

XXI. Of Private and Public Good

(1) To resume private or particular good, it falleth into the division of good active and passive; for this difference of good (not unlike to that which amongst the Romans was expressed in the familiar or household terms of *promus* and *condus*) is formed also in all things, and is best disclosed in the two several appetites in creatures; the one to preserve or continue themselves, and the other to dilate or multiply themselves, whereof the latter seemeth to be the worthier; for in nature the heavens, which are the more worthy, are the agent, and the earth, which is the less worthy, is the patient. In the pleasures of living creatures, that of generation is greater than that of food. In divine doctrine, *beatius est dare quam accipere*. And in life, there is no man's spirit so soft, but esteemeth the effecting of somewhat that he hath fixed in his desire, more than sensuality, which priority of the active good is much upheld by the consideration of our estate to be mortal and exposed to fortune. For if we might have a perpetuity and certainty in our pleasures, the state of them would advance their price. But when we see it is but *magni aestimamus mori tardius*, and *ne glorieris de crastino, nescis partum diei*, it maketh us to desire to have somewhat secured and exempted from time, which are only our deeds and works; as it is said, *Opera eorum sequuntur eos*. The pre-eminence likewise of this active good is upheld by the affection which is natural in man towards variety and proceeding, which in the pleasures of the sense, which is the principal part of passive good, can have no great latitude. *Cogita quamdiu eadem feceris; cibus, somnus, ludus per hunc circulum curritur; mori velle non tantum fortis, aut miser, aut prudens, sed etiam fastidiosus potest*. But in enterprises, pursuits, and purposes of life, there is much variety; whereof men are sensible with pleasure in their inceptions, progressions, recoils, reintegrations, approaches and attainings to their ends. So as it was well said, *Vita sine proposito languida et vaga est*. Neither hath this active good an identity with the good of society, though in some cases it hath an incidence into it. For although it do many times bring forth acts of beneficence, yet it is with a respect private to a man's own power, glory, amplification, continuance; as appeareth plainly, when it findeth a contrary subject. For that gigantic state of mind which possesseth the troublers of the world, such as was Lucius Sylla and infinite other in smaller model, who would have all men happy or unhappy as they were their friends or enemies, and would give form to the world, according to their own humours (which is the true theomachy), pretendeth and aspireth to active good, though it recedeth furthest from good of society, which we have determined to be the greater.

(2) To resume passive good, it receiveth a subdivision of conservative and effective. For let us take a brief review of that which we have said: we have spoken first of the good of society, the intention whereof embraceth the form of human nature, whereof we are members and portions, and not our own proper and individual form; we have spoken of active good, and supposed it as a part of private and particular good. And rightly, for there is impressed upon all things a triple desire or appetite proceeding from love to themselves: one of preserving and continuing their form; another of advancing and perfecting their form; and a third of multiplying and extending their form upon other things: whereof the multiplying, or signature of it upon other things, is that which we handled by the name of active good. So as there remaineth the conserving of it, and perfecting or raising of it, which latter is the highest degree of passive good. For to preserve in state is the less, to preserve with advancement is the greater. So in man,

“‘Igneus est ollis vigor, et cælestis origo.’”

His approach or assumption to divine or angelical nature is the perfection of his form; the error or false imitation of which good is that which is the tempest of human life; while man, upon the instinct of an advancement, formal and essential, is carried to seek an advancement local. For as those which are sick, and find no remedy, do tumble up and down and change place, as if by a remove local they could obtain a remove internal, so is it with men in ambition, when failing of the mean to exalt their nature, they are in a perpetual estimation to exalt their place. So then passive good is, as was said, either conservative or perfective.

(3) To resume the good of conservation or comfort, which consisteth in the fruition of that which is agreeable to our natures; it seemeth to be most pure and natural of pleasures, but yet the softest and lowest. And this also receiveth a difference, which hath neither been well judged of, nor well inquired; for the good of fruition or contentment is placed either in the sincereness of the fruition, or in the quickness and vigour of it; the one superinduced by equality, the other by vicissitude; the one having less mixture of evil, the other more impression of good. Whether of these is the greater good is a question controverted; but whether man's nature may not be capable of both is a question not inquired.

