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The Philosophic Principles of Rational Being

The past we possess.

The future lies before us.

Good, bad, ours to own.

From the principal early philosophers to address the problems of the philosophic basis of being and life, the ancient Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle, through the many following centuries in which that original work was reviewed and further developed by philosophers such as Augustine, Boethius, and Aquinas, to the many further subsequent philosophers such as Kant, and their analyses during the 18th to the 20th centuries, a general [but not unanimous] agreement on the fundamentals of reality and living life has developed. That set of concepts is reviewed and summarized [with some editing and additions] as follows.

REALITY

Reality is that which exists, which is. It includes material reality [matter and energy in their various manifestations] and non-material reality [ideas, concepts, feelings, events, *etc.*].

There are skeptics who attempt to contend contrary to this conception, as follows.

- Some contend that there is no reality, that all is an illusion. With them there is no point to further discussion because it will resolve nothing nor produce any useful results. Their contention cannot be absolutely proved nor absolutely refuted; rather, it is a termination of investigation and learning.

- There is the skeptic who contends that all is unknowable and that there is no such thing as truth. He refutes himself for if his statement of skepticism is deemed true then it refutes itself and if it is deemed not true then it denies his skepticism.
- That skeptic could then contend that his statement that all is unknowable and that there is no such thing as truth applies to all except to that very statement. With him there is no point to further discussion because it will resolve nothing nor produce any useful results. The construct of his contention is inconsistent.

Therefore, reality is as presented above or else all discussion, philosophy, and learning are pointless and cease. Common sense, then, dictates reality.

Reality is objective. There can be no subjective reality. The skeptical objections and their refutation are as follows.

- The skeptic who contends that there are different realities for different persons or different situations is misunderstanding through errors in perception or errors in judgment. Objective reality is independent of perception and judgment. It exists in itself.

Different persons may experience different personal realities because each experiences a personal sub-set of the comprehensive totality of reality. Reality is "a whole"; what a person experiences is "a part".

- Some skeptics acknowledge the independent objective existence of material reality but contend that ideas and concepts exist only by virtue of minds thinking of them and have no independent objective existence. That contention is in error as follows.

If all minds ceased and subsequently new minds arose, those new minds would develop some of the same ideas and concepts that were in the earlier, now ceased, minds *e.g.*: truth, goodness, right and wrong, beauty, *etc.*, and other abstract concepts such as mathematics and logic. If that ceasing of existing minds and the subsequent arising of new minds were to occur many times over, some of the same fundamental ideas and concepts would reappear in each new set of minds. Such ideas and concepts exist in themselves independently of minds to think of them. They have the same objective existence as does material reality. Some of them are, for example: truth, goodness, justice, right and wrong, love, beauty.

TRUTH

Truth is that which is in agreement with reality. It is objective truth because it corresponds with objective reality. It is absolute truth because there is only one objective reality.

A judgment is a conclusion as to the truth or falsity of a specific statement; that is, a judgment is a conclusion that a specific statement is in agreement with reality [is true] or is not in agreement with reality [is false].

- There can be no subjective truth. Apparent subjective truth results from errors in perception of reality or from errors in judgment as to the agreement with reality, or both. There is only one reality.
- There can be doubt, questions, or issues with regard to specific truths, the doubt arising from insufficient information or from concern as to the validity of the reasoning to reach the judgment. Those problems do not affect objective reality nor objective truth. They only affect our ability to know the specific truths, an effect that can be

reduced or removed with better information or better reasoning or both.

- A judgment is conclusively certain if it is impossible for new evidence to change it and its reasoning is beyond criticism. [For example, it is conclusively certain that the sum of the interior angles of a plane triangle is a straight line].
- Otherwise the judgment is in doubt to the degree that those two conditions are not met. The possible states of doubt range from "nearly" or "practically" certain through certain "so far" or "at this time" or "per a preponderance of the evidence" on to the genuinely doubtful. But, such doubt does not change objective reality nor objective truth -- it only describes the limits of our knowledge of the truth.

KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge is accumulated truth. There are two sources or methods to obtaining knowledge: information obtained via the senses [empirical, physical knowledge] and conclusions obtained from logical, rational deduction [metaphysical knowledge]. Both are subject to error; however, that defect is not comprehensive.

The senses may be in error some times through unintended or unrecognized distortions in perception or because of error in our comprehension of that which the senses deliver to us, but the senses are not comprehensively, consistently in error. If our senses were not largely reliable it would be impossible for us to successfully exist. Therefore, while we cannot rely absolutely on the senses [empirical, physical information] as a source of knowledge nevertheless the senses are a valuable and largely reliable source of knowledge.

Likewise, in spite of our best efforts, our logical, rational thinking and analyses can be in error through deficiency in the facts available to us upon which the rationality is based or because of

defects in the logic that we apply to the problem. But, our logical, rational thinking is not comprehensively, consistently in error. Again, if our rationality were not largely reliable it would be impossible for us to successfully exist. Therefore, while we cannot rely absolutely on logic and reasoning [metaphysics] as a source of knowledge nevertheless it is a valuable and largely reliable source of knowledge.

Then, what is the key to accurate, valid, reliable knowledge? The pertinent factors bearing on the validity of any truth, any component of knowledge, are: the causality or mechanism involved, non-dependence on unsubstantiated assumptions, and valid relating to all other truths, to the body of validated knowledge. These operate as follows.

- Causality or mechanism is apparent from observation and experience which show that every thing and every event has a cause, and that those causes are themselves the results of precedent causes, and *ad infinitum*. Defining and comprehending the causality or mechanism operating to produce any contended or proposed truth is essential to authenticating or validating that truth.

The candidate truth cannot be deemed valid until its causes and mechanism are analyzed back to an already substantiated operating cause upon which it effectively depends. If that is lacking then it is always possible that a candidate truth will be found not to have a valid precedent operating cause, a valid mechanism in its precedence and, therefore, itself not be valid.

- Assumptions are proposed or contended truths, proposed or contended components of knowledge, that lack sufficient proof or justification to credit them as real truths, as really in agreement with reality. Clearly that infection cannot be part of knowledge without contaminating the whole.

It is not easy to avoid assumptions. Personal prejudices and beliefs may not be apparent to their holder, or they may be apparent but are nevertheless deemed exceptions to the requirement prohibiting assumptions. That may be because he considers them so important or fundamental as to be beyond question.

Or it may be because he is psycho-emotionally wedded to them, dependent on them. For example, in the history of philosophy the God assumption appears abundantly, major instances being, for example, Augustine, Aquinas and Descartes.

In the sciences, hypotheses that have not [or not yet] succeeded in advancing to the state of completely determined and validated laws nevertheless acquire over time the status of being treated as if completely validated and not subject to questioning. Major modern instances of this are the “Hubble Constant” and its related cosmology and the unresolvable inconsistency of Quantum Mechanics and Einstein’s General Relativity’s treatment of gravitation.

In addition there can also be assumptions that are so embedded in the psyche of the pursuer of knowledge that he is not even aware of their presence and influence on his thinking and research.

- Validly relating to the body of validated knowledge is fundamental to what knowledge is: accumulated truth, assembled agreement with reality, that is agreement with that which is. Overall consistency is a fundamental requirement. A component of knowledge not being so compatible would constitute a contradiction, the holding that a thing and its refutation are simultaneously valid.

If those criteria are met then contributions to knowledge produced physically, that is using the senses, or produced

metaphysically, that is using reasoning, or produced using both are reliable validated components of knowledge.

Just as there is only one reality and can be only one reality, so is there and can there be only one knowledge, one overall collection of truths, one system of everything.

[See the next following two sections: 2 - *The Problem of Absolute Truth* and 3 - *The Problem of Absolute Reality*].

