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Good and Evil

INTRODUCTION

THE theory of good and evil crosses the boundaries of many sciences or subject matters. It occupies a place in metaphysics. It is of fundamental importance in all the moral sciences—ethics, economics, politics, jurisprudence. It appears in all the descriptive sciences of human behavior, such as psychology and sociology, though there it is of less importance and is differently treated.

The relation of good and evil to truth and falsity, beauty and ugliness, carries the discussion into logic, aesthetics, and the philosophy of art. The true, it has been said, is the good in the sphere of our thinking. So it may be said of the beautiful that it is a quality which things have when they are good as objects of contemplation and love, or good as productions. It is no less possible to understand goodness and beauty in terms of truth, or truth and goodness in terms of beauty.

One aim of analysis, with respect to the true, the good, and the beautiful, is to preserve their distinctness without rendering each less universal. This has been attempted by writers who treat these three terms as having a kind of parallelism in their application to everything, but who also insist that each of the three notions conceives things under a different aspect or in a different relation. "As good adds to being the notion of the desirable," Aquinas writes, "so the true adds a relation to the intellect"; and it is also said that the end "of the appetite, namely good, is in the desirable thing," whereas the end "of the intellect, namely the true, is in the intellect itself."

In that part of theology which goes beyond metaphysics and moral philosophy, we meet with the concept of infinite goodness—the goodness of an infinite being—and we then face the problem of how God's goodness is to be understood by man. The basic terms of moral theology—righteousness and sin, salvation and damnation—are, like virtue and vice, happiness and misery, conceptions of good and evil in the condition of man. (Their special theological significance comes from the fact that they consider the goodness or evil of man in terms of his relation to God.) But the theological problem which is traditionally called "the problem of evil" concerns the whole universe in its relation to the divine perfection. According to Barth, "The problem of ethics contains the secret that man as we know him in this life is an impossibility. *This* man, in God's sight, can only perish."

That problem, which is further discussed in the chapter on WORLD, can be formulated in a number of ways. How are we to understand the existence of evil in a world created by a God who is omnipotent and perfectly good? Since God is good and since everything which happens is within God's power, how can we account for the sin of Satan or the fall of man, with all the evil consequent thereupon, without limiting God's power or absolving the erring creature from responsibility? Can it be said, as Voltaire's Dr. Pangloss over and over again attributes to Leibniz, that this is the best of all possible worlds, if it is also true that this world is far from perfectly good, and if, as certain theologians hold, "God could make other things, or add something to the present creation, and then there would be another and a better universe"?

THE CONTEMPORARY discussion of good and evil draws its terminology from economics rather than theology. The word "value" has

almost replaced "good" and "evil." What in other centuries were the various moral sciences are now treated as parts of the general theory of value. The substitution of "value" for "good" or of "value judgment" for "moral judgment" reflects the influence of economics.

According to Marx, Aristotle "was the first to analyse . . . the form of value." As indicated in the chapter on WEALTH, economics at its origin was treated by Aristotle, along with ethics and politics, as a moral discipline. But he made it subordinate to them because it dealt not with the whole of human welfare, but only with wealth—one of the goods.

In the modern development of economics, the word "goods" comes to have a special significance. It refers to commodities or utilities, as in the phrase "goods and services." More generally, anything which is useful or exchangeable has the character of an economic good. This general sense is usually conveyed by the economist's use of the word "value." According to Adam Smith, "the word *value* . . . has two different meanings, and sometimes expresses the utility of some particular object, and sometimes the power of purchasing other goods which the possessor of that object conveys." These two meanings are distinguished as "value in use" and "value in exchange." Marx accepts this distinction, but thinks that there is a more fundamental notion of value. He thinks it is possible to abstract from both use-value and exchange-value, and to discover the underlying property which gives value to all exchangeable things, namely, that they are products of labor.

With Smith and Marx, as with Aristotle, the theory of value does not deal with every type of good, but only with that type which earlier moralists called "external goods" or "goods of fortune." But more recently the concept of value has been extended, by economists and others, to the evaluation of everything which men think of as desirable in any way. In consequence, the age-old controversy about the objectivity or subjectivity of good and evil is now stated in terms of the difference between facts and values, or between judgments of fact and judgments of value.

