magistrate is further emphasized as the one who looks after the common good in the sense of the good of the whole.⁶⁹

The final point has to do with the possibility of discord and the dissolution of society. Althusius consistently underscores the importance of harmony (*harmonia*), concord (*concordia*), and agreement (*consensio*) between members of a community.⁷⁰ He writes that *consensio* prevails when members' "heart and soul are one, willing, doing, and refusing the same for the common benefit".⁷¹ Since he also states that "without agreement and mutual concord there can be no community and friendship",⁷² the consensus among the members of a community is crucial for its existence and ability to advance the common benefit.⁷³ While leader(s) have an important function to facilitate harmonious life, the aspiration for consensus involves agreement between members.⁷⁴ Consequently, there seems to be little room for substantial disagreement between the members. Even though there is no theoretical possibility of disagreeing on the ultimate aim of politics and human beings – since only one is presented – there is clearly the possibility of disagreeing on the means to achieve this aim. This suggests that at least in practice, the alignment of the good of the members and the common good is a condition rather than a fact of mutual life in a community – the harmony and consensus between the members is not a certainty but something that needs to be actively sought after.⁷⁵

⁶⁷ Ingravalle 2010a, 117–18.

⁶⁸ "Ut enim bonus medicus totum corpus primum curat, ex eoque malos humores educit, & deinde aegrum membrum, cui remedia specialia applicat: ita & Reip. administrator, primum corpus totum Reip. deinde illius membra curat, & diversa remedia illis adhibet" (*Politica*, ch. 37.79 [ed. 1981]).

⁶⁹ *Politica*, ch. 11.1 (ed. 1981); *ibid.*, 21.3; 23.34; 31.3.

⁷⁰ See Lazzarino Del Grosso 2010 for a thorough analysis of the importance of concord and harmony for Althusius.

⁷¹ "Consensio est, qua conjunctorum symbioticorum anima & cor unum est, idem volens, agens, nolens, ad communem conjunctorum utilitatem." (*Politica*, ch. 2.8 [ed. 1981]).

⁷² "Sine hac consensione & mutua concordia nulla omnino societas & amicitia consistere potest. Matth.c.12.v.25" (*Politica*, ch. 2.9 (ed. 1981)).

⁷³ See also Scattola 2002, 354, 357–58; and Lazzarino Del Grosso 2010, 165–66.

⁷⁴ Lazzarino Del Grosso 2010, 167–69.

⁷⁵ Hueglin's (1999, 127–28, 158–59, 166–67, 182) federalist interpretation of *Politica* is built on the fact that agreement is achieved only in some matters, and the rest are left to the discretion of the members (communities).

The need to live the right way is further illustrated with certain familiar maxims that Althusius endorses. We can find in his theory the Calvinist notion that working means to work for the welfare of others and for the glory of God.⁷⁶ Referring to the Apostle Paul, Althusius gives the instruction to prioritize the benefit of one's neighbour above one's own, even to the extent of sacrificing one's own right for the greater benefit of another.⁷⁷ This can be seen as charity, which the Decalogue teaches and without which social life, or *symbiosis*, is not possible.⁷⁸ Similarly, while it was stated previously that human beings tend to prefer their own benefit above public utility, there is no question that it should be the opposite when living in a community.⁷⁹ As a consequence, it is justified to deviate from normal bounds and to sacrifice private good for the public good in emergency situations, for example, by paying extra taxes or relinquishing private property for the commonwealth.⁸⁰ With all these remarks, we can see how Althusius' model for social life as *symbiosis* characterized by reciprocity is supported by – if not entirely built on – the moral requirement to act charitably and to fulfil duties towards God and fellow human beings.

The findings thus far can be summarized by noting that the individual and common good do not coincide necessarily or automatically, but only within a certain conception of social life and its conditions: there needs to be (1) an agreement and consensus between the members of the community (2) to live together (3) and share what is necessary and useful for social life, (4) according to the laws they themselves established (5) in accordance with the natural and divine law – especially in accordance with the duties of the Decalogue – (6) and under the guidance and administration of the leader of the community, (7) who acts for the good of the community, (8) which involves the good of the body and soul of the subjects (9) and requires acting for the benefit of one's neighbour and for the glory and honour of God.

While these are all general requirements for social life, many of them are also conditions for the alignment of the individual and common good. As we will soon see, disparities between the individual and common good can be found in situations where some of the mentioned conditions are lacking or threatened, such as in disagreement, unlawfulness, immorality, and failures in leadership and the duty to do one's part.

⁷⁶ See, e.g., *Politica*, ch. 11.1 (ed. 1981). See also Odermatt's (2009) analysis of (protestant) ethical notions in Althusius' theory.

⁷⁷ *Politica*, ch. 1.22 (ed. 1981).

⁷⁸ On the role of charity, see, e.g., *Politica*, ch. 11–12 (ed. 1995); and *Politica*, ch. 6.28 and 6.35 (ed. 1981); *ibid.*, 21.27–28.

