

Iamblichus, *Protrepticus* VI

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*Mixed protreptics to political as well as practical virtue and to the acquisition  
as well as use of the more intellectually perfect wisdom*  
[3.21-23]

*But since 'our conversation is with humans,' not with those who have access to the divine share of life, with these kinds of invitations should be mixed in some exhortations to the political and practical way of life as well. [37.2] Let's put it this way: the things that underlie our way of life, e.g. a body and what's around it, underlie it in the manner of certain tools, the use of which is dangerous, and more of the latter is accomplished by those who use them in ways they shouldn't. [7] Well then, one should desire both to acquire this knowledge and to use it appropriately, this knowledge through which we will put all these things to good use. [9] Hence we should do philosophy, if we are going to engage in politics correctly and conduct our own life in a beneficial way. [36.27-37.11]*

**Furthermore, there is a difference between the kinds of knowledge that produce each of the things of which we want to have more and more in our way of life, and the kinds of knowledge that make use of these kinds of knowledge, and the ones that serve are different from the others that issue orders; and in these as it were more commanding kinds of knowledge exists what is good in the strict sense. [16] If, then, only that kind of knowledge which does have correctness of judgment, and does use reason, and observes the good as a whole -- that is to say, philosophy -- is capable of using everything and issuing orders in accordance with nature, by all means one ought to do philosophy, since only philosophy includes within itself this correct judgment and this intelligence to issue orders without errors. [22]**

Furthermore, since everyone chooses what is possible and what is beneficial, it must be pointed out that both these features belong to philosophy, and also that the difficulty of acquiring it is more than outweighed by the magnitude of its benefit; for we all work at the easier tasks with greater pleasure. [37.11-26]

Now then, that we are capable of acquiring the kinds of knowledge about the just and the expedient and also the ones about nature and the rest of truth, it is easy to demonstrate. [38.3] **For prior things are always more cognizable than posterior things, and what is better in nature than what is worse, for there is knowledge of what is determinate and orderly more than of their opposites, and again of the causes more than of the effects. [7] And good things are more determinate and organized than bad things, just as a decent person is, relative to a worthless person; for they necessarily have the same mutual difference. [10] And prior things are causes more than posterior things (for if they are eliminated, then the things that have their substance <made> out of them are eliminated: if numbers then lines, if lines then surfaces, and if surfaces then solids), and letters <are causes more> than what are named 'syllables'.** [37.26-38.14]

**Hence since soul is better than body (being more of a ruler in its nature), and the skills and intelligence concerned with the body are medical science and athletic training (for we regard these as sciences and say that some people possess them), clearly for the soul too and the psychic virtues there is a certain diligence and skill, and we are capable of acquiring it, if it is the case, as surely it is, that we are also capable of acquiring knowledge of things of which our ignorance is greater and cognition is harder to come by. [38.14-22]**

Similarly for the natural sciences as well, for it is a much greater pre-requisite to be intelligent about the causes and the elements than about the posterior things; for these are not among the highest things, nor are the primary things naturally <made> out of them; rather, it is out of those <elements> and because of those <causes> that the other things come into being and are manifestly constituted. [39.4] For whether it is fire or air or number or any other natures that are causes of and primary to other things, it would be impossible to be ignorant of these things and recognize any of the other things; for how could anyone either cognize speech while being ignorant of syllables, or have knowledge of these while understanding nothing about the letters? [38.22-39.8]

Now then, that there is a kind of knowledge of the truth and of the virtue of the soul, and how we are capable of acquiring them, let this then be our statement about these topics; but that it is the greatest of goods and the most beneficial of all will be clear from what follows. [13] For we all agree that the most excellent man should rule, i.e., the strongest by nature, and that the law rules and should have sole authority; but the law is a kind of intelligence, i.e. a discourse based on intelligence. [16] And again, what standard do we have, what criterion of good things, that is more precise than the intelligent man? [18] For all that this man will choose, if the choice is based on his knowledge, are good things and their contraries are bad. [20] And since everybody chooses most of all what conforms to their own proper dispositions (a just man choosing to live justly, a man with bravery to live bravely, likewise a self-controlled man to live with self-control), it is clear that the intelligent man will choose most of all to be intelligent; for this is the function of that capacity. [25] Hence it's clear that, according to the most authoritative judgment, intelligence is supreme among goods. [39.9-40.1]

So one ought not to flee from philosophy, since philosophy is, as we think, both a possession and a use of wisdom, and wisdom is among the greatest goods; nor should one sail to the Pillars of Heracles and run many risks for the sake of possessions, while for the sake of intelligence devoting neither effort nor expense. [6] It would surely be slave-like to strive for living rather than living well, and for him to follow the opinions of the majority rather than evaluating the majority by his own opinions, and to seek out possessions but for what is noble to take no trouble whatsoever. [40.1-11]

And as to the benefit and the greatness of the thing, I consider this to have been sufficiently demonstrated; but as to the reason why it is much easier to acquire it than other goods, one might be convinced by the following. [15] For, despite no payment coming from the people to those who do philosophy which would make them keen to exert considerable effort in this way, and despite having given to the other skills a big lead, nevertheless the fact that in running a short time they have surpassed them in precision seems to me to be a sign of the easiness of philosophy. [20] And again, the fact that everybody feels at home with this and wishes to occupy their leisure with it, renouncing everything else, is no slight evidence that the close attention comes with pleasure; for no one is willing to work hard for a long time. [24] In addition to these, its practice greatly differs from all others: philosophers need neither tools nor special places for their job; rather, wherever in the inhabited world the mind runs, it latches onto the truth equally as if it were present everywhere. [41.2] Thus it has been demonstrated that philosophy is possible, and why it is the greatest of goods and easy to acquire; *hence on all counts it is worthwhile that we should embrace it eagerly.* [40.12-41.5]