

THE SHRINE *of* WISDOM

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AUTUMN EQUINOX 1944

THE PURPOSE OF HUMAN LIFE

As Discussed in the *Gorgias* of Plato

PART II.*

At this point Callicles inquires of Chaerephon whether Socrates has been speaking in jest or earnest. "In most profound earnest, I should say," answers Chaerephon, "but you had better ask him."

"By the Gods, and I will," exclaims Callicles. "Tell me, Socrates, are you in earnest or only in jest? For if you are in earnest, and what you say is true, is not the whole of human life turned upside down; and are we not doing, as would appear, in everything the opposite of what we ought to be doing?"

Socrates, in a rhetorical exhortation, now urges him to seek for the truth of the matter. "O Callicles, if there were not some community of feeling among mankind, however varying in different persons—I mean to say, if every individual had a private feeling which was not shared by the rest of his species—I do not see how we could ever communicate our impressions to one another. . . . And you may imagine that my words too are like your own, an echo of another; and need not wonder at me; but if you want to stop me, silence philosophy, who is my love, for she is always saying to me what I am now saying to you, my friend, neither is she capricious . . . but philosophy is always true. She is the teacher whose words you heard, and at which you are now wondering; her you must refute, and either

* For previous section see *Shrine of Wisdom*, No. 100.

show, as I was saying, that to do injustice and to escape punishment is not the worst of all evils; for if you leave her word unrefuted, by the dog, the god of Egypt, I declare, O Callicles, that Callicles will never be at one with himself, but all his life long in a state of discord. And yet, my friend, I would rather that my lyre should be inharmonious, and that there should be no music in the chorus which I provided; yea, or that the whole world should be at odds with me and oppose me, rather than that I myself should be at variance with myself, and contradict myself."

In reply Callicles accuses Socrates of leading both Gorgias and Polus into self-contradiction by using an argument based on the laws of nature, and when it was refuted, extricating himself by substituting an argument based on the laws of custom and conventional justice which is opposed to natural justice. Polus, he says, in conceding that to do injustice is more dishonourable than to suffer it, spoke according to the standard of custom, whereas it is only according to natural law that the more disgraceful is the greater evil. The laws, being made by the many who are weak, are designed to terrify the few stronger and better men, lest these get the mastery. The weak, therefore, say that dishonesty, or the desire to have more than one's neighbour, is shameful and unjust, and in this way, by a convention, preserve equality in spite of their own inferiority. Natural justice, on the other hand, is the law that the stronger should have more than the weaker, and tyrants act according to the natural law that might is right. Callicles ends by seriously advising Socrates to give up philosophy which, he says, is fit only for younger men, and to turn to higher things such as a knowledge of the laws of the State and of the kind of speech to be used in the dealings of one man with another, whether in public or private affairs, and of the pleasures, desires, and character of humanity.

"Now I, Socrates, am very well inclined to you and am disposed to say to you that you are careless where you ought to be careful, and having so noble a soul are chiefly remarkable for a puerile exterior: neither in a court of justice could you state a case nor offer valiant counsel on another's behalf: and you must not be offended, my dear Socrates, for I am speaking out of good will, if I ask whether you are not ashamed at being in this case,

which I say, indeed, is that of all those who carry the study of philosophy too far. . . . Cease, then, emulating these paltry splitters of words, and emulate only the man of substance and honour who is well to do."

Socrates compliments Callicles on his frankness, friendliness, and boldness, and draws him into an inquiry as to the kind of character and pursuits proper to a man, and how far he should go in youth and in later years. Returning to the meaning of natural justice, he asks: "Do you not mean that the superior should take the property of the inferior by force; that the better should rule the worse; that the noble should have more than the mean?"

"Yes, that is what I was saying, and what I still maintain."

"Are the superior and better and stronger the same or different?"

"Well, I tell you plainly that they are the same."

"Then the many are by nature superior to the one against whom, as you were saying, they make the laws?"

"Certainly," says Callicles. It follows that according to his earlier statement, the laws made by the many, if they are the superior, are by nature just and noble. But Callicles has also said that in the opinion of the many justice is equality, and that to do is more disgraceful than to suffer injustice. Hence nature and custom concur in this respect, and Socrates has not been appealing to custom when the argument was about nature.

Stung by this refutation, Callicles exclaims: "This man will be always taking nonsense! At your age, Socrates, are you not ashamed to be word-catching? Do you not see—have I not already told you that by superior I mean better? Do you imagine me to say that if a rabble of slaves and nondescripts, who are of no use, except perhaps for their physical strength, gets together, their declarations are laws?"

"Ho! my philosopher, is that your line?"

"Certainly."

"I was thinking, Callicles, that something of the kind must have been in your mind, and that is why I repeated the question. Then please begin again and tell me who are the better if they are not the stronger? And I will ask you to be a little milder in your instructions, or I shall have to run away from you."

