

Renewing Husbandry: Wendell Berry, Aristotle, and Thomas Aquinas on “Economics”

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“WE SEEM to have been living for a long time on the assumption that we can safely deal with parts, leaving the whole to take care of itself. But now the news from everywhere is that we have to begin gathering up the scattered pieces, figuring out where they belong, and putting them back together.”¹

Thus Wendell Berry in his 2004 essay “The Purpose of a Coherent Community.” Picking up pieces, and putting them back together: what seems to be a matter of child’s play, may well be a succinct statement of the fundamental task for all those concerned about the good human life. If the good human life is anything, it is a whole, and it is a lived in a community that is a whole. Pieces have their place in a whole, and thus pieces—or parts—can be what they are supposed to be only when they are woven into a whole. And only someone who has a conception of the whole, and its end, can truly weave the parts together.

Husbandry, according to Berry, is an art that is all about weaving parts into a whole. Indeed, all arts are ultimately about this. But “husbandry” names an art that concerns properly human wholes: the wholes wherein the good human life is lived, most especially family. The name “husbandry” of course also refers to the realm of farming or agriculture. The rich analogicity in this name points to a connection that is of the first importance: the connection of care for land and living things, and the care for family and home. Berry holds that a return to the practice of husbandry could solve many of the problems in agriculture, since farming is best

¹ Wendell Berry, *The Way of Ignorance* (Berkeley, CA: Shoemaker and Hoard, 2005), 77.

practiced in the context of the economy of the home. The home is the whole of which farming is naturally a part.

Berry's point about agriculture is an instance of a broader point: the home is the whole of which most economic endeavors are naturally a part. Home economy is, or should be, *the* economy, in the most important sense. When economic endeavor is conceived and pursued as fundamentally within the context of the home, it can be properly woven into the whole—the good life of the family, that it should most of all serve. This is also the economic view of Aristotle and of Aquinas. *Oeconomica*, or the art of household management, is an art by which the household manager orders all things, including wealth-getting, in view of the good life of the family community, itself a part of a broader community. My thesis then is that the husbandry that Berry recommends for a renewal of agriculture, as well as for a broader economic renewal, is supported by Aristotle and Aquinas's understanding of *oeconomica*.²

Here is the order I will follow. We will first consider Berry's critique of the present state of agriculture, and the broader society, focusing on dissolution—a dissolution especially connected with making monetary profit the primary end of economic endeavor. Then we will take a brief look at his proposed solution: husbandry, the art that weaves parts into a whole in view of the true end. We will then turn to the thought of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas. In their political and economic doctrine, I find the basic principles that are at work in Berry's critique and solution. Most importantly, in their understanding of the art of household management, *oeconomica*, economic endeavor is understood and practiced as immediately subordinated to the good life of the family, as opposed to monetary profit.³

² That both agriculture and the broader economy suffer from fragmentation and are in need of renewal, I ask leave to take as given. I recognize that there are many successful parts or aspects of agriculture and the economy today. I would contend that their fragmentation and need for renewal is most clear in agriculture's failure to conduce, as well as it could and should conduce, to the good health of people and land, and the broader economy's failure to conduce, as well as it could and should conduce, to the good life of the community. Recognizing that these are profoundly complex issues, I ask leave to focus on an approach that I believe is very timely, regardless of precisely how we judge the current state of affairs.

For Berry's exposition of the failures of contemporary agriculture, as well as of the broader economy, I would especially recommend *The Unsettling of America* (see note 4 below).

³ As regards this difficult point we must note that there is no implication here that monetary profit, or the seeking of monetary profit, is evil. At issue is the *governing end* of economic endeavor. As we will have some occasion to see, Aristotle and Aquinas, as well as Berry, hold that when monetary profit, as contrasted with

I. Berry's Critique: Things Are Falling Apart

In many of his essays Berry subtly connects things agricultural with things broader and even more fundamental. I want to look first at what I take to be, according to Berry, the principles of a broader demise of human life and culture, and then turn to see the realm of agriculture as a specific and telling instance of that broader demise. Berry writes:

The inventors of this agriculture assumed, in short, that the human will is sovereign in the universe, that the only laws are the laws of mechanics, and that the material world and its "natural resources" are without limit. These are the assumptions that, acknowledged or not, underlie the "war" by which we humans have undertaken to "conquer" nature, and which is the dominant myth of modern intellectual life.⁴

