

2) Potential, Formal, and Actual Good.

As the three levels in our knowing ground the distinction between objects of desire, ends, and values, so also they serve to reveal three dimensions in the objective field of the good.

First, then, to desire the good is already something of the good that is desired. In like manner any spontaneity or impulse or potency is already something of the end towards which it tends. By the potential good is meant that inception of the good that is to be acknowledged in desires, spontaneities, impulses, drives, tendencies, potencies.

Still to begin is not to attain, and the potential good is only a beginning. It is said to be good, not because of what it is, but only because of what it makes possible. Moreover, between possibility and attainment there is the hurdle of fulfilled conditions. Desire and spontaneity become attainment only if certain concrete conditions are fulfilled. Again, such fulfillment consists in previous attainments, and so it occurs only if still earlier conditions are fulfilled.

The solution to this problem is reached by its transposition to a higher level. Thus, all men desire food, clothing, and shelter. In primitive fruit-gathering cultures such desires are met by each individual taking what he can get from the bounty of nature. In such situations the conditions of satisfaction of desires are fulfilled when they happen to be fulfilled. But in more advanced cultures men make it their business to see that the conditions will be fulfilled. They ~~institute a division of labor and a process of exchange~~ discover more roundabout procedures for satisfying desires and institute a division of labor and a process of exchange. The economic order is discovered realized, and when it works, it harnesses desires to their own satisfaction in on a scale that otherwise would not be imagined.

More generally, there are schemes of continuous or recurrent change. They may be very simple and so enounced in a circle of hypothetical propositions. They may be extremely complex and consist in enormously intricate but, in the main, self-adjusting equilibria. But their key feature is, always the same: the fulfilment of conditions turns back upon itself to renew the partial fulfilment and so to secure, the other things being equal, the perpetuity of the process.

Now just as desire or spontaneity is named a potential good because it makes attainment possible, so the scheme of recurrent change will be named a formal good because it makes attainment regular and, to a greater or less extent, assured.