(4) The former question being debated between Socrates and a sophist, Socrates placing felicity in an equal and constant peace of mind, and the sophist in much desiring and much enjoying, they fell from argument to ill words: the sophist saying that Socrates' felicity was the felicity of a block or stone; and Socrates saying that the sophist's felicity was the felicity of one that had the itch, who did nothing but itch and scratch. And both these opinions do not want their supports. For the opinion of Socrates is much upheld by the general consent even of the epicures themselves, that virtue beareth a great part in felicity; and if so, certain it is, that virtue hath more use in clearing perturbations than in compassing desires. The sophist's opinion is much favoured by the assertion we last spake of, that good of advancement is greater than good of simple preservation; because every obtaining a desire hath a show of advancement, as motion though in a circle hath a show of progression.

(5) But the second question, decided the true way, maketh the former superfluous. For can it be doubted, but that there are some who take more pleasure in enjoying pleasures than some other, and yet, nevertheless, are less troubled with the loss or leaving of them? So as this same, *Non uti ut non appetas, non appetere ut non metuas, sunt animi pusilli et diffidentis*. And it seemeth to me that most of the doctrines of the philosophers are more fearful and cautious than the nature of things requireth. So have they increased the fear of death in offering to cure it. For when they would have a man's whole life to be but a discipline or preparation to die, they must needs make men think that it is a terrible enemy, against whom there is no end of preparing. Better saith the poet:—

“Qui finem vitæ extremum inter munera ponat
Naturæ.”

So have they sought to make men's minds too uniform and harmonical, by not breaking them sufficiently to contrary motions; the reasons whereof I suppose to be, because they themselves were men dedicated to a private, free, and unapplied course of life. For as we see, upon the lute or like instrument, a ground, though it be sweet and have show of many changes, yet breaketh not the hand to such strange and hard stops and passages, as a set song or voluntary; much after the same manner was the diversity between a philosophical and civil life. And, therefore, men are to imitate the wisdom of

jewellers: who, if there be a grain, or a cloud, or an ice which may be ground forth without taking too much of the stone, they help it; but if it should lessen and abate the stone too much, they will not meddle with it: so ought men so to procure serenity as they destroy not magnanimity.

(6) Having therefore deduced the good of man which is private and particular, as far as seemeth fit, we will now return to that good of man which respecteth and beholdeth society, which we may term duty; because the term of duty is more proper to a mind well framed and disposed towards others, as the term of virtue is applied to a mind well formed and composed in itself; though neither can a man understand virtue without some relation to society, nor duty without an inward disposition. This part may seem at first to pertain to science civil and politic; but not if it be well observed. For it concerneth the regiment and government of every man over himself, and not over others. And as in architecture the direction of framing the posts, beams, and other parts of building, is not the same with the manner of joining them and erecting the building; and in mechanicals, the direction how to frame an instrument or engine is not the same with the manner of setting it on work and employing it; and yet, nevertheless, in expressing of the one you incidently express the aptness towards the other; so the doctrine of conjugation of men in society differeth from that of their conformity thereunto.

(7) This part of duty is subdivided into two parts: the common duty of every man, as a man or member of a state; the other, the respective or special duty of every man in his profession, vocation, and place. The first of these is extant and well laboured, as hath been said. The second likewise I may report rather dispersed than deficient; which manner of dispersed writing in this kind of argument I acknowledge to be best. For who can take upon him to write of the proper duty, virtue, challenge, and right of every several vocation, profession, and place? For although sometimes a looker on may see more than a gamester, and there be a proverb more arrogant than sound, "That the vale best discovereth the hill;" yet there is small doubt but that men can write best and most really and materially in their own professions; and that the writing of speculative men of active matter for the most part doth seem to men of experience, as Phormio's argument of the wars seemed to Hannibal, to be but dreams and dotage. Only there is one vice which accompanieth them that write in their own professions, that they magnify them in excess. But generally it were to be wished (as that which would make learning indeed solid and fruitful) that active men would or could become writers.

(8) In which kind I cannot but mention, *honoris causa*, your Majesty's excellent book touching the duty of a king; a work richly compounded of divinity, morality, and policy, with great aspersion of all other arts; and being in some opinion one of the most sound and healthful writings that I have read: not distempered in the heat of invention, nor in the coldness of negligence; not sick of dizziness, as those are who leese themselves in their order, nor of convulsions, as those which cramp in matters impertinent; not savouring of perfumes and paintings, as those do who seek to please the reader more than nature beareth; and chiefly well disposed in the spirits thereof, being agreeable to truth and apt for action; and far removed from that natural infirmity, whereunto I noted those that write in their own professions to be subject—which is, that they exalt it above measure. For your Majesty hath truly described, not a king of Assyria or Persia in their extern glory, but a Moses or a David, pastors of their people. Neither can I ever leese out of my remembrance what I heard your Majesty in the same sacred spirit of government deliver in a great cause of judicature, which was, "That kings ruled by their laws, as God did by the laws of nature; and ought as rarely to put in use their supreme prerogative as God doth His power of working miracles." And yet notwithstanding in your book of a free monarchy, you do well give men to understand, that you know the plenitude of the power and right of a king, as well as the circle of his office and duty. Thus have I presumed to allege this excellent writing of your Majesty, as a prime or eminent example of tractates concerning special and respective duties; wherein