Berry points to several fundamental aspects of the dominant modern worldview. Of particular interest is his identification of the root of the war to conquer nature: taking the human will as sovereign in the universe. Here, it seems to me, is a point of the first significance. At the root of our problems is the assertion of a certain autonomy of the human will: an assertion that is more a moral matter than a theoretical one.⁵ A will that is sovereign does not find its good in discovering, and living by, an objective and received order, an order inscribed in nature. The sovereign will pursues its own private desires, and finds nature something to be conquered.

A first fruit of the stance of the sovereign will is blindness to the order, the *natural* order, of the universe. And central in the order of the universe is its own *wholeness*, and the wholeness of many of *its* parts (e.g., the wholeness of one person's life, of the family, of the farm, of the nation, of an ecosystem). Consider Berry's words in *The Unsettling of America*, in the chapter titled "The Ecological Crisis as a Crisis of Character":

The good of the whole of Creation, the world and all its creatures together, is never a consideration because it is never thought of; our culture now simply lacks the means for thinking of it. It is for this reason that none of our basic problems is ever solved. Indeed, it is for this reason that our basic problems are getting worse.⁶

the flourishing of the family, becomes the governing end of economic endeavor, significant negative consequences follow upon this disorder.

⁴ Berry, *Way of Ignorance*, 106. See also Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1996), 53.

⁵ I believe that assuming the stance of being sovereign in the universe is a "practical" stance that, unfortunately and contradictorily, is assumed by many of us who have a "theoretically" Christian stance.

⁶ Berry, *Unsettling of America*, 22.

We do not know how to think and live in terms of wholes. To use another way that Berry captures this point: we do not know how to think and live according to true *context*. “Contexts,” he notes, “become wrong by being too small.”⁷ This statement is from the essay entitled “Renewing Husbandry.” In that essay he expresses the cause of the demise of agriculture as “the emergence of context as an issue.”⁸ At the heart of what Berry means by context is the truth that parts are truly understood only in relation to the whole or wholes to which they truly belong. Thus when parts are not seen and treated in relation to the proper wholes, or in other words are taken out of context, they are perverted or misused. I believe, and I think that Berry would concur, that this issue of context is an issue of teleology. The relation of part to whole is fundamentally one of order to the end (*telos*).⁹ Thus when what is in reality a part is not recognized as such, that is, it is not seen in its proper context, then it is destroyed by the loss of its true end, the true source of its purpose and importance.

Let us consider Berry’s understanding of the demise of agriculture. Without purporting to give an adequate summary of his critique of contemporary agriculture, I think that we can capture much of his position in this point: business corporations have replaced families as the primary agents of agriculture, and as a result monetary profit has replaced the health of the family and community as the end of agriculture. When farming is done in the context of a family (“Once, of course, the idea of a farm included the idea of a household . . .”),¹⁰ farming itself tends to be, and to be seen as, a part of a larger whole: the life of the family and of the broader community. When farming is done by a business corporation, it tends to be reduced to a means of profit. Here farming is not a part of a larger whole, or at least not a part of the whole to which it naturally belongs. As a result, farming becomes redefined, “to suit the purposes of a businessman.”¹¹ Berry sketches some consequences:

The consumer wants food to be as cheap as possible. The producer wants it to be as expensive as possible. Both want it to involve as little labor as possible. And so the standards of cheapness and convenience,

⁷ Berry, *Way of Ignorance*, 100.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁹ See the prologue to Aquinas’s *Commentary on Aristotle’s Politics*. “And nature in its activity goes from simple things to composite things, so that what is most composite in things produced by natural activity is complete and whole and the end of other things, as is evident in every whole in relation to its parts.”