⁷⁹ See, e.g., *Politica*, ch. 6.28 (ed. 1981); *ibid.*, 15.13; 21.26. See also Mastellone 2010, 391.

⁸⁰ See, e.g., *Politica*, ch. 15.13 (ed. 1981); *ibid.*, 37.115.

10.3 Conflicts Between the Individual and Common Good

Although the previous discussion has underscored the reciprocal and harmonious character of social life, conflict nevertheless creeps in even in Althusius' society. This is due to the normative nature of social life. To achieve the common aim, which is the good of the members and the preservation of the community, life in communities must be lived in a certain way rather than just anyway. For this to happen, the role of the magistrate is critical since it is the magistrate's duty to administer the life of the subjects for their good individually and as a whole. Consequently, the possible conflicts between the individual good and the common good, or the good of the community, are to be found in conflicts between a ruler and the commonwealth, or between a ruler and a member, part, or individual subject of the commonwealth.

10.3.1 *Tyrant Against the Common Good*

Perhaps the most obvious place to find conflicts in Althusius' design for society is his (in)famous discussion on tyranny.⁸¹ In Althusius' words, "tyranny is opposed to right and just administration",⁸² and the tyrant is one who "obstinately, violating the faith and sanctity of oath, begins to tear down and dissolve the bonds and foundations of associated body of the commonwealth".⁸³ The idea is roughly that the tyrannical ruler is overstepping or abusing his mandate to govern, which has been bestowed upon him by the members, and this in turn threatens the very existence of the commonwealth. For Althusius, it is essential that the ruler is bound by the laws of the commonwealth and by the collective will of its members.⁸⁴ Towards the end of his discussion on tyranny, Althusius writes that the welfare of the commonwealth is the highest law.⁸⁵

Althusius divides tyranny into two main categories. The first concerns the overthrow and destruction of the fundamental laws of the commonwealth. These fundamental laws refer simply to "certain treaties by which many cities and provinces unite and agree to hold and defend one and the same commonwealth by common works, advice, and help".⁸⁶ Althusius states that it is tyrannical for a ruler to violate,

⁸¹ For a short account of Althusius' view on tyranny and their context, see Quagliani 2010.

⁸² "Tyrannis igitur est justae & rectae administrationi contraria [...]" (*Politica*, ch. 38.1 [ed. 1981]).

⁸³ "Tyrannus igitur est, qui obstinate, violata fide & religione jurisjurandi, vincula & fundamenta consociati corporis Reip. convellere & dissolvere incipit" (*Politica*, ch. 38.3 [ed. 1981]).

⁸⁴ See particularly the discussion in *Politica*, ch. 9.13–27, and 19.1–18 (ed. 1981).

⁸⁵ *Politica*, ch. 38.101 (ed. 1981).

⁸⁶ "Est autem haec fundamentalis lex, nihil aliud, quam pacta quaedam, sub quibus plures civitates & provinciae coierunt & consenserunt in unam eandemque Rempubl. habendam & defendendam communi opera, consilio & auxilio" (*Politica*, ch. 19.49 [ed. 1981]).

change, or remove fundamental laws, especially those that concern true religion.⁸⁷ In addition, he considers it tyranny when a ruler does not remain loyal to the associated body, disregards the sanctity of oath, and destroys the orders and estates of the realm or prevents them from performing their duties.⁸⁸ These definitions make it clear that what is under attack here is the established order of society and the way of life that the members of the commonwealth have agreed to. The violations of fundamental laws are basically violations of the collective agreement of the members. This agreement does not determine the aim of human beings, which is given, but involves consent to mutual life and to *communication* to achieve that aim.⁸⁹

The second kind of tyranny consists of the administration of things (*res*) and activities (*negotium*) of the associated body contrary to piety and justice.⁹⁰ Althusius further divides this into general and specific, in which the latter – on which we will focus – is against some part (*pars*) or section (*caput*) of administration.⁹¹ Some cases of specific tyranny involve actions that can be interpreted as being contrary to the good of the souls of individuals, like the attempt to deprive one or more members of the commonwealth from the true religion (Calvinism) and force idolatry on them, or the spoiling of morals either by setting up inns and brothels or by abolishing and neglecting places of virtue and piety like schools.⁹² Other cases relate more to the good of the body, which is endangered by neglecting the defence against violence and injustice, and by encouraging division, rivalries and disagreements, for instance.⁹³ A special type of tyranny involves the elimination and hindrance of trade and hence of the necessary means for sustaining life and the community.⁹⁴ Althusius further condemns as tyranny the draining of subjects by immoderate taxes, contributions, and services.⁹⁵

While the previous examples show the neglect of, interference in, or assault on the good of individuals, there is little indication of the anticipated rift between the individual and common good. In this respect, cases concerning public goods yield more interesting results. These include situations in which the ruler misuses public goods for his private desire (*libido privata*), luxury, and illicit amusements, or sells villages, towns, cities, and provinces and thus separates them from the commonwealth.⁹⁶ It is also tyranny “to pull down public goods to build up the tyrant’s private

⁸⁷ *Politica*, ch. 38.6 (ed. 1981).