The issue, as currently stated, is whether questions of value can be answered in the same way as questions of fact. One position maintains that, unlike questions of fact which can be answered by scientific investigation and can be objectively solved, questions of value elicit no more than expressions of opinion, relative to the individual's subjective response or to the conventions of his society at a given time. The other side of the issue is held by those who insist that the norms of value are as objective and as scientifically determinable as the criteria of fact or existence.

THE WORD "VALUE" does not change the problem in any way; for what does evaluating anything mean except judging it as good or bad, better or worse? The problem, which has a history as long as the tradition of the great books, is the problem of how we can defend such judgments and what they signify about the things judged. Are good and evil determined by nature or convention? Are they objects of knowledge or opinion?

The title of an essay by Montaigne—"That the taste of good and evil depends in large part on the opinion we have of them"—indicates one set of answers to these questions. "If evils have no entry into us but by our judgment," he writes, "it seems to be in our power to disdain them or turn them to good use . . . If what we call evil and torment is neither evil nor torment in itself, if it is merely our fancy that gives it this quality, it is in us to change it." Echoing Montaigne, Hamlet remarks that "there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so." The Greek Sophists, centuries earlier, appear to take the same view. The statement of Protagoras that "man is the measure of all things," Plato thinks, does not significantly apply to *all* things, but only to such things as the good or the right, the true or the beautiful. In the *Theaetetus,* Protagoras is made to say that as "to the sick man his food appears to be bitter, and to the healthy man the opposite of bitter," so in general men estimate or judge all things according to their own condition and the way things affect them. This theory of good and evil necessarily denies the possibility of moral science. Socrates calls it "a high argument in which all things are said to be relative."

Plato and Aristotle respond to the Sophists by arguing in the opposite vein. For Plato, the good is not a matter of opinion, but an object of knowledge. Knowledge of good and evil is the best fruit of the tree of knowledge. "Let each one of us leave every other kind of knowledge," Socrates says at the end of *The Republic*, "and seek and follow one thing only," that is, "to learn and discern between good and evil."

Aristotle does not think that ethics, or any science which deals with good and evil, can have as much precision as mathematics. "Our discussion will be adequate," he writes, "if it has as much clearness as the subject matter admits of, for precision is not to be sought for alike in all discussions." This, however, does not exclude the possibility of our knowing with great exactitude the first principles of moral science, such as the nature of happiness and virtue. Indefiniteness and even a certain kind of relativity occur only when these principles are applied to particular cases. Hence, in Aristotle's view, the moral sciences, such as ethics and politics, can have objective and universal validity no less than physics or mathematics, at least on the level of principles.

In modern times, Locke and Kant also affirm the scientific character of ethics, but without the qualification which Aristotle insists upon when we go from principles to practice. Locke explains the grounds on which he is "bold to think that morality is capable of demonstration, as well as mathematics"; for, he says, "the precise real essence of the things moral words stand for may be perfectly known, and so the congruity and incongruity of the things themselves may be certainly discovered; in which consists perfect knowledge." He is confident that "from self-evident propositions, by necessary consequences, as incontestible as those in mathematics, the measures of right and wrong might be made out, to any one that will apply himself with the same indifferency and attention to the one as he does to the other of these sciences." But Locke adds, "this is not to be expected, whilst the desire of esteem, riches, or power makes men espouse the well-endowed opinions in fashion." He himself seems to tend in the opposite direction when he identifies the good with the pleasant and makes it relative to individual desires.

For Kant the two major parts of philosophy—physics and ethics—are on equal footing, the one concerned with the "laws of *nature*," the other with the "laws of *freedom*." In each case there is both empirical and *a priori* knowledge. Kant calls the latter in each case "metaphysics" and speaks of "a *metaphysic of nature* and a *metaphysic of morals*." The nature of science, he thinks, requires us to "separate the empirical from the rational part, and prefix to physics proper (or empirical physics) a metaphysic of nature, and to practical anthropology a metaphysic of morals, which must be carefully cleared of everything empirical."

This partial inventory of thinkers who stand against skepticism or relativism in the field of morals indicates that agreement on this point is accompanied by some disagreement about the reasons for holding what appears to be the same view. The opposite view seems also to be shared by thinkers of quite different cast, such as Spinoza and J. S. Mill, who differ from each other as well as from Montaigne and the ancient Sophists.

The terms "good and evil," Spinoza writes, "indicate nothing positive in things considered in themselves, nor are they anything else than modes of thought . . . One and the same thing may at the same time be both good and evil or indifferent"—according to the person who makes the judgment of it. Spinoza therefore defines "good" as "that which we certainly know is useful to us." Apart from society, he says, "there is nothing which by universal consent is good or evil, since everyone in a natural state consults only his own profit." Only when men live together in a civil society under law can it be "decided by universal consent what is good and what is evil."