¹⁰ Berry, *Unsettling of America*, 31.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

which are irresistibly simplifying and therefore inevitably exploitive, have been substituted for the standard of health (of both people and land), which would enforce consideration of essential complexities.¹²

The word “standards” is important. Standards are determined in view of the end. Rather than the richer end of a wider whole—which end Berry often refers to as the “health” of the human community as well as of the ecosystem¹³—contemporary agricultural science takes the end of agriculture to be quite limited: efficiency, productivity, and ultimately, profit.¹⁴

The problem of making profit the governing end is not limited to agriculture. Berry observes in *The Gift of Good Land*:

For complex reasons, our culture allows “economy” to mean only “money economy.” It equates success and even goodness with monetary profit because it lacks any other standard of measurement.¹⁵

This second sentence is a very strong assertion. Berry holds that the modern, capitalist economic environment has a powerful, negative influence on human thought and action. “The most forceful context of every habitat now is the industrial economy that is doing damage to all habitats.”¹⁶ Whether or not it is true that our culture lacks any other standard of measurement, it seems to me that we can say this: When monetary profit becomes the primary goal, explicitly or implicitly, of practically all economic endeavor, it likewise tends to become the regnant standard of judgment outside of economics, indeed, in life itself.

II. Berry’s Solution: Husbandry

In looking at Berry’s critique, I moved from his more general cultural critique to the specific analysis of agriculture. In looking briefly at his solution I will do the opposite, starting with the more specific husbandry of agriculture and moving to a more general husbandry.

Farming done by those whose first thought is of family and home is different from that done by business corporations. In the notion of husbandry, one and the same agent looks to the household *and* looks to the

¹² Ibid., 32.

¹³ E.g., *Way of Ignorance*, 124. Berry’s notion of “health” needs to be taken in a broad sense, one that transcends simple bodily flourishing, as is clear in his speaking of the health of communities.

¹⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 118, “... though the aim of science, more often than not, is to connect capital with profit.”

¹⁵ Wendell Berry, *The Gift of Good Land* (New York: North Point Press, 1995), xiii.

¹⁶ Berry, *Way of Ignorance*, 76.

farm. Indeed, this agent looks to the latter *because* of the former. Farming is a rich *part*, of a broader and richer *whole*, the “health” of a family.

Husbandry pertains first to the household; it connects the farm to the household. It is an art wedded to the art of housewifery. To husband is to use with care, to keep, to save, to make last, to conserve. Old usage tells us that there is a husbandry also of the land, of the soil, of the domestic plants and animals—obviously because of the importance of these things to the household.¹⁷

Berry is suggesting that farming pursued in the context of the household is more apt to be true farming, as it were, since the agents of the farming are specifically motivated by the health of family and land.¹⁸

Berry addresses the alienation of household and farm in *The Unsettling of America*. “The understanding of kindly use in agriculture must encompass both farm and household, for the mutuality of influence between them is profound.”¹⁹ When the determinative end of the farm’s economy is the economy of the household, the farm itself naturally is the object of a unique solicitude and preserving care. But when the office of directing the farm is separated from the office of directing the household, competition tends to replace collaboration. The household becomes largely consumptive, and the farm primarily productive. And as quoted above: “The consumer wants food to be as cheap as possible. The producer wants it to be as expensive as possible. Both want it to involve as little labor as possible.”²⁰

One might ask: But is Berry’s suggestion of husbandry for the renewal of agriculture as simple as: restore the family farm? It goes without saying that “families” can be in the business of agri-business. But if by “family farm” we mean a farm united to a household by the care of persons who look first to the health of family, land, and broader community, I think we can affirm that for Berry restoring such farms is the heart of the renewal of agriculture. At the same time, Berry is keenly aware that farming is not done in a vacuum. The renewal of agriculture will go hand-in-hand with a renewal of husbandry in a broader sense. When Berry says that the renewal of agriculture will “require us to accept again, and more competently than before”²¹ the true ends of agriculture, it is clear that the “us” is not just farmers.

¹⁷ Ibid., 96–97.

¹⁸ I omit a consideration of the specifics of how such farming is different.

¹⁹ Berry, *Unsettling of America*, 31.

²⁰ Ibid., 32.

²¹ Berry, *Way of Ignorance*, 103.

Husbandry is just such a competent acceptance of true ends. It is the vision and acceptance of health of the community as giving form and meaning both to agriculture and to other parts within the whole. In other words, husbandry in the broader sense looks to the true good of family and community, and it takes from there the principles of, among other things, all economic activity. This broader husbandry brings about societal conditions in which the farmer's husbandry can grow and thrive. Inasmuch as husbandry is an art that looks to the good of that which is husbanded, the practitioner of husbandry tends to be one who habitually looks beyond his own private good or gain.