⁸⁸ *Politica*, ch. 38.7 (ed. 1981).

⁸⁹ Members also consider what the utility and benefit of the commonwealth demands in the general council of the commonwealth (*Politica*, ch. 17.56 [ed. 1981]). See also footnotes 65 and 66.

⁹⁰ *Politica*, ch. 38.5 (ed. 1981).

⁹¹ *Politica*, ch. 38.8 and 38.10 (ed. 1981).

⁹² *Politica*, ch. 38.11–12 (ed. 1981).

⁹³ *Politica*, ch. 38.14–17 (ed. 1981).

⁹⁴ *Politica*, ch. 38.18. For the importance of trade, see, e.g., *ibid.*, 2.34–35 and 11.6–7.

⁹⁵ *Politica*, ch. 38.19 (ed. 1981). See also *ibid.*, 38.25.

⁹⁶ *Politica*, ch. 38.21 (ed. 1981). See also *ibid.*, 38.47–53.

property, and thereby deprive many in order to enrich just a few".⁹⁷ In these situations, the wrongdoing is in using what was meant for the good of the people, either individually or collectively, for the individual or private good of the ruler. Consequently, the private good of the ruler is not to be equated with the common good or the good of the community – the ruler is there to serve the good of his people, not himself.⁹⁸ However, this does not mean that the good of the commonwealth would not also involve the good of the ruler in the sense that he has sufficient resources to appear splendid and magnificent, for instance.⁹⁹ Instead, there is an attempt to demarcate between the acceptable and unacceptable – as in useless or immoderate – spending of public funds (*pecunia publica*), which is also reflected in Althusius' view that it is tyranny to use the realm's things (*res regni*) for prohibited purposes or to wastefully use the goods of the realm (*bona regni*) to its public ruin.¹⁰⁰

The given examples draw a distinction between the person, will, and good of the ruler and those of the commonwealth or the people. Althusius' discussion on tyranny also includes a situation that shows a division between the parts of the commonwealth. Usually, remedies for tyranny involve more or less severe measures against the tyrannical ruler that range from reproach to deposition.¹⁰¹ However, Althusius holds that a part of the realm can in fact leave the remaining body (1) if the public and manifest welfare of the part recommends it, or (2) if the fundamental laws are not observed by the magistrate, or (3) if the true worship and obvious command of God clearly requires it.¹⁰² Here we have, then, direct (1) as well as indirect (2 and 3) references to the good of the part that now stands as separate from the whole.

Nevertheless, Althusius' discussion does not quite allow us to infer that these cases (1, 2, 3) undoubtedly represent a conflict between the good of a part and the good of the rest – or between the good of a member community and the good of the commonwealth – because there is no explicit reference to the good of the remaining body. Instead, it is quite clear that the leaving part has a just cause and that it does what is good by leaving, while on the contrary, the situation for the rest does not seem good either before or after the separation since the remaining body suffers from tyranny: in case (2), it suffers from the violation of the fundamental laws (the agreements of the members); and in case (3), it suffers from the inability to practice the one and only true religion, that is, from the inability to seek the good of the soul. The only unclarity in this respect involves the first situation (1). It is not certain whether the welfare of the remaining body is affected by the leaving of one part to seek welfare for itself. Keeping in mind, however, that welfare, utility, and benefit

⁹⁷ "Quae publica diruit, ut sua privata aedificet, qua multis adimit, ut paucos locupletet" (*Politica*, ch. 38.22 [ed. 1981]).

⁹⁸ See also Mastellone 2010, 392.

⁹⁹ See *Politica*, ch. 37.3 ff., especially §10–22 (ed. 1981).

¹⁰⁰ *Politica*, ch. 37.4–8 and 38.23 (ed. 1981).

¹⁰¹ *Politica*, ch. 38.58–62 (ed. 1981).

¹⁰² *Politica*, ch. 38.76 (ed. 1981).

are served by extending *communicatio*, it seems unlikely that the reduction of the whole through one part leaving would be good for the rest. However, this is not entirely impossible because Althusius also holds that a medium-sized commonwealth is better than a great or small one.¹⁰³

10.3.2 *Concern for the Unity of the Commonwealth*

For the rest of the chapter, the nature of the conflicts dealt with will be different from the previous examples. From now on the ruler is right and justified in correcting his subjects because he is acting within his mandate and hence working by default for the good of his subjects individually and collectively. These conflict situations are relevant insofar as (1) doing something wrong has a connection to seeking self-interest, which the ruler seeks to curb by his mandate; and (2) they reveal something new about the actual content of the common good and its relation to the good of individuals, members, or the people in general.