Holding that all men seek happiness and that they determine what is good and evil in particular cases by reference to this end, Mill seems to offer the standard of utility as an objective principle of morality. But insofar as he identifies happiness with a sum total of pleasures or satisfactions, it tends to become

relative to the individual or the group. If competent judges disagree concerning which of two pleasures is the greater or higher, there can be no appeal, Mill says, except to the verdict of the majority. To this extent at least, judgments of value are expressions of opinion, not determinations of science. Nor does Mill hesitate to say that "the ultimate sanction of all morality" is "a subjective feeling in our minds."

As Nietzsche represents the epitome of atheism in theology, so he also represents the most extreme rejection of all the traditional doctrines of morality in the western tradition. In *Beyond Good and Evil,* he declares that, in reviewing all the "finer and coarser moralities which have ruled or still rule on earth I found certain traits regularly recurring together and bound up with one another . . . There is *master morality* and *slave morality*—I add at once that in all higher and mixed cultures attempts at mediation between the two are apparent and more frequently confusion and mutual misunderstanding between them, indeed sometimes their harsh juxtaposition—even within the same man, within *one* soul . . . Slave morality is essentially the morality of utility. Here is the source of the famous antithesis 'good' and *'evil'*—power and danger were felt to exist in evil, a certain dreadfulness, subtlety and strength which could not admit of contempt. Thus, according to slave morality the 'evil' inspire fear; according to master morality it is precisely the 'good' who inspire fear and want to inspire it, while the 'bad' man is judged contemptible. The antithesis reaches its height when, consistently with slave morality, a breath of disdain finally also comes to be attached to the 'good' of this morality—it may be a slight and benevolent disdain—because within the slaves' way of thinking the good man has in any event to be a *harmless* man: he is good-natured, easy to deceive, perhaps a bit stupid, *un bonhomme.* Wherever slave morality comes to predominate, language exhibits a tendency to bring the words 'good' and 'stupid' closer to each other."

IN ORDER TO clarify this basic issue it is necessary to take note of other terms which are usually involved in the discussion of good and evil—such terms as pleasure and pain, desire and aversion, being, nature, and reason. In the course of doing this, we will perceive the relevance of the chapters which deal with those ideas.

It has been said, for example, that the good is identical with the pleasant; that the good is what men desire; that the good is a property of being or existence; that the good is that which conforms to the nature of a thing; that the good is that which is approved by reason. It is possible to see some truth in each of these statements. But each, taken by itself, may be too great a simplification. Searching questions can be asked by those who refuse to equate the good with the pleasant or the desirable, the real, the natural, or the reasonable. Are there no pleasures in any way bad, no pains in any way good? Are all desires themselves good, or are all equally good? How does calling a thing "good" add anything to its being or existence? Does not evil exist or qualify existence? By what standards can the natural and the rational be judged good, if the good is that which conforms to nature and reason?

These questions call for more analysis of each of these factors in the discussion of good and evil and suggest that no one of these factors *by itself* is sufficient to solve the problem of defining good and evil or formulating their criteria. Of the five things mentioned, two particularly—pleasure and desire—seem to leave open the question whether good and evil are objective or subjective. They require us to decide whether things please us *because they are good* or are good *because they please us;* whether we desire things because they are good or simply call them "good" when we desire them. On this issue Spinoza flatly declares that "we do not desire a thing because we adjudge it good, but, on the contrary, we call it good because we desire it." In saying that "a thing is good so far as it is desirable," Aquinas takes the opposite position, for according to him "a thing is desirable only in so far as it is perfect." It can be desirable, therefore, without being actually desired by this or that individual.

The other three terms—unlike pleasure and desire—seem to favor the objectivity of good

and evil, at least for those who regard the order of existence, the nature of things, and the laws of reason as independent of our desires or preferences. Thus for Spinoza the *nature* of man and his *reason* seem to provide an objective standard for determining what is good alike for all men. Nothing, he writes, "can be good except in so far as it agrees with our nature, and therefore the more an object agrees with our nature the more profitable it will be." And in another place he says, "by *good* I understand . . . everything which we are certain is a means by which we may approach nearer and nearer to the model of human nature we set before us." That model, he tells us, is the man of reason, the man who always acts "according to the dictates of reason," for "those desires which are determined by man's power or reason are always good."