GOODNESS [THE GOOD]

Beings capable of making choices have both needs and "wants" [things that they want]. Needs are those things that are essential to the existence and functioning of the being. Wants are things that are desired by the being but that are not needs. [It is possible for beings capable of making choices to want things that are harmful to their existence or their functioning, and to do so through choice or through error in perception or judgment. Such things are generally referred to as "bad"].

The ancient philosophers, and even those up to the present, have identified goodness, or the good, with those things that humans desire. Because humans are fallible and can behave irrationally that definition is adjusted to "good is that which a rational human would, or ought to, desire". However, "ought" is an awkward philosophical concept and "rational" is difficult to define. The definition of "good" based on desire is actually only a guide to identifying good [and not infallibly], not a definition of good.

The better definition of good is: "Good is those things that satisfy a being's needs or that satisfy those wants of a being that are not harmful to the being's existence or functioning [are not bad per the definition of bad just, above]". Goodness resides in those things that are good; they are objectively good. It is not that they are good because they happen to be desired; they are good because of the needs and wants that they satisfy. If they happen to be desired it is because

of their having that inherent goodness. [Also, see conditional good, below].

JUSTICE

For most beings there is not sufficient good to satisfy their needs. That is because if their needs are satisfied they tend to increase their numbers which increases the amount of good needed to satisfy their needs. The result is the natural world's competition for survival.

Sufficiently rational beings develop the concept of civilization, a societal organization of a community with shared tasks, shared contribution toward the production of goods, and shared benefit in receiving distribution of the resulting goods. Because of its efficiencies civilization results in the generation of sufficient goods to meet the needs of all of its society, normally produces goods in excess of that level so that some wants can also be satisfied, and tends somewhat to restrain excessive increase in the number of its members so that the demand for goods necessary to merely satisfy needs does not get out of hand.

The principal threats to that success of a civilized community are war, plague, pestilence, and natural disaster. War is one community's seeking to increase the good available to itself through appropriating by force some or all of the good of another community. Plague reduces a community's ability to supply its needs by reducing the number of its members able to participate in generating goods and by reducing their effectiveness. Pestilence is the destruction of goods needed for a community's survival by beings of another specie consuming them for their own survival. Natural disaster includes events that destroy production of goods or even destroy the entire community such as drought, flood, storm, earthquake and volcano.

Justice can only be present where there is sufficient good to supply the needs of all; that is, justice is only possible in a civilization.

In a civilization there will be persons who contribute to generating the supply of good in proportion to their ability to do so,

and persons who are unable to do so [the sick, the disabled, the children and the elderly], and some persons whose conduct is adverse to the social generating of good or to the functioning of the society in general [criminals]. Justice is the allocation of sufficient good to each member of the society other than the criminal so that his needs are satisfied and the allocation of any remaining good among the members of the society in partial satisfaction of their wants in some proportion to their contribution to the social production of good for the society. The reasons for this are as follows.

- First, the society chooses to meet the needs of the contributors because they are necessary, they are the principal generator of goods; the needs of the sick and disabled because anyone in the community could next fall victim to that state [the policy is that of mutual insurance]; and the needs of the children and the elderly because the children are necessary to the future and to assure the care of the elderly, a state that all members of the society expect eventually to enter. The society may choose to meet some of the needs of those whose conduct is adverse [the criminals] to the extent its members see fit.
- Second, the nature of rational beings, they having evolved from competitive survival of the fittest to the level of civilization, is such that only by the distribution of satisfaction of wants in a fashion that recognizes the relative value of recipients' contributions will society's members be motivated to maximize the generation of social goods and motivated to justly share goods rather than pursue their own good at the expense of others.
- Third, there can never be enough goods to satisfy all wants because as wants become satisfied beings develop new, additional wants. That is, wants are inherently unlimited whereas the means to satisfy wants are inherently limited.

KINDS OF GOOD

- *Absolute and Conditional Goods*

Absolute goods are goods as defined above, those that satisfy a need or that satisfy a want that is not harmful. They are universally good; for example, food, rest, health. Most goods are absolutely good.