Callicles says that the better are the more excellent, but on being told that this explains nothing, agrees that he means the wiser, and according to his conception of natural justice, the better and wiser should rule and have more than the inferior.

Socrates examines the implications of this statement. Does Callicles mean that among a number of people of various degrees of strength and weakness, if there be one, a physician, wiser than the rest with respect to food, he should have more food than the others because he is better, or should arrange the distribution of the common store of food because of his authority, while having for his own share less than some and more than others, and if the weakest, having least of all?

"You talk about meats and drinks and physicians and other nonsense; I am not speaking of them!" exclaimed Callicles. He explains that the wiser should have a larger share, but not of meats and drinks. Socrates suggests that perhaps he means that the most skilled weaver should have the most and the best clothes, or that the most prudent farmer should have most seed for his own use.

"How you go on, always talking in the same way, Socrates!"

"Yes, Callicles, and not only talking in the same way, but on the same subjects."

"Yes, by Heaven! you are literally always talking of cobblers and fullers and cooks and doctors, as if this had to do with our argument."

"But why will you not tell me in what a man must be superior and wiser in order to claim a larger share? Will you neither accept a suggestion nor offer one?"

Callicles says that by superiors he means wise politicians who understand government and are courageous enough to carry out their designs. These should have an advantage over their subjects, and this is justice.

"What, my friend, are they to have more than themselves?" asks Socrates.

"How do you mean?"

"I mean that every man is his own ruler; but perhaps you think that it is not necessary for him to rule himself; he is only required to rule others."

"What do you mean by his 'ruling over himself'?"

"A simple thing enough; just what is commonly said, that a

man should be temperate and master of himself, and ruler of his own pleasures and passions."

"How charming! You mean those fools the temperate?" says Callicles. He insists that the temperate are fools, for how can a man be happy who is the servant of anything? The man who is truly alive is he who encourages his desires to the utmost and has the courage and intelligence to minister to them and satisfy all his longings. This is natural justice and nobility. But the masses, unable to do this, being ashamed of their inability and wishing to hide it, say that intemperance is base, and praise justice and temperance because they are cowards. What can be more truly base and evil than temperance to a man who is by nature capable of seizing exclusive power and becoming a tyrant? How miserable is the man who is prevented by a reputation for justice and temperance from giving more to his friends than to his enemies!" Callicles sums up by saying that luxury, intemperance, and licence, if they are duly supported, are happiness and virtue; all the rest is a mere bauble, custom contrary to nature, the foolish inventions of worthless men.

"There is a noble freedom, Callicles," says Socrates, "in your way of supporting the argument: for what you say is what the rest of the world think but are unwilling to say. And I must beg of you not to relax your efforts in order that we may truly know the rule of human life. Tell me then: you say, do you not, that in the rightly developed man the passions ought not to be controlled, but that we should let them grow to the utmost and somehow or other satisfy them, and that this is virtue?"

"Yes, that is what I say."

"Then those who want nothing are not truly said to be happy?"

"No, indeed! for then stones and the dead would be the happiest of all."

Socrates reminds Callicles of the saying of a wise man that the body is a tomb, and that the part of the soul which is the seat of desires is liable to be influenced and tossed about in various ways. He recalls the fable which compares the incontinent and intemperate part of the soul of the ignorant and uninitiated man to a vessel full of holes, because its desires can never be satisfied. Of the souls in Hades, the invisible world,

these are the most miserable, for they are represented as carrying water in a sieve to a vessel full of holes.

Callicles still holds his former opinion, so Socrates uses another image, comparing the temperate and intemperate life to two men, each of whom has a number of casks. Those of the first man are sound, and one is filled with wine, one with honey one with milk, and the others with other liquids. The streams from which he fills them are scanty and they are filled only with great toil and difficulty, but when once filled, there is no need to feed them any more. The other man can also find streams, though not so easily, but his casks are leaky, and night and day he is compelled to feed them continually, for if he slackens, he is tormented with the most fearful pains.

Callicles objects that the one who is filled has no longer any pleasure left. The better life, he says, is one in which all his desires are about a man and he lives happily in the gratification of them; for the life of pleasure is an ever-flowing stream.

"Capital, excellent," cries Socrates, "go on as you have begun, and have no shame. I, too, must disencumber myself of shame: and first, will you tell me whether you include itching and scratching, provided that you have enough of scratching and continue scratching through life, in your notion of happiness?"

"What a strange being you are, Socrates! A regular clap-trap orator."

"That was the reason, Callicles, why I scared the modesty out of Polus and Gorgias; but your modesty will not be scared, for you are a brave man. And now answer my question."

"I answer that the scratcher would live pleasantly."

"And if pleasantly, then happily?"

"To be sure."

Socrates extends the argument to the inclusion of base pleasures and, pointing out that Callicles has made no distinction between good and evil pleasures, asks whether pleasure and good are the same, or whether there is any pleasure which is not a good.