I should have said as much, if it had been written a thousand years since. Neither am I moved with certain courtly decencies, which esteem it flattery to praise in presence. No, it is flattery to praise in absence—that is, when either the virtue is absent, or the occasion is absent; and so the praise is not natural, but forced, either in truth or in time. But let Cicero be read in his oration *pro Marcello*, which is nothing but an excellent table of Cæsar’s virtue, and made to his face; besides the example of many other excellent persons, wiser a great deal than such observers; and we will never doubt, upon a full occasion, to give just praises to present or absent.

(9) But to return; there belongeth further to the handling of this part, touching the duties of professions and vocations, a relative or opposite, touching the frauds, cautels, impostures, and vices of every profession, which hath been likewise handled; but how? rather in a satire and cynically, than seriously and wisely; for men have rather sought by wit to deride and traduce much of that which is good in professions, than with judgment to discover and sever that which is corrupt. For, as Solomon saith, he that cometh to seek after knowledge with a mind to scorn and censure shall be sure to find matter for his humour, but no matter for his instruction: *Quærenti derisori scientiam ipsa se abscondit, sed studioso fit obviam*. But the managing of this argument with integrity and truth, which I note as deficient, seemeth to me to be one of the best fortifications for honesty and virtue that can be planted. For, as the fable goeth of the basilisk—that if he see you first, you die for it; but if you see him first, he dieth—so is it with deceits and evil arts, which, if they be first espied they leese their life; but if they prevent, they endanger. So that we are much beholden to Machiavel and others, that write what men do, and not what they ought to do. For it is not possible to join serpentine wisdom with the columbine innocency, except men know exactly all the conditions of the serpent; his baseness and going upon his belly, his volubility and lubricity, his envy and sting, and the rest—that is, all forms and natures of evil. For without this, virtue lieth open and unfenced. Nay, an honest man can do no good upon those that are wicked, to reclaim them, without the help of the knowledge of evil. For men of corrupted minds presuppose that honesty groweth out of simplicity of manners, and believing of preachers, schoolmasters, and men’s exterior language. So as, except you can make them perceive that you know the utmost reaches of their own corrupt opinions, they despise all morality. *Non recipit stultus verba prudentiæ, nisi ea dixeris quæ, versantur in corde ejus*.

(10) Unto this part, touching respective duty, doth also appertain the duties between husband and wife, parent and child, master and servant. So likewise the laws of friendship and gratitude, the civil bond of companies, colleges, and politic bodies, of neighbourhood, and all other proportionate duties; not as they are parts of government and society, but as to the framing of the mind of particular persons.

(11) The knowledge concerning good respecting society doth handle it also, not simply alone, but comparatively; whereunto belongeth the weighing of duties between person and person, case and case, particular and public. As we see in the proceeding of Lucius Brutus against his own sons, which was so much extolled, yet what was said?

““Infelix, utcunque ferent ea fata minores.”

So the case was doubtful, and had opinion on both sides. Again, we see when M. Brutus and Cassius invited to a supper certain whose opinions they meant to feel, whether they were fit to be made their associates, and cast forth the question touching the killing of a tyrant being a usurper, they were divided in opinion; some holding that servitude was the extreme of evils, and others that tyranny was

better than a civil war: and a number of the like cases there are of comparative duty. Amongst which that of all others is the most frequent, where the question is of a great deal of good to ensue of a small injustice. Which Jason of Thessalia determined against the truth: *Aliqua sunt injuste facienda, ut multa juste fieri possint*. But the reply is good: *Auctorem præsentis justitiæ habes, sponsorem futuræ non habes*. Men must pursue things which are just in present, and leave the future to the Divine Providence. So then we pass on from this general part touching the exemplar and description of good.

Revision #1

Created 2019-08-13 16:08:04 UTC by Textpedia

Updated 2019-08-13 16:08:30 UTC by Textpedia