Conditional goods are ones that satisfy a want and are good in spite of their being harmful to the being's existence or functioning. For example, death in general is not a good; but death is good for a terminally ill person who wants relief from extreme and otherwise unrelievable pain.

- *Internal and External Goods*

Goods can be analyzed and sub-divided in a number of different ways in addition to the divisions already presented, that of goods that satisfy needs and those that satisfy wants that are not bad, and that of absolute versus conditional goods. The next major distinction is between goods that are external to the being and those that are internal.

External goods are called possessions, they exist outside of the being who has them, *e.g.* food, clothing, money, but not all external goods can be "owned" as for example parents or children. While choice and effort enter into the acquiring of possessions, chance is still a major factor. For example the chance factors of where, when, into what family one was born have a major affect on one's acquisition of possessions.

Internal goods are called perfections and they exist within the being who has them, *e.g.* health, knowledge, skills, but by that is not meant that they are perfect. Something is perfect if it is as near to its best as is possible, but it can still be good even though less than perfect. While there can be an element of chance in the acquiring of perfections, choice is the dominant factor. One must choose to

conduct oneself in a fashion that leads to better health, additional knowledge, new skills if one is to acquire those perfections.

Some external goods satisfy needs, for example food; others satisfy wants, for example entertainment. Some internal goods satisfy needs, for example health; others satisfy wants, for example a skill.

In general internal goods are superior to external goods. That is, perfections are part of the being, their acquisition is more under the control of the being and due to the choices of the being, and it is more difficult for the being to lose them or have them taken away. Possessions are lesser goods because they are not part of the being, their acquisition is less under the being's control, and they can be more easily lost or taken away.

Possessions tend to be things that are used up in the process of performing their function or that tend to wear out with use. Perfections, on the other hand, are neither consumed nor worn out; rather they are enhanced by use.

Possessions tend to distract beings from the pursuit of perfections. That is because possessions gratify immediately whereas perfections take time and involve extended personal effort to develop so as to provide gratification. It is possible to have too much of possessions but not of perfections. For example too much food or drink can be unpleasant or even dangerous, but it is not possible to have too much knowledge or health; they can be enjoyed without limit.

- *Means and Ends*

Another analysis of goods is into means and ends. Means are goods that one needs or wants because they facilitate or are necessary for the acquiring of other goods. A particular skill might be pursued as a means to acquiring money, the acquisition of money pursued as a means to acquiring food, the food itself being an end to satisfy the need for food. A good that is purely a means is of no value other than

for the other goods it is the means to acquiring. For example, money is worthless other than for what it can purchase.

Ends are goods valued completely and simply for themselves. They have no role in acquiring other goods; they simply directly satisfy a need or a want. Many goods are means to some extent and at the same time ends in another sense. For example, having money would tend to relieve anxiety about survival [an end] while at the same time being only the means to acquiring that needed to actually survive.

VIRTUE

Virtue is directly related to morality and ethics. Morality is the principles or rules of “right conduct” [for which see below]. Ethics is the collection or system of moral principles. Virtue is conformity of one’s life and conduct to moral, ethical principles.

With regard to “right conduct” a rational being’s conduct, or behavior, relates in two ways. One is solitary, what the being does relative to itself; how its conduct affects itself. The other is social, how its conduct affects other beings both individually and collectively, with whom it shares existence.

The pursuit of happiness is the pursuit of those goods that satisfy one’s needs and wants. “Right conduct” toward oneself is the pursuing, with justice, of one’s own happiness to the extent that one is able to do so without harming others’ just pursuit of their own happiness. “Right conduct” toward others is the pursuing, with justice, of their happiness to the extent that one is able to do so without harming ones’ just pursuit of one’s own happiness.