In conclusion then regarding Berry's notion of husbandry, we are dealing here with a solution that is fundamentally moral. To restore husbandry is most of all to change our desires. "The corruption of community," writes Berry, "has its source in the corruption of character."²² Likewise, the restoration of community, and the good life that is truly lived only in community, can come only through a reformation of character, that is, the reformation of desire. In the title essay of *The Unsettling of America*, following a critique of the American attitude toward work and life itself, Berry concludes: "To see these things is to come up against the question: Then what is desirable?"²³ Indeed: what is desirable? It seems to me that to practice husbandry, even imperfectly, is precisely to practice desiring well. It is to practice looking to what is naturally first: the good life of family, and the broader community, and then desiring all else in that context.

III. The Aristotelian/Thomistic Tradition: *Oeconomica*

Aristotle's understanding of *oeconomica*, or the art of household management, can serve as a basis for Berry's understanding of husbandry, as well as his critique of the modern economic "context." We will examine some basic principles of *oeconomica*, following Thomas Aquinas's understanding as found in his commentary on Aristotle's *Politics*. We will see first how wealth-getting, including farming, is intrinsically tied to the household. Then in an examination of "moneymaking" we will see how seeking monetary profit without limit threatens the household, the primary locus of economic activity.

Oeconomica names the art of governing the household. The end or goal of this art is the good life of the family community.²⁴ A foundational principle is that the one governing, the *paterfamilias*, looks to the common

²² Berry, *Unsettling of America* 19.

²³ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁴ "... since the household manager has the good life of its members as his goal (*finis*).” Aquinas, *In pol.* I.8.4. *Commentary on Aristotle's Politics*, trans. Richard

good, a good beyond his own private good. The common good of the family community is the good life of a whole that has many parts. This good life is primarily a “spiritual” affair, in the sense that it most of all consists in living the virtues—both moral and intellectual. While primarily a spiritual affair, it is by no means exclusively so. Since *oeconomica* first of all concerns the good human life, it is an art that must be firmly rooted in an understanding of human nature and its true flourishing. Thus, because *oeconomica* is primarily concerned with spiritual goods, it is also essentially concerned with bodily goods.²⁵

For Aristotle and Aquinas the *paterfamilias*, or the one who practices *oeconomica*, practices or oversees the various arts concerning material possessions precisely because his end is the virtuous human life. This conception of the end of *oeconomica* is determinative of how the realm of wealth-getting²⁶ is conceived. There are two fundamentally distinct kinds of wealth-getting: what we can call natural wealth-getting (*possessiva naturalis*), and moneymaking (*pecuniativa*). To distinguish these kinds of wealth-getting, it is helpful first to distinguish between natural, or true wealth, and artificial wealth. Though the distinction between true wealth and money may seem obvious, the manner in which Aquinas distinguishes them is instructive. He says:

... true wealth consists of such things as alleviate the needs of nature. And so these things are true wealth because they take away need and make their possessors self-sufficient, namely, to have enough to live well.²⁷

Regan (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2007), 57. All quotations will be from this translation.

It should be noted that the good life of the family is only properly conceived when understood in relation to broader communities to which the family belongs, which is why *oeconomica* is subordinate to the art of politics. See Aquinas's *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: Dumb Ox Books, 1993), Bk. I, lect 1, no. 6 (on the division of moral philosophy into three parts, one of which is *oeconomica*) and nos. 25–30 (on the primacy of *politica*).

²⁵ It seems to me that this is crucial; it is a principle that stands at the center of all true culture. The material realm has its greatest importance precisely from its place in service of things spiritual. It is no accident that usually those persons, communities, and cultures that believe in the primacy of the spiritual are the ones who steward the material world, beginning with their own bodies, and likewise practice the fine arts, in a most exemplary fashion.

²⁶ To discover how Aristotle and Aquinas think about what today is considered the realm of “economics” we need especially to turn to this part—wealth-getting—of *oeconomica*.

²⁷ Aquinas, *In pol.* I.6.10; p. 48.