Callicles maintains that pleasure and good are the same. Socrates then asks whether he is of the opinion that knowledge differs both from fortitude and from pleasure, and whether fortitude differs from pleasure. Callicles agrees that they are all

different from one another, and Socrates calls attention to this point: "Well then, let us remember that Callicles says that pleasure and good are the same, but that knowledge and fortitude are not the same, either with one another, or with the good."

He next asks Callicles whether good and evil are opposed to one another, and shows that they exclude each other; for just as the body cannot be at the same time both sick and healthy, so a man cannot have both good and evil or be without both at the same time and in the same respect. Callicles agrees that if there is anything that a man has and has not at the same time, it cannot be good and evil fortune. He then, in his answers to Socrates, agrees that the state of hunger is painful, but to eat when hungry is pleasurable, and consequently the man who is engaged in satisfying his hunger or thirst is experiencing pleasure and pain at the same time. But no one can have both good and evil fortune in the same respect at the same time; hence pleasure is not the same as good fortune, nor is pain the same as evil fortune.

At this point Callicles protests at what he calls the quibbling methods of Socrates, but Gorgias presses him to continue, as they all wish to hear the discussion.

"Yes, Gorgias," says Callicles, but I must complain of the habitual trifling of Socrates: he is always arguing about small and unworthy questions."

"What matter? That does you no harm, Callicles. Let Socrates argue in his own fashion."

Socrates continues: "You are happy, Callicles, in having been initiated into great mysteries before you were initiated into the small. I thought that was not allowable. But to return to our argument: Does not a man cease from thirsting and from the pleasure of drinking at the same moment?"

"True."

"And if he is hungry, or has any other desire, does he not cease from the desire and the pleasure at the same moment?"

"Yes."

"But he does not cease from good and evil at the same moment, as you have admitted—do you not still admit that?"

"Yes, I do, but what is the inference?"

"Why, my friend, the inference is that the good is not the

same as the pleasant, or the evil the same as the painful, for there is a cessation of pleasure and pain at the same moment but not of good and evil. How then can pleasure be the same as the good, or pain as evil? And I would like you to look at the matter from another point of view, which could hardly, I think, have occurred to you when you identified them: Are not the good good because they have good present with them, as the beautiful are those who have beauty present with them?"

"Yes."

Callicles in further answers places the courageous and the wise in the category of the good, but the cowardly and the foolish in that of the bad. He agrees that both good and bad men seem to rejoice and grieve to much the same extent. From this follows the refutation of his assertion that pleasures are good and pains evil.

"The wise man and the brave we allow to be good?" says Socrates.

"Yes."

"And the foolish and the coward to be evil?"

"Yes."

"And he who is in pain is evil?"

"Certainly."

"We say, further, Callicles, that the good and the evil both have joy and pain, and that the evil, perhaps, has more of them?"

"Yes."

"Then the inference is that the bad man is as good and bad as the good. Can this be denied, if pleasure and good are the same?"

Callicles with a very bad grace yields this point, admitting that pleasure and good are not the same, and that some pleasures are good, while others are evil. In the discussion which follows it is made clear that the beneficial pleasures are those which do some good, and the harmful are those which do some evil. There are also good and evil pains. It is agreed that the good pleasures and pains ought to be chosen because, as Polus has already admitted, all actions should be done for the sake of the good. Pleasure is therefore for the sake of the good, and not the good for the sake of pleasure.

It is next decided that knowledge is necessary in order to judge whether a pleasure is good or evil; and it is recalled that some processes, such as cookery, aim at pleasure, while others, such as medicine, aim at good. The discussion, Socrates reminds them, is about the best way of human life, and there is nothing more serious than the question whether a man should cultivate rhetoric and engage in public affairs, as Callicles advises, or whether he should follow the life of a philosopher, and the nature of the difference between the two; for the difference must be clearly seen before a choice can be made. With regard to the soul, also, there are some processes which lead to the soul's highest good, while others are concerned only with the soul's pleasure, no matter whether this is good or bad. These processes of gratification, whether good or bad, are termed by Socrates flattery.

To this Callicles reluctantly agrees, and Socrates passes on to the consideration of rhetoric. Guided by him, Callicles distinguishes two classes of rhetoric, one of which is merely flattery, while the other, a noble art, aims at training and improving the souls of the citizens in a State, whether or no the speeches be welcome or unwelcome to the hearers.

Socrates next shows that the truly good man who speaks always with a view to the best, speaks not at random, but with reference to some standard, keeping in view the form of the whole, and ordering and harmonizing in conformity with the standard of good.

Callicles admits that both the good body and the good soul are those in which harmony and order prevail. Health is the name given to harmony of body, and Socrates describes the harmonious soul as lawful.

"And what is this but temperance and justice? Would you not grant that?"