Virtue is that “right conduct”, that right action. A good life is one that virtuously achieves a pleasing state of progress in the pursuit of happiness. Everyone can be virtuous; however, unfortunately, not everyone [perhaps even not very many] can have a good life; that is not everyone can achieve a pleasing state of progress in the pursuit of

happiness. Chance, things beyond one's control, can be a large factor affecting one's seeking of a good life.

Lack of virtue, that is conduct contrary to right conduct as described above, that is conduct harmful to others' pursuit of their own happiness, that is conduct adverse to the social generating of good or to the just functioning of the society in generating and distributing good in general, is criminal.

But, why should one be virtuous ? What is the motivation to not be criminal ? That a rational person would wish to pursue his own happiness and would wish to avoid other persons' pursuit of their happiness from harming his own pursuit of happiness is self evident. The question is why should a rational person be concerned about and avoid harming other persons' just pursuit of their own happiness and why should he be in favor of adding his effort to theirs ?

"Fairness", like "ought", is an awkward concept for purely philosophical purposes and cannot be relied on to support virtue. But, rational beings have a sense of fairness, a sense of good or bad, right or wrong ways to treat other beings. In other words they understand that if they treat others in a manner that they, themselves, would resent if so treated, then likely those others will resent receiving that treatment. That understanding by rational beings is the basis underlying the motivations to be virtuous. The motivations to be virtuous are as follows.

- The desire for self respect, to be able to approve of oneself.
- The desire for the respect of others, to have the approval of others.
- Fear of the actions that others might take if they are resentful of the treatment that they receive because of your non-virtuous conduct, resentful of your anti-virtuous behavior.

VIRTUE AND SOCIETIES

Societies, also, can be virtuous or criminal depending on whether they foster the pursuit of happiness of all of their members or of only a select few.

Socialism is virtuous because it generates and distributes good in a just manner. It supports everyone's pursuit of happiness. It contributes to everyone's pursuit of a good life.

Capitalism is criminal because it generates and distributes good in an unjust manner. It supports only the wealthy rulers' pursuit of possessions [which they think will produce their happiness] at the cost of harming the overall pursuit of happiness by everyone else. [So, also, are aristocracies and tyrannies.]

With regard to the possible motivations to be virtuous, criminal societies, or rather those beings who rule and control them, function as follows.

- Self respect is not a problem for them. They believe that they are special and superior to the masses so that they respect and admire themselves and only themselves for their exercise of rule and control over the society even though it is principally for their own benefit.
- Likewise they are not concerned in general about having the respect of others. The only others whose respect they care about, if any at all, is their peers in the ruling clique and that as a matter of self preservation, preservation of their rule-maintaining organization and their position in it.
- However, they do fear the actions that resentful others might take. To deal with that problem they employ a combination of force and propaganda. The force is to instill fear and maintain disciplined control. As a roman emperor said, "Let them hate so long as they fear." The propaganda is to confuse, mislead, and distract the others so that they are

unable to recognize the extent to which they have cause for major resentment and are therefore inhibited from acting to bring justice.

THE BEAUTIFUL

Beauty, that is the beautiful, is a good that is absolute, not conditional; that is external, not internal; that is an end in itself, not a means to other ends; and that has the following special characteristics.

- Beauty communicates, puts forth or expresses feelings that are abstract rather than logical concepts, feelings that are not, or not as well expressible other than through beauty.
- Beauty is wanted, is valued solely for itself, not for any benefit other than that which results from contemplation of the communication expressed.
- That which beauty expresses is true. We instinctively, automatically recognize it as true, as unarguably valid. It is that about beauty that pleases us most.
- For an expression of feelings to express that trueness the quality of its composition must be superior. It must exhibit those characteristics that we recognize as measures of quality: order, theme and variation, form and rhythm and so forth as well as quality of craftsmanship. In other words, the closer the expression is to perfection the more beautiful it is. We unconsciously measure particular instances of beauty against our conceptions of perfection and are pleased by sensing approximations to that conception.
- In a world that appears to be filled with imperfection and disorder beauty offers the opposite.
- The expressed communication resides in a sensuous medium; that is, a medium that can communicate in a manner consistent with what is being expressed. The

medium can be naturally occurring objects, events, or phenomena; or it can be specifically created or crafted objects, phenomena, or occurrences; or a combination of them. Occasionally the sensuous medium might be pure thought, pure idea or concept.