There are several key inter-related notions here: nature, needs, and living well (*bene-vivendum*). Nature for Aristotle and Aquinas is that fundamental standard, that given in reality that is a foundation for all judgments regarding the human good. Nature has certain determinate needs; and these needs are determined in relation to the end: the end of *living well*, or, the virtuous life. True wealth, again, consists of those things that can actually fulfill the needs of nature, these needs understood in relation to the virtuous life.²⁸

Money, or artificial wealth, which was invented to facilitate the exchange of real wealth,²⁹ cannot itself fulfill the needs of nature.³⁰ And thus Aristotle and Aquinas unabashedly conclude: "Therefore it is clear . . . that those who abound in things necessary for life are in truth richer than those who abound in money."³¹ This is not, it should be stressed, an assertion of the primacy of spiritual goods, that is, those with spiritual goods are richer than those with money. The point pertains to *material* wealth: true wealth is an abundance of those real things that are *needed for human life*.³²

We can now return to distinguishing two kinds of wealth-getting: natural wealth-getting and moneymaking. The art of natural wealth-getting is the art of securing a certain amount of natural wealth: the amount that is needed, according to human nature, for the good life. Aristotle and Aquinas consistently emphasize that this amount is limited by nature. As a result they call this art a "natural" art, Aquinas explaining that by it "a person acquires what nature made for the person."³³

Now farming (*agricultura*) is a part of natural wealth-getting; the other part with which we are not concerned is called *praeditiva*, which especially

²⁸ While the "needs" of nature are first of all determined by the bodily aspects of human nature, the natural ordination of things bodily to things spiritual provides the fuller context in which bodily needs are determined. Put otherwise, what the *human* body *needs* is ultimately determined in view of the virtuous life, the life to which human nature as a whole is ordained. One example might illustrate this point. If there is a natural obligation to offer some portion of the fruits of the earth in the worship of God, then this has bearing upon the determination of how much of these fruits a man "needs" to produce.

²⁹ *In pol.* I.7.6; p. 52.

³⁰ "And so such wealth is not true wealth, since it does not satisfy the desire of human beings." *In pol.* I.6.10; p. 48.

³¹ *In pol.* I.7.11; p. 54.

³² In my experience, the interesting thing is this: it is usually those who either explicitly or implicitly hold the primacy of spiritual goods who accept and, more importantly, live this point.

³³ *In pol.* I.6.8; p. 47. We might also note that the term "natural" points to a *determinatio ad unum* that is from nature.

includes hunting and other forms of acquiring animals for food. Aquinas writes in his commentary:

Then he concludes from the foregoing that a natural kind of acquiring property . . . is part of household management [*oeconomica*] insofar as we call anything subordinate a part. For the natural kind of acquiring property is subordinate to both household management and the political community. And this is so because statesmen and household managers need to provide that things in reserve for the necessities of life and the benefit of both the household and the political community exist or are acquired.³⁴

Farming, then, an art within natural wealth-getting, is naturally a part of *oeconomica*. It is intrinsically ordered to *oeconomica*. Such an ordering, far from being an oppressive servitude, is precisely what gives form, meaning, and dignity to farming. Farming, as Berry observed, belongs to the household.

By a brief examination now of the other kind of wealth-getting, that is, moneymaking, we will find the principles to understand the perennial possibility of the demise, not only of farming, but of the broader social and economic structure. There are two kinds of moneymaking, and the difference between them makes all the difference. In short, moneymaking1 is an art of acquiring money precisely so as to assist and enhance what natural wealth-getting does, unto the end of satisfying limited human *needs*.³⁵ In other words, there is a moneymaking wherein money is sought only for the sake of need. Moneymaking2, associated with the merchant and the trader,³⁶ is an art that seeks to multiply money itself. This art, says Aquinas, is concerned with making “the greatest profit.”³⁷ Aristotle and Aquinas do not consider this art to be in itself evil. Yet they are unequivocal in emphasizing the following: Unlike *oeconomica*, and the subordinate arts of natural wealth-getting and moneymaking1, moneymaking2 has no *natural* end, is *un-limited*, and therefore is intrinsically dangerous.³⁸ The danger consists especially in this: those who run house-

³⁴ *In pol.* I.6.9; p. 47.

³⁵ See *In pol.* I 8.3; p. 56. Moneymaking1 is also called natural (8.9) and necessary (8.6).

