



Podcast 1: “Political Philosophy and the Question of the Good”

Discussion Questions:

Level 1 (Grades K-3):

1. What makes your life good? Why?
2. What makes your life bad? Why?

Level 2 (Grades 4-8):

1. What kinds of things are most important to making your life good? (Sports? Friends? Time with family? Video games? Social media?)
2. How do you know they are the most important things? Who or what tells you? (Parents? Friends? Social media? The Bible? Thinking carefully and reasoning together with friends?)
3. Is there a way to know for yourself that these are the most important things? (We are fishing for 1) careful reasoning, 2) Revealed Truth and 3) personal revelation)

Level 3 (Grades 9-12):

- 1*. Are you more likely to live a good life by knowing, discussing, and thinking about the things that make it good?
- 2*. Are the things that make your life good also important to making society, your political community, and the country good?
- 3*How is it possible for people with different beliefs to agree upon what is good for their communities/society/country?



questions designated with an *
are discussed in the episode

Primer for Parents Reading Guide

Note to Parents: In the Supplemental reading selections includes in your child’s digital course, references were provided (A, B, C...) to make it easier to find answers to the Summary Questions. We have included those references in the parents’ version of the Reading Selections to provide you with additional guidance as you engage your child in conversation regarding the respective topic.

Reading for Podcast 1: “Political Philosophy and the Question of the Good”

- These Reading Selections have been taken from Course 9.1, Lesson 1, Introduction: “Political Philosophy and the Question of the Good”



Political Philosophy and the Question of the Good

Political philosophy is about ideas. Fathom the Good shows you how some of the most important ideas have been discussed by great thinkers and authors who had a lot to say about things that matter most, like liberty and justice. These authors will help you dive deep to carefully consider what most people pass over, bringing to the surface ideas that shape our reality but that almost always are ignored. Your dive will not be a hopeless groping in the dark but a journey guided by knowledge that is like a beam of light from above.

We know there is an "above" because in some ways we come in contact with it every day. As human beings, we uniquely experience what we call "the Good," an experience that is both moral and intellectual. As moral beings, we act according to what we believe and, as intellectual beings, we have the capacity to reason, to know what is right and what is not.

Glossary

Moral Agency - The ability to make moral choices, choices involving what is noble and base, right and wrong, good and evil.

Natural Law - Law that comes from nature (like gravity) or God (as in "Thou shall not kill"), making it a higher law that does not change and that people submit to.

Modern Philosophy - A kind of philosophy that became influential and then dominant beginning in the 1500s and 1600s. Modern philosophy is less concerned with eternal truth and more concerned with what works for the safety and prosperity of human beings.

Ancient Philosophy - Ancient philosophy in general refers to philosophy written in the time period before the fall of the Roman empire, or around 400 AD. In this course, we refer especially to "Classical" political philosophy. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle each were ancient political philosophers who spoke of or recognized natural law as it is described above.

Natural Rights - Modern philosophers replaced traditional natural law with the doctrine of natural rights. Modern natural rights is based on the needs and interests of the individual apart from any community and any higher moral authority. This is how an individual in the "state of nature" would be described.

Revelation - Truth or moral guidance that is revealed by God or His messengers, such as the word of God in the Bible.

Moral Conscience - An individual's ability to make moral judgments based on reason and revelation.



What Is a Moral Being?

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A moral being is someone capable of exercising moral agency. In other words, it is about making choices. Moral agency means we can choose what is noble or base, good or evil, right or wrong. Philosophers have called this awareness of or sensitivity to good and evil "natural law." One of the most important things you will learn in this course is the difference between modern philosophy's use of the term "natural law" and ancient philosophy's use of the term.

For Americans, John Locke is an important modern philosopher. Later on in Unit 3, you will see how he uses "natural law" to describe material well-being—the preservation of one's property and physical safety. But Locke's use of the term is very different from ancient philosophers' usage. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, for example, used the term to mean a higher law coming from God or nature. (To help you remember the difference, we will refer to natural law in John Locke as "natural rights." You will need to keep this distinction in mind throughout this course.)

In addition to natural law, revelation also is a source that guides our moral choices. (An example of "revelation" is the word of God in the Bible.) Philosophy and revelation working together develop the concept of the individual as an agent acting according to his or her moral conscience. This exercise of moral conscience is fundamental to who we are as Americans, at least insofar as the Founding Fathers envisioned us.

What Is an Intellectual Being?

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But moral conscience cannot be exercised in a vacuum. It is not purely subjective based on our personal feelings or preferences. It is developed over time as a product of both faith and intellect. An intellectual being is aware of the order and beauty in the world we live in. Though we cannot make sense of everything we see—far from it—we can see enough to know that there is some order, some purpose, some meaning in the mysterious and infinitely complex workings of nature, even to our limited minds. Understanding this nature and how we ought to live within it is the "Good" we are trying to "fathom."

We must exercise reason (another way of saying intellect) if we are to trace an idea back to its origins to determine if it is good and worth living according to or not. This is what is at the heart of Fathom the Good: to reason well, carefully considering the ideas that most influence how we live. To fathom means to step back from the noise and confusion and intimidation of the world (especially a world dominated by social media) to ask the right kinds of questions, good questions that really mean something, and to dive deeply and resolutely into the things that matter most.

Glossary

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The Good - An ultimate purpose for human life. Higher law serves this ultimate purpose.

Politics - The way human beings answer the questions: "Who should rule?" and "For what purpose should they rule?" Politics is essential to human beings because we need orderly communities, and we only create them by exercising reason among ourselves. Instinct does not directly tell us how to create good communities (as it does for a hive of bees or a flock of birds, for example).



The "Good"

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The "Good," then, is more than a theory. It is more than a technical, philosophical idea that is so complex that it cannot be understood or even lived. It is a way of thinking about how we live and experience life as moral and intellectual beings. We might not know everything about it, but we know enough of the existence of the Good to seek after it, and by seeking, we discover more of what it means to be human. When the question of the Good is our compass, we become better people. This is what Fathom the Good and the study of political philosophy is all about—pursuing the question of human flourishing.

"Politics" often has a bad name among us today because we associate it with bad conduct—the often petty and dishonest pursuit of money, power, or popularity. But there is more to politics than the petty. Political life is, in fact, an essential feature of human life. It is the effort to integrate moral life into everyday living. It is the never-finished effort to make our common life more human, more in accordance with human flourishing. Beneath the unattractive and often polluted surface of power-seeking and manipulation, politics is about human purpose, and therefore it is about the Good.

It is the job of political philosophy to understand how the Good applies to human society and everyday life. It is a core activity, an important intellectual discipline of the Western tradition of classical education. It is a tradition starting with Plato and Aristotle, running through Augustine and Aquinas, and moving forward to the American Founders and Tocqueville into the best thought of the present day.

Through Fathom the Good, the Western tradition of political philosophy becomes a path of progress towards a knowledge of the moral and political world we live in. Along with faithfully following revealed truths, to fathom the good is a key to true self-knowledge and thus to moral and spiritual growth and fulfillment.