Concerning the second aspect, it is revealing that Althusius devotes a whole chapter to the conservation of public concord and tranquillity, which boils down to maintaining the unity of the commonwealth against factions and seditions that can arise from numerous causes.¹⁰⁴ While Althusius thinks that in every dispute, faction, and sedition, there are (eventually) two parties, one of which defends the law and justice of the community against all who act unjustly, nowhere in this context does he explicitly treat the defiant party as having a just cause to pursue something truly good.¹⁰⁵ Instead, the point of view is that of the magistrate who works to prevent the people (*populus*) from degenerating into a crowd (*multitude*, *turba*).¹⁰⁶ In fact, here and elsewhere within the discussion on administration – and particularly on political prudence – we can discern clear influences from the notion of the ‘reason of state’, which seems to place the continued existence and order of the commonwealth as a major, if not the primary, concern of the ruler.¹⁰⁷ Consequently, the possibility of a conflict emerges between the actions of the ruler, who is concerned with unity, and the interests of the people (or a part of them, or an individual).

Althusius’ discussion on the causes of factions is less than flattering to humans in general since factions arise from private and public hatreds between different families or from ambition, disagreement, discord, enmities, rivalries, and bad

¹⁰³ *Politica*, ch. 10.11 (ed. 1981).

¹⁰⁴ *Politica*, ch. 31.1–3 (ed. 1981).

¹⁰⁵ *Politica*, ch. 31.4 and 31.7 (ed. 1981).

¹⁰⁶ See Ingravalle’s insightful analysis of *populus* in Althusius’ theory. He argues that the people are at the same time a well-ordered symbiotic community (*consociatio symbiotica*) and a *tuba*, *coetus*, and *vulgus*, and for this reason, they need *directio* and *regimen* to align with the *communicatio* (Ingravalle 2010b, 300).

¹⁰⁷ Carney’s introduction to *Politica* (trans. Carney 1995), xxv–xxvi. See also Lazzarino Del Grosso (2010, 167–68) for the role of the supreme magistrate in conserving unity.

suspicious.¹⁰⁸ While we could perhaps interpret ambition and rivalry as something related to pursuing one's own advantage, it is still clear that they are negative things that disturb the peace and tranquillity of the commonwealth.¹⁰⁹ Yet, some of the causes for sedition include reasons that are more difficult to categorize as simply bad or unjustified. Althusius mentions, for example, scarcity and excessive or unusual taxation and oppression imposed for unnecessary expenses.¹¹⁰ As these come close to one of the cases of tyranny, it gives reason to think that perhaps not all causes for sedition are necessarily condemnable. Instead, the action itself – turning against the ruler without following the proper procedure for countering tyranny – is what makes it bad.

The second interesting feature of this discussion is that Althusius – like Plato to whom he refers, among others – also considers excessive wealth (*divitiae*) and poverty as causes of sedition since (1) wealth leads to self-indulgence, indolence, a desire (*desiderium*) for new things, and unrest, and since (2) poverty also begets a desire (*cupiditas*) for new things, as well as many crimes and disgraces.¹¹¹ I will come back to the effects of wealth and poverty below, but it should be noted that Althusius also mentions the idleness of subjects that results from too much happiness, satiety, and indulgence, as a cause for sedition.¹¹² Moreover, elsewhere he writes that when people are in need, they are submissive and humble towards those from whom they expect help, but as soon as they feel that they are doing well, and especially when they have an abundance of wealth, they strive for freedom and try to shake off the yoke of their superiors.¹¹³ These remarks remarkably suggest that if and when the common good or the good of the community is understood to include the unity of the commonwealth and the stability of the government, the material welfare of the subjects, if it is excessive, is in fact not compatible with the good of the community.¹¹⁴ This creates an interesting contrast with the discussion on tyranny, where a part could leave the rest if its welfare required it. While there the ruler had clearly failed to preserve the unity of the commonwealth and the (adequate)

¹⁰⁸ *Politica*, ch. 31.8 (ed. 1981).

¹⁰⁹ See also *Politica*, ch. 31.18 and 31.22 (ed. 1981).

¹¹⁰ *Politica*, ch. 31.13–14; 31.16; and 31.49 (ed. 1981).

¹¹¹ *Politica*, ch. 31.16 and 31.23 (ed. 1981).

¹¹² *Politica*, ch. 31.23 (ed. 1981).

¹¹³ *Politica*, ch. 23.22 (ed. 1981). See also *ibid.*, 31.24.

¹¹⁴ Hueglin (1999, 159–60) argues that Althusius remains rooted in a tradition that sees the world in terms of scarce resources, so that someone's gain comes at the expense of others. Based on this we could also think that excessive wealth means excess for some (likely for the ruling class) but scarcity for the rest, and thus, the ultimate problem could rather be (too great) inequality than excessive riches in general. However, Hueglin notes that in Althusius' schema, society is organised so that participants are willing to share voluntarily – indeed throughout his reading, Hueglin emphasises the importance of subsidiarity and solidarity for Althusius.

welfare of the people, here he is still trying – and possibly succeeding, when employing the various measures for subduing sedition¹¹⁵ – to achieve both.