"Yes," admits Callicles, and he also agrees that the true rhetorician seeks to implant justice in the souls of the citizens and to remove injustice; to implant temperance and take away intemperance; to implant every virtue and take away every vice. The soul which is unjust and unholy ought to be controlled, and the prevention of that which is not to her improvement will be to her true interest.

"Then," declares Socrates, "control or chastisement is better

for the soul than intemperance or the absence of control which you were just now preferring.”

Callicles, much annoyed at having refuted his own former statement, refuses to continue the discussion and advises Socrates to finish it by himself. Gorgias adds his request to that of the others, and Socrates accordingly sums up, in brief questions and answers, the conclusions already reached, arriving at the point that the factor which makes a thing good is the appropriate order inhering in each thing.

The soul which has order is orderly and temperate, and the temperate soul is good. The intemperate soul is the bad soul. The temperate man will be just to men and holy in his relations with God. He will be courageous because he will patiently endure what he ought, and will not try to avoid what he ought not. Therefore the temperate and good man will do well and perfectly all that he does, and must therefore be happy and blessed; while the evil man, being intemperate, will do evil and be unhappy.

“And this is he whom Callicles was applauding!” says Socrates. “Philosophers tell us that communion and friendship, orderliness, temperance, and justice, bind together heaven and earth and Gods and men, and that this universe is therefore called cosmos or order.”

The argument which follows leads to the conclusion that wrongdoing is far more disgraceful and evil to the doer of the wrong than to the sufferer from it; and that the only evil greater than the doing of injustice is the remaining unpunished.

Socrates, recalling the remark of Callicles that the philosopher is ridiculously defenceless, asks: “What is that defence without which a man will be truly ridiculous? Must it not be one which will avert the greatest of human evils?”

He inquires next whether it is possible to avert both the evil of doing injustice and of suffering injustice. Is it necessary that a man should have the power as well as the will to escape suffering injustice? Callicles agrees that in order to avoid either suffering or doing injustice, both the power and the will are required. But it becomes clear that only the art and power of a tyrant will avail to prevent a man suffering injustice, and that such art and power will at the same time corrupt the soul. The soul, Socrates continues, should not spend its efforts in avoiding

danger always and prolonging the body's life to the uttermost. "O! my friends, I want you to see that the noble and the good may be something different from saving and being saved, and that he who is truly a man ought not to care about living a certain time—he leaves all that with God—and considers how he can best spend his appointed time, whether it is to aim at becoming great and powerful in a city, for this may not be to his true benefit: in gaining such power he may risk something of highest worth."

Callicles, now partly convinced, says: "Somehow or other your words, Socrates, always seem to me to be good words, yet, like the rest of the world, I am not quite convinced by you."

Socrates reminds him of the two kinds of process possible in the training either of body or soul; one with a view to the highest good, the other with a view to pleasure. The statesman should aim not at personal power, but at the greatest good of the citizens and the city. "For we have already discovered that it is of no use to impart to them any other good, whether money or office, or any other sort of power, unless the mind of those who are to have it be gentle and good."

Reviewing the aims of some of the statesmen whom Callicles has praised earlier in the discussion, Socrates says that they should, as political shepherds of men, have aimed at rendering their flock more just. "People say that they have made the city great, not seeing that the ulcerated and swollen condition of the State is to be attributed to the earlier statesmen who filled the city full of harbours and docks and walls and revenues, leaving no room for justice and temperance. And when the crisis of the disorder comes, the people will blame the advisers of the hour and applaud Cimon and Pericles who are the real authors of their calamities. And if you are not careful they may assail you, Callicles, and my friend Alcibiades, when they are losing not only their new acquisitions, but also their original possessions; not that you are the authors of these calamities of theirs, though you may perhaps be accessories after the fact."

A statesman who removes injustice, says Socrates, is in no danger of being treated unjustly. He alone can without risk allow his services to be remunerated at the discretion of others, if he is really able to make them good.

"Then to which service of the State do you invite me, Cal-

lices? Am I to be the physician of the State and struggle to make the Athenians as good as possible; or I am to be the flatterer and servant of the State?"

"I say that you should be the servant of the State . . . for if you refuse, the consequences will be——" Here Socrates interposes, saying that he is well aware of the possibilities. "I must be indeed a fool, Callicles, if I do not know that in the Athenian State any man may suffer anything. And if I am brought to trial and incur the dangers of which you speak, he will be a villain who brings me to trial—of that I am very sure, for no good man would accuse the innocent. Nor shall I be surprised if I am put to death. Shall I tell you why I anticipate this?"

"By all means," says Callicles.

