

Aristotle taught that all actions aim at some good, and the greatest good-sought for its own sake-is happiness.

Aquinas stated that finite goods cannot satisfy us; true happiness lies in attaining the infinite good, which is God. Charity is the virtue that has God as its object, and its principal act is love. Therefore, to love God is to pursue our greatest good.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” (Mt 22:37–38). Jesus himself taught that this commandment is the way to attain full life, true happiness, and the supreme good that all hearts seek.

The second commandment is “to love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:39).

If we seek the greatest good individually, meaning loving God and being happy, the second commandment tells us to search also for the happiness of every other human person.

In this way, the common good can be expressed as assisting one another in loving God and being happy.

We now live in a technological revolution.

Artificial Intelligence systems are becoming extraordinarily capable and surpassing human beings in tasks like manufacturing, data analysis, and content generation, working through patterns, and statistical calculations. It is a fact that AI is replacing humans in an immense diversity of tasks.

What will happen, then? Will humans become redundant?

Can AI replace us in searching for the common good? Can AI replace or prevent us from loving?

Let’s set AI aside for a moment and understand how the common good is achieved, with the Aristotelian-Thomistic framework of the four causes.

First, we have the **material cause** of the common good: the individual human beings forming society - minds, hearts, and souls striving to love God and to be happy.

Second, the **formal cause** is the order that the greatest commandments establish within us.

Aquinas teaches that the commandment orders our heart through our intentions, our soul through our affections, our mind through our thoughts, and our stren-

gth through our actions.

Third, the **final cause** is the end for which the common good is pursued.

On the personal level, it is the most just and necessary end. If this is true for the individual, it must also be true for the collective.

Lastly, we have the **efficient cause**. Aquinas teaches that the intellect apprehends the good, the will desires it, and the intellect judges its attainability. The will sets the intention. So, by the active power of free will, humans are the principal efficient cause of the common good.

Now, can AI play any role in achieving the common good?

AI cannot be the **material** or **final** cause, because only human beings seek fulfillment.

Regarding the efficient cause, Aquinas distinguishes between the **principal** and **instrumental** efficient cause. An instrument acts through the active power of the principal agent.

Thus, in the best scenario, it may be an **instrumental efficient cause**; a tool assisting human action under human direction. In the worst scenario, AI may be an obstacle to our own agency.

I will mention two *positive* and three *negative* example cases.

First, as an **instrument**, AI can facilitate our pursuit of the common good assisting in summarizing information, connecting knowledge and decision-making in complex situations. For example, it could be a tool for personalized medicine to improve our health, or a tool for personalized education to pursue the good of more formation.

Second, AI may also be an instrument to automate repetitive or routine tasks. For example, extracting resources or producing food, so that we satisfy the basic needs of human life. People can better focus on love, virtue, and justice when they have their basic needs satisfied.

However, on the *negative* side, AI can be harmful and misused.

The first case is that people may delegate intellectual tasks so much to AI that

they risk diminishing their own capacity for critical thinking and free decision — powers essential to authentic love. AI systems may be used for deterministic manipulation through “algorithmic slavery,” “behavioral hacking,” and “attention engineering.”

Secondly, authors like Andy Clark in *Natural-Born Cyborgs*, argue that tools can fundamentally reshape our thinking, becoming extensions of our neural processes. Clark claims the boundary between humans and instruments is increasingly blurred. We do not know yet how these tools will affect our way of thinking.

Thirdly, an even more extreme, but also possible, case occurs when these complex systems are completely out of human control. I will not enter the debate of calling AI systems agents or not, superintelligence or not. I do not want to debate if AI has agency or the capacity to decide on its own, because they are categorically different from human beings. The fact is that these complex systems function so fast, with such complexity, they may function on “their own” without needing humans.

To respond to the first problem, we need to keep exercising the intellect independently, so we do not become dependent on any tool.

Responding to the second, we need to keep cultivating critical thinking and our independence from stimuli, so that we are not completely manipulated. At the same time, it is not only us, but the grace of God, that ultimately enables us to act with virtue in freedom.

Finally, if AI systems become an obstacle, they must be strongly regulated or removed completely.

Conclusion

Humans must remain the principal efficient cause of the common good, using AI as an instrument — not allowing it to replace or dominate us.

No other person or machine can take our place, we are not redundant. Humans are the true agents of our common good.

The Common Good and the Role of AI: A Thomistic Reflection

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