Finally, the pursuit for the good of the soul can be a cause of sedition in the sense that different opinions concerning religion can lead to schisms, sects, and secession.¹¹⁶ This does not relativize religion since, according to Althusius, there is only one true religion. However, if the true religion is not the only one practiced in the commonwealth, and if the ruler cannot remove discrepancy in religion without danger to the commonwealth, he should tolerate the dissidents for the sake of public peace.¹¹⁷ The good of the soul of the people has then to yield to peace and unity of the commonwealth. However, even here the question is not about completely disregarding the pursuit of the good of the soul since peace means the survival of the commonwealth and hence the Church within it.¹¹⁸ This is even advantageous for the rest of the commonwealth since Althusius holds that the existence of some true believers in the commonwealth brings the favour of God for the whole realm, or at least shelters it from God's wrath.¹¹⁹

10.3.3 *The Exclusion of Some Work from Society*

As we have seen, individuals contribute to the common good – or to the good of others and to their own good – with their individual skills and strengths, according to their calling from God. This happens under the direction and guidance of the ruler and his administration since they regulate work so that professions that are important for the community are taken care of and not too many individuals are dedicated to one profession.¹²⁰ The result is a mutual life in which various useful and necessary tasks complement each other. According to Althusius, the general precondition for the usefulness and necessity of activities (*negotium*) is that they are directed to the welfare (*salus*) of the body and soul.¹²¹ Odermatt observes that Althusius bases the ethical value of every activity on two standards: whether it glorifies and honours God and whether it is useful for the symbiosis. Consequently, in accordance with the earlier observations concerning the normative character of social life, we can note that the usefulness of an activity for an individual does not suffice for its

¹¹⁵ Althusius (*Politica*, ch. 31.28–69 [ed. 1981]) gives a long list of measures which include, for example, more and less severe suppression of dissidents but also endeavour to counter poverty and shortage.

¹¹⁶ *Politica*, ch. 31.20 (ed. 1981).

¹¹⁷ *Politica*, ch. 28.65–66 (ed. 1981).

¹¹⁸ *Politica*, ch. 28.66 (ed. 1981).

¹¹⁹ *Politica*, ch. 28.8–9 (ed. 1981).

¹²⁰ Odermatt 2009, 204–5.

¹²¹ *Politica*, ch. 7.14 and 7.16–25 (ed. 1981).

positive evaluation.¹²² Althusius' discussion of craft activities that are bad, or are considered to be so, will serve to illustrate his evaluation of activities.¹²³

To begin with, Althusius states that some professions quite literally involve dirty work (*sordidus*), such as charcoal makers, blacksmiths, and carpenters, but this observation does not entail any kind of ethical evaluation.¹²⁴ Some work is ignoble (*illiberalis*) and hateful to people, like the work of custom and tax collectors, money-lenders, and money changers, but it is difficult to see how these disliked professions would be useless or unnecessary: taxes, for instance, are gathered for the necessity and utility of the commonwealth.¹²⁵ Yet, Althusius also includes in this category peddlers, counterfeiters, retailers, and others who profit from falsehoods and untruths, which suggests that – at least in some cases – there is also an ethical principle at work.¹²⁶ Moreover, some activities are vile and servile because they serve less useful or, in the opinion of men, less honourable needs.¹²⁷ These include, for example, pig dealers, gatekeepers, barbers, muleteers, millworkers, butchers, innkeepers, etc., which again do not seem to be useless or unnecessary but are presumably shunned for their low social standing. More to the point are works that serve pleasure instead of necessity (*voluptuariis & minus necessariis usibus inseruiunt*), such as the profession of brocade weavers, gladiators, athletes, beast fighters, mime artists, show dancers, actors, comedians, jesters, etc. We can presuppose that many people enjoy the products of these works, but Althusius denounces them for their lesser usefulness for the symbiosis and due to his protestant morals, which call for the abstinence of luxuries and self-indulgence.¹²⁸ Finally, Althusius mentions that impious or altogether peculiar arts (*artes impiae vel prosus curiosae*), which are harmful to the moral purity of the people or useless for human life, cannot be tolerated in the commonwealth at all.¹²⁹ Unfortunately, he does not give any examples of these.¹³⁰

Setting aside the obvious multidimensionality of evaluations of the 'badness' of some craftworks, we can still see that the usefulness and necessity of activities are set in a continuous rather than a binary scale. Some works are simply deemed less

¹²² Odermatt 2009, 203.

¹²³ For an extensive analysis of the ethical dimension of works and offices, see Odermatt 2009. She notes (211–14), for example, that while Althusius has a positive regard for merchants and especially peasants, his attitude towards craftworkers is more ambivalent.

¹²⁴ *Politica*, ch. 2.29 (ed. 1981).

¹²⁵ *Politica*, ch. 2.30 (ed. 1981); *ibid.*, 11.25.

¹²⁶ *Politica*, ch. 2.30 (ed. 1981).

¹²⁷ *Politica*, ch. 2.31 (ed. 1981). See also *ibid.*, §32.

¹²⁸ Odermatt (2009, 210) claims that Althusius criticizes activities that have to do with luxury and entertainment because they create a temptation to violate the commandments of the Decalogue and endanger the symbiosis.

