

PART I

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Goodness in Harmony and Form

Would it not be helpful if we could be clear at the beginning of our inquiry? Would it not be helpful if we could just define our terms clearly and build on that beginning? Mathematics works this way, clear step by clear step. Philosophy, however, gains clarity only toward the end of inquiry. Even at the end of a philosophical inquiry, clarity is not exactly the end in view. Rather we should hope for an enlarged and highly complicated feel for what connects with what and why certain things are more important than others. Nevertheless, in order to begin I can counterfeit the helpful feeling of clarity by establishing a contrast between what I intend to argue for and what I shall argue against. Let me begin by contrasting two large, thematic, models of goodness.

The one I shall argue *for* is the aesthetic model according to which goodness is some kind of harmonious togetherness of things with balance, proportion, and measure, things that “just fit together,” as I mentioned earlier. It deserves the label “aesthetic” because it holds that goodness is something grasped or appreciated in a kind of aesthetic vision or judgment, a matter of coherent perception (“aesthetic” derives from the Greek word for perception). The grasp is itself a harmony that connects the goodness in the thing with the goodness in the perception. The large model of goodness *against* which I shall argue is the realization or fulfillment model according to which goodness is the realization, fulfillment, or completion of a thing’s nature; this model usually supposes that things are substances that can bear unrealized

realizations. That something is good means that it is finished in its realization, or on the way to finishing, according to the realization model.

By virtue of thoroughness, clarity might develop in the maturation of inquiry. Thoroughness of inquiry overcomes the dichotomies that provide initial clarity and integrates the truth in both sides. I hope to show along the way that something is true in both the aesthetic and the realization models of goodness. Nevertheless, I will argue that the second is subordinate to and accounted for within the first.

In the West, Plato is associated with the aesthetic model of goodness. His fundamental vision was that the cosmos is a maelstrom of changing processes that have determinateness only insofar as they pass through formal structures. The processes cohere, when they do, because their forms cohere. Because the processes are always passing through forms on the way to other forms, Plato called the concrete world the realm of *becoming*. Everything is always becoming something else. The stability of the world, for Plato, derives from the stability of the forms through which things pass repeatedly. In the human sphere are forms that are necessary and precious for human life, and these become the ideals that we strive to preserve or achieve. The understanding of goodness then is the understanding of what makes forms cohere. Evil or disaster happen when the forms important to embody in the processes of human life break up by accident, collision, or entropy. Plato's abstract analysis of goodness appealed to what he called the Form of the Good, that which makes good things good because they have internal coherence. In the *Republic* where he talked about the Form of the Good, he said that it gives coherence of different sorts to images, concrete processes, theoretical ideas that might apply to those processes, and to what he called the "dialectic" of weighing what theories take in or leave out in their account of processes. He also said the Form of the Good gives aesthetic judgmental faculties to imagination, to common sense for dealing with concrete processes, to theoretical rationality, and to dialectical speculation. The Form of the Good is not itself a determinate form, and hence we cannot know it in a theory or conceptual picture. It gives coherence to the forms of things in process, and in the *Philebus* Plato characterized "that which gives coherence" as balance, proportion, measure, beauty, and things of this sort, all matters of aesthetic appreciation. In the *Statesman* Plato said

that a good politician has an aesthetic sense of “normative measure” for just how much of this or that to promote and how far to go, this all in contrast with “standard measure” or rules that tell you how much and how many. In the preface, I listed some of the major Platonic contributors to the aesthetic model of goodness, coming down to Charles Peirce and Alfred North Whitehead, my own patrons. Robert S. Brumbaugh is the extraordinary interpreter of Plato on goodness whom I follow in my reading.

In the West, Aristotle is associated with the realization model of goodness. Goodness lies in the achievement of a final cause, “that for the sake of which” a thing acts. The ultimate final cause for Aristotle is self-sufficiency, that which needs nothing else and cannot change because any change would be for the worse. For him, the ultimate Good is “thought thinking itself,” which is pure act with no potency; Thomas Aquinas developed this into his idea of God. Next most perfect in itself to thought thinking itself, for Aristotle, is a fixed star spinning in place; next best is a spinning star moving in orbit; next best is the rotation of the seasons; next best is the reproductive cycle in plants and animals. Human beings need to find the balance between extremes, the Golden Mean, in moral life; but the highest good for human beings, according to Aristotle in book 10 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, is contemplation of eternal truths in imitation of thought thinking itself.<sup>1</sup>