"I think that I am the only, or almost the only, Athenian living who sets his hand to the true art of politics; I am the only politician of my time. Now seeing that when I speak, I speak not with any view of pleasing and that I look to what is best and not to what is most pleasant, being unwilling to practise those graces which you recommend, I shall have nothing to say in the court of justice, and the figure which I used to Polus may be applied to me. I shall be tried just as a physician would be tried in a court of little boys at the indictment of the cook. What would he reply in such a case if someone were to accuse him saying, 'O my boys, many evil things has this man done to you: he is the death of you, especially of the younger amongst you: he gives you the bitterest potions and compels you to hunger and fast. How unlike the variety of meats and sweets which I procure for you!' If the physician told the truth, he could only say: 'All this, my boys, I did with a view to health.' And then would there not be a clamour among such judges? How they would cry out!"

"I dare say."

"Would he not be utterly at a loss for a reply?"

"He certainly would."

"And that is the sort of thing which I should experience, as I well know; for I shall not be able to rehearse to the people the pleasures which I have procured for them and which are deemed by them to be benefits and advantages. And if anyone says that I corrupt young men and perplex their minds, or that I speak evil of old men and use bitter words towards them, whether in

private or public, I may not say the truth: that all this I do with a view to justice and out of a regard to your interests, my judges, and to that only. And therefore there is no saying what may happen to me."

"And do you think, Socrates, that a man who is thus defenceless in a city is in a good position?"

"Yes, Callicles, if he be his own defence and have never said or done anything wrong, either in respect of Gods or men. . . . If I died because I have no powers of flattery or rhetoric, I am very sure that you would not find me repining at death. For no one fears to die who is not entirely irrational and effeminate: but he fears to act unjustly; since for the soul to come to Hades full of unjust actions is the extremity of all evils. And in proof of this, if you have no objection, I should like to tell you a story."*

Socrates, after solemnly assuring his hearers of the truth underlying the fable, recounts the myth of the judges and judgment in the underworld. He draws the inference that just as the body after death still bears the outer marks and characteristics which it had in life, so the soul's natural and acquired affections are laid open to view when the man is stripped of body.

"And when the souls come to the judge, he inspects them quite impartially, not knowing whose the soul is: perhaps he may lay hands on the soul of a great king or potentate who has no soundness in him, but his soul is full of the prints and scars of perjuries and wrongs which have been stamped upon it by each action. He is all crooked with falsehood and injustice. . . . Him Rhadamanthus beholds . . . and dispatches him ignominiously to his prison and there he undergoes the punishment which he deserves. . . . Yes, Callicles, the very bad men come from the class of those who have great power. And yet in that very class there may arise good men; and worthy they are of all admiration. For where there is great power to do wrong, to live and die justly is a hard thing and greatly to be praised, and few there are who attain this.

"Or again, Rhadamanthus looks with admiration on the soul of some just one who has lived in holiness and truth; him Rhadamanthus sends to the Islands of the Blessed.

* Thomas Taylor's translation.

“Now Callicles, I am persuaded of the truth of these things, and renouncing the honours at which the world aims, I desire only to know the truth and to live as well as I can, and when the time comes, to die. And to the utmost of my power I exhort all other men to do the same.

“Perhaps this may appear to you only an old wife’s tale which you despise. And there might be reason in your despising such tales if by searching we could find out anything better or truer; but now you see that you and Polus and Gorgias, who are the three wisest of the Greeks in our day, are not able to show that we ought to live any life which does not profit in another world as well as in this. And of all that has been said, nothing remains unshaken but the saying that to do injustice is more to be avoided than to suffer injustice, and that the reality and not merely the appearance of virtue is to be followed . . . and that when anyone has done wrong in anything he is to be punished, and that the next best thing to a man being just is that he should become just . . . also that he shall avoid all flattery of himself as well as of others . . . and all his actions should be always with a view to justice.

“Follow me, then, and I will lead you where you will be happy in life and after death. And never mind if someone despises you as a fool and insults you, if he has a mind; let him strike you, by Zeus! and do you be of good cheer and do not mind the insulting blow, for you will never come to any harm in the practice of virtue if you are a really good and true man.

“When we have practised virtues in common, we will betake ourselves to politics, if that seems desirable, or we will advise about whatever else may seem good to us, for we shall be better able to judge then. In our present condition we ought not to give ourselves airs, for even on the most important subjects we are always changing our minds; and what stage of education does that imply? Let us then take this discourse as our guide, which signifies to us that the best way of life is to practise justice and every virtue in life and death. This way let us go and in this exhort all men to follow.”

EXTRACTS FROM HAFIZ OF SHIRAZ*

Why fix thy heart upon this frail abode?
 When gone, thou never shalt retrace thy road.
 To place thy trust there were the madman's part,
 And he who loves it has an alien's heart.
 Within this fabric of six doors † we miss
 A tenement of ease, a place of bliss.
 Saki, ‡ that fire-like water I desire,
 I crave that water to be freed from fire. §
 This heart enlightened with a fire is tried,
 Extinguished only by this water's tide.
 Saki, that ruby-tinted dew we seek
 That pales the amethyst and ruby's cheek.
 Oh, let that water of the fountain run,
 Not flowing water, but a moving sun.
 Above the nine steps of the five-fold sphere, ||
 One cup of wine my quadrangle house shall rear;
 Above those pillarless nine zones to soar,
 I must be shackled by myself no more.
 Arise! if rational; in inspiration trust.
 O Saki, give me that imperial bowl
 Which opes the heart, exhilarates the soul.
 By "bowl" I image the eternal wine,
 By "wine" I signify vision divine.
 As Yaman's lightning-flash our youth-time dies,
 And life as morning's East-wind swiftly flies.
 At once this mansion of six doors eschew,
 And bid this dragon of nine heads ¶ adieu.