¹²⁹ *Politica*, ch. 2.33 (ed. 1981).

¹³⁰ See, however, *Politica*, ch. 7.33–39 (ed. 1981), where Althusius, discussing public offices (and people suitable to hold them), gives various examples of harmful people. These include, for example, orators and malicious, selfish, and ambitious people.

useful and necessary than others, but this does not entail their complete uselessness, while it is connected to their lower social valuation. Nevertheless, moral concerns and utter (social) uselessness do exclude some activities from the common life all together. This underlines the fact that not every kind of activity is compatible – and some, like the professions related to pleasure, are uncomfortably compatible – with the ideal of mutual life in which the different professions serve reciprocally the utility, benefit, and welfare of all the members, and consequently the common good.¹³¹ Concerning the individual's point of view, Althusius writes that if a person is suitable for more than one vocation, he should choose the best one (*optima*), which Odermatt takes to refer to the ethically highest one that leads to the glory of God.¹³² The possibility that someone's inclinations and abilities would be directed only to morally unacceptable activities, is not addressed.

10.3.4 *Censorship of Immoderate Behaviour*

The evaluation of the usefulness and morality of activities is further relevant for us to the extent that it includes situations that can at least broadly be conceived as conflicts between self-interest and the good of the community, but which can also be conceived as conflicts between self-interest and individual good. In this context, it is quite difficult to consider the pursuit of one's own benefit as the pursuit of individual good because the 'goodness' of one's behaviour is so intimately tied to the right way of living. As is claimed in several chapters of this volume, there is no conflict between the two genuine 'goods', that is, between the individual and common good. Rather, the conflict is between the bad behaviour of an individual and the requirement to act in a way that is objectively good, that is, piously toward God and justly toward neighbours, which includes being useful to the community.

In this respect, Althusius' discussion of censorship (*censura*) is revealing.¹³³ Censorship is the investigation and reproach of those habits (*mores*) and luxuries (*luxus*) that are not hindered or punished by laws, but which however corrupt the souls of the subjects or uselessly consume their goods.¹³⁴ Censorship also corrects what is not yet worthy of punishment but, if neglected or disregarded, can become

¹³¹ Odermatt (2009, 203) writes that in addition to those who act in an ethically questionable fashion – like thieves and those who refuse to work or who work in immoral professions – also those who devote their life to contemplation and whose work serves mostly their own subsistence are excluded from the symbiosis.

¹³² *Politica*, ch. 7.22 (ed. 1981); Odermatt 2009, 204.

¹³³ *Censura* is the main topic of chapter 30, while the functions of censors also come up elsewhere, like in connection to the provincial administration (ch. 8) and to the religious administration of the commonwealth (ch. 18). Here, I concentrate on what we might call the secular or political functions of censorship and leave the religious functions mostly aside (see, however footnote 151). For more thorough expositions of Althusius' views on *censura*, see, e.g., Biachin 2010; Koch 2009.

¹³⁴ *Politica*, ch. 30.1 (ed. 1981).

a cause of many and great evils and, if little by little omitted, can pull the Commonwealth out by the root.¹³⁵ What is relevant here is, first, that bad behaviour is taken to be detrimental for the inner state of a person, for his or her soul, and hence it is contrary to the good of the soul. Althusius' discussion also reveals a concern for the good of the body since the useless consummation of goods (*bona*) is also condemned. However, bad morals are not bad only because they are bad for the person themselves. There is also a certain interpersonal dimension present since censors should investigate the vices that "do not appear in court [...] but nevertheless offend the eyes of pious and good citizens and merit, to make an example, a most serious reprimand [...]"¹³⁶

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that bad behaviour can be detrimental for the commonwealth if it is allowed to spread. Elsewhere, when explaining the negative effects of too-great-a population and power of the commonwealth, Althusius writes that "power leads to wealth (*divitiae*), wealth to pleasures (*voluptates*), and pleasure to all vices", and he infers that "when the power of commonwealth is increased, its fortitude and virtue are diminished",¹³⁷ which ultimately results in the downfall of the commonwealth.¹³⁸ Thus, there seems to be an intimate connection between the behaviour of individuals and the success of the commonwealth. Both affect each other: bad behaviour and luxury are bad for the commonwealth, and the power and wealth of the commonwealth beget vices in its citizens.

The key to understanding the badness of behaviour is immoderation, which seems to characterize many vices as well as the badness of excessive power and wealth. Althusius gives several examples of bad morals, such as wantonness, lust, drunkenness, abuse (*jurgium*), errors, schisms, heresies, and perjury.¹³⁹ He also mentions prohibited or limited things, such as obscene and infamous books, shameful and dishonest speeches, singing, games, dancing, and feasts.¹⁴⁰ While these examples make up a bit of a mixed bag including both secular and religious wrongs, Althusius also writes that the good and saintly (*sanctus*) morals of the commonwealth are plagued and corrupted by two evils, namely the public pleasure of luxury and immoderate licentiousness, as well as "praising the amassing of money by whatever means, as if it would be an honourable pursuit".¹⁴¹ What these evils have

¹³⁵ *Politica*, ch. 30.2 (ed. 1981).

