

Goodness: Comments On Chapter Three of Lisa

Mr. Jahorski, when distinguishing quantity and quality, refers to goodness as a quality. To judge the goodness of a thing, one must see: "how valuable this thing is" (1). Is it true that goodness would be a quality and a value, as implied by Mr. Jahorski's remarks? To sort out what goodness is, we will refer to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book One, (2) where this concept is analyzed deeply.

According to Aristotle, goodness, like being, may be said of several things:

"Le bien comporte autant de categories que l'etre: en effet, en tant que substance, le bien supreme s'appelle Dieu et l'intelligence; en tant que qualite, les vertus, en tant que quantite, la juste mesure . . ." (3)

So goodness would be said of a quality but it would also be said of a quantity and of some other categories. Would it rather be a criterion, that is, a measure one may use to judge the value of a thing? This would mean that each thing contains a certain amount of goodness, otherwise it would be called a bad thing if it does not contain any goodness at all.

Aristotle is opposed to Plato's theory of Ideas according to which the Idea of Goodness would exist in itself and would be imperfectly reflected in the material world. Aristotle argues that there is not only one good in itself but three: honor, thinking and pleasure.

"Si donc ces biens-la doivent etre ranges parmi les biens en soi, il faudra admettre que le meme concept du bien apparaisse dans tous ces objets, comme la notion de blancheur apparait dans la neige et le blanc de ceruse. Pourtant les concepts d'honneur, de pensee, de plaisir admettent en tant que biens, des definitions differentes et dissemblables. Ainsi donc le souverain bien n'est pas cette qualite commune que comprendrait une seule idee." (4)

If there is no common goodness, then, what is it? Is it just an analogy? Aristotle does not answer this question, at least not in part of his book. He is a very empirical man. He wants to stick to the facts as much as possible:

"Or, le principe en cette matiere, c'est le fait; S'il nous apparaissait avec suffisamment d'evidence, nous n'aurions plus besoin du pourquoi" (5)

What is evident to him is that goodness varies from one thing to another. The goodness for each one would be the realization of the ends toward which it is oriented:

"Aussi, s'il y a une fin, quelle qu'elle soit, pour toutes les actions possibles, ce serait elle le bien realise. S'il y a plusieurs fins, ce sont precisement ces fins." (6)

If we apply this definition of goodness to Mark's example of a good skater (7), speed will not be the only criterion for being good, because speed may be just one end of skating. A good skater will be the one who realizes all the "virtues" of skating. That is why the ones who obtain the best in something is called a "virtuoso".

According to Aristotle each thing has its virtue and goodness is the realization of these virtues: *"A ces conditions, le bien propre a l'homme est l'activite de l'ame en confirme avec la vertu"* (8)

This conformity to virtue must be constant, otherwise: *"Une hirondelle ne fait pas le printemps, non plus qu'une seule journee de soleil"*. (9)

So, to say that one is a good skater, one must constantly be good in skating, not just during a short period of time.

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Footnotes

1. Lipman, M.: *Lisa*, I.A.P.C. 1976, p. 25.
2. Aristotle: *Ethique de Nicomaque*, trad. preface et notes de Jean Voilquin, Garnier-Flammarion, Paris, 1965, 31 Op chap. VI #3 p. 25.
3. Idem no 2.
4. Ibid, #11 p. 26.
5. Ibid, chap. IV, #7 p. 23.
6. Ibid, chap. VII, #1 p. 27.
7. Lipman, M., op. cit. p. 22.
8. Aristotle, op. cit. chap. VII, #15 p. 29.
9. Ibid, #16.

Bibliography

- Aristotle: *Ethique de Nicomaque*, trad. preface et notes de Jean Voilquin, Garnier-Flammarion, Paris, 1965, 31 Op.
- Lipman, M. and Sharp, A. M., and Oscanyan, F. S. *Ethical Inquiry: Instructional Manual to Accompany Lisa*, I.A.P.C. 1977 466p.