³⁶ In the commentary on the *Politics*, Aquinas uses the term “*campsores*”—merchants. See *In pol.* I 8.3; p. 57. In *ST I–II*, q. 77, a. 4, quoted in a footnote below, Aquinas speaks of “*negotiatores*”—traders. It would seem that bankers fit here too.

³⁷ *In pol.* I.7.7; p. 52.

³⁸ A central text in Aquinas is *ST I–II*, q. 77, a. 4, in which he distinguishes between two kinds of “trading,” the second being identical to what I have called Money-making2: “The other kind of exchange is either that of money for money, or of

holds may not see the difference between the two kinds of moneymaking, and so they are drawn to seek money without limit (moneymaking2), in lieu of seeking only the money that is *needed* for the household (moneymaking1). Aquinas explains:

In household moneymaking, the acquisition of money is directed to another end, namely, governance of the household, but in commercial moneymaking [moneymaking2] . . . increasing money is the end. And so, since commerce [moneymaking2] is similar to household management, it seems to some household managers that what belongs to merchants, namely, to be zealous to maintain and increase money without limit, is their duty.³⁹

Since the household does need money, and thus moneymaking1 has a natural place in household management, it is easy for the household manager to slip into the practice of seeking money without limit. When this happens, the household manager begins to misunderstand and mispractice his own art, *oeconomica*.⁴⁰

But the danger of moneymaking2 consists in more than just its similarity—both seek money—with moneymaking1. Aquinas points to another

any commodity for money, not on account of the necessities of life, but for profit, and this kind of exchange, properly speaking, regards tradesmen, according to the Philosopher (*Polit.* i, 3). The former kind of exchange is commendable because it supplies a natural need: but the latter is justly deserving of blame, because, considered in itself, it satisfies the greed for gain, which knows no limit and tends to infinity. Hence trading, considered in itself, has a certain debasement attaching thereto, in so far as, by its very nature, it does not imply a virtuous or necessary end.” It is important to note that Aquinas proceeds to explain how such trading *can* be ordered to a virtuous or necessary end. But the distinction must not be missed between that which by its nature is ordered to a good end and that which is not. And further, in the case of the second kind of trading, or moneymaking2, its very unlimitedness—its tending to infinity—appeals to human concupiscence. Aquinas will make this point again in the texts quoted below from his commentary on the *Politics*.

³⁹ In *pol.* I.8.3; pp. 56–57. I have revised the translation.

⁴⁰ Aquinas’s point here brings to mind the account of Berry and so many others of the pressures brought to bear in the twentieth century on family farmers. When those around us assume as their fundamental “economic” approach that of moneymaking2, the art of multiplying money without limit, it is very difficult not to see this as the norm, as what we are supposed to do. One thinks of Andrew Lytle’s “The Hind Tit,” in *I’ll Take My Stand* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 204–5, speaking of industrialized society’s influence on farmers: “Through its philosophy of Progress it is committing a mortal sin to persuade farmers that they can grow wealthy by adopting its methods. A farm is not a place to grow wealthy; it is a place to grow corn.”

key piece of the picture when he notes that *moral weakness* makes the household manager especially susceptible to the aforementioned problem of mistaking one moneymaking for the other.

... the reason for this disposition, namely, that household managers seek to increase money without limit, is because human beings are eager to live howsoever, not to live well, which is to live virtuously. For, if they were to strive to live virtuously, they would be content with things sufficient to sustain nature. But since they omit this effort and want to live according to their own will, each of them strives to acquire things with which to satisfy the individual's desire. And because the *desire* of human beings [as opposed to their needs] has no limit, they desire without limit things whereby they can satisfy their desire.⁴¹

Here we have a significant contrast. The effort to live virtuously yields contentment: contentment with limited wealth, or those things that are "necessary."⁴² On the other hand, the desire to live according to one's own will leads to unlimited, and therefore insatiable, desires. And money-making², given its want of any limit, is especially attractive, indeed *tempting*, because of these unlimited desires that fallen humans tend to have.