¹³⁶ "Inquisitio censurae fit in vitia illa, quae in iudicium defectu accusatoris, vel denunciatoris non veniunt, & tamen oculos piorum & bonorum civium offendunt & merentur, propter exemplum, maxime seriam reprehensionem & notationem, quamvis a poena abstinere possit" (*Politica*, ch. 30.5 [ed. 1981]).

¹³⁷ "Potentia quoque parit divitias, divitiae parit voluptates, voluptas parit omnia vitia: & quando crescit potentia Reipub, minuitur fortitudo & virtus" (*Politica*, ch. 9.10 [ed. 1981]).

¹³⁸ *Politica*, ch. 9.10–11 (ed. 1981). See also *ibid.*, 30.16–17.

¹³⁹ *Politica*, ch. 30.6 (ed. 1981).

¹⁴⁰ *Politica*, ch. 30.9 (ed. 1981).

¹⁴¹ "Bonorum itaque & sanctorum morum Reip. duae sunt deterrimae pestes & corruptelae, nimirum publica luxur voluptatisque immoderatae licentia, & pecuniae quocunque pacto congerendae laudatum, tanquam rei honestae, stadium" (*Politica*, ch. 30.7 [ed. 1981]).

in common is that they pertain to having or desiring something too much. While they are seemingly secular rather than religious, they are connected to the good of the soul because “he is not dear to God, to whom wealth is dear”.¹⁴² In any case, the lack of restraint gives a reason for censorship, which Althusius describes, citing Cicero, as a teacher of sense, of shame and moderation.¹⁴³

Wealth and money (*pecunia*) are particularly interesting examples because they are clearly both good and bad.¹⁴⁴ On the one hand, since wealth can lead to vices and “money is the nurse and mother of all luxuries and the greatest curse”,¹⁴⁵ wealth and money are clearly negative things. On the other hand – and in addition to the fact that material well-being is an integral part of self-sufficiency – Althusius also acknowledges that wealthy subjects are useful for the commonwealth and the magistrate. He writes that “the ruler’s most certain treasure is in the coffers of his subjects”.¹⁴⁶ In other words, wealthy subjects are a good thing as they can contribute to taxes to make up the public goods (*res/bona publica*) of the community, which are used in turn for the utility and necessity of the commonwealth.¹⁴⁷ For “everything is for sale for a coin, whether one desires allies or soldiers, or to destroy enemies or cities”.¹⁴⁸ This apparent contradiction is overcome by moderating the desire for money. Crucially, this moderation is a public matter as it is the task of censorship to “remove the too excessive pursuit for money [...], limit greed, interest, gnawing usury, and filthy gain”¹⁴⁹ and to forbid extravagance and “determine the end and manner of spending”.¹⁵⁰

The lesson is that to serve both ends of the social life – the good of the soul as well as the good of the body – and to secure the commonwealth, the desire for earthly pleasures needs to be restrained.¹⁵¹ This is not all, however. The task of

¹⁴² “[...] Deo non carus, cui carae sunt opes [...]” (*Politica*, ch. 30.17 [ed. 1981]).

¹⁴³ *Politica*, ch. 30.2 (ed. 1981). See also *ibid.*, §5.

¹⁴⁴ Besides money, luxury can manifest in housing, feasting, and clothing: *Politica*, ch. 30.15 and 30.20–23 (ed. 1981). For the connection of wealth and money to common good, see Cary Nederman’s chapter in this volume.

¹⁴⁵ “Pecuniae, quae nutritrix & mater omnis luxuriae est & maxima perniciēs [...]” (*Politica*, ch. 30.17 [ed. 1981]).

¹⁴⁶ “Sane thesaurus principis certissimus in subditorum oculis [...]” (*Politica*, ch. 30.18 [ed. 1981]).

¹⁴⁷ See, e.g., *Politica*, ch. 11.25; 17.15; 17.19; 30.18; 32.1; 32.13; 37.81 (ed. 1981).

¹⁴⁸ “Omnia enim venalia numis, sive socios, sive milites habere cupias, sive hostes, aut urbes perdere” (*Politica*, ch. 25.17 [ed. 1981]). See also *ibid.*, 24.29.

¹⁴⁹ “[...] Itaque censor nimium pecuniae studium tollet, aut, quoad res feret, minuet, avaritiam coercet, & foenus & usuras rodentes & quaestus sordidos, [...]” (*Politica*, ch. 30.17 [ed. 1981]).

¹⁵⁰ “[...] denique profusiones vetabit, & finem atque modum sumptuum statuet [...]” (*Politica*, ch. 30.17 [ed. 1981]).