Nevertheless, if desire and pleasure cannot be eliminated from the consideration of good and evil—at least not the good and evil which enter into human life—then the problem of finding a purely objective foundation for our moral judgments is not solved simply by an appeal to being, nature, and reason.

Some help toward a solution may be found in one often reiterated fact about the relation between the good and human desire. The ancients insist that no man desires anything but what at the time *seems* good to him in some way. "No man," Socrates observes, "voluntarily pursues evil, or that which he thinks to be evil. To prefer evil to good is not in human nature; and when a man is compelled to choose one of two evils, no one will choose the greater when he may have the less." This, however, does not prevent men from desiring "what they suppose to be goods although they are really evils." Since they are mistaken in their judgment "and suppose the evils to be goods, they really desire goods."

The object consciously desired is always at least *apparently* good. When men are mistaken in their estimate of things as beneficial or injurious to themselves, the apparent good—the good actually desired—will be really an evil, that is, something actually undesirable. An object which is really good may not appear to be so, and so it will not be desired although it is desirable. The deception of appearances, Socrates says, tricks us into taking "at one time the things of which we repent at another, both in our actions and in our choice of things great and small."

THE DISTINCTION between the *real* and the *apparent* good is, of course, connected with the problem of the objective and the subjective good. The apparent good varies from individual to individual and from time to time. If there were a real good, it would be free from such relativity and variability. Unless there are real, as distinct from merely apparent, goods, moralists cannot distinguish between what men *should* desire and what in fact they *do* desire.

Since moral science deals with human behavior, its province can be separated from that of other sciences which treat the same subject matter—such as psychology and sociology—only in terms of a different treatment of that subject matter. Moral science must be normative or prescriptive rather than descriptive. It must determine what men *should* seek, not what they *do* seek. The very existence of normative sciences, as well as their validity, would thus seem to depend on the establishment of a real, as opposed to a merely apparent, good.

This creates no special difficulty for moralists who think that man knows what is really good for him, both in general and in particular, by intuition or rational deduction, through the commandments of the divine law, or through the precepts of the law of reason. But for those who insist that the good is always somehow relative to desire and always involves pleasure, the distinction between the real and the apparent good raises an extremely difficult problem.

To say that an apparent good is not really good suggests, as we have seen, that what is called "good" may not be in itself desirable. That something which is really good may not in fact appear to be so, seems to imply that the word "good" can be significantly applied to something which is not actually desired—at least not consciously. How, then, is the good always relative to desire? The traditional answer to this question must appeal to the distinction between natural and conscious de-

sire, which is discussed in the chapter on DESIRE. It is by reference to natural desire that the good is said to be in itself always desirable—even when the really good thing is not consciously desired.

The relation of good and evil to pleasure and pain can also be clarified by a basic distinction between the pleasure which is an object of desire and pleasure conceived as the satisfaction of desire. This is discussed in the chapter on PLEASURE AND PAIN. If obtaining a desired good is satisfying, then there is certainly a sense in which the good and the pleasant (or the satisfying) are always associated; but it may also be true that pleasure is only one kind of good among various objects of desire and that certain pleasures which men desire appear to be, but are not really, good.

THE FOREGOING considerations apply to the good in the sphere of human conduct. But the human good, the practicable good, the good for man, does not exhaust the meaning of the term *good*. The idea of the good is, for Plato, the measure of perfection in all things; it is "not only the author of knowledge to all things known, but of their being and essence, and yet the good is not essence, but far exceeds essence in dignity and power."

The absolute good is also, as in *The Divine Comedy*, the final cause or ultimate end of the motions of the universe. It is the "Alpha and Omega," Dante says, "of all the scripture which Love reads to me . . . that Essence wherein is such supremacy that whatsoever good be found outside of It is naught else save a beam of Its own radiance . . . the Love which moves the sun and the other stars."

So too, in Aristotle's cosmology, the circular motions of the celestial spheres, and through them all other cycles of natural change, are sustained eternally by the prime mover, which moves all things by the attraction of its perfect being. It therefore "moves without being moved," for it "produces motion through being loved."

Though desire and love enter into the conception of the good as a cosmic final cause, they are not *human* desire or love. Though the goodness which inheres in things according to the degree of their perfection may make them desirable, it is not dependent on their being consciously desired by men.