* Translated from the Persian.

† The World, considered as a cube with its six sides.

‡ Cup-bearer.

§ Water symbolizes spiritual life: fire—desire.

|| The "nine steps" may be regarded as symbolizing nine stages on the pathway to the Celestial realms; the five-fold sphere as the earth with its four quarters and centre.

¶ This may be interpreted as representing a nine-fold attachment to material existence.

Thy gold, thy being, for the Path resign,
 Count life as nothing, if the Path be thine.
 Haste onward to the Lasting Mansion, haste;
 And know that all, excepting God, must waste.

It is a crime to seek to raise but self,
 Before all other men to praise but self;
 The pupil of the eye a lesson gives:
 Be all submitted to thy gaze but self.

Opportunity flies, O brother,
 As the cloud that quick doth pass:
 Oh, make use of it! life is precious:
 If we let it go—alas!

Let not thy heart the world's vain goods pursue,
 For no one yet hath found her promise true.
 No stingless honey in her mart we buy,
 No thornless dates her garden will supply.
 If lamp she lights, as soon as it grows bright,
 The wind extinguishes the spreading light.
 Who careless doth his heart on her bestow,
 Behold, he cherishes a deadly foe!

SEED THOUGHT

There is another kind of essence of things, besides that of sensibles, to which belongeth neither motion, nor corruption, nor any generation at all. By which essences of things, that have no generation or corruption, we should understand nothing else, but intelligible natures, species and ideas which are the standing and immutable objects of science. And certain it is that there could be no constant and immutable science at all, were there no other objects of the mind but signatures and sensibles, because these are all mutable.

—*Ralph Cudworth.*

THE DIVINE NAMES*

BY DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE

Chapter IV continued

Now this is the all-surpassing greatness of the Good, that It gives power even to the things which are deficient in goodness, and to the very defect itself, to the end that goodness should be imparted to the whole of things. And to speak the truth openly, even the things that fight against the Good have both their being and their ability to fight through Its power. In short, all things that are, in so far as they have being, are good, and are from the Good, and in so far as they are deprived of the Good neither are good nor have being.

For even in the case of other qualities such as heat and cold, that which has been heated continues to exist after the heat has left it, and many natural things exist which lack both life and mind, whereas God Himself transcends all being, and therefore *is* in a super-essential manner. And in general, with regard to all other things, though a quality may be lost or may never have been present, the things still have being and power, and remain. But that which is wholly deprived of the Good never was, or is, or will be, or can be. For instance, the intemperate man, though he is deprived of good through his irrational animal desire, and to this extent is deprived of being and seeks the non-real, yet still participates in the Good in the measure of his feeble echo of friendship and union.

And even anger participates in the Good in so far as it seeks to change and direct that which seems evil to that which is considered good. And even the man who desires the worst life, since he wholly desires life and the life which seems good to him, inasmuch as he feels desire and looks to a life which appears best, has some share in the Good. And if you were to take away the Good entirely there would be no essence, life, movement, or any other thing. Therefore that which produces generation from corruption is not the power of evil, but the prevailing of a lesser good; just as disease is an absence of order—not

* For previous sections see *Shrine of Wisdom*, Nos. 96 to 100.

complete, for if order were entirely absent, the disease itself could not exist—but the disease remains and exists and has its degree and place in the lowest order as a parasite. For that which is entirely bereft of good neither exists nor is in any existing thing; but the mixed, because of the good existing in all things, and in the degree in which it is present in things, both exists and participates in the Good. For truly all things which are will possess a greater or lesser degree of being in so far as they participate in the Good.

Similarly, from the point of view of being itself, that which in no manner whatsoever is, will have no being at all, but that which in part is and in part is not, in so far as it has fallen short of that which truly is (the Principle of Being), is not, but in so far as it participates in being, it is, and both its whole existence and its non-existence are preserved and maintained.

But evil which has entirely lapsed from the Good will be neither among the more nor the less good. That, however, which is partly good and partly not good will be opposed to a particular good, not indeed to the whole of goodness, and even this is preserved by a certain participation in good, and thus the Good gives subsistence even to the deprivation of Itself solely by the participation of Itself; for when the Good is entirely absent, there will be nothing which is altogether good, nothing mixed, and nothing entirely evil.