¹⁵¹ Heresies, schisms, atheism, etc. are to be disposed of rather than restrained in the commonwealth, although members of religions other than the true one can be tolerated to a certain extent (see *Politica*, ch. 28.50–72 [ed. 1981]; *ibid.*, 30.15 and §24–28). Also, it should be kept in mind that the good of the soul does not consist only, or even mainly, of the moderation of earthly desires, but it requires the true religion that leads to salvation. Faith itself is a gift from God and cannot be coerced, but it is the duty of the supreme magistrate to cultivate and protect the true religion (*ibid.*,

censorship is also to encourage the pursuit of wealth if wealth is lacking. Too much wealth is not only detrimental to the commonwealth, but so also is too much poverty.¹⁵² As Biachin and Odermatt have noted, idleness is not approved.¹⁵³ Those who can work, like wandering, healthy, and vigorous beggars, should be either made to work or banished from the community to prevent them from benefiting from the achievements of the diligent and from consuming things acquired by the labour of others.¹⁵⁴ Consequently, common welfare requires that the desire for earthly things needs to be carefully managed by a public authority.

10.4 Conclusions

There is no denying that Althusius' political theory embodies a clear emphasis on the reciprocity of life in society. However, harmonious mutual life is by no means a certainty since conflicts do arise and need to be dealt with. Significantly, many conflicts involve some sort of clash between the common good and the good of a member, part, or individual, which ideally should align with each other. In certain cases, conflicts also emerge between what individuals desire and what is objectively good for them and/or for the commonwealth.

Closer examination reveals first that the common good or the good of the commonwealth cannot be equated with the private good of the ruler. This connects to the ideal that the power of the ruler is given only for the welfare of the subjects and not for the ruler's own benefit. A ruler who neglects to care for, or even acts contrary to, the welfare of the commonwealth is a tyrant who can be resisted and ultimately deposed in due process. It is also possible for a part to leave the existing whole if the welfare of the part so requires. The points concerning tyranny reveal that a harmonious and reciprocal society and the alignment between the common and individual good are possible only if the power of the ruler is checked with effective measures.

When acting within his jurisdiction, however, the ruler and the broader administration have the power to guide and lead their subjects towards their good. Besides the good of the bodies and souls of his subjects, the ruler is also responsible for the concord between the subjects and the unity of the commonwealth. Thus, divisions that threatened the established order(s) are not tolerated, not even when the reason for sedition is reminiscent of a justified cause for resisting a tyrant, such as

28.63–65). In relation to this, there are different roles for the ecclesiastical administration (discussed in chapter 28) and censorship. The censors, for example, monitor that people attend religious meetings and the Lord's supper, that they practice piety are ready for holy days and feasts. The censors also keep an eye on possible religious errors (*ibid.*, 30.15).

¹⁵² *Politica*, ch. 30.16 and 30.19 (ed. 1981).

¹⁵³ *Politica*, ch. 30.10 (ed. 1981); Biachin 2010, 127–28; Odermatt 2009, 215.

¹⁵⁴ *Politica*, ch. 30.13 and 30.27 (ed. 1981). See also *ibid.*, 37.83 ff. on the obligation to care and protect those who cannot work.

excessive burdens and scarcity. Even more strikingly, Althusius also considers excessive wealth, happiness, satiety etc. as causes for turmoil and hence harmful for the commonwealth. Besides the affliction of excessive material well-being, he also recognizes the dangers of religious strife and recommends religious toleration for the sake of peace. Consequently, the concern for the unity of the commonwealth sets limits for the pursuit of the good of both the body and the soul. This makes perfect sense when we keep in mind that the disintegration of the commonwealth would reduce the all-important *communicatio* and consequently hinder the pursuit of the good of the body and soul.

We have also learned that reciprocal life does not mean an all-inclusive social life. All activities are evaluated from the point of view of their usefulness to one's fellow human beings and to the broader society, as well as from the point of view of morality and their connection to glorifying and honouring God. While different works have different values, exclusion is only due to immorality and the complete uselessness of an activity. It is relevant that this evaluation is detached from an individual's self-interest and is instead subject to an outward judgment of worth – to the good that the activity of an individual can bring in relation to God and for fellow human beings. Clearly, Althusius' ideal society is not a place for self-interest seeking individuals.

Finally, Althusius' discussion on censorship reveals how far into an individual's private life the power of the ruler and his administration is extended. To serve both the good of the body and soul of the subjects, their behaviour must be quite carefully managed by the public authority. They cannot be trusted to attain individual good on their own since they are prone to vices. Besides being detrimental for the good of the body and soul of the individual, vices also threaten the good of the community. The ambivalent role of wealth and money reveals how the pursuit of material welfare needs to be managed, but this time to serve the good of the soul rather than the unity of the commonwealth. What is sought after is enough, but not too much, emphasis on the pursuit of material welfare. In other words, both luxury and scarcity are to be avoided. Here, the functionality of a reciprocal society is again shown to rely on outward control rather than on the natural needs and attributes of the people or on the religious duty to participate, which is nevertheless ideologically important. However, this control is not arbitrary or limitless since laws, justice, and the collective will of the members bind the ruler and the administration. That said, subjugation to the right way of living and to its relatively far-reaching enforcements seems to be the price to pay for the alignment of the individual and common good in Althusius' theory.

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