

Perspectives On "Proving" That Pleasure is "The Good"

Post by "Joshua" of December 24, 2022 at 9:10 PM

Quote

People were doing things for thousands of years. They were using some criteria (deliberately plural). They didn't have to stand around and ponder "the good" (or if there was one good, or many goods, or any good at all) before they could do anything.

I'm aware of the danger of erring too far the other way, but I take an alternative view of the history of this question. My sense is that the general conditions which predated Greek thought--and whatever non-Greek influences it may have had, say, in Phoenicia--were those of varying degrees of monarchy.

In Egypt, the rule of the Pharaohs had been replaced by the Persian occupation under the Achaemenid Empire; in Phoenicia itself, as well as Carthage, Etruria, and Macedonia, the monarchy was not yet in full decline. In all of these cases, the value of the individual was in his capacity as a subject. What does it mean in these circumstances to speak of a *purpose* in life, when the purpose is so manifestly servitude? Prosperity is a product of piety, and famine, war, destruction, conquest, and exile are, as punishments, the outward signs of a sinful and guilty people. We have, in a word, entered the world of the Hebrew Testament. It is the book not of one people, but of a whole barbaric age.

Individuality has no place in that world. The ruler is the father of a tribe--reveals himself to a tribe--makes a covenant with the tribe--and with no small degree of relish, he punishes the tribe. If they are very lucky, a scapegoat is punished on their behalf, but the motivating sin is always public, and always mutual, and always on display.

The Greek polis was, for the space of a few centuries, something new. Power was not so centralized as it had once been; the individual was governed not by an absolute monarch, but by a body of his fellow citizens. An appreciation for skill, talent, genius, and many-sidedness began to take shape, here as in the Renaissance and elsewhere always a sign of increasing liberty.

In Miletus, probably, or at least somewhere in Ionia, in the seventh or sixth century B.C. some individuals began asking a series of daring questions: what is nature? What is it made of, how does it operate, where did it come from, when does it change, and above all *why*? Who are we, and how should we live? What is the nature of our mind and consciousness? What happens to it when we die?

What are we here for?

These are not the kinds of questions entertained by those grasping for power and control. The Book of Job makes that plain: *Where were you when I laid the foundations of the Earth?*

The only question fit for an all-powerful God is a rhetorical one. He has all the answers--and *that* is the meaning of control. Pay no attention to the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil behind the curtain. ☐