For if evil is an incomplete good, then if the Good should be entirely absent, both the perfect and the imperfect good will be absent. Evil can only exist and be seen when either it is an evil to other things to which it is opposed, or when it is cast out of other things because of their goodness. For it is impossible that the same things in the same relations in every respect should oppose one another. Evil, therefore, has no real being.

But neither is evil in beings. For if all things are from the Good, and the Good is in all beings and embraces all things, either evil will not be in beings, or it will be in the Good. But it will not be in the Good (for as cold is not in fire, neither is evil in that which turns even evil to good), but if this is so, how could evil be in the Good? And if it is said that evil is in the Good, this is impossible and absurd. For it is not possible, as says the true Word, that a good tree should bring forth evil fruits, or, indeed, the reverse.

If, therefore, evil is not from the Good, clearly it will be from another principle and cause. For either evil will be from the Good, or the Good from evil, or if these are both impossibilities, both the Good and the evil will be from another principle and cause. For no duality can be a principle; a unity must be the principle of every duality. Again, it is absurd that from one and the same unity two opposites should proceed, and that the self-same principle should not be simple and unitive, but divided and double, opposite to, and striving against itself.

And indeed it is not possible that there should be two opposite principles of existing things which fight one another and also contend in the universe. For if this were so, God Himself would not be at rest or free from anxiety if He were subject to limitations. Also, everything would be disordered and forever at war. But it is the Good which unites in friendship all existing things and is praised by the sacred writers as Peace Itself and the bestower of peace. Therefore all good things are friendly and harmonious with one another, and are the progeny of one Life, and progress in an orderly manner from one Good, and are pleasant and friendly and akin.

Therefore evil is not in good, and evil is not inspired by God, nor is evil from God: for either He is not good, or He does good and creates things which are good; and not sometimes and not at other times, nor certain things and not all things, for this would imply change and difference in That Which is most Divine of all, namely the Cause.

But if in God the Good is truly His Essence, then if He changes from the Good, at one time He will be and at another time He will not be. Again, if He possesses the Good by participation, it will be imparted by another, and sometimes He will have it, and sometimes not. Therefore evil is not from God or in God, either wholly or according to time.

But neither is evil in angels. For if the angelic goodness is the manifestation of the Divine Goodness, the angel, being himself in a secondary manner and by participation that which the One Whom he proclaims is primarily and causally, is verily an image of God, a shining forth of the unmanifested Light, a pure mirror, most clear, flawless, unspotted, undefiled, receiving, if I may speak thus, the whole beauty of the God-like form of

Goodness, resplendently shedding forth, unmingled in itself, according to his capacity, the Goodness of the hidden silence.

Hence evil is not in the angels. But are they evil because they punish sinners? By this reasoning those who punish evil-doers are evil, and also the priests who exclude the godless from the Divine Mysteries. But it is not evil to be punished. It is evil to become deserving of punishment. Nor is the exclusion of the unworthy from the sacred Mysteries evil, but it is evil to become guilty and impure and unfit for the holy Mysteries.

But neither are daimons evil by nature. For if they are evil by nature they are neither from the Good, nor do they exist in the nature of things, nor, again, did they change from good, if they are always evil by nature.

Secondly, are they evil to themselves or to others? If to themselves, they must destroy themselves; if to others, how or what do they destroy? Essence, power, or energy? If it is assumed that they destroy essence, then first we answer that they cannot destroy it contrary to its nature, for they do not destroy things which are of an incorruptible nature, but those which are susceptible to corruption. In the second place, even this is not evil to everything and in every respect, for it does not destroy any one of existing things in so far as this acts in accordance with its own essence and nature; but only in so far as it has fallen short of the natural order is it weakened with respect to its lawful proportion and symmetry and unable to maintain its original condition. But it is not entirely weak, for in that case both the disease itself and the creature which is diseased would have been destroyed. Thus destruction would destroy itself. Therefore such a thing is not evil, but is a deficiency of good; for that which is wholly bereft of good will not even exist.

And the same reasoning holds with respect to the destruction of power and energy. Moreover, how can daimons be evil if they are from the Good? For the Good produces and establishes that which is good.

But someone may say that they are called evil not because of what they are (for they are from the Good and are endowed with a good existence), but from what they are not, because (as the Scripture asserts) they could not guard their original principle. For how do we regard daimons as having become

evil except through a falling away from the estate and energy of Divine Good? On the other hand, if the daimons are evil by nature, they must always be evil. But evil is unstable. If, therefore, they are always in the same condition, they are not evil, for to abide the same is a property of the Good. Hence if they are not always evil, they are not evil by nature, but through a deficiency of the angelic good.

And they are not entirely destitute of good, inasmuch as they exist and live and possess intelligence, and in short, so far as there is a certain movement of aspiration in them. But they are said to be evil because of a certain weakness of their natural energy.

