

What Makes for a Good Life?

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Individual well-being is composed of many good things worthy of choice. But are these things chosen because they are good, or are they good because they are chosen? This question, originally reported by Plato, is fundamental to how well-being is theoretically conceived, and practically secured. Knowing what goods people deserve, and how to distribute them, requires an answer to this question.

This research argues that objects contributing to individual well-being are good because they are chosen. To begin, the goodness of objects is defined in terms of the reasons one has for valuing them. Intrinsic value is then taken as a starting point to identify a source of value on which all other good things depend. If the value of intrinsically good objects is derived from individual choice, then the goodness of all other objects can be said to flow from the same source.

The goal, then, is to show that reasons for valuing intrinsically good objects cannot be given by objects external to agents, but only by the process of choosing. Reasons for valuing intrinsically good objects are reasons for valuing things in themselves. For objects external to agents to be valuable in themselves would suggest that value exists in the external world, as though it were constitutive of nature. Against this implausible account, the capacity of agents to choose ends/goals for themselves is defended as a source of intrinsic value on the grounds that deliberate choice itself is intrinsically valuable, rather than the object of one's choice.