

Of Goodness and Goodness Of Nature

I TAKE goodness in this sense, the affecting of the weal of men, which is that the Grecians call philanthropia; and the word humanity (as it is used) is a little too light to express it. Goodness I call the habit, and goodness of nature, the inclination. This of all virtues, and dignities of the mind, is the greatest; being the character of the Deity: and without it, man is a busy, mischievous, wretched thing; no better than a kind of vermin. Goodness answers to the theological virtue, charity, and admits no excess, but error. The desire of power in excess, caused the angels to fall; the desire of knowledge in excess, caused man to fall: but in charity there is no excess; neither can angel, nor man, come in danger by it. The inclination to goodness, is imprinted deeply in the nature of man; insomuch, that if it issue not towards men, it will take unto other living creatures; as it is seen in the Turks, a cruel people, who nevertheless are kind to beasts, and give alms, to dogs and birds; insomuch, as Busbechius reporteth, a Christian boy, in Constantinople, had like to have been stoned, for gagging in a waggishness a long-billed fowl. Errors indeed in this virtue of goodness, or charity, may be committed. The Italians have an ungracious proverb, Tanto buon che val niente: so good, that he is good for nothing. And one of the doctors of Italy, Nicholas Machiavel, had the confidence to put in writing, almost in plain terms, That the Christian faith, had given up good men, in prey to those that are tyrannical and unjust. Which he spake, because indeed there was never law, or sect, or opinion, did so much magnify goodness, as the Christian religion doth. Therefore, to avoid the scandal and the danger both, it is good, to take knowledge of the errors of an habit so excellent. Seek the good of other men, but be not in bondage to their faces or fancies; for that is but facility, or softness; which taketh an honest mind prisoner. Neither give thou AEsop's cock a gem, who would be better pleased, and happier, if he had had a barley-corn. The example of God, teacheth the lesson truly: He sendeth his rain, and maketh his sun to shine, upon the just and unjust; but he doth not rain wealth, nor shine honor and virtues, upon men equally. Common benefits, are to be communicate with all; but peculiar benefits, with choice. And beware how in making the portraiture, thou breakest the pattern. For divinity, maketh the love of ourselves the pattern; the love of our neighbors, but the portraiture. Sell all thou hast, and give it to the poor, and follow me: but, sell not all thou hast, except thou come and follow me; that is, except thou have a vocation, wherein thou mayest do as much good, with little means as with great; for otherwise, in feeding the streams, thou driest the fountain. Neither is there only a habit of goodness, directed by right reason; but there is in some men, even in nature, a disposition towards it; as on the other side, there is a natural malignity. For there be, that in their nature do not affect the good of others. The lighter sort of malignity, turneth but to a crassness, or frowardness, or aptness to oppose, or difficulties, or the like; but the deeper sort, to envy and mere mischief. Such men, in other men's calamities, are, as it were, in season, and are ever on the loading part: not so good as the dogs, that licked Lazarus' sores; but like flies, that are still buzzing upon any thing that is raw; misanthropi, that make it their practice, to bring men to the bough, and yet never a tree for the purpose in their gardens, as Timon had. Such dispositions, are the very errors of human nature; and yet they are the fittest timber, to make great politics of; like to knee timber, that is good for ships, that are ordained to be tossed; but not for building houses, that shall stand firm. The parts and signs of goodness, are many. If a man be gracious and courteous to strangers, it shows he is a citizen of the world, and that his heart is no island, cut off from other lands, but a continent, that joins to them. If he be compassionate towards the afflictions of others, it shows that his heart is like the noble tree, that is wounded itself, when it gives the balm. If he easily pardons, and remits offences, it shows that his mind is planted above injuries; so that he cannot be shot. If he be thankful for small benefits, it shows that he weighs men's minds, and not their trash. But above all, if he have St. Paul's perfection, that he would wish to be anathema from Christ, for the salvation of his brethren, it shows much of a divine nature, and a kind of conformity with Christ himself.

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