In Jewish and Christian theology, for example, the goodness of God is in no way measured by human desires, purposes, or pleasures; nor is the goodness of created things which, according to Genesis, God surveyed and found "very good." The order of creation, moreover, involves a hierarchy of inequalities in being and goodness. Even when each thing is perfect in its kind, all things are not equally good, for according to the differences in their natures, diverse kinds are capable of greater or less perfection.

In the metaphysical conception of goodness, that which has more actuality either in existence or power has more perfection. God's infinite goodness is therefore said to follow from the fact that he is completely actual—infinite in being and power. Things "which have life," Augustine writes, "are ranked above those which have none . . . And among those that have life, the sentient are higher than those which have no sensation . . . and among the sentient, the intelligent above those that have no intelligence."

Augustine contrasts these gradations of perfection which are "according to the order of nature" with the "standards of value" which are "according to the utility each man finds in a thing." That which is less good in a metaphysical sense may be preferred on moral grounds as being better for man. "Who," he asks, "would not rather have bread in his house than mice, gold than fleas?" Is it not true that "more is often given for a horse than for a slave, for a jewel than for a maid"?

According to Augustine, as well as to Aquinas later, metaphysical goodness consists in "the value a thing has in itself in the scale of creation," while moral goodness depends upon the relation in which a thing stands to human need or desire, and according to the estimation placed upon it by human reason. It is in the moral, not the metaphysical sense that we speak of a good man, a good will, a good life, and a good society; or of all the things, such as health, wealth, pleasure, virtue, or knowledge, which it may be good for man

to seek and possess. Only in the metaphysical sense can things be thought of as good entirely apart from man; only then can we find a hierarchy of perfections in the world which accords with a hierarchy of beings. Thus Spinoza declares that "the perfection of things is to be judged by their nature and power alone; nor are they more or less perfect because they delight or offend the human senses, or because they are beneficial or prejudicial to human nature."

THE METAPHYSICAL conception of goodness raises peculiarly difficult problems. Are there as many meanings of "good" as there are of "being"? When we say God is good, are we making a moral or a metaphysical judgment? Are we attributing perfection of being or goodness of will to God? If goodness is a property of being, then must not all evil become a privation of being? Conceiving evil in this way, Augustine points out that if things "are deprived of all good, they cease altogether to be," so that "evil does not exist" in itself; and Aquinas maintains that "no being is said to be evil, considered as being, but only so far as it lacks being."

If to understand what the notion of goodness adds to the notion of being it is necessary to say that being has goodness in relation to appetite, the question inevitably arises, "Whose appetite?" Not man's certainly, for then the moral and the metaphysical good become identical. If God's, then not appetite in the form of desire, but in the form of love, for the divine perfection is usually thought to preclude desire.

Problems of this sort confront those who, conceiving the good both *apart from* and also *relative to* man, are obligated to connect the metaphysical and the moral meanings of good and to say whether they have a common thread. Some writers, however, limit their consideration to the strictly moral good, and deny, as do the Stoics, goodness or evil to anything but man's free acts of will.

We should, says Marcus Aurelius, "judge only those things which are in our power, to be good or bad." In this we are entirely free, for "things themselves have no natural power to form our judgments . . . If thou art pained by any external thing, it is not this thing which disturbs thee, but thy own judgment about it. And it is in thy power to wipe out this judgment now . . . Suppose that men kill thee, cut thee in pieces, curse thee. What then can these things do to prevent thy mind from remaining pure, wise, sober, just?"

Though Kant develops what he calls a "metaphysic of ethics," he does not seem to have a metaphysical as opposed to a moral conception of the good; unless in some analogous form it lies in his distinction between "value" and "dignity," according to which "whatever has reference to the general inclinations and wants of mankind has a *market value,*" whereas "whatever . . . is above all value, and therefore admits of no equivalent, has a dignity"—"not a merely relative worth, but an intrinsic worth."

But since Kant thinks that only men, or rational beings, can have intrinsic worth, he finds goodness only in the moral order. He agrees with the Stoics that good and evil occur only in the realm of freedom, not at all in the realm of existence or nature. "Good or evil," he writes, "always implies a reference to the *will,* as determined by the *law of reason*" which is the law of freedom. According to Kant, "nothing can possibly be conceived in the world, or even out of it, which can be called good without qualification, except a Good Will!"; and in another place he says, "If anything is to be good or evil absolutely . . . it can only be the manner of acting, the maxim of the will." In this sense, the free will complying with or resisting the imperatives of duty is either the seat or the source of all the goodness or evil that there is. "Men may laugh," Kant says, "at the Stoic, who in the severest paroxysms of gout cried out: Pain, however thou tormentest me, I will never admit that thou art an evil: he was right . . . for pain did not in the least diminish the worth of his person, but only that of his condition."

