

## Distinguishing the Catholic Common Good from the Secular

| <i>Attributes</i>       | <i>Details</i>  | <i>Relevant Sources</i>   | <i>Fine Points of Distinction</i>   |
|-------------------------|---|---|---|
| <b>Inherent Dignity</b> | <p>Inherent dignity includes a recognition of both my inherent dignity and your inherent dignity. The human person is a particular type of creature, created in God's image and distinct from other animals.</p>  | <p><b><u>Church sources:</u></b></p> <p>Scripture:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Genesis 1-2</li> <li>◆ Deuteronomy 10:17-19</li> <li>◆ Psalms 8:4-5; 139:13-14</li> <li>◆ Luke 10:25-37</li> <li>◆ 1 Corinthians 3:16</li> </ul> <p>Tradition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Gaudium et Spes, §§12-22,</li> <li>◆ Evangelium Vitae,</li> <li>◆ Evangelii Gaudium, no. 153</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Civics sources:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ UN Declaration of Human Rights</li> </ul>   | <p>Outside of the Catholic common good there might be some question about who counts as a person. Catholics consider the unborn, disabled, elderly, etc. as human persons. 2</p>  |
| <b>Interdependence</b>  | <p>There is an inherent interdependence for human flourishing—my good is tied to your good, though I may not see this.</p> <p>If we devalue any one person or class of person, we are all potentially able to be devalued.</p> <p>The most common misunderstandings: (1) Some members claim excessive rights (at the expense of others); (2) Some members neglect duties; (3) The shared good is not accurately identified.</p> | <p><b><u>Church sources:</u></b></p> <p>Scripture:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Genesis 12:1-3</li> <li>◆ Psalms 72</li> <li>◆ 1 Corinthians 12:12-26</li> </ul> <p>Tradition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Mater et Magistra, §157</li> <li>◆ Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, §§38-39</li> <li>◆ Caritas in Veritate, §7</li> <li>◆ Economic Justice for All, §365</li> <li>◆ Laudato Si, §§156-158</li> <li>◆ Cloutier, “Modern Politics and CST”, chapter in: <a href="https://www.amazon.com/Heart-Catholic-Social-Teaching-Contemporary/">https://www.amazon.com/Heart-Catholic-Social-Teaching-Contemporary/</a></li> </ul> | <p>Outside of the Catholic view, other forms of thought pit one group against another group—a class, a race, a nation, etc. In the secular view, in order for one group to win, the other must lose. There also tends to be a lack of unity across time—secular views privilege present people over and against past people and future people.</p> <p>Some secular views do not view reality as inherently ordered toward harmony or friendship (e.g. overly-simplistic Darwinian survival of the fittest, or Marxists or critical race theories, which believe in inherent conflict between groups with differentials of power such that the world is always “oppressed vs. oppressor.” These theories can be helpful in our analysis of a fallen world but do not see beyond the fallenness of our world to the fullness of reality that we are called to.)</p> <p>The Catholic view emphasizes that we are made for community with all people (even if we are not very good at it or don't reach its perfection in this fallen world.)</p> |

## Distinguishing the Catholic Common Good from the Secular cont.

| <i>Attributes</i>   | <i>Details</i>  | <i>Relevant Sources</i>   | <i>Fine Points of Distinction</i>   |
|---|---|---|---|
| <p><b>Shared Conditions</b></p>                                 | <p>The common good includes the set of conditions we all share that enable each person to achieve flourishing. This differs from an “aggregate” understanding, in which the common good is simply the sum of each individual good.</p>  | <p><b><u>Church sources:</u></b></p> <p>Tradition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Gaudium et Spes, §26</li> <li>◆ Cloutier, “Catechism Commentary: The Common Good” Catholic Moral Theology <a href="https://catholicmoraltheology.com/catechism-commentary-the-common-good/">https://catholicmoraltheology.com/catechism-commentary-the-common-good/</a></li> </ul>  | <p>An aggregate or utilitarian perspective tends to skip over shared conditions and defines the common good in terms of a sum total of individual outcomes, whereas a Catholic vision of shared conditions recognizes that outcomes always depend on both conditions and concrete activities of participants.</p>   |
| <p><b>Individual Duties and Responsibilities</b></p>            | <p>Duties and responsibilities are those actions that are necessary for all to do in order that everyone can share in the good. Many of these we do without thinking and are easy. Others are “difficult duties” and will require some kind of enforcement mechanisms (generally these involve what we call punishments or penalties that “harm” individuals for the sake of the common good) to ensure the common good of all.</p> | <p><b><u>Church sources:</u></b></p> <p>Scripture:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Leviticus 25:35</li> <li>◆ Tobit 4:5-11</li> <li>◆ Isaiah 1:16-17</li> <li>◆ Matthew 25: 31-46</li> <li>◆ James 2:14-18</li> </ul> <p>Tradition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Pacem in Terris, §11</li> <li>◆ Pacem in Terris, §30</li> <li>◆ Mater et Magistra, §20</li> <li>◆ Caritas in Veritate, §43</li> </ul> | <p>Secular visions usually depict individuals as pre-social, and so they enter into a social contract to protect their rights. In this secular scenario, a person tries to maximize his/her rights and minimize his/her duties.</p> <p>The Catholic vision is not pre-social. Our relationship with God, with family, and even with society already exist prior to our coming into being. We receive these relationships as a gift (even if they are also affected by sin), and so are indebted to the group right from the start. None of us “invent” the money system we use, the language we speak, or the family we are born into. These realities pre-exist our coming into being.</p> <p>A secular vision also tends to promote the value of autonomy, such that duties exist only in situations that might otherwise impede someone else’s rights. This is distinct from a Catholic view which has a more expansive understanding of duties because of our relationship with others in the human family.</p> |
| <p><b>Historical Variability and Structural Consistency</b></p> | <p>Any group in any time or place has a common good, simply because it is a certain sort of group working together. However, the aims of the group, the particular people involved, and the means by which people cooperate can all be quite different over time.</p>   |   | <p>A secular view often assumes that social changes are all positive and make comparisons across time irrelevant. For example, many use the term “outdated” to suggest the inherent superiority of the new perspective. A Catholic view helps us see that, while there are discontinuities across time, there are continuities, too, and sometimes valuable insights from past times can be helpful in a contemporary context. A contrast here is probably not helpful.</p>   |