

The Human Good is the Souls' Activity that Expresses Virtue for "Political science spends most of its pains on making the citizens to be a certain character, viz. good and capable of noble acts" [1099: 27-32].

I. Prolegomena

Book 1:

The good is that which all things aim (1)

Determine the highest good since everything is subordinate to it; the highest good is political science (2)

Generalize political science principles by well educated and experienced men since political science is not precise (3)

Among well educated people contend that happiness (i.e., living well & doing well) is the chief political aim; among others it changes: pleasure, wealth, or honor. Thus, only the best people should determine since it is those who have the best (4).

Three conceptions of happiness based on the lives people live:

(a) vulgar lead a life of gratification & identify happiness with pleasure (slavish in their tastes) but this is a life suited for animals; (b) cultivated people live an active life & identify happiness with honor but this secondary to goodness; (c) the contemplative life (5).

The Platonic idea of Good cannot be evaluated empirically (e.g., how can a weaver benefit by knowing this good itself); it is an empty pursuit [1096-20] (6)

The end of actions are its goods; Some goods are for the sake of other goods; an end pursued of itself is the only one complete without reservation; happiness is the only complete end (7).

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Action of the soul that expresses reason is distinctive of human beings; the excellent man's function is to express reason well (8).

Though happiness could be god-given, it "comes as a result of excellence and some process of learning or training, to be among the most god-like things; for that which is the prize end of excellence seem to be the best thing and something godlike and blessed" [1099-10-15] (9).

Excellent activities determine happiness or not. A happy man will never become miserable because he always makes the best of circumstances and will not do a bad deed; he is completely virtuous (10).

Activities of people impact the lives of others including both the living and dead but in different degrees (11).

Happiness or virtue is more than praised, it is blessed because it is god-like. It is also a first principle "for it is for the sake of this that we all do everything else, and the first principle and cause of good, is, we claim, something prized and divine" [11021-4] (12).

Since virtue and happiness is an activity of soul, we must study the soul; the soul possesses an irrational and rational element [1102:26-27]. The virtue of the nutritive part of the human soul is shared with all living being and is not specifically concerned with reason; the virtue of character pertaining to the appetitive part of the soul are the results of obedience to reason. Excellence is divided into two kinds: (a) intellectual: philosophic wisdom and understanding and (b) moral: practical wisdom being intellectual, liberality and temperance moral [1103:4-10] (13).

II. Virtues of Character:

Book 2:

Excellence is of two kinds: intellectual & moral. Intellectual excellence is by birth and teaching (requires experience & time) and moral excellence comes about as a result of habit. Moral excellence does not arise in us by nature; we are adapted by nature to receive them & are made perfect by habit; we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts [11031]. Habits distinguish between good & bad constitutions & between good & bad states. Habits are formed in formidable years of our lives (1).

Character is either promoted by discipline or destroyed by being undisciplined. Courage and temperance are two examples. Abstaining from pleasure we become temperate; "by being habituated to despise things that are terrible and to stand our ground against them we become brave" [1103:27-1104:1-3]. (2).

Pleasure and Pain develops or diminishes Character Virtues. A temperate man enjoys abstinence itself. In fact, every action is accompanied by pleasure or pain. Reasons of pleasure and pain that men become bad. We measure our actions by pleasure and pain. It is hard to fight pleasure. "The whole concern both of excellence and of political science is with pleasure and pains; for the man who uses these well will be good, he who uses them badly bad" [1105:10-13] (3).

It seems paradoxical to demand that we become virtuous by performing virtuous actions ("for if men do just & temperate acts, they are already just & temperate" [1105:18-20]). The solution is that we must be in a right state to produce a virtuous act; we must produce the act as the just do them. Actions are not enough, we must have the disposition (4).

Virtue or excellence must be one of three kinds arising in the soul: (a) passions/feelings: appetite, anger, fear, confidence, envy, joy love, hatred, longing, emulation, pity...the feelings accompanied by pleasure of pain; (b) Capacities/faculties: being capable of a feeling like anger; (c) states: what we have when we have feelings such anger (strong or weak). Virtues are not feelings or capacities because they are not objects of praise or blame, nor are they the product of decisions. Virtues are the states of the soul (5).

Virtues causes the possessor to be in a good state & performs his functions well (e.g., horse). Just as science produces its product well when it pursues the moderate approach between two extremes (too little or too much) (e.g., athlete), so is virtue; it is a state concerned with choice between the extremes (6).

The Virtue of character aims at the means between the two extremes. Courage is the means between feelings of fear and confidence; temperance is the means between pleasure and pain; there is mean between wastefulness and selfishness. There are a number of others they are enunciated (e.g., money, proper pride, ambition, anger, conversation, righteousness (7-9)).

Books III-IV:

The Virtues & Responsibilities:

Virtue pertains only to voluntary feelings & actions. We forgive what is done non-voluntarily; what is forced by something external is non-voluntary and everything done by reason of ignorance is non-voluntary. What is forced by something is external is involuntary. What is forced by circumstances is mixed because it is done willingly & is not something the person would do [1110:10]. What one is doing it to; what the result will be; this is seemingly different from actions done in ignorance (as when one is drunk); one does not know what is right or wrong (1).

Choice is voluntary but not identical to it. Children & other animals act voluntarily but do not make choices. Choices is not appetite, emotion, wish, or belief; choices involve reason & thought (2).

Decision is the outcome of rational deliberation. We deliberate about what is up to us; it is done when it is unclear which action should be undertaken; we deliberate about the means by which we may bring about our ends "We deliberate not about ends but about what contributes to ends" [1112:12] (3)

We wish for an end, whose achievement is the goal of deliberation. The good is not identical to what is wished, since one can wish incorrectly. The apparent good is not identical to what is wished, since then nothing would be good by nature. The excellent person wishes the real good, while the base person wishes the apparent good. (4).

If a person's wishes follow from his character, they seem to be involuntary; but we praise & blame people for what they wish; character is acquired willingly though it might not be shed willingly. So people are responsible for their ends; actions and states are not voluntary in the same way "for we are masters of our own actions from the beginning right to the end, if we know the particular facts, but though we control the beginning of our states the gradual progress is not obvious, any more than it is in illnesses; because it was in our power, however, to act in this way or not in this way, therefore the states are voluntary." [1114] (5)

He who is called brave is one who is fearless in face of a noble death (6) The end of courage is noble (7).