IN THE SPHERE of moral conduct, and especially for those who make desire or pleasure rather than duty the principle, there seems to be a plurality of goods which require classification and order.

Some things, it would appear, are not desired for themselves, but for the sake of something else. They are good only as means to be used. Some things are desired for their own sake, and are good as ends, to be possessed or enjoyed. This division of goods into means and ends—the useful and the enjoyable or pleasant—permits a third type of good which is an end in one respect, and a means in another. Analysis of this sort leads to the concept of a *summum bonum*—that good which is not a means in any respect, but entirely an end, the supreme or highest good for which all else is sought.

The chief question with respect to the *summum bonum* is whether it is *a* good or *the* good—whether it is merely one type of good, more desirable than any other, or the sum of all good things which, when possessed, leaves nothing to be desired. Aristotle and Mill seem to take the latter view in their conception of happiness as the *summum bonum*. "Human nature," Mill says, "is so constituted as to desire nothing which is not either a part of happiness or a means of happiness." Happiness, he insists, is "not an abstract idea, but a concrete whole" including all other goods within itself. It is the only good which is desired entirely for its own sake. Aristotle treats virtue and knowledge as intrinsic goods, but he also regards them as means to happiness. In Mill's terms, their goodness remains subject to the criterion of utility, from which happiness alone is exempt since it measures the utility of all other goods.

If the evaluation of all things by reference to their contribution to happiness as the ultimate good constitutes utilitarianism in ethics, then Aristotle no less than Mill is a utilitarian, even though Aristotle does not refer to the principle of utility, does not identify the good with pleasure, and conceives the virtues as intrinsically good, not merely as means. Kant would regard them as in fundamental agreement despite all their differences—or at least he would regard them as committing the same fundamental error. For a quite different reason, Weber dismisses an "ethic of ultimate ends," on the ground that "the problem of the justification of means by ends . . . has only the possibility of rejecting all action that employs morally dangerous means." Weber goes on to say that "it is not possible to bring an ethic of ultimate ends and an ethic of responsibility under one roof."

To Kant any discussion of human conduct which involves the calculation of means to ends is pragmatic or utilitarian, even when the controlling end is the *summum bonum* or happiness. Kant makes a sharp distinction between what he calls "pragmatical rules" of conduct which consider what should be done by one who wishes to be happy, and what he regards as the strictly "moral or ethical law" which "has no other motive than the *worthiness of being happy*." Morality, he says in another place, "is not properly the doctrine of how we should *make* ourselves happy, but how we should become *worthy* of happiness"—through doing our duty.

Kant's criticism of Aristotle's ethics of happiness is therefore applicable to the utilitarianism of Mill; and Mill's rejoinder to Kant serves as a defense of Aristotle. This basic issue concerning the primacy of happiness or duty—of desire or law—is discussed in the chapters on DUTY and HAPPINESS, where it is suggested that in an ethics of duty, right and wrong supplant good and evil as the fundamental terms, and the *summum bonum* becomes a derivative notion rather than the first principle of morality.

At the other extreme are those who deny duty entirely, and with it any meaning to right and wrong as distinct from good and evil. A middle ground is held by those who employ right and wrong as subordinate terms in the analysis of good and evil, finding their special significance in the consideration of the good of others or the social good. To do right is to do good to others; to do wrong is to injure them. The question which Plato so insistently raises, whether it is better to do injustice or to suffer it, can also be stated in terms of good and evil, or right and wrong. Is it better to suffer evil or to do it? Is it better to be wronged by others or to wrong them? As justice for Aristotle is that one among the virtues which concerns the good of others and the common good, and as it is the one virtue which is thought to involve duty or obligation, so the

criteria of right and wrong measure the goodness or evil of human acts by reference to law and society.

THE DIVISION of goods into means and ends is not the only distinction made by moralists who recognize the plurality and inequality of goods.

