

# What is the Good Life?

M.B.

In William Heard Kilpatrick's "Philosophy of Education" (1951), there is a chapter on "The Life Good to Live". He used this title rather than "The Good Life" because he believes that while morality has "a clear and proper place in the good life," "it is no definition of 'the good life' in its full meaning." "The good life as it is here discussed," Kilpatrick goes on to say, "is the life good to live, good for living purposes, a life that answers well to the various content demands of actual living, qualitatively considered." Merely to live, according to Seneca, is not to live well. Kilpatrick quotes Philip James Bailey's well-known poem:

*"We live in deeds, not years;  
in thoughts, not breaths;  
In feeling, not figures on a dial.  
We should count time by heart  
throbs. He lives most  
Who thinks most—feels the nob-  
lest—acts the best."*

The author then proceeds to enumerate five psychological bases of values. These are the satisfactions that constitute the good life. They result from the organism's efforts to meet wants:

1. The satisfaction of getting and enjoying what we want, with the added fact that the stronger the want is felt, the greater is the resulting satisfaction. Briefly this is called the satisfaction of wants.

2. The satisfaction from effort, from devising and using means in the pursuit of a desired end or aim. In the first type of satisfaction, the end is important. In this second satisfaction, the means is salient. "The more we are interested in the end or aim, the more will we be interested in the means to attain that end." Many people hold that the satisfactions derived from effort (the means) are both greater and nobler than the satisfaction of mere wants. Shakespeare says so well in "The Merchant of Venice":

"All things that are  
Are with more spirit chased  
than enjoyed."

The "pursuit" of happiness is perhaps as great a source of satisfaction as attaining happiness itself. William James is quoted by Kilpatrick to re-enforce the same idea:

"Wherever a process of life communicates an eagerness to him who lives it, there the life becomes genuinely significant. Sometimes the eagerness is more knot up with the motor activities, sometimes with the perceptions, sometimes with the imagination, sometimes with reflective thought. But, wherever it is found, there is the zest, the tingle, the excitement of reality; and there is 'importance' in the only real and positive sense in which importance ever anywhere can be."

One chief factor in the joy of effort is the presence of the self as a cause. The child is stirred by hearing a horn toot; but he is vastly more stirred if he toots the horn himself. "Pleasure at being a cause" is a great source of satisfaction.

3. When an enterprise grows under effort, additional satisfaction is produced. Dewey says, "The emotional accompaniment of the progressive growth of a course of action, a continual movement of expansion and achievement is happiness."

4. Variety increases satisfaction. "Change to something new is thus welcome, especially if the new is satisfying on its own account. It is further true that variety offers new sources of possibility."

5. The satisfaction from living up to one's own personally-held standards. This is synonymous with such expressions as "living up to one's ideals," "doing one's best," "obeying conscience." Says Muirhead in his *Ethics*: "An artisan or an artist or a writer who does not do his best is not only an inferior workman but a bad man." (What can we say of a teacher who does not do his best?) "The finer the character of an individual the surer and finer will be the quality of his satisfaction from living up to his standards; and the greater the proportion of such individuals, the higher the civilization." The quality of civilization attained by any people is determined to a large degree by the extent to which it possesses the highest feasible standards and the kind of determination the people have to live up to these standards.

Kilpatrick then proceeds to state what constitutes the good life. He mentions the following:

1. Physical health. It appears that there are two views with respect to the importance of health. Spencer considers the preservation of health as the first and highest on his list of educational values. Aristotle, on the other hand, considered the body subordinate to the soul. "The body exists to realize, make possible and actual, the mind or soul." This apparent conflict of ideas seems to be easily resolved, according to Kilpatrick, by the position: "seek physical health and vigor as allows the other constituents of the good life their best chance to come into vigorous being. Bodily appetites thus would not be allowed to assert themselves to the hurt of other and higher values."

2. Mental wholeness, the well-adjusted personality. "If man is to live effectively and enjoy the good life, his internal arrangements, his attitudes and habits, must be in good mutual adjustment." "Both emotion and habit must always be ready to obey one's reason." One of the most important tasks of the school is to secure the best possible adjustments in the lives of learners.

3. Satisfying personal relationships. "Not to get on pleasantly with other members of the family, not to be acceptable to other children, not to find congenial companionship among one's fellows in school or college or business, not to be happy in marriage—these are the more usual instances known among us of unsatisfying personal relations."

4. The chance to choose as a responsible self. The difference between man and animals is man's ability to choose. "Not to learn to choose thoughtfully and responsibly is to be enslaved to ineffectiveness, to be unfitted for decent

decent living either as an individual or in the group. "The self by what it learns from successive choices is continually rebuilding and enriching itself and its living." Training learners for critical and responsible choosing becomes a good rule for good teaching.

5. Meaningful work. "There is no fun like work." If an individual is gripped by worthwhile work, by devising or using means to an end that is truly desired, there is immense satisfaction resulting therefrom. Work that is a drudgery, that gives no feeling of justification to the worker is effort without heart, without interest. "Blessed is he who has found his work; let him ask no other blessedness."

6. The chance to create. "To feel one's self actually creating is one of the highest and keenest joys. Few other possibilities of life seem so satisfying." In the act of creating, one "forgets himself in what he is doing, can identify himself without something that in the truest sense is his own."

7. "Leading on." This means the possibility of one opening "new vistas, new possibilities to follow up, with possibly a new disposition to realize the new insights." Says Wordsworth:

"Effort, and expectation, and desire,

And something ever about to be."

This principle states the end and aim of all moral behavior and even of living and civilization itself: "to find and embody in institutional life and its supporting those ways of behaving which open up new possibilities in both content and richness in life, which lead on so consistently and so

widely as to promise increasing good life to all."

8. Range of interests. Bacon said, "The more good things we are interested in, the more ardently we live." This is not the same, however, as dispersing of interests. This means the desirability of concentrating interest, thought, and effort upon certain activity, without losing a broad familiarity with the wider aspects of life. The quality of living is hurt by restricting one's interest to a very narrow sphere. Herein comes the possibilities of what is generally called "general education".

9. The esthetic. "Art can and does elevate life, give it richness in high degree." Whitehead is quoted as saying: "Great art is the arrangement of the environment so as to provide for the soul vivid, but transient values. But great art is more than a transient refreshment. It is something which adds to the permanent riches of the soul's self-attainment. It transforms the soul into the permanent realization of values extending beyond its former self."

10. Music. "Music, the greatest good that mortals know, and all of heaven we have below."

11. An adequate social life process. The individual is inherently dependent on his social environment and his relations with it. The modern individual will live but a poor and thwarted life unless his surrounding society furnishes him both stimulating climate and institutions to call out his finer and better possibilities, and meanwhile protect him in this better and finer life. Civilization is well developed if it achieves these: it enables aggregate institutional arrangements to call out, make possible, and protect the good life; it educates the members of society

to supply the necessary conditions for the good life.

12. Religion. How does religion play in life as we know it? "Religion is the spirit with which one holds one's supreme value — the value in terms of which one values all else — plus the outworking of this attitude appropriately in life." "Religion is a unifying of one's self and one's life on the basis of some supreme and inclusive outlook and consequent program of action." "Life on any large scale faces inherent uncertainty, with

the development of events always precarious. In many situations the decisive factor is the degree of intelligent effort. This, then, is the place and function of faith, that a man may see clearly what basis there is for hope and by his resolve will make the most of that hope through determined efforts. Such a faith furnishes an effective attitude for one's efforts. Some inclusive philosophy of life to give the needed faith to life as a whole; and that this kind of faith becomes thus a necessary part of any adequate religion."

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