

Background Information on Goodness

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When thinking about Goodness, what might first come to mind is a moral sense of equality and justice. This perspective is easily seen through the eyes of children who are quick to recognize when someone has not been treated fairly. This concept of goodness is also found in the natural law precepts of “Do good; avoid evil” and God’s revealed law in the Ten Commandments.

Goodness can also be understood as how well a person, thing, or action fulfills its intended purpose or end, or how well it acts as a means for another particular end.¹ For example, if I say, “This orange is good” it is likely because it fulfills all the standards, purposes and ends of an orange, e.g., it is ripe, properly shaped and colored, and provides nutrition.

Philosophers sometimes distinguish different areas where the goodness of a thing can be sought - these include the Goods of Society, the Goods of fortune, the Goods of the body and the Goods of the soul. Teachers may find that directing discussion towards these ends can assist in helping students better understand goodness and the meaning and value of the things in the world around them.

The Common Good is part of what some call the Goods of Society. The Common Good deals with man’s moral relationship with society. Other Goods of Society include friendship, social status, political honor, fame, and the state itself. These goods, if seen as a final end, could lead to the subordination of man to the dictates of the state by a utilitarian or tyrannical government, thus suppressing man’s God-given dignity for the broader needs and goals of society.

There are also other goods that act as means to an end, such as money, stocks, gold, investments, etc., which are Goods of Fortune.² These are all considered “good” because they can be exchanged for food, shelter, clothing, recreation, medicine, and so forth. If viewed as an end in themselves, these Goods of Fortune could leave man with the notion he never has enough.

Another way of understanding Goodness is in reference to the Goods of the Body.³ This includes getting enough food, sleep, leisure, activity, shelter, etc. They are primary and necessary goods but must also be at the service of the higher good and purpose of our humanity lest the sink into hedonism – the pursuit of pleasure and intrinsic goods as an end in itself without reference to its final purpose or end.

Higher goods that man hopes to achieve are the Goods of the Soul. These are the virtues that, when perfected, elevate him to be all that he can be. These virtues include both intellectual

¹ Aristotle calls these the Goods of Fortune. See Sullivan, D. (1957). *An Introduction to philosophy: The perennial principles of the classical realist tradition*, p. 130.

² *Ibid.*, p. 130.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

virtues and moral virtues. There is a realization, though, that one can never be virtuous enough, can never attain perfect goodness,⁴ which brings us to the fullness of Goodness Himself – God.

⁴ See Fr. Robert Spitzer S.J.'s book *New proofs for the existence of God: Contributions of contemporary physics and philosophy* (2010), pp. 269-270.