Goods have been divided into the limited and the unlimited with respect to quantity; the pure and the mixed with respect to quality; sensible and intelligible goods or particular goods and the good in general; external goods, goods of the body, and goods of the soul; the pleasant, the useful, and the virtuous. More specific enumerations of the variety of goods list wealth, health, strength, beauty, longevity, pleasure, honor (or fame), virtue, knowledge, friendship.

All of the foregoing classifications can be combined with one another, but there is one distinction which stands by itself, although it affects all the others. That is the distinction between the individual and the common good, or between private and public good, the good for this one man and the good of all others and of the whole community. In the language of modern utilitarianism, it is the distinction between individual happiness and what Jeremy Bentham called "the greatest good for the greatest number."

The phrase "common good" has several meanings in the tradition of the great books. One sense, which some think is the least significant, refers to that which can be shared or used by many, as, for example, land held in common and worked by a number of persons or families. Thus we speak of the "commons" of a town or village. This meaning applies particularly to economic goods which may either belong to the community as a whole or be divided into parcels of private property.

Another sense of common good is that in which the welfare of a community is a common good participated in by its members. The welfare of the family or the state is a good which belongs to a multitude organized for some common purpose. If the individual members of the group derive some benefit from their association with one another, then the prosperity of the community is not only a common good viewed collectively, but also a common good viewed distributively, for it is the good of each member of the group as well as of the whole.

With this in mind, perhaps, Mill speaks of "an indissoluble association between [the individual's] happiness and the practice of such mode of conduct, negative and positive, as regard for the universal happiness prescribes; so that not only he may be unable to conceive the possibility of happiness to himself, consistently with conduct opposed to the general good, but also that a direct impulse to promote the general good may be in every individual one of the habitual modes of action." If this statement by Mill is used to interpret Bentham's phrase—"the greatest good for the greatest number"—then the greatest number cannot be taken to mean a majority, for the good of nothing less than the whole collectively or of all distributively can be taken as the common or general good.

Still another conception of the common good is possible. A good may be common in the sense in which a specific nature is common to the members of the species—not as organized socially in any way, but simply as so many *like* individuals. If all men seek happiness, for example, then happiness is a common good, even though each individual seeks his own happiness. In a deeper sense it is a common good if the happiness each seeks is the same for all men because they are all of the same nature; but, most strictly, it is a common good if the happiness of each individual cannot be separated from the happiness of all.

Aquinas seems to be using this meaning of *common good* when, in defining law as a rule of conduct "directed to the common good," he refers not merely to the good of the community or body politic, but beyond that to "the last end of human life," which is "happiness or beatitude." Law, he says, "must needs concern itself properly with the order directed to universal happiness." Mill also seems to conceive happiness as a common good in this sense. "What the assailants of utilitarianism seldom have the justice to acknowledge," he writes, is "that the happiness which forms the

utilitarian standard of what is right in conduct, is not the agent's own happiness, but that of all concerned."

The several meanings of the common good create a fundamental issue. Some writers use it in one sense only, rejecting the others. Some not only use the term in all its meanings, but also develop a hierarchy of common goods. They regard universal happiness, for example, as a common good of a higher order than the welfare of the political community. Yet in every order they insist upon the primacy of the common over the individual good. In the political order, for example, they think the welfare of the community takes precedence over individual happiness. They would regard Smith's statement of the way in which individuals accidentally serve the common good while seeking their private interests, as a perversion of the relationship. To say that an individual considering only his own gain is "led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention" (*i.e.*, the general prosperity of society) does not excuse the individual's failure to aim at the common good.

The several meanings of the common good also complicate the statement of the issue between those who seem to say that the welfare of the community always takes precedence over individual well-being or happiness—that the good of the whole is always greater than the good of its parts—and those who seem to say that the state is made for man, not man for the state, or that the prosperity of the society in which men live is good primarily because it enables each of them to live well. This issue, which runs through all the great books of political theory from Plato and Aristotle to Hegel and Mill, is discussed in the chapters on CITIZEN and STATE.

The opposition between collectivism and individualism in economics and politics does not exhaust the issue which, stated in its broadest moral terms, is a conflict between self-interest and altruism. The primary problem to consider here is whether the issue is itself genuine, or only an opposition between false extremes which needlessly exclude the half-truth that each contains.

The collective aspect of the common good may not need to be emphasized at the expense of its distributive aspect. The good of each man and the good of mankind may be inseparable. It may be the same good which, in different respects, is individual and common. It may be that no good can be supreme which is not both immanent and transcendent—at once the highest perfection of the individual and a good greater than his whole being and his life.