The beautiful satisfies a need or want that we have. It is difficult to contend that beauty is a need, really essential to the functioning and survival of a rational being although some have felt so on occasion. On the other hand beauty certainly is wanted and it is a want that is not harmful to beings' functioning and survival.

The beautiful is always true; however, the true is not necessarily beautiful. There are ugly truths. That is, some of reality, some of that which is, is ugly. One might propose that beauty is the highest form of truth just as compassion is the highest form of love and equity is the highest form of justice.

One can also observe that art is created beauty [if it is not beautiful it cannot be art] and an artist is one who creates beauty [if his creation lacks beauty he has failed as an artist].

HAPPINESS

A good that is purely an end in itself and not at all a means is called a higher good [as compared to lesser goods, those that are partially or totally means]. It is not the greatest good. There are many higher goods, many goods that are pure ends and not at all means. In general a higher good is more valuable, more desirable, than a lesser good because a higher good consists completely of something needed or wanted. A good that is purely a means provides nothing that is directly needed or wanted, satisfies no end; it only provides a means which if employed will lead to obtaining an end, a higher good.

The greatest good, *summum bonum*, for a rational being would be its having:

- [1] The highest good of each of the satisfactions of all of its needs
[to survive and function],
- [2] And of all wanted perfections
[that it chooses to pursue],
- [3] And a personal comfortable amount of wanted possessions
[neither so much nor so little as to distract from perfections].

Happiness is virtuously having that greatest good, that *summum bonum*. It can be pursued, but it can never be completely achieved; however, its pursuit with progress toward it can be an approximation or partial enjoyment of pure happiness.

Happiness depends upon Virtue and Virtue depends upon Justice.

LOVE

It is a curious thing, that love needs to be explained. We all want love and, seemingly, have a clear idea of what we mean by that. Yet, misconceptions of love abound, and, still more of a problem, most persons seem not to know how to give love, seem not to know what loving is.

Love is wishing good for the object of your love and acting to bestow that good. The feeling of love is the wishing. Being loving is the acting to bestow.

When a person says "I love candy" they do not mean that they wish well for the candy. They do not even care about the candy's welfare. What they mean is that they want to possess the candy, they want to satisfy and gratify themselves with the candy (in this case at the expense of the candy inasmuch as it becomes destroyed in being eaten).

More frequently than not when a lover says to his beloved, "I love you !" he does not mean that he wishes her welfare. No, he means that he wants to possess her, to continually experience the pleasure and gratification of her for himself.

Those are not love. None of us in wishing to be loved wishes to be owned, possessed, used in such a fashion. Then, where did the concept of what we really want come from ?

It came from childhood, from infancy. When we were very young we received true love from our parents. They wished and acted with regard to us only in the interest of our welfare. They fed, clothed, nurtured, caressed, and cared for us in every way. It felt very good.

While we do not wish to return to the helplessness and dependence of that past state we do wish to continue in being loved in that way. That is what love is. Giving that to others is loving. Receiving that is being loved. It is not a clinging, smothering, restricting thing. True loving seeks the fulfillment of the person loved.

Love does not require sacrificing oneself. One must be able to, and one must succeed at, loving oneself. If one cannot really love the person that they are closest to, themselves, then they certainly cannot validly love others.

Love and being loving are the condition and acts of sound, integrated persons. They are acting in their own welfare and, because love is something that can be, that is, infinite, that is without limit, they have abundant love remaining to give to others. They are able in abundance to wish the welfare of others and to reasonably act in that direction.

Social love is a society based on love -- based on each member wishing and behaving to implement the welfare of the others, of all. Social love is the virtuous society.

*The past – harvest done,
The future waits for planting.
What crop will we grow ?*