Aristotle and Aquinas seem to be keenly aware of an ever-present danger that those who run households will seek to multiply money without limit, thereby undermining the proper exercise of *oconomica*.⁴³ It goes without saying that these thinkers recognize a place in society for moneymaking². At the same time, it is clear that for them the household, the center of economic activity, exercises what should be the dominant approach⁴⁴ toward money—seeking it for the fulfillment of need alone. If *household* managers do not act like household managers, then the family and household will not be the center of economic activity, even if most of those

⁴¹ *In pol.* I.8.3; p. 57 (emphasis added). It should be noted that "sufficient to sustain nature" should not be taken to mean "sufficient to keep the body alive," but rather "sufficient to live the fully human good life, to flourish."

⁴² Again, what is "necessary" for human life is understood in view of the full flourishing of human nature.

⁴³ Aquinas, expounding Aristotle, after giving the reasons that household managers begin to seek money without limit, proceeds to give "three abuses" that follow. The third is that "they abuse their faculties (i.e., their virtues, skills, or position) in ways contrary to their nature" (p. 57). In explaining by example he notes: "But some use military and medical skills to make money [i.e., to acquire money], subordinating such skills to money as the end to which all other things need to be directed. And so Eccl. 10:19 says: 'All things yield to money'" (p. 58).

⁴⁴ One fruit of its dominance would be that commerce and banking, for instance, would be truly in the service of household economies.

pursuing wealth are members of families. In such a situation, not only are farms alienated from the home; economy itself is alienated from the home.

IV. Conclusion

Here is a summary of what I have seen in the writing of Wendell Berry regarding our topic:

1. Farming needs to be practiced in the right context and for the right end: namely, in the context of the family, for the end of the health of the human community and the environment.
2. Husbandry is farming in the right context and for the right end.
3. Husbandry, as a broader art to be practiced by all in various ways, looks to the health of the community, and in light of that end, uses, conserves, and protects all that is within its care.
4. Husbandry names an art with a virtuous attitude; thus, to restore husbandry is most of all to change our desires.
5. Our biggest problem is that we do not desire well; that is, we do not desire, as end, the health of the community.
6. A major result of this problem, as well as a major cause and perpetrator of this problem, is an economy characterized primarily by its ordination to monetary profit.

Now every one of these points is either explicitly or implicitly in the thought of Aristotle and Aquinas.⁴⁵ In commenting on Aristotle's *Politics*, Aquinas says that farming is a part of *oeconomica*, the art by which the household manager directs the family community to *bene vivendum*, true human flourishing. If the household manager desires and thus strives toward the truly good human life, the virtuous life, then this true end assumes the place of standard and source-of-order in *all* that the family does. How the family pursues wealth is a major aspect of the proper ordering of family life. And how the family pursues wealth should be the dominant and determinative economic force in society. Aristotle and Aquinas

⁴⁵ I do not assert that the worldviews of Berry, Aristotle, and Aquinas are at root the same, though I do believe there is deep commonality. More specifically, as regards our topic, Berry does not, to my knowledge, speak of virtue as the end of community life. At the same time, I think his notion of "health" has more in common with virtue than may be immediately apparent. The point of this essay has been to emphasize a couple of shared themes in the work of these thinkers, and as such I do not attend to any differences.

see an economy wherein parents, acting *as parents*, drive the economic project. Here the pursuit of money is limited according to needs, as understood in light of the end of virtue. Again, in Aquinas's words: "if they were to strive to live virtuously, they would be content with things sufficient to sustain nature."⁴⁶

Berry says, "A creature can live only in a context that favors its life."⁴⁷ Aristotle and Aquinas hold that the context that most favors true human life is a community where the virtuous life is consciously accepted as the most central "health" and as the true "standard of living." Among other things, such conscious acceptance, such husbandry, gives proper form and limit to farming, and economics.

Looking to the future Berry remarks:

Putting the pieces back together is going to be slow work. The pieces can be scattered in a hurry merely by indifference or neglect or violence. But the same forces that scattered them cannot put them back together. For that, we are going to need the hope and the purpose of a coherent community, clearly articulated and steadily borne in mind. And we are going to have to resign ourselves to patience and small steps.⁴⁸

Bracing, realistic, and hopeful words.

N·V

⁴⁶ *In pol.* I.8.3; p. 57.

⁴⁷ Berry, *Way of Ignorance*, 75.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.