Chapter 1 of this part introduces many of the important concepts concerning goodness that I will develop throughout this volume. The claim basic to this whole project is that anything with form has goodness by virtue of that form. The first argument for this is experiential, namely, that we experience everything as having some good or other. To make out this argument I need to introduce the notion of form as such, which I will articulate theoretically in the first and second chapters. Crucial to the notion of form is that of harmony, which I shall develop abstractly in the second and third sections of the first chapter. In order to experience goodness appreciatively, the form of that which is good needs to relate to the appreciators. I shall elaborate a conception of a “situation” in which the intentions and attentions of experiencers relate through harmonies to that which is appreciated. Throughout the volume, I will embroider the example of appreciating a sunset.

The most revolutionary contribution of this book, I dare to think, is its systematic development of the hypothesis that anything that is determinate is a harmony, including as components within itself relations with all other things with respect to which the thing is determinate. We cannot fully define things by “properties” they possess, but by how they compose in their forms all the other things to which they relate without making those things lose their own external integrity. In my language, things have components rather than properties, and many of these components are relations to other things. Relations themselves are harmonies. This is an extreme relational metaphysics undergirding a relational axiology.

Chapter 2 extends the argument by asking, in a preliminary way prior to the full-blown discussion in chapter 4, why we should identify goodness with form. The first answer is that goodness is a kind of “density of being,” as in the philosophy of Leibniz. The denser the being of something, the better it is. The chapter elaborates the theory of harmony to explain density of being. This elaboration requires the further elucidation of the notion of an existential field in which harmonies are related. A situation as defined in chapter 1 is one kind of existential field and is “situated” within a larger enviroing existential field. I justify the goodness of density of being in two stages. First, I explain how the elegant optimization of complexity and simplicity constitutes goodness. Second, I explain how the composition of the form of a harmony arranges its components so that they function in one or several of four ways: as having narrowness, width, vagueness, or triviality. Though borrowed from Whitehead, I nevertheless develop these notions here according to my view of harmony, not his. Finally, chapter 2 articulates the experiential terms of intensity and immediacy for the situational grasp of the goodness in density of being.

Chapter 3 deepens the discussion of the previous two chapters by developing a more formal but concrete cosmology to show the grounds for their claims. The metaphysical theory of determinateness as harmony applies to any possible cosmos. Our particular cosmos is temporal, and so a temporal cosmology needs articulation. It includes a theory of the future as a structured field of possibilities, often including alternative possibilities. I introduce and complicate Aristotle’s famous example (in *De Interpretatione* 19a30, chapter 9) of admirals contemplat-

ing a sea battle on the morrow to illustrate alternatives in the future that have different values. The chapter discusses a theory of actuality and actualization with an analysis of becoming. Acts of becoming take place in the overlap of a field of actualized things and a field of possibilities. Goodness is present wherever there is form, in possibility or actuality. The perspectives in which things are good include their own harmonies and their functions in all the harmonies in which they become components. The cosmology articulates some of the complex ways in which things are good in themselves and good for or in other things.

The fourth chapter steps back to ask why we should identify what I have described in the complex theory of form with what we mean by goodness or value. The preliminary discussion treats and rejects several arguments to the effect that goodness is not really in things but is just in the projections of valuations onto things. Then I argue that we distinguish between greater and lesser goods, and different kinds of goods, by contemplating imagined possibilities, as when an artist contemplates how to compose a work. The chapter begins the sketch of a theory of aesthetic judgment so that we can see how aesthetic valuation, on the one hand, is immediate, and, on the other hand, is mediated to be critical. All of this immediate appreciation and critical judgment takes place within the processes of engaging things in the world that have goodness in one perspective or another.

The argument plot of this part is like successive waves washing over the beach, each bringing in new material, adding layers of sediment. It is like climbing a hill from many different approaches, each with its special tracks. It is like the five parts of Whitehead's *Process and Reality* that are radically different ways of approaching the same general topic. Although some sections here have the form of a sequential argument, like a mathematical argument, with steps building upon what has been suggested earlier, the overall plot of this part is a deepening of the hypothesis about harmony, form, and goodness by adding new dimensions to what was articulated earlier.