

3

3

PASSAGE III

HUMANITIES: *This passage is adapted from The Nature of Goodness by George Herbert Palmer ©1903.*

My reader may well feel that goodness is already the most familiar of all the thoughts we employ, and yet he may at the same time suspect that there is something about it perplexingly remote. Familiar it certainly is. It attends all our wishes, acts, and projects as nothing else does, so that no estimate of its influence can be excessive. When we take a walk, read a book, pick out a dress, visit a friend, attend a concert, cast a vote, enter into business, we always do it in the hope of attaining something good. Since they are so frequently encountering goodness, both laymen and scholars are apt to assume that it is altogether clear and requires no explanation. But the very reverse is the truth. Familiarity obscures. It breeds instincts and not understanding. So woven has goodness become with the very web of life that it is hard to disentangle.

Consequently, we employ the word or some synonym of it during pretty much every waking hour of our lives. Wishing some test of this frequency I turned to Shakespeare, and found that he uses the word "good" fifteen hundred times, and its derivatives "goodness," "better," and "best," about as many more. He could not make men and women talk right without incessant reference to this concept.

How then do we employ the word "good"? I do not ask how we ought to employ it, but how we actually do. For the present, we shall be engaged in a psychological inquiry, not an ethical one. We need to get at the plain facts of usage. I will therefore ask each reader to look into his own mind, see on what occasions he uses the word, and decide what meaning he attaches to it. Taking up a few of the simplest possible examples, we will through them inquire when and why we call things good.

Here is a knife. When is it a good knife? Why, a knife is made for something, for cutting. Whenever the knife slides evenly through a piece of wood, and with a minimum of effort on the part of him who steers it, when there is no disposition of its edge to bend or break, but only to do its appointed work effectively, then we know that a good knife is at work. Or, looking at the matter from another point of view, whenever the handle of the knife neatly fits the hand, following its lines and presenting no obstruction, we may say that in these respects also the knife is a good knife. That is, the knife becomes good through adaptation to its work, an adaptation realized in its cutting of the wood and in its conformity to the hand. Its goodness always has reference to something outside itself, and is measured by its performance of an external task.

Or take something not so palpable. What glorious weather! When we woke this morning, drew aside our curtains and looked out, we said "It is a good day!" And of what qualities of the day were we thinking? We meant, I suppose, that the day was well fitted to its various purposes. Intending to go to our office, we saw there was nothing to hinder our doing so. We knew that the streets would be clear, people in an amiable mood,

business and social duties would move forward easily. In fact, whatever our plans, in calling the day a good day we meant to speak of it as excellently adapted to something outside itself.

A usage more curious still occurs in the nursery. There when the question is asked, "Has the baby been good?" one discovers by degrees that the anxious mother wishes to know if it has been crying or quiet. This elementary life has as yet not acquired positive standards of measurement. It must be reckoned in negative terms, a failure to disturb.

This signification of goodness is lucidly put in the remark of Shakespeare's Portia, "Nothing I see is good without respect." We must have some respect or end in mind in reference to which the goodness is compared. Good always means good "for." That little preposition cannot be absent from our minds, though it need not audibly be uttered. The knife is good for cutting and the day for business. Omit the "for," and goodness ceases. To be bad or good implies external reference. To be good means to be an efficient means; and the end to be furthered must be already in mind before the word good is spoken.

In short, whenever we inspect the usage of the word good, we always find behind it an implication of some end to be reached. Good is a relative term. The good is the useful, and it must be useful for something. Silent or spoken, it is the mental reference to something else which puts all meaning into it. So Hamlet says, "There's nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." No new quality is added to an object or act when it becomes good.

21. One of the main arguments the author is trying to make in the passage is that:
- A. the word *good* always connotes the same idea no matter the context of the usage, whether people realize it or not.
 - B. although the word *good* is used frequently, the exact definition and connotation of the word is difficult to identify precisely.
 - C. things or people are either good or not good; goodness is not a quality that is debatable.
 - D. a debate of ethics, not psychology, will most clearly identify the exact definition and connotation of the word *good*.
22. The main idea of the sixth paragraph (lines 63–69) is that:
- F. it is irrelevant for a mother to inquire if her baby has been well-behaved or not.
 - G. a baby has not been alive long enough to be judged as either good or bad.
 - H. since the baby is so young, it is not judged as good by what it does, but rather what it does not do.
 - J. whether or not a baby has been crying is not a significant standard upon which to determine its goodness.

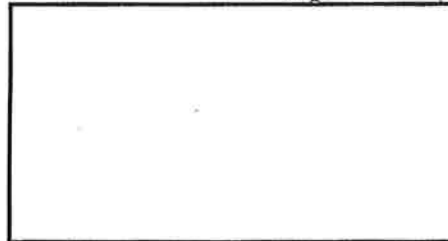
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3

3

23. According to the passage, why does the author concern himself with Shakespeare's usage of the word *good*?
- He was seeking confirmation for his belief that both the use of the word and the concept of *good* are strikingly common.
 - He was looking for a definition of the concept of *good* and turned to Shakespeare for inspiration.
 - He was trying to understand the lack of the concept of *good* and *goodness* in the works of Shakespeare.
 - He was seeking support for his belief that Shakespeare was able to use the concept of *good* more effectively than any other author.
24. The author of the passage asserts that the weather and a knife are similar because:
- both are defined as good if and only if they can be helpful to many people for a variety of reasons.
 - neither can be defined as good unless they remain consistent and unchanged in the wake of fluctuating circumstances.
 - both are defined as good when their characteristics serve appropriate external circumstances.
 - neither one can be good unless a universal definition of the concept is accepted.
25. As it is used in line 70, the word *lucidly* most nearly means:
- obscurely.
 - inappropriately.
 - enthusiastically.
 - coherently.
26. The author argues that a knife may be described as good:
- only if it cuts wood.
 - only if it is made for something other than cutting.
 - only as it relates to something other than itself.
 - only if it requires extra effort in its use.
27. As it is used in the passage, the word *palpable* most nearly means:
- apparent.
 - powerful.
 - drab.
 - complicated.
28. The main argument that the author tries to make in the seventh paragraph (lines 70–81) is that:
- it is always clear what is meant when someone describes something as *good*.
 - the concept of being *good* is entirely different than the concept of being *good for*.
 - it is often easier to understand the concept of *good* without using the phrase *good for*.
 - the word *good* is relative, finding meaning only when there is a specific end in mind.
29. It can be reasonably inferred from the passage that the author would agree that the word *good* actually means:
- measurable.
 - significant.
 - persistent.
 - practical.
30. When, referring to the role of goodness in life, the author states, "no estimate of its influence can be excessive" (lines 6–7), he most likely means that:
- people must be careful not to allow the search for goodness to monopolize their lives.
 - it is impossible to over-emphasize the power that the quest for goodness has on us.
 - it is impossible to conceptualize and grasp the definition of the word *good*.
 - people often inaccurately describe the role that goodness plays in their own lives.

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GO ON TO THE NEXT PAGE.