Their evil, then, is a turning aside and a departure from and privation of their true estate, a weakness, failure, and falling away from that power which would preserve them in their perfection. Other than this, what evil is there in daimons? Irrational passion, thoughtless animal desire, unrestrained phantasy. But these, though they are in daimons, are not in every way and entirely evil, for in other living creatures it is not the possession, but the loss of these which is an evil and brings about the destruction of the creature, while their possession preserves the condition and establishes the nature of the creature.

Hence the race of daimons is not evil in so far as it is according to nature, but in so far as it is not. And the whole good given to them has not been changed, but they themselves have fallen away from that wholeness of good. And we assert that the angelic gifts bestowed on them have not been changed at all, but remain entire and most brilliant, even though the daimons do not see it, having fallen away from their power of perceiving goodness.

Inasmuch as they are, they are from the Good, and seek the Beautiful and the Good in that they desire Being, Life and Intellect, which truly are. But they are called evil through a declination and deprivation and lapse from that good which is proper to them, and they are evil according to that which they are not, and they desire evil in seeking that which is not.

But someone may say that souls are evil. If, however, they meet with evil providentially and are able to withstand it, this is not evil but good, and is from the Good Who turns evil to good.

But if we say that souls become evil, in what respect do they become evil except through a deficiency of good dispositions and energies, and through slipping and wandering away from the right path? Similarly we say that the air around us is darkened by a deficiency and absence of light, though the light itself is always light and illuminates even the darkness. Evil, then, is neither in daimons nor ourselves as essential evil, but is a privation and lapse from the perfection of our own true goodness.

Nor, again, does evil exist in irrational living creatures. For if you take away the passion and desire and the other things we speak of which are not essentially evil in their nature, the lion, having lost his strength and courage, will not be a lion, and the dog, if it becomes gentle to everyone, will not be a dog, since it is natural to a dog to keep guard and to allow those of the household to come near but to drive off strangers.

Therefore it is not evil that the nature of anything should be uncorrupted, but evil is its destruction and weakness, and a deprivation of its natural disposition, energies, and powers. And if all things which are generated reach their perfection in time, imperfection will not be entirely contrary to all the parts of nature.

Nor is there evil in nature as a whole. For if all natural laws proceed from universal nature, there is nothing contrary to nature, though in individual creatures some things will be in accord with nature and other things will not. For one thing is unnatural in one creature and another in another creature, and that which is natural in one is unnatural in another. But evil in nature, that which is contrary to nature, is a deficiency of that which is natural to a creature. Therefore evil in nature is this: the inability to fulfil the purpose of nature.

(To be continued)

THE ELEMENTS OF THEOLOGY

PROCLUS*

Proposition CLXXIX

Every intellectual number is bounded

For if there is another multitude posterior to this, essentially inferior to it and thus more remote from the One, but the intellectual number is nearer to the One; and if that which is nearer to the One is less according to quantity, but that which is more remote from it is more according to quantity—if this be the case, then the intellectual number also will be less than every multitude posterior to it. Hence it is not infinite.† The multitude of intellects, therefore, is bounded. For that which is less than a certain thing is not infinite, because the infinite, so far as infinite, is not less than any thing.

Proposition CLXXX

Every intellect is a whole, so far as each consists of parts, and is united to other things and at the same time separated from them. But imparticipable intellect, indeed, is a simple whole, as containing all parts in itself totally. But each partial intellect possesses the whole as in a part; and thus is all things partially

For if a partial intellect is all things according to one, but a subsistence according to one thing is nothing else than a subsistence partially, the whole is in each of these intellects partially, being defined according to a certain one particular thing which predominates in all of them.

* For previous sections see *Shrine of Wisdom*, Nos. 56 to 100.

† According to number.

Proposition CLXXXI

Every participated intellect is either divine, as being suspended from the Gods, or is intellectual only

For if a divine and imparticipable intellect has a primary subsistence, the intellect which is allied to this is not that which differs from it in both respects, namely, which is neither divine nor imparticipable. For things which are dissimilar in both these respects, cannot be conjoined with each other. It is evident, therefore, that the medium between these is partly similar to that which is primarily intellect, and partly dissimilar from it. Either therefore it is imparticipable and not divine, or it is participated and divine. But every thing imparticipable is divine, as being allotted an order in multitude analogous to the One. Hence, there will be a certain intellect which is divine and at the same time participated.

It is necessary, however, that there should be an intellect which does not participate of the divine unities, but intellectually perceives them only. For in each series such things as are first, and which are conjoined with their monad are able to participate of things proximately situated in a superior order. But such as are far distant from the primary monad, cannot be directly suspended from the natures that proximately belong to a higher order. Thus there is both a divine intellect, and an intellect which is intellectual only; the latter indeed being established according to an intellectual peculiarity which it possesses from its own monad and from imparticipable intellect; but the former subsisting according to the union which it receives from